

Health Ministry Spokeswoman
Sima Sadat Lari Said on Monday
That Some 217 More Iranians Have
Died From Coronavirus Disease
(COVID-19) Over the Past 24 Hours
Bringing the Total Deaths to 14,405

IRAN NEWS

Iraqi Prime Minister's Visit to
Tehran Will Not Be Delayed Despite
His Visit to Saudi Arabia Was
Postponed, an Iraqi Media Quoted
Foreign Ministry Official
Spokesman Ahmed Al-Sahaf

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2

DOMESTIC

Majlis Speaker Praises Tehran-New Delhi Ties

> SEE PAGE 2



3

DOMESTIC

Iran Exports Tea to 12 Countries in Q1

> SEE PAGE 3



4

INTERNATIONAL

EU Leaders Struggle With Mission Impossible

> SEE PAGE 4



8

SPORTS

Hamilton Takes Lead With Eighth Hungarian GP Win

> SEE PAGE 8



Iran Differentiates Between Protest, Unrest

TEHRAN (FNA) - Judiciary Chief Seyed Ebrahim Raiesi said on Monday that his country recognizes people's legal protest in quest for their rights, but shows serious reaction to those who endanger the nation's security and tranquility.

"The Judiciary system is based on religion and law. We discern between protest and unrest. We believe that attention and care should be given to [the demands raised in] protests, but our redline is unrest, insecurity and distorting the security of the country," Raiesi said, addressing high-ranking judiciary officials in Tehran.

He ordered the country's judges and judiciary officials to be sensitive to violent crimes and not to allow hooligans and outlaws find a ground to stir insecurity and commit crimes.

Judiciary Spokesman Gholam Hossein Esmaili said in December that armed rioters and outlaws wounded and killed a number of people and policemen during the November unrests after the protest rallies against the gasoline rationing.

"It is confirmed that a considerable number of people have been killed by the outlaws and many officers who were trying to establish order have also been wounded by the weapons of these outlaws too," Esmaili told reporters in a press conference in Tehran.

IRGC Laser Guidance Missile System Unveiled

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The "Laser- Guidance" Missile System was unveiled on Monday morning during the visit of the Chief Commander of IRGC to the IRGC Aviation's Helicopter Group.

Major General Hossein Salami, Chief Commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), visited the Fath Helicopter Group of IRGC Aviation on Monday morning along with a group of deputies of the General Command of the IRGC.

Gen. Salami stressed that most of the burden and pressure of national security in the country is on the IRGC ground forces, noting that Today, IRGC's ground forces in the important border areas, including the northwest, south, southeast, and southwest of the country, have a very good and reliable defense arrangement.

General Salami, stating that security and defense operations in these areas need a variety of logistics, said, IRGC Ground Forces because it uses the offensive doctrine in-depth, increasing the abilities of helicopter unit is also a necessity.

See Page 7

Iranian Companies to Replace Indians in Farzad B Gas Field Project



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Oil Minister Bijan Zanganeh says the developmental project of Farzad B Gas Field will be carried out with domestic companies and Indians will have no room in it.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of a ceremony to sign a contract for completing the development of South Azadegan Oilfield on Monday, Zanganeh said currently no foreign company is ready to sign deal with Iran in any field and they will even not continue the current agreements but the ministry relies on domestic capacities and experts to carry out them..

He went on to say that the deal for developing Farzad B Gas Field will be signed soon while its head of agreement has already been signed and the final deal will be signed very soon.

Asked about the long-term agreement between Iran and China, Zanganeh said, "The discussion is on a general agreement and I can say with confidence that in the field of oil, neither the Chinese have asked us for a concession nor are we giving a concession. The subject is long-term cooperation in various fields, including field development, refining, petrochemicals, etc. We are ready for any other country except the Zionist regime that wants to have such cooperation with Iran. Even American companies are not barred from working as contractors or investors in our projects.... This [the Iran-China deal] will be a friendly and bilateral cooperation. Our current relationship with the Chinese is also good and without any tension."

He added that under the framework of the 25-year comprehensive cooperation road map, Iran and China will collaborate on the oil sector in the long-run.

Zanganeh added that Iran is ready to sign a similar cooperation road map with all countries.

Referring to the rumors going around the said Iran-China 25-year road map, Zanganeh said after being finalized, the road map must be ratified by the Iranian Parliament.

Regarding the role that international companies can play in the development of Iran's oil industry, Zanganeh said: "Cooperation with foreign companies is not only important for raising capital; What we are looking for is mainly the absorption of technology to increase the recovery rate of reservoirs, and that interdependence can help expand our market presence, but it is not the case that if they do not work with us, we will die. During these years, we have shown that we carry out our work decisively and do not fall short."

He added that with a 10% increase in the recovery rate in the South Azadegan joint field, production from this field will increase by 2.7 billion barrels and revenues will exceed \$1 trillion.

"We should see the index of activity in joint fields in the West Karun and South Pars. Of course, action has been taken in other joint fields as well, and it will yield results by the end of the current government," the minister said.

The official also stressed increasing the recovery rate of oil fields.

The minister went on to say that there are 27 billion barrels of oil in place (OIP) in the South Azadegan joint field, but the maximum extraction is less than 1.5 billion barrels.

"We can increase the recovery rate of 6% in this field to 16%," said the official, highlighting that this means an increase of 2.7 billion barrels of oil production from South Azadegan and will generate over \$1 trillion revenue for the country.

SNSC Urged to Respond to U.S. War Threat Against Iran

TEHRAN (MNA) – Head of Iran's Passive Defense Organization Brigadier General Gholamreza Jalali on Sunday called on the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) to respond to the U.S. Army's threat against Islamic Republic of Iran.

He went on to say that U.S. Army's threat against the Islamic Republic of Iran is a war threat that should be responded harshly. Iran's defense infrastructures are relatively secure but the US Army's threat is a war threat that needs to be addressed at other levels, Jalali emphasized.

In his reaction to the secret order of the U.S. president to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) for orchestrating the cyber-attack against Iran, the brigadier general stated, "the defense infrastructures of the Islamic Republic of Iran enjoy relative and suitable security but the US Army's threat against Iran should be investigated in other levels meticulously."

Americans themselves consider this kind of threat to attack the country's infrastructures as war attacks and follow them in their operational strategies, so, Iran's Supreme National Security Council must decide on this issue and respond to them seriously, Jalali stressed. In response to suspicions about forests' fire and also the outbreak of fire in some power plants in Iran, he said, "in the field of security, we have three layers of safety, security and defense and most of these fires have occurred in the field of safety, so, no cyber-attack has occurred."

Turning to the recent incident in Shahid Ahmadi Roshan Nuclear Facility (Natanz Complex), he said, "this incident is separate from other incidents so that Passive Defense Organization submitted its investigation report to the Supreme National Security Council and Secretariat of the Council is scheduled to summarize the incident."

China Guarantees to Buy Iran Crude for 25 Years

TEHRAN (PressTV) - A former Iranian ambassador to China says the East Asian country would guarantee to buy Iran's oil for 25 years as part of a long-term partnership deal that is being negotiated between the two.

Mehdi Safari said in remarks published on Sunday that China is looking for a reliable supplier of energy as its imports of oil have more than doubled in six years to reach 11 million barrels per day (bpd).

Safari said China is already importing nearly half of its oil needs, around 5.5 million bpd, from the Persian Gulf region where Iran has the most dominant presence due to the length of its coasts on the sea.

"China says that it will guarantee, as part of a mutual guarantee, to buy Iran's oil for the next 25 years," Safari told the semi-official Tasnim news agency.

He said a main reason for China to seek a long-term energy partnership with Iran is the pressure imposed by the United States on the Chinese in the South East Asia region, prompting Beijing to increasingly look westward to revive the so-called new Silk Road through territories like Iran.

See Page 7

CIA, Mossad's Iranian Spy Executed

TEHRAN (IP) - A spy for the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the Israeli spy agency (Mossad) was executed in Iran.

Mahmoud Mousavi Majd had espionage cooperation with CIA and Mossad in different security areas especially on Iran's armed forces, Qods Forces of IRGC.

Mousavi Majd was arrested on October 10, 2018, and Branch 15 of the Islamic Revolutionary Tribunal investigated his charges and sentenced him to death on August 25, 2019.

The verdict was affirmed in the Iranian Judiciary Supreme Court, after legal procedures.

On June 09, Judiciary's spokesman Gholam-Hossein Esmaili Mahmoud said that Mousavi Majd who was linked with CIA and Mossad and has provided them with intelligence from security bodies, especially armed forces like IRGC was sentenced to death.

Esmaili stated that Mousavi Majd had disclosed information on the location of Iranian military sites and commanders. In a press conference, Judiciary Spokesman Gholam Hossein Esmaili said Mousavi Majd had been gathering intelligence for the CIA and Mossad on the Iranian security sphere and Armed Forces, including on the IRGC Quds Forces.

Decoding Black Boxes of Ukrainian Plane Started in France

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) announced on Monday that the process of decoding black box of Ukrainian plane (PS752) started in France.

ICAO announced on Monday that the Iranian team delivered black boxes of the Ukrainian plane to the laboratory of the Bureau of Enquiry and Analysis for Civil Aviation Safety (BEA).

The organization stressed that the coordination session is now underway that restoration of information in black boxes was to start later yesterday.

Immediately after the accident, the black boxes of the plane have been kept under security care in ICAO.

The black boxes were taken to Paris on July 17 observing technical and security protocols under the supervision of the expert teams.

After landing in Paris, the Iranian team in coordination with Iran's Embassy delivered the black boxes to the French authorities and that the French police took the responsibility for their protection.

See Page 7



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Iranian, Russian FMs to Meet in Moscow

TEHRAN (MNA) – A spokesperson with the Russian Foreign Ministry said that Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov will hold talks in Moscow today (Tuesday). “Lavrov and Zarif will hold negotiations on Tuesday in Moscow,” Maria Zakharova told reporters on Monday, according to TASS.

The meeting comes as Zarif was in Iraq on Sunday, holding talks with high-ranking officials of the neighboring country including Iraqi president, prime minister, foreign minister, and parliament speaker among others.

Majlis Speaker Praises Tehran-New Delhi Ties

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN – Majlis Speaker Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf praised the longstanding, amicable ties between Iran and India, saying that such amicable relations should not be affected by another country’s interferences.

“Trade ties between Iran and India go back to long ago. Such relations have had a great impact on the two nations’ cultural and political ties too,” Qalibaf also said in a Monday meeting with Indian Ambassador to Tehran Gaddam Dharmendra.

Referring to the significant role of Iran and India as two historical civilizations in Asia, Qalibaf said, “Expansion of mutual ties between the two countries can bear great impacts on the regional and international levels.”

“We should not let a third country interfere in our historical ties,” he stressed.

Qalibaf also invited the Indian parliament speaker to pay an official visit to Tehran. Dharmendra, for his part, referred to the 70th anniversary of Iran-India friendship agreement, saying, “We had many plans for this year’s anniversary; our parliament speaker was due to visit Tehran; however, the plans have been disrupted because of the coronavirus pandemic.



He expressed New Delhi’s willingness for broadening ties with Tehran in different economic, political and cultural fields.

During the meeting, the two sides explored the ways of boosting bilateral ties between the two nations in different sectors.

Earlier this month, the Iranian Parliament ratified the Agreement for the Avoidance of Double Taxation (DTAA) and the Prevention of Fiscal Evasion between Iran and India to help boost bilateral trades.

In February 2018, Iran and India signed the agreement with respect to taxes on income. The Agreement is said to stimulate the flow of investment, technology and personnel from Iran to India and vice versa, and will prevent double taxation.

Iran Always Wants Friendly Ties Between Baghdad, Erbil

BAGHDAD (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has said that Iran has always been seeking friendly relations between Baghdad and Erbil.

Zarif, on a visit to Erbil, made the remarks in a meeting on Sunday night with Masoud Barzani, the leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Kurdistan Region.

The foreign minister underlined the significance of Iraq’s national sovereignty, calling for expansion of all-out relations with the country.

Barzani, the former president of Iraqi Kurdistan Region, for his part, praised the unforgettable role of Iranian martyred General Ghasem Soleimani in fighting Daesh terrorist group.

He noted that Kurdistan Region will never turn into a place for threatening the interests and security of Iran.

Barzani also stressed the need for expansion of trade relations with Iran during the COVID-19 pandemic while observing the health protocols.

Meanwhile later on Sunday Zarif held talks with Fayek Zidan, the President of the Supreme Judicial Council of Iraq, in Baghdad.

The two sides conferred on further cooperation and synergy between Tehran and Baghdad on legal pursuit of the assassination of resistance commanders, Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis.

The U.S. assassinated General Soleimani, the commander of the Quds Force of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), along with Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, deputy head of Iraq’s Hashd al-Sha’abi, and their companions by targeting their vehicles outside Baghdad International Airport on January 3.

The assassination was carried out under the direction of US President Donald Trump, with the Pentagon taking responsibility for the strike.

General Soleimani was widely viewed as a key figure in defeating ISIS, the world’s most notorious terrorist group, in the Middle East battles.

Tehran Always Ready for Dialogue with All Regional States

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Foreign Ministry Spokesman Seyed Abbas Mousavi underlined Tehran’s readiness for talks with regional countries, saying there is no other way than dialogue for resolution of differences.

“The Islamic Republic of Iran is always ready ... for dialogue and cooperation with all countries of the region,” Mousavi said in Baghdad during a Sunday visit to Iraq accompanying Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif.

“As for Saudi Arabia, we have announced our efforts and principled and unchanging policy (on talks) and it

depends on the government and officials of his country as to how and from what standpoint they would respond to our offer for regional cooperation and dialogue,” he added.

“Iran always seeks stability, security and peace in the region,” the spokesman said, stressing that there is no alternative to dialogue for peaceful resolution of misunderstandings and differences in the region.

That would be the only way for restoration of stability and security and even economic prosperity in the region, he went on to say.

Iran Skeptical of U.S. Intention in Afghan Peace Process

KABUL (IRNA) - Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Abbas Araqchi said that the U.S.’ intentions in the Afghan peace process are doubtful.

In a television interview with Afghanistan’s Tolonews, he said that Tehran is not opposed to peace in Afghanistan, but that what the U.S. is doing with the Taliban is a deal with the group.

Araqchi stressed that the peace process in Afghanistan should be addressed through dialogue between Afghans, but that there are various factors that discourage Iran from the U.S. peace plan with the Taliban.

“We believe that the U.S. should not be trusted and that the U.S. presence in the region is dangerous and will cause a lot of discord in the region,” he said.

In the absence of the Afghan government, the U.S. formally negotiated with the Taliban and made a deal about the future of Afghanistan, Araqchi said.

The U.S. entered in to a deal with the Taliban and legitimized the group and held talks with them in the absence of the Afghan government, Araqchi said, noting that the U.S. which considered itself a supporter of Afghan government signed peace deal without it.

Commenting on Iran’s relations with Taliban, the diplomat said that after the Americans began negotiations with it and other countries established ties with it, Iran also had contacts with the Taliban.

Iran’s relationship with the Taliban is only to hear the group’s views and express Iran’s position, or else Iran only recognizes the Afghan government and Constitution, he said.

Rejecting the claim that Iran funds the Taliban, he said that there is no reason for Iran to do that.

Iran Felicitates Syria on Successful Parliamentary Elections

TEHRAN (MNA) – The Spokesperson of the Foreign Ministry congratulated Syria’s successful parliamentary elections to the country’s government and nation.

Speaking on Monday, Seyed Abbas Mousavi said, “Syria’s election was held in a situation in which the Syrian nation are facing conflicts and destructions by terrorist groups and the illegal presence of foreign occupying forces, as well as the cruel [US] sanctions on the country.”

“The Islamic Republic of Iran hopes the successful parliamentary elections will be a positive step on the path of reaching peace, stability and development in Syria in line with the efforts to alleviate the challenges of the country’s people,” he added.

Voters headed to polls on Sunday as Syria held its third parliamentary election since the start of the war in 2011. The vote was due to take place in April but had to be postponed twice due to the COVID-19 pandemic. There are 1,656 candidates competing for 250 chairs in the Syrian parliament. The legislative polls are held across 70 percent of territory under government control.

Trade Activity to Resume in Chazabe Border

TEHRAN (MNA) – Trade activity will be resumed in Chazabe border on Thursday after a five-month period that trade was halted due to the outbreak of the coronavirus.

The Governor of Dashte Azadeghan Hamid Sielavi made the announcement on Monday, saying that the Iraqi central government agreed to reopen the Chazabe trade border after continuous follow-up and consultation with Iraqi officials in this regard.

He added that after holding some meetings between the provincial and Iraqi officials and resolving problems and bilateral commitments, including the observance of health protocols due to the coronavirus, the two sides agreed to reopen the Chazabe border since Thursday.

All health guidelines and protocols will be observed strictly at Chazabe border for doing trade exchanges, he emphasized.

Rouhani Asks for Accelerating the Customs Clearance of Goods

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - President Hassan Rouhani has urged for accelerating the clearance of priority goods from the customs, including raw materials needed for production and basic goods.

“Relying on internal capabilities and operational solutions, the government and the country will pass through the difficult conditions caused by the US sanctions and maximum pressure, as well as the inevitable restrictions due to the spread of the coronavirus in the country,” President Hasan Rouhani said at the meeting of the government’s economic coordination headquarters.

“Clearance of goods in the shortest time along with transparency and strict implementation of instructions to boost supply of raw materials and basic goods are among the decisive decisions of the government,” he said.

Referring to the progress made for minimizing the clearance time of goods, Rouhani added that “Considering the large inventory of goods in the country’s customs, speeding up the clearance of priority goods is an important step for the production process.”

Home-Made ‘Remdesivir’ to Enter Market Next Week

TEHRAN (MNA) – Minister of Health and Medical Education Saeed Namaki said that the home-made ‘Remdesivir’ will enter the Iranian pharmaceutical market next week.

“We will supply the first localized production of antiviral “Remdesivir” medicine at the market next week in the fight against the novel coronavirus,” said Namaki at the virtual meeting of heads of medical universities on Monday.

“Favipiravir production has also entered the Iranian pharmaceutical market accordingly,” he added.

Namaki stressed, “These medicines are only distributed in the hospital.” Previously, the medical equipment department of the Iranian ministry of health announced the permit for having ‘Remdesivir’ officially enlisted in Iran Drug List (IDL). Director-General of Drugs and Controlled Substances Heidar Mohammadi, in a letter on Saturday to Iranian medicine manufacturing companies, issued a permit for the enlistment of the medicine.

There is no reliable and effective drug in the world for the treatment of patients suffering from coronavirus but the two drugs named “Remdesivir” and “Favipiravir”, as prescribed by some doctors, were distributed in the country especially when the effectiveness of the two drugs were emphasized in the U.S. and Europe.

Regional Countries’ Cooperation to Ensure Regional Security



TEHRAN (MNA) – Chairman of Iranian Parliament’s National Security and Foreign Policy Committee said that the security of West Asia will be ensured with the roleplaying, interaction, and participation of the regional countries.

In his meeting with Australia’s ambassador to Iran Lyndall Sachs in Tehran on Sunday, Mojtaba Zonnour voiced Iran’s tendency for the development of all-out ties with Canberra, underlining the significance of the two sides’ Parliament in improving relations.

He expressed discontent with Australia’s act of joining the U.S.-led coalition in the Persian Gulf saying that “regional security cannot be neither imported nor purchased.”

The Iranian MP added that the U.S. presence in the region has not helped combat the ISIS or pirates of the Oman Sea and the Indian Ocean.

Reacting to the remarks of the Australian PM about Iran’s reduction of JCPOA commitments, he said the Australian PM had better persuade the U.S. President Trump and European officials to stay committed to the JCPOA obligations and stop unfair sanctions against the Iranian nation.

“The strategic position of the Islamic Republic of Iran, as well as regional stability and security, has paved the way for investment and the development of trade, commerce and tourism interactions with Australia,” Zonnour said.

Sachs, for her part, welcomed the expansion of Parliamentarian ties with Iran as an initial step to boosting cooperation in other sectors.

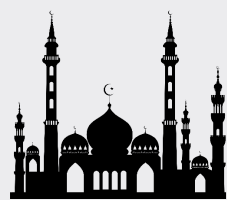
Majlis Stresses Bolstering Civil Defense Organization

TEHRAN (FNA) - Parliament’s National Security and Foreign Policy Commission underlined the need to reinforce Civil Defense Organization as the country is facing various threats of enemies.

Parliament’s National Security and Foreign Policy Commission Rapporteur Abolfazl Amouyee made the remarks on Sunday, while referring to Sunday’s session with the Head of Iran’s Civil Defense Organization, Brigadier General Gholamreza Jalali.

“Besides reviewing cyber, biological, chemical, physical and radiation threats, strengthening the organization’s legal status was underscored,” Amouyee added.

Effective moves have been taken about the vulnerabilities in Iran, he said, noting, “but there are still other threats that should be addressed; however, removal of these threats requires strengthening the legal status of the organization.”



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:10
■ Evening (Maghreb)	20:37
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:25
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:05

49. Those who fear their Lord in their most secret thoughts,
and who hold the Hour (of Judgment) in awe.
50. And this is a blessed Message which We have sent down: will ye then reject it?
Surah 21. The Prophets (49 - 50)

Iran Exports Tea to 12 Countries in Q1

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The spokesman of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) says that Iran has exported tea to 12 countries during the first quarter of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-June 20).

Rouhollah Latifi announced that over 575 tons of tea worth \$493,785 was exported during the three-month period.

The official has stated that 75 percent of the payment to the tea farmers will be made by the tea factories and the other 25 percent is paid by the government.

Latifi said Iraq has been the main destination for Iran's tea exports in the first quarter by purchasing 183 tons of tea worth \$237,500. He added that Kazakhstan, Afghanistan, Germany, India, Tajikistan, Russia, Uzbekistan and Turkey were the other major destinations for Iran's tea, respectively.

On the amount of imported tea, he said the country has imported tea from 14 countries and India by selling 8,000 tons of tea worth \$38m topped the list of exporters to Iran.

Larifi added that Sri Lanka by selling tea worth over \$13m and the UAE with selling tea worth over \$11m ranked second and third among tea exporting countries to Iran.

He further said the statistics of the customs administration show that the volume of Iran's imported tea was between 60 million to 70 million tons last year. He then pointed to the significance of Iran's position in the tea trade, adding that tea is a commodity for all walks of the society and it is the most widely consumed drinking



in the world after water and is one of the most money-making agro products. Latifi noted that if one takes a look at international trade statistics, he can notice that four countries account for 45 percent of tea production and 60 percent of tea exports.

He added that India, China, Kenya and Sri Lanka are the major tea exporting countries and most of tea products in China and India have domestic consumption and Kenya and Sri Lanka export the most amount of tea in the world.

Meanwhile earlier Head of Iran's Tea Organization (ITO) Habib Jahansaz has said that tea production in the country is expected to rise 10 percent in the current Iranian calendar year (ends on March 20, 2021).

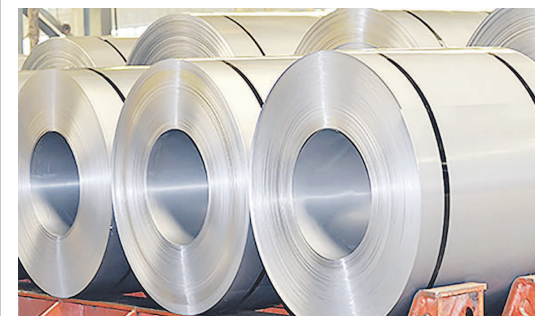
Tea harvest season starts in farmlands across the northern provinces of Gilan and Mazandaran in early May.

More than 55,000 families grow tea over 28,000 hectares of farmland in the two provinces, accounting for 90 percent of the country's total tea production.

In late December 2019, Jahansaz said Iran exported over 4,000 tons of tea to the neighboring countries, in the previous Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19).

Iran exports tea to India, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Canada, Australia, Spain, the Czech Republic, Azerbaijan, and Georgia.

MSC Accounts for 95% of Hot Rolled Steel Sheet in Q1



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

ISFAHAN – The total volume of hot rolled steel sheet output in the country stood at 1.83m tons in the first quarter of the current year and Mobarakeh Steel Company accounts for 95 percent of the total production.

According to reports, Mobarakeh Steel Company produced 1.355m tons of hot rolled steel sheet and the output at Foolad Saba Company witnessed 9.1 percent growth in production in the first quarter comparing to the same period last year.

According to Iranian Mines, Mining Industries Development and Renovation (IMIDRO), the total volume of cold rolled steel sheet output in the first quarter was 397,894 tons and the production of wide sheet at Oxin Steel Company was 23787 tons as the product is specifically produced in this unit.

The statistics on the performance of steel-makers in the past Iranian year show that the output of flat steel structural sections stood at 9.960m which show 5 percent growth comparing to its preceding year as the previous output was 9.459m.

Statistics released by Iranian Steel Producers Association (ISPA) also show that the total hot rolled steel sheet production was 8.232m last year which signaled 4 percent growth comparing to its preceding year which was 7.943m. Meanwhile the output of cold rolled steel sheet was 2.628m which showed 4 percent rise.

According to reports, exports of flat structural sections stood at 805,000 tons which showed 8 percent decline comparing to the preceding year while the amount of hot rolled steel sheet was 536,000 tons which showed 19 percent fall. Meanwhile the amount of cold rolled steel sheet in the same period was 120,000 tons which signaled 179 percent growth comparing to the same period in the preceding year.

54K Tons of Cement Exported To Afghanistan

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - A total of 54,000 tons of cement have been exported from Iran's southeastern Sistan-Baluchestan Province since the beginning of the current Iranian year on March 20, a local official said.

"The cargos have been transported by 2,056 trucks through Milak border crossing," Ayoub Kord was also quoted as saying by Fars News Agency.

More than 17.5 million tons of cement and clinker were exported from Iran in the last Iranian year (March 2019-20), registering a 32% growth compared with the previous year, according to the head of Cement Employers Association.

"Cement accounted for 6.7 million tons and clinker for 10.8 million tons of the total sum. Our main export destinations over the period were Iraq, Kuwait, the Persian Gulf littoral states, China, Bangladesh, India and Central Asian Countries," Abdolreza Sheikhan was quoted as saying by Mizan Online.

A total of 60.3 million tons of cement and 66 million tons of clinker were produced in Iran last year, showing a 9% and 6.9% rise compared with the year before, he added.

Petropars to Complete Azadegan Oilfield Development

TEHRAN (Shana) – The Petroleum Engineering and Development Company (PEDEC) has signed a contract with Petropars Group for completing the development of South Azadegan joint oilfield besides building a 320,000 b/d central treatment export plant (CTEP) at Azadegan.

The contract to complete the development of South Azadegan field was signed with the aim of increasing the daily production capacity of the field to 320,000 barrels of crude oil in 30 months and within the contract amount worth \$961 million and IRR 1,183 billion.

Touraj Dehghani, PEDEC CEO, and Hamid Reza Masoudi, the CEO of Petropars, signed the document in Tehran on Monday. The document was signed in a ceremony held in the presence of Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Zangeneh.

The project entails drilling 35 wells, installation of 50 downhole ESP pumps, completion of 8 manifolds, completion of two intermediate separation plants, construction of 328 km of flow pipelines, 45 km of communication pipelines and 65 km of gas and crude oil transmission pipelines from the CTEP to the West Karun Pumping House and NGL 3200.

The parties also signed a \$300 million contract for the construction of a CTEP (with a daily processing



capacity of 320,000 barrels); the largest oil and gas processing unit in the country, which is scheduled to be built within 30 months.

It is worth mentioning that the West Karun Exploitation and Desalination Unit and the Skid Mounted Processing Unit are the current capacities for Azadegan oil refining. The CTEP is being built to add to the field's processing capacity.

Thus, the total value of the contracts signed today between PEDEC and Petropars is \$1,261 million and IRR 1,183 billion.

The contracts will complete development of the joint field with 206 wells and 320,000 barrels/day of crude oil as well as 200 million cubic feet of gas per day.

The development of the South Azadegan joint field, which is located in the West Karun region, near the Iraqi border and about 80 km west of Ahvaz, began in 2014 when the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) signed a deal with a Chinese company. However after foot-dragging and failure of the Chinese firm to complete the project, NIOC expelled the company.

Today, the field's production capacity has reached 140,000 b/d which was only 45,000 b/d back in 2013. So far over 171 wells have been spudded in the field besides construction of 2 separators, 257 km of flow pipelines, 90 km of transmission pipelines and 23 km of communication pipelines.

Iran, EAEU to Set Up Working Groups For Expansion of Trade

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) will set up three more working groups on the expansion of trade ties between the two sides, the head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) announced.

According to the website of the TPO, after holding the first meeting of Iran-EAEU joint working group through video conference, the two sides agreed on the establishment of three new working groups focusing on customs, standards, and health and safety measures.

Head Hamid Zadboum, at the end of the meeting which was attended by the representatives of the two sides, the working group's protocol was signed.

"Based on this protocol, which includes the outcomes of the negotiations held in every meeting, the parties agreed to establish three new working groups on customs cooperation, technical measures, healthcare, and plant health measures within the framework of the agreement between the two sides," Zadboum said.

The meetings of the mentioned working groups will be held between the representatives of the relevant bodies from Iran and the EAEU member countries in the near future and after setting their goals, according to the official.

Surge in Production Secret of Improvement in Economic Condition

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei has named this year "Year of Surge in Production" as he has rightly emphasized in different periods that our country should become strong in different dimensions and one dimension is to become strong in the economic sector.



Soul of economy is nothing but production. Now that the country is challenging with the U.S. and its allies' cruel sanctions, the forex restrictions have increased and oil as a strategic good is experiencing its toughest days in the world, helping the production can help the country to come out of this undesirable condition.

On the whole we can see banking system as the main supporter of production in the country as the banks inject billions of toman into the production sector and they do not let the current problems worsen.

Useless speculations sometimes exert such pressures on the country which force both production and infrastructures to face challenges and if existing liquidity in the market is directed wisely and smartly towards production, it can both boost surge in production and wipe out all disruptions in the national economy.

Bank Melli Iran (BMI) plays an important role in this condition as it is in charge of major parts of government and public resources, and the volume of its assistance to different fields like production is incomparable with other banks.

So all branches of BMI have been justified to have proper planning for materializing the slogan of the year and the bank is determined to help the national economy progress.

Although surge in production needs cooperation of all bodies and organs in the country, BMI will do its best to play its part in this regard.

BMI like last year, which had been named Pick-Up in Production, will intensify its assistance to the production sector in order to lay the ground for a brilliant future for the national economy.

SECOND ANNOUNCEMENT



PERMIT NO : 1399.1877

NATIONAL IRANIAN SOUTH OILFIELDS COMPANY - AHVAZ-IRAN

TENDER NO.: 08-38-9740001

NATIONAL IRANIAN SOUTH OILFIELDS COMPANY (NISOC) INTENDS TO PURCHASE THE FOLLOWING GOODS:

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

ONLY ACCEPTABLE DELIVERY TERM IS D.D.P., NISOC'S WAREHOUSE, AGHAJARI, IRAN

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

NO ADVANCE PAYMENT WILL BE PAID

FOREIGN PURCHASING DEPARTMENT

Bldg, No. 104, Material Procurement Management Complex, kony-e-Fadaeian Islam (New Site), Ahvaz, Iran

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

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Kuwait Ruler Had Successful Surgery

KUWAIT (Reuters) - Kuwait's 91-year-old ruler Emir Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah underwent successful surgery on Sunday morning, his office said, after having been admitted to hospital on Saturday for medical checks.

Sheikh Sabah has ruled Kuwait since 2006. His office, in a statement carried by state news agency KUNA, did not specify what kind of surgery he underwent.

The emir's designated successor Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf al-Ahmed al-Sabah took over some of the ruler's constitutional duties on Saturday temporarily.



Ecuador Electoral Council Suspends Party of Ex-President Correa

QUITO (AFP) - Ecuador's National Electoral council decided Sunday to suspend four political organizations, including the Fuerza Compromiso Social party of former president Rafael Correa.

The registrations for Podemos, Fuerza Compromiso Social (FCS), Libertad es Pueblo and Justicia Social were left "without effect," the CNE said after a virtual meeting.

The nation's highest electoral body responded to a request from the State Comptroller General's office, which observed irregularities in the registration processes for the four political groups.



EU Leaders Struggle With Mission Impossible



BRUSSELS (Reuters) - EU leaders stood at an impasse on Monday after three days of haggling over a plan to revive economies throttled by the COVID-19 pandemic, but the chairman of their near-record-length summit urged them to make one last push on "mission impossible".

Charles Michel reminded the 27 leaders of the European Union that more than 600,000 people had now died as a result of the coronavirus around the world, and it was up to them to stand together in the face of an unprecedented crisis.

"My hope is that we reach an agreement and that the headline ... tomorrow is that the EU has accomplished mission impossible," the European Council President said at their third dinner in a row at the Brussels conference center. "That is my heartfelt wish ... after three days of non-stop work."

The leaders are at odds over how to carve up a vast recovery fund designed to help haul Europe out of its deepest recession since World War Two, and what strings to attach for countries it would benefit.

The meeting was adjourned on Monday until 1400 CET (1200 GMT).

Diplomats said the leaders may abandon the summit and try again for an agreement next month, but as they negotiated into the early hours of Monday a deal still looked possible.

On the table is a 1.8-trillion-euro (1.64 trillion pounds) package for the EU's next long-term budget and recovery fund.

The 750 billion euros proposed for the recovery fund would be raised on behalf of them all on capital markets by the EU's executive European Commission, which would be a historic step towards greater integration, and then funnelled mostly to hard-hit Mediterranean rim countries.

European Central Bank (ECB) President Christine Lagarde said it would be better for the leaders to agree an "ambitious" aid package than to have a quick deal at any cost.

"Ideally, the leaders' agreement should be ambitious in terms of size and composition of the package ... even if it takes a bit more time," she told Reuters.

Lagarde's comments suggested she was relaxed about the possibility of an adverse reaction on financial markets if the summit fails, especially as the ECB has a 1 trillion euro-plus war chest to buy up government debt.

News of the EU impasse had little impact on the euro in early Asian trade, with analysts saying markets remained hopeful of an agreement.

UK Poised to Suspend Hong Kong Extradition Treaty

LONDON (Reuters) - Britain will on Monday suspend its extradition treaty with Hong Kong in a further escalation of its dispute with China over the introduction of a security law in the former colony, British newspapers reported.

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab, who on Sunday accused China of "gross" human rights violations, will announce the suspension of the treaty in parliament, the Times and Daily Telegraph newspapers said, citing sources.

Britain's foreign office declined to comment.

Such a move would be another nail in the coffin of what former Prime Minister David Cameron has cast as a "golden era" of ties with the world's second largest economy.

But London has been dismayed by a crackdown in Hong Kong and the perception that China did not tell the whole truth over the novel coronavirus outbreak. Last week Prime Minister Boris Johnson ordered Huawei Technologies [HWT.UL] equipment to be purged completely from Britain's 5G network by the end of 2027.

China has accused Britain of pandering to the United States.

Earlier on Sunday, China's ambassador to Britain warned of a tough response if London attempted to sanction any of its officials, as some lawmakers in Johnson's Conservative Party have demanded.

"If UK government goes that far to impose sanctions on any individual in China, China will certainly make a resolute response to it," Liu Xiaoming told the BBC's Andrew Marr Show.

"You've seen what happens in the United States - they sanction Chinese officials, we sanction their senators, their officials. I do not want to see this tit-for-tat happen in... China-UK relations."

Raab told the same program he would not be drawn on future additions to Britain's sanctions list but he denied that Britain would be too weak to challenge China through this channel.

Britain says the new national security law breaches agreements made before the 1997 handover of Hong Kong to Chinese rule, and that China is crushing the freedoms that have helped make Hong Kong one of the world's biggest financial hubs.

Trump Refuses to Commit to Accepting November Election Results

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - United States President Donald Trump refused to publicly commit to accepting the results of the upcoming presidential election in November, while also declining to say if the Confederate flag was an offensive symbol.

In an interview with Fox News host Chris Wallace broadcast on Sunday, Trump said it was too early to make such an ironclad guarantee, echoing a similar threat he made weeks before the 2016 vote and scoffing at recent polls that show him lagging behind presumptive Democratic candidate Joe Biden.

"I have to see. Look ... I have to see," Trump said. "No, I'm not going to just say yes. I'm not going to say no, and I didn't last time either."

The Biden campaign responded: "The American people will decide this election. And the United States government is perfectly capable of escorting trespassers out of the White House."

While considered remarkable that a sitting president would express less than complete confidence in American democracy's electoral process, the statement follows Trump's playbook of four years ago, when in the closing stages of his race against Hillary Clinton he said he would not commit to honoring the election results if the Democrat won. Pressed during an October 2016 debate about whether he would abide by the voters' will, Trump responded he would "keep you in suspense".

During the interview, Trump also declined to say whether the Confederate battle emblem, which has come to represent racial oppression and slavery for many Americans, was an offensive symbol.

"It depends on who you're talking about, when you're talking about," Trump responded. "When people proudly had their Confederate flags they're not talking about racism. They love their flag, it represents the South. They like the South... I say it's freedom of many things, but it's freedom of speech."

Trump has also promised to veto the annual National Defense Authorization Act over an amendment to remove the names of Confederate generals from military bases within a year. The position breaks with several of his fellow Republicans in Congress.

UAE Launches Historic Mars Space Mission From Japan

TOKYO (Dispatches) - The first Arab space mission to Mars blasted off Monday aboard a rocket from Japan, with the probe dubbed "Hope" successfully separating about an hour after liftoff.

A live feed of the launch showed the rocket carrying the unmanned probe, known as "Al-Amal" in Arabic, lifting off from the Tanegashima Space Centre in southern Japan at 6:58 am local time (2158 GMT).

Almost exactly one hour later, the feed showed people applauding in the Japanese control room as the probe successfully detached.

In Dubai, the launch was met with rapturous excitement, with the UAE Mars mission's deputy project manager Sarah Al-Amiri declaring it "an indescribable feeling" to see the probe blasting off.

"This is the future of the UAE," Amiri, who is also minister of state for advanced sciences, told Dubai TV from the launch site.

The Emirati project is one of three racing to Mars,

including Tianwen-1 from China and Mars 2020 from the United States, taking advantage of a period when the Earth and Mars are nearest. In October, Mars will be a comparatively short 38.6 million miles (62.07 million kilometres) from Earth, according to NASA.

"Hope" is expected to reach Mars's orbit by February 2021, marking the 50th anniversary of the unification of the UAE, an alliance of seven emirates.

Unlike the two other Mars ventures scheduled for this year, it will not land on the Red Planet, but instead orbit it for a whole Martian year, or 687 days.

While the objective of the Mars mission is to provide a comprehensive image of the weather dynamics in the Red Planet's atmosphere, the probe is a foundation for a much bigger goal -- building a human settlement on Mars within the next 100 years.

The UAE also wants the project to serve as a source of inspiration for Arab youth, in a region too often wracked by sectarian conflicts and economic crises.



N. Korean Leader Berates Officials Over Troubled Flagship Hospital

SEOUL (AFP) - North Korean leader Kim Jong Un berated officials for their "careless" construction of a flagship hospital in Pyongyang and ordered those responsible to be sacked, state media reported Monday.

The North has long used giant infrastructure projects to try to burnish the government's credibility, including housing developments in Pyongyang and the continuing Wonsan-Kalma tourism development, but critics say speed is often prioritized over quality.

The latest scheme is the Pyongyang General Hospital, in a prime location across the Taedong river from Mansu hill, where giant statues of the North's founder Kim Il Sung and his son and successor Kim Jong Il -- father of the current leader -- look out over the capital.

Completion is scheduled for October 10 to mark the 75th anniversary of the founding of the ruling Workers' Party, and Kim called its construction a "crucial task" for the country's public health programme at a groundbreaking ceremony in March.

But after being briefed on the progress during a visit to the construction site, Kim "pointed out serious problems", the official KCNA news agency reported.

The commission in charge had organised the finances "in a careless manner with no budget for the construction properly set up", Kim was quoted as saying. The project had been initiated for the "good of the people" but was "burdening" them with demands for "assistance", Kim said.

No details were provided, but Kim ordered the ruling party's Central Committee to investigate and "replace all the officials responsible".

The report did not give the exact date of Kim's visit.

It comes amid speculation that construction is being hampered by the North's difficulties securing materials due to tightened border controls over the coronavirus pandemic.





Shanon
(adviser)

Parsian

Mahmoodieh (\$2300) Apt
220sq.m
3bdrs, S/p
Sauna, J
roof garden
marble floor
pkg, & F.F

Farmanieh Villa (\$7000)
2000sq.m
5bdrs, S/p
Sauna, J
nice yard
terrace, pkg
elegantly Furn

Kamranieh Apts
(\$1800) 160sq.m, 2bdrs, S/p, S, J, pkg, & F.F
(\$2700) 260sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, S, J, pkg, & F.F

Nice mountain View

(\$1800) Gheitarieh Apt
180sq.m, 3bdrs
balcony, & F.F

Niavaran (\$2000)
200sq.m, 3bdrs
balcony

Cell: +989121907875
Shanon_tari@yahoo.com
Tel : 88510081
Fax : 88506474

Elahieh bldg (\$5000)
4storey, 13bdrs
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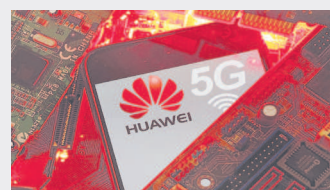
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UK Asks Japan for Huawei Alternatives in 5G Networks

TOKYO (Reuters) - The British government asked Japan to help build its 5G wireless networks without Huawei Technologies, the Nikkei said on Sunday, a further step in a global technology and security war between the United States and China.

Britain named NEC Corp and Fujitsu Ltd as potential alternative suppliers to Huawei, the business daily reported, without citing sources.

British officials met with their counterparts in Tokyo on Thursday, two days after Britain ordered Huawei equipment purged from its 5G networks by the end of 2027, the Nikkei said.



IMF Calls for Further Action To Secure Resilient Recovery

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Kristalina Georgieva, Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), has called for increased international cooperation to mitigate the continuing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In a statement issued at the conclusion of the virtual meeting of the Group of 20 (G20) Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors, chaired by Saudi Arabia, the IMF Chief said that the global economy faces a deep recession this year, with partial and uneven recovery expected in 2021.

"While there remains great uncertainty on the outlook, the unprecedented actions taken by the G20 countries and others have helped to avert a much worse outcome. As we enter the next phase of the crisis, further policy action will be required, as well as increased international cooperation. The G20 Action Plan is key to this effort," she added. "To support countries in fighting the crisis and to prevent long-lasting scarring of the global economy particularly waves of bankruptcies, risks to financial stability, high unemployment, and increasing inequality I emphasized the following: "First, the public health response remains the main priority to protect people, jobs, and economic activity. Across the world, countries have implemented exceptional measures to support individuals and workers. These lifelines should be maintained as needed and, in some cases, expanded.

"Second, supportive fiscal and monetary policies will need to continue until we can secure a safe and durable exit from the crisis. Premature withdrawal of this support could derail the recovery and incur larger costs. "Third, policies need to prepare for and support transformational change, as some sectors may permanently shrink, while others such as digital services will expand. Adapting to change in an inclusive manner will require adequate social protection, and training and job search assistance to workers.

"Fourth, we need to unite to help the poorest and most vulnerable economies, especially those struggling with high debt or dependent on hard-hit sectors. The G20's Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI) has been commendable and I hope that consideration will be given to extending it. In addition, to make it even more effective, greater private sector participation, and greater debt transparency, should be strongly promoted. Beyond the DSSI, there is a need to fill gaps in the international debt architecture and think about more comprehensive debt relief for many countries. We stand ready to support these efforts.

"I also emphasised that we can use the crisis as an opportunity to build a better future for all people by: maximising the potential of the digital economy; promoting green investment to combat climate change in a job-rich manner; and investing in human capital to build a more inclusive economy.

"The IMF has moved with unprecedented speed providing emergency financing to 72 countries in four months and we will continue to support our member countries relentlessly. We see especially pressing needs to assist low-income countries, and small and fragile states which have been hit very hard with the support of our membership, we continue to mobilize additional concessional resources to help them. In this context, we are stepping up action to make better use of existing Special Drawing Rights (SDRs).

"The IMF will explore additional tools that could further help in this crisis that is like no other and play our role at the center of the global financial safety net in this time of unprecedented need for our member countries."

Kuwait Scrambles to Boost Coffers With up to \$16b Debt Plan

KUWAIT (Reuters) - Kuwait plans to issue between 4 billion and 5 billion dinars (\$13 billion to \$16 billion) in public debt by the end of the fiscal year ending March 2021 if parliament approves a long-debated debt law, a government document seen by Reuters showed.

Facing one of the worst economic crunches in the oil-exporting Persian Gulf region, Kuwait is scrambling to boost state coffers badly hit by the coronavirus crisis and low crude prices, rapidly depleting its General Reserve Fund (GRF) to plug a budget deficit. A parliamentary committee is due to vote on the law - which would allow Kuwait to tap international debt markets - on Sunday ahead of putting it to the elected assembly for approval.

Legislators have been requesting more visibility from the state about use of the funds and repayment mechanisms given the government's heavy reliance on oil income.

"The government will face a real crisis in everything if the debt law is not passed," a government official told Reuters on condition of anonymity. The law, which a parliamentary committee discussed last week, would allow it to borrow 20 billion dinars (\$65 billion) over 30 years. Other Persian Gulf states have tapped international markets over the past few years and the region saw more issuances when oil prices crashed earlier this year as the pandemic hit global demand.

Even with parliamentary approval, Kuwait could need three to four months to prepare a debt sale, according to the government document.

A finance ministry official declined to comment when contacted by Reuters.

Kuwait has already depleted the cash in its GRF, the document showed. The International Monetary Fund estimates the deficit could reach more than 11% of gross domestic product this year, compared with a 4.8% surplus last year. The finance ministry also proposed selling 2.2 billion dinars of the GRF's assets to Kuwait's other - much larger - sovereign fund, the Future Generations Fund, or borrowing from the central bank to boost state finances, the document showed.

Finance Minister Barak al-Sheatan said in a statement published in state media on Saturday that the ministry submitted to cabinet "available options for securing sufficient liquidity" and that the government had approved an "interim financial reform scheme". He did not specify the measures approved.

"The government looks forward to the legislative authority's cooperation," Sheatan said in the statement issued after S&P Global Ratings on Friday revised Kuwait's outlook to 'negative' from 'stable'.

Kuwait's 91-year-old Emir Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah underwent successful surgery on Sunday morning after being admitted to hospital on Saturday, his office said. His designated successor Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf al-Ahmed al-Sabah temporarily took over some of the ruler's constitutional duties on Saturday.

Gold Price Set to Soar Over 20% This Year

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Gold will extend its rally as the price may surge more than 20 percent in 2020, according to a recent forecast from Russia's National Rating Agency (NRA).

The economic uncertainties triggered by the coronavirus pandemic have sparked interest in

the traditional safe haven asset. In the first half of the year, the price of the precious metal rose 26 percent, hitting a near decade high.

However, the NRA expects gold demand to cool in the next six months as fears about the economic fallout from the coronavirus outbreak wane, leading to a downside correction. Although gold price growth may slow to 15-17 percent in the second part of the year, the annual average price will still grow by 21 percent, the agency said.

Russian gold producers are projected to be the biggest beneficiaries from the price rally. According to analysts' estimates, gold miners will enjoy better financial performance and will see their annual revenues growing around 30 percent.

Russia is the third-largest gold producer in the world after China and Australia. Last year, the country produced 368 tons. While gold production rose around five percent in the first quarter, Russian producers saw a 20-percent year-on-year decline in April as the coronavirus pandemic triggered lockdowns across the country.

Given the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the industry and the Russian economy, the NRA does not expect gold output to differ much from last year's figures. The analysts' forecast is more pessimistic than the one presented by the Union of Gold Producers of Russia. In June, the association said that it expects gold production to increase up to one percent this year.

G20 Officials Pledge To Keep Cooperating To Bolster Global Economy

RIYADH (Reuters) - Finance officials from the Group of 20 major economies vowed on Saturday to continue using "all available policy tools" to fight the coronavirus pandemic and bolster the global economy, warning that the outlook remains highly uncertain.

G20 finance ministers and central bankers, in a communique issued after a virtual meeting on Saturday, said the global economy would recover as economies gradually reopen, but said further actions were needed to ensure growth.

"We are determined to continue to use all available policy tools to safeguard people's lives, jobs and incomes, support global economic recovery, and enhance the resilience of the financial system, while safeguarding against downside risks," they said in statement after the meeting ended.

COVID-19, the disease caused by the virus, has infected more than 14.14 million people and killed 596,576, according to a Reuters tally. The United States, the world's largest economy, tops the list of deaths.

Sweeping shutdowns aimed at halting the spread of the disease have caused massive disruption to the global economy, and are hitting the world's poorest countries hardest.

G20 finance officials said 42 of the world's 73 poorest countries had requested a freeze in official bilateral debt payments through the end of the year, amounting to about \$5.3 billion (\$4.23 billion) in deferred payments.

Reflecting concerns raised by the World Bank that China, a G20 member and the largest creditor to developing countries, was not participating fully, the officials urged all official bilateral creditors to implement the Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI) fully and transparently.

They also "strongly encouraged" private creditors to participate on comparable terms, and said they would consider extending the debt standstill in the second half of 2020.

Private creditors had not received any formal requests from countries for debt service suspension under the G20 initiative, the Institute for International Finance (IIF) said on Wednesday, ahead of Saturday's meeting.

"We encourage the private sector investors to participate in this, but we need to be very careful not to interfere on private agreements," Saudi Finance Minister Mohammed al-Jadaan said in a press conference at the end of the meeting.

Saudi Arabia is the current G20 chair.

The officials also reaffirmed their commitment to resolving differences over how to tax digital services and reaching a broad, consensus-based solution this year.

Turkish Steel Exporters Hail U.S. Ruling Against Trump



ANKARA (Dispatches) - A U.S. court ruling striking down US President Donald Trump's high tariffs on steel imports from Turkey is being welcomed by Turkish exporters and experts alike.

In 2018 and 2019 the Trump administration raised tariffs up to 50% on steel imports from Turkey, causing major losses for Turkish steel exporters.

The U.S. Court of International Trade last week ruled that the move was unlawful. Turkish exporters hailed the ruling, adding that they would file a claim for compensation.

Ismail Gulle, head of the Turkish Exporters' Assembly (TIM), said the court's decision was belated but right. Trump's decision to double tariffs lacked any basis and hurt Turkish steel sector exports, he told Anadolu Agency.

While in 2018 - before the decision - "Turkish steel industry export to the U.S. were \$900 million, in 2019 they fell to \$271 million, a 70% loss," he said.

Turkey has a target of \$100 billion in bilateral trade with the U.S., he said.

Adnan Aslan, head of the Turkish Steel Exporters Association, said Turkish steel exporters suffered due to Trump's arbitrary decision.

"We will claim compensation for losses," he said. "If the case goes for an appeal, we will file with the higher courts."

In 2017, the U.S. share of Turkey's total steel exports was 15% but now is only around 3%.

"The U.S. created a special quota for South Korea, Australia, Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, and Canada, and doesn't put tariffs on steel imports from these countries."

He said the ruling will serve as a test case for similar issues, such as with the EU.

"Trying to solve problem through legal avenues is a source of pride for Turkish steel producers," said Bozkurt Aran, who heads the Trade Studies Center at the Turkish Economic Policy Research Institute (TEPAV).

Indonesia Boosts Tax Incentives to Limit COVID-19's Economic Impact

JAKARTA (Dispatches) - Indonesia has increased tax incentives for businesses in a move to try and limit the economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic, its tax office said.

Previously announced tax relief that was due to expire in September, has been extended until the end of the year, a statement said. They include tax breaks for some manufacturing workers and small and medium-sized enterprises, and a discount on corporate tax installments.

The government has also expanded the type of companies eligible to apply for the tax breaks, including, for example, forestry businesses in the scheme.

It has allocated nearly 50 billion U.S. dollars in state spending to fight the coronavirus pandemic. That, and a projected drop

in fiscal revenues, are seen expanding its 2020 budget deficit by more than three times the government's original plan, to 6.34 percent of gross domestic product.

Finance Minister Sri Mulyani Indrawati has previously said the tax breaks were meant to prevent "massive bankruptcies."

The government's forecast for the economy, Southeast Asia's largest, ranges between a 0.4 percent contraction and a one percent growth. It grew five percent last year. On Saturday, Indonesia overtook China as the country with the most confirmed coronavirus cases in East Asia, with 84,882 infections and 4,016 deaths.



Mashad-Qatar Flights Resume Operation

MASHHAD (IRNA) - Mashhad-Qatar flights have resumed after a four-month suspension due to coronavirus pandemic, Director-General of Khorasan Razavi Province Airports Company Mahmoud Amani Beni said on Monday. He told IRNA that from this week on, Qatar Airways will start to fly four days a week namely on Sundays, Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays on the Qatar-Mashhad route. He added that Afghanistan's first flight to Mashhad after the coronavirus lockdown with 146 passengers landed at Mashhad International Airport on May 28, 2020.



Malaysia Riding out Covid-19 Storm Comparatively Better

KUALA LUMPUR (Bernama) - Despite the numerous challenges brought by the Covid-19 pandemic, Malaysia is riding out the severe economic downturn comparatively better than many economies, says the World Bank. Country director for Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, East Asia and Pacific, Ndiame Diop said Malaysia's economy rests on strong fundamentals. The country's diversified economic structure, sound financial system, effective public health response and proactive macroeconomic policy support have all helped to soften the pandemic's blow, he said in a statement Sunday. "While we expect the economy to see a sharp contraction this year with gross domestic product (GDP) shrinking by 3.1% and a particularly pronounced contraction in the second quarter, there is light at the end of the tunnel," he said. The World Bank estimates that 90% of the world's economies would see a contraction this year. "The impact from the pandemic is expected to lead to the first increase in global extreme poverty since 1998, effectively wiping out the progress made since 2017," he said. Diop noted that the Malaysian Government has deployed a six-stage strategy to build resolve, resilience and to restart the economy, adding that the country is currently on the recovery stage; building the foundation for the later stages, namely revitalising and reforming the economy. "This means the government is set on not just getting out of this crisis, it is also trying to get into a better shape than it was before, so it is more able to withstand the next one," he said. Diop said while significant policy support has been put in place, the government might need to do more to protect those who need it most, especially vulnerable households and businesses. While some economic activities would rebound post-movement control order (MCO), it would take some time for incomes and jobs to recover as some economic sectors, such as manufacturing, would see a faster return to growth than others, like tourism. "This may mean providing further rounds of financial assistance to the vulnerable, especially the Bottom 40 who lack the savings and support networks to withstand a prolonged hit to their earnings," he said.



He said the crisis underscored the need for Malaysia to put in place a stronger social protection system that is more cost-effective and less fragmented to improve individuals' and households' welfare, both during the recovery period and in the future. Diop said Covid-19 caught Malaysia somewhat off-guard with limited budgetary space to respond with direct fiscal injections; noting that as the economy recovers, reforms would need to be taken to boost tax revenues, including finding new sources of revenue that are more progressive. A key focus also must be on upskilling and retraining the workforce for a new economy, as well as accelerating the digital agenda and bridging the digital divide, he said. "Even before the crisis, there was a growing realisation that Malaysia needs to shift its competitive approach towards attracting higher-quality investments; a challenge which is even more critical to address now," he added. - Bernama

Japan to Pay at Least \$536m for Companies To Leave China



TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japan's government will start paying its companies to move factories out of China and back home or to Southeast Asia, part of a new program to secure supply chains and reduce dependence on manufacturing in China. Fifty-seven companies including privately-held facemask-maker Iris Ohyama Inc. and Sharp Corp. will receive a total of 57.4 billion yen (\$536 million) in subsidies from the government, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry said Friday. Another 30 firms will receive money to move manufacturing to Vietnam, Myanmar, Thailand and other Southeast Asian nations, according to a separate announcement, which didn't provide details on the amount of compensation. The government will pay a total of 70 billion yen in this round, the Nikkei newspaper reported. The payments come from 243.5 billion yen that the government earmarked in April to reduce reliance on Chinese supply chains, with the money aimed at helping companies shift factories back home or to other nations. As U.S.-China relations deteriorate and the trade war worsens, there's been increasing discussions in the U.S. and elsewhere about how to "decouple" economies and firms from China. Japan's decision is similar to a Taiwanese policy in 2019, which was aimed at bringing investment back home from China. So far, no other country has enacted a concrete policy to encourage the shift. China is Japan's biggest trading partner under normal circumstances and Japanese companies have massive investments there. The outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic has damaged those economic ties as well as China's image in Japan. The government of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has been trying for years to improve relations with China after anti-Japan riots in 2012, but the fallout from the pandemic and the ongoing territorial dispute over islands and gas fields in the East China Sea have undercut those efforts.

Asian Bonds See the Highest Foreign Buying in a Year in June

SINGAPORE (Dispatches) - Asian bonds recorded their biggest foreign inflows in a year in June as a surge in global liquidity following stimulus measures unveiled by major central banks bolstered demand for regional assets. Asian bonds received a combined net inflow of \$6.45 billion last month, the highest since June 2019, data from regional banks and bond market associations in Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, South Korea and India showed. Foreign investors bought \$2.87 billion worth of South Korean bonds, the highest in the region. The country's bonds have attracted inflows every month this year. South Korea's stronger current account position, lower fiscal deficit and better yields, compared to other countries with the same sovereign ratings, are the reasons behind inflows into its bonds, some analysts said. Malaysian bonds also received \$2.7 billion worth of foreign money last month, largely into government securities. Foreign buying in Malaysian bonds in June "is in line with higher portfolio flows into emerging market debt as negative sentiment abated amid reopening optimism and carry-trade flows," Julia Goh, a senior economist at UOB, said in a report. At the end of last month, ratings agency S&P Global changed to negative its outlook on Malaysia, to reflect weaker fiscal metrics, growth outlook, and heightened policy uncertainty. Thailand and Indonesian bonds also received \$718 million and \$364 million in inflows last month. Foreigners sold \$204 million worth of Indian bonds in June. With more than a million cases of coronavirus, India is the third most afflicted country globally, just after the United States and Brazil. "The amount of global liquidity injected by major central banks is likely to see some of it flowing into Asia, especially with investors seeking higher yields amid a prolonged period of zero or negative interest rates in developed economies," Khoon Goh, head of Asia Research at ANZ, said in a report.

Brazil Powerbrokers Sense Chance to Kickstart Economic Reforms

BRASILIA (Dispatches) - With Brazil's coronavirus outbreak widening and the economy forecast to face its worst recession on record, politicians and officials have suspended the infighting that stalled the country's ambitious reform agenda and are determined to seize the momentum to push the program through. "The next 18 months will go down in the history of the Brazilian economy as 18 months of economic reforms," Adolfo Sachsida, Brazil's secretary for political economy, told the Financial Times. The sweeping plans, which include an overhaul of the byzantine tax system and dominated political debate last year, are aimed at slashing red tape to spur growth while promoting fiscal discipline to attract private investment. But progress was halted after President Jair Bolsonaro pushed his government close to a constitutional crisis with Congress and the Supreme Court and by the arrival of Covid-19, which has so far killed some 75,000 in a country that is among the world's worst hit. Economists and policymakers see the agenda as a crucial step towards restoring investor confidence and kickstarting growth in Latin America's largest economy, which last year expanded only 1.1 per cent. The programme — which also includes changes to the machinery of government and a proposal for central bank independence — has gained more urgency as a result of the pandemic, which is likely to trigger a contraction this year potentially as large as 8 per cent, according to the World Bank. As political pressures subside, influential officials and Congress powerbrokers appear to be uniting around the need to pass the reforms. Rodrigo Maia, speaker of the lower house, wants a tax overhaul completed before he finishes his term in February. "Our priority is tax reform. We don't have



time to waste," he said on Twitter last week. The push has also been endorsed by leaders of the powerful centrao political bloc, composed of 221 of the lower house's 513 lawmakers, which has aligned itself in recent months with Mr Bolsonaro in exchange for a series of political appointments. "Tax reform is necessary, everyone wants it, I believe it will be a priority after this pandemic period," Arthur Lira, a senior centrao figure, told local media. Reforming Brazil's tax system has long been an objective of economic policymakers, who say simplifying tens of thousands of federal, state and local rules would create efficiencies and improve the business and investment environment. But a series of efforts over the years have foundered under pressure from political lobbying and vested interests, while lack of trust has fuelled

resistance by the nation's 27 governors and thousands of mayors to any attempt to centralise tax collection. "It is a very complex topic. To really agree on a common position is a big challenge, but I recognise that in parliament there is a political will to move forward," said Efraim Morais Filho, leader of the centre-right Democratas party in the lower house. Brazil's economy ministry has yet to present a tax reform proposal, so attention is focused on a plan drafted by members of the lower house, which wants to create a general tax on goods and services by unifying five different levies. "I think it has the conditions for a solid majority. It seems to me the government has made a choice not to present its own proposal and only to contribute improvements," said Mr Morais Filho.

IRGC...

FROM PAGE 1

The commander further said the elite force's Aviation has reached self-sufficiency in the field of defensive tools and equipment. "IRGC Aviation is now fully capable of providing its needs in the field of modernization and overhaul of the squadrons," Salami said. During the ceremony, attended by a number of IRGC commanders, the force unveiled a laser-guided missile system that will be installed on the IRGC helicopters. Salami pointed to the vital role of IRGC Aviation in maintaining the country's security, adding, "The force has experienced considerable progress in the field of offensive, transportation and logistic helicopters." The commander of IRGC Ground Force, Brigadier General Mohammad Pakpour, who was also present at the ceremony, said, "All essential grounds for the application of helicopters in IRGC operations have been provided." "We are currently able to use such equipment in all operational zones," he added.

China Guarantees...

FROM PAGE 1

Safari said the comprehensive partnership deal with China could entail many benefits for Iran as well, including a surge in arrivals of Chinese tourists into the country. "The Chinese send 250 million tourists (to other countries) each year, if only one million of them arrive in Iran, that would deeply change our economy," said the former envoy. Neither Iran nor China have given any concrete details about a potential long-term agreement that has yet to be finalized. However, leaks have suggested that China would invest around \$400 billion in Iran's energy and infrastructure sectors over 25 years in return for taking delivery of a stable supply of energy from the Middle Eastern country.

Decoding Black Boxes...

FROM PAGE 1

Based on the international regulations, manufacturer of the plane and Ukraine as a user of the aircraft will represent the investigation process. Meanwhile Canadian Foreign Minister François-Philippe Champagne in a message said Canada has received information with regard to delivery of the Ukrainian plane black box by Iran to France. "We have received confirmation that the black boxes of Flight #PS752 have arrived in Paris where they are expected to be brought to the @BEA_Aero tomorrow morning for analysis," Philippe Champagne wrote in his Twitter account on Monday. "Officials from @TSBCanada [Transportation Safety Board of Canada] will be present," he added. Earlier, Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Legal and International Affairs Mohsen Baharvand had said that the process of decoding Ukrainian plane black box will start under the supervision of an Iranian team of experts in France as of July 20.

Watford Sack Manager Pearson

LONDON (Reuters) - Premier League strugglers Watford have sacked manager Nigel Pearson with two games of the season remaining, the BBC and other British media reported on Sunday.

Pearson joined Watford in December, overseeing an uptick in form, but the club have struggled since the league restarted in June after an enforced suspension due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Quartararo Wins Spanish MotoGP

MADRID (Dispatches) - Fabio Quartararo won the Spanish Grand Prix on Sunday as MotoGP got its season underway amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Six-time defending MotoGP champion Marc Márquez crashed hard with four laps to go and had to be carried off the track on a stretcher with an apparent arm injury. He started third but had to come from behind after losing control of his bike and avoiding an earlier crash that put him back in the pack at the beginning of the race.

8 IRAN NEWS

SPORTS

TUESDAY JULY 21, 2020

Hamilton Takes Lead With Eighth Hungarian GP Win

BUDAPEST (Reuters) - A masterful Lewis Hamilton won the Hungarian Grand Prix in dominant style and for a record eighth time on Sunday to wrest the Formula One championship lead from Mercedes team mate Valtteri Bottas.

Max Verstappen took second for Red Bull, the Dutch youngster awarded 'drive of the day' after crashing on the way to the grid in early drama that had his mechanics scrambling to fix the damage before the start.

Bottas, now five points behind Hamilton after three races, finished a close third after battling back from a botched start off the front row.

Hamilton's 86th career victory, from his 90th pole position and collecting a bonus point for fastest lap, left the six-times world champion five short of Michael Schumacher's all-time record of 91 wins.

"It was a pretty beautiful day, to be honest," said Hamilton, who had lapped all but three cars by the time he pitted for soft tyres with three laps to go and a lead of more than 26 seconds.

The Briton also equalled Schumacher's record of winning a grand prix eight times, something the Ferrari great achieved in France between 1994 and 2006.

"Round one had multiple different punches that I wasn't perhaps ready for but I refocused and the last two have been fantastic," Hamilton, fourth in the opener won by Bottas, said of the season so far.

"This weekend, we've just been on point throughout so we need to try and keep this up," said the Briton, the only Black driver who again led other drivers in taking a knee before the start in support of anti-racism campaigns.

Hamilton, winner of the Styrian Grand Prix in Austria the weekend before, now has three wins in a row in Hungary, with the next two races on home soil at Silverstone. Those will also be without spectators in a season overshadowed and delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic.



The day started wet and conditions were still greasy by the time the cars went out, as Verstappen discovered to his cost when he locked up and skidded into the tyre wall at turn 12.

The Dutch driver was amazed by his mechanics' performance in winning their own race against the clock, giving him a car to drive from seventh place on the grid and zero to hero.

"I thought I was not going to race, so to be second is like a victory for me," he said.

Bottas meanwhile rued what might have been, the Finn distracted on the grid by a cockpit light that made him move early and then stop before starting again.

"I reacted to a light on my dash that went off. I don't know what it was and I reacted to that instead of the start light," he said. "I lost many places and it made the race very difficult."

Canadian Lance Stroll finished fourth for Racing Point, who are racing while subject to a protest from Renault over the legality of their Mercedes-lookalike car.

Alex Albon took fifth for Red Bull in another turn up for a team who appeared to be struggling on Saturday.

Ferrari's Sebastian Vettel was sixth, with Racing Point's Sergio Perez seventh and Australian Daniel Ricciardo eighth for Renault.

Formula One F1 - Hungarian Grand Prix - Hungaroring, Budapest, Hungary - July 19, 2020 Mercedes' Lewis Hamilton passes his team after winning the race REUTERS/Leonhard Foeger/Pool

Denmark's Kevin Magnussen was ninth for his Haas team's first point of the season but he and team mate Romain Grosjean were later summoned to stewards for an alleged use of driver aids during the formation lap.

Gundogan Urges Man City to Shape Up After FA Cup Exit

LONDON (AFP) - Ilkay Gundogan admits Manchester City must sharpen up as they focus on Champions League glory after their FA Cup exit.

City suffered a surprise semi-final defeat against Arsenal on Saturday as Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang's double sealed a 2-0 win at Wembley.

With two Premier League games remaining and City assured of second place behind champions Liverpool, Pep Guardiola's team will turn their attention to Europe.

A 2-1 first leg win against Real Madrid gives City a chance of making the quarter-finals, with the second leg of their last-16 tie taking place at the Etihad Stadium on August 7.

But City were sluggish against Arsenal -- days after a lacklustre win against Bournemouth -- and German midfielder Gundogan knows improvements have to be made if they are to win the Champions League for the first time.

"We have two more league games to play and then we have a big game against Madrid," Gundogan told City's website.

"We should definitely improve because the way we played (Saturday) won't be enough to go into the next round of the Champions League.

"We have to improve quite quickly because we don't have much time. We need to try to do our best."

Kane Double

For Spurs Hits Leicester's Top-Four Hopes

LONDON (Reuters) - Tottenham Hotspur striker Harry Kane looked back to his best with two quality goals as his side dealt a huge blow to Leicester City's top-four hopes with a 3-0 victory in the Premier League on Sunday.

Kane struggled for sharpness when the season resumed last month, a legacy of the serious hamstring injury that sidelined him from Jan. 1, but the striker produced a dazzling display as Spurs boosted their Europa League qualifying hopes.

Leicester's James Justin deflected Son Heung-min's shot into his own goal after six minutes to give Spurs the perfect start and England captain Kane's clinical double before halftime put Jose Mourinho's side in complete control.

He has now scored four times in two games and has 23 in all competitions this season.

"I'm feeling as good as I've done for the last four or five years," Kane, who notched up 200 career club league goals against Newcastle United in midweek, told Sky Sports.

"I like to do my talking on the pitch and that's what we did today. It's good that we are finishing strongly."

Leicester have looked certain of a top-four finish for virtually the whole season but now are at risk of missing out on a Champions League spot.

They remain fourth but are level on 62 points with fifth-placed Manchester United who have two games left to play to Leicester's one. They meet on the final day of the season.

Spurs are finishing strongly, winning four of their last five games, and moved two points above Wolverhampton Wanderers into sixth with 58, closing in on Europa League qualification.

Kane was even involved in Tottenham's opener. His superb pass released Son down the left and he sprinted half the length of the pitch to support his fellow striker.

Son went alone though and cut in to shoot right-footed, his effort taking a hefty deflection off Justin to give goalkeeper Kasper Schmeichel no chance. In an open game, Leicester responded and Jamie Vardy had chances before Spurs keeper Hugo Lloris made a great low save to keep out a sweetly-struck volley by Ayoze Perez.



On Tuesday, she won her first match since her return to competitive tennis, defeating Sofia Kenin (WTA 4), before going on to beat Bernarda Pera (WTA 60) on Wednesday,

Clijsters Makes It Five in a Row

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - Kim Clijsters won her fifth singles match in a row at the World Team Tennis exhibition tournament in White Sulphur Springs, in the U.S. state of Virginia.

Playing for the New York Empire team, the Belgian star powered home to a 5-1 victory over Bielorrussia's Olga Govortsova, ranked 135th by the World Tennis Association (WTA).

De Gea Blunders Put Chelsea in FA Cup Final

LONDON (AFP) - Chelsea were gifted a place in the FA Cup final as Manchester United goalkeeper David De Gea made a series of costly blunders in the Blues' 3-1 win on Sunday.

Frank Lampard's side will face London rivals Arsenal in the final on August 1 thanks to another nightmare display in a horrendous season for De Gea.

The Spaniard was at fault when he let Olivier Giroud's shot trickle over the line late in the first half at Wembley.

And De Gea made an even worse mistake moments after the interval when he allowed Mason Mount's shot to evade his weak attempted save.

While the spotlight was on De Gea and his future at the club after his latest howlers, Chelsea were by far the better team as they reached the FA Cup final for the first time since they last lifted the trophy in 2018.

Harry Maguire's own goal was a fitting end to a woeful performance from United, who lost for the first time in 20 games in all competitions despite Bruno Fernandes' late penalty.

United had beaten Chelsea three times this season, with two wins in the Premier League and one in the League Cup. But Lampard, who won the FA Cup four times as a player, had the last laugh with a result that moves him closer to silverware in his first season as Chelsea boss.



Messi Breaks Top Scorer Record

VITORIA GASTEIZ (Reuters) - Lionel Messi finished as top scorer in La Liga for a record seventh time after netting twice as dethroned champions Barcelona ended their disappointing campaign on a high with a resounding 5-0 win at Alaves on Sunday.

Barca finished the season second in the standings on 82 points, five behind newly-crowned champions Real Madrid who drew 2-2 at Leganes later on Sunday. Alaves came 16th on 39.

Teenage forward Ansu Fati put Barca in front midway through the first half after the visitors hit the woodwork three times, while Messi and strike partner Luis Suarez further stretched their side's lead before halftime.

Defender Nelson Semedo hit the fourth early in the second half before Messi struck again, ending the campaign on 25 league goals, four more than second-top scorer Karim Benzema of Real Madrid.

The Argentine, who also finished as top marksman for a fourth consecutive season, eclipsed the benchmark he previously shared with the late Telmo Zarra but said he would have rather have won the league.

"Individual prizes and objectives are secondary. It's an important achievement to win it seven times but I would have liked it to have been accompanied by the La Liga title," Messi said.

