

Brazilian Coach Bernardo Rezende Is a Candidate to Take Charge of Iran National Volleyball Team to Replace Igor Kolakovic, The Secretary General of Iranian Volleyball Federation Said

IRAN NEWS

Spokesman for the Parliament National Security and Foreign Policy Commission Abolfazl Amouei Reacted to Remarks by Britain Officials About Sanctioning Iranian Authorities

VOL. XXVI, No. 7007 TEHRAN Price 40,000 Rials

www.irannewsdaily.com

THURSDAY JULY 30, 2020 - MORDAD 9, 1399

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IRGC Fires Underground Ballistic Missiles in War Game

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps has fired a series of ballistic missiles from launch pads hidden deep underground in a large-scale military exercise underway in southern Iran.

On the second day of Payambar-e Azam 14 (The Great Prophet) war game on Wednesday, the IRGC Aerospace Force successfully fired ballistic missiles hidden in camouflage deep under the ground.

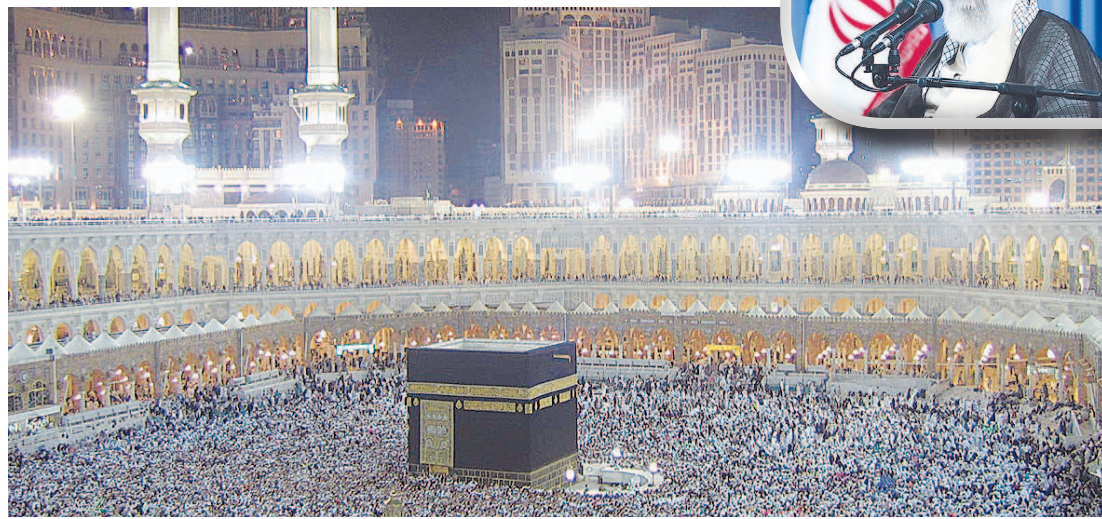
In another operation over the Persian Gulf waters and the Strait of Hormuz, the IRGC Aerospace Force flew combat drones to strike a replica of a hostile aircraft carrier.

The IRGC's Sukhoi-22 fighter jets also destroyed targets on the Farur island with winged bombs. A broad range of smart bombs were dropped to detonate the hypothetical enemy's targets with great accuracy, as the targets have been designed on a much smaller scale than the actual size.

Meanwhile Iran's IRGC Aerospace Force Brigadier General Amir Ali Hajizadeh put forward more details about the successful launch of ballistic missiles from underground.

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U.S. Presence in Region Source of Insecurity, Devastation



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – Supreme Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution says the Presence of the US in the West Asia region is detrimental to the regional nations.

In a message marking the annual Hajj pilgrimage, Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei said the US presence also leads to insecurity, devastation and underdevelopment of countries.

The Leader then touched upon anti-racism protests in the United States.

"With regards to the current developments in the U.S. and the anti-racism movement there, our firm stance is to support people and condemn the atrocious behavior of the racist government of that country," he said.

The Leader in his message addressing the Hajj said, "Hajj has always been the occasion of feeling the dignity, greatness, and blossom of the Islamic world, which this year is experiencing the sorrow and regret of the believers and the feeling of separation and the failure of the eager."

"Hearts feel homesick from the nostalgia for the Kaaba, and the separated are embracing tears and sighs. This deprivation is short-lived and will not last long god willing, but its lesson, which is to appreciate the great blessing of Hajj, must be sustained and free us from negligence," he said.

The leader's message added, "We must feel and think more than ever, the secret of the greatness and power of the Islamic Ummah in the all-encompassing and diverse group of believers in the sanctuary of the Kaaba and the Prophet mausoleum (Peace Be Upon Him) and the Imams of Al-Baqi' Cemetery (as) this year."

Ayatollah Khamenei underlined that Hajj is an exercise of power against the arrogant who is the center of corruption, oppression, killing the defenseless, and looting, and today the body and soul of the Islamic Ummah are afflicted and oppressed by their oppression and malice.

"Hajj is a demonstration of the hard and soft abilities of the Ummah. This is the nature and spirit of Hajj and part of the most important goals of Hajj; This is what the late Imam Khomeini called the Abrahamic Hajj; and this is what can solve the great problems of the Islamic world if those in charge of Hajj, who call themselves the custodians of the two shrines, sincerely obey it and choose God's will instead of pleasing the U.S. government," Leader said.

The Leader made the remarks that today, as always and more than ever, the obligatory convenience of the Islamic Ummah is in unity; a unity that created unison in the face of threats and enmities, and bravely shields against the U.S. and the Zionist regime and against the bullying.

He also stressed that today more than ever this fundamental transformation is at the disposal of the Islamic Ummah and the sympathetic and prudent elite and noted that today the Islamic awakening which means the elites and the Muslim youth must pay attention to their epistemological and spiritual assets, is an undeniable fact.

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COVID-19 Kills Another 196 Iranians

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Health Ministry spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari said on Wednesday that some 235 more Iranians have died from coronavirus disease (COVID-19) over the past 24 hours bringing the total deaths to 16,343.

Sima Sadat Lari said that, with the 196 new victims, the country's total COVID-19 deaths mounted to 16,343.

Some 2,636 new cases of infection with the COVID-19 were found over the past 24 hours, some 1,604 of whom have been hospitalized, she added.

Sadat Lari noted that a total of 298,909 Iranians have been confirmed infected with the COVID-19, some 259,116 of whom have recovered and were discharged from hospital.

Some 4,027 other COVID-19 patients are in critical condition and being treated in intensive care units, the spokeswoman said. She added that 2,405,862 tests have so far been carried out in Iran.

According to the spokeswoman, the provinces of Tehran, East Azerbaijan, Ardabil, Isfahan, Alborz, Ilam, Khorasan Razavi, Kerman, Golestan, North Khorasan, Semnan, Lorestan, Hormozgan, and Fars provinces are in the red alert.

Iraq to Import Power from Turkey

DUBAI (Dispatches) - Iraq plans to import electricity from Turkey and a Kurdistan-based company to deal with a severe power shortage, an electricity ministry spokesman said July 28, as the rampant cuts sparked a wave of deadly protests this week.

Iraq intends to import 450 MW from KAR Group, which is based in the semi-autonomous Kurdish region in the north of the country, and 200 MW from Turkey to plug the power deficit, ministry spokesman Ahmed Musa told S&P Global Platts. "We think these temporary imports will probably improve power supply to handle the summer season and the crisis of high temperatures," said Musa.

Protests against the power cuts this week, which led to at least two deaths according to local media, have prompted Iraq to come up with short-term solutions to the electricity shortage, a chronic problem that has led to protests in previous peak summer months when temperatures soar to 50 degrees Celsius.

The protests complicate Iraq's ability to wean itself of Iranian gas and electricity imports, with Baghdad under U.S. pressure to lower its reliance on Tehran. Iraq has been receiving U.S. waivers to continue importing gas and electricity from Iran since 2018.

Under its current agreement with Iran, Iraq can import up to 1.2 GW during peak demand, Musa said.

Iraq also has made commitments to adhere to OPEC+ crude production cuts and make up for lax compliance in May and June during the summer, but that will produce less of the associated gas needed as feedstock for its power plants. The gas requirements and pressure from the populous could complicate Iraq's adherence to the cuts during July to September.

Iraq plans to start adding gradually from August or September up to 1.5 GW of installed capacity from various new power plants or existing facilities that are under maintenance, Musa said. Currently power generation fluctuates between 16-18 GW/day.

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Enemy Has Failed to Hinder Iran's Exports

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – President Hassan Rouhani stated that the enemy has not been able to stop our exports, adding that in the last two years and a few months, we have gone through difficult days.

President Rouhani in a cabinet meeting on Wednesday said that these are the days when we become stronger and stronger against all the conspiracies that were designed by the ill-wishers against people and our country.

"The enemy's first plan was for our economy, which wanted to destroy our economy and put people under economic pressure, and basically the foundations of our economy would not remain and could not continue. They thought we had triple-digit inflation and negative double-digit economic growth, and they thought that they could destabilize the economy in a few months, President Rouhani emphasized.

He added, "We have gone through difficult days in these two years and a few months, and it was not an easy day for the people but thanks to God, the basis of the country and the system and the framework of the country's economy and people's lives are well managed. Today, basic goods are immediately available to the people. Of course, in addition to abundance, we were interested in a balanced price, which we should do more in this regard."

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Iran Trade Value Hits \$14b in Q1

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Islamic Republic of Iran's trade value reached \$14 billion in the first three months of the current year (from March 21 to June 20).

Accordingly, the Islamic Republic of Iran exported \$6.4 billion and imported \$7.6 billion worth of products in the same period, based on which, total value of trade of the country from March 21 to June 20, 2020, hit \$14 billion at large.

According to studies made by Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (TCCIMA), Islamic Republic of Iran exported \$11.4 billion and imported \$10.4 billion worth of products in the first three months of the last Iranian calendar year (from March 21 to June 20, 2019).

Based on the above figures, Iran's total trade value in the first three months of the last Iranian last year hit \$21.8 billion.

Iran's export value in the first quarter of the current year hit \$6.4 billion, showing a 44 percent decline as compared to the same period of last year.

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Pakistan Says U.S. Harassing Iranian Airliner "A Dangerous Game"

ISLAMABAD (IRNA) - Pakistan's Minister for Human Rights says the U.S.' July 23 threat against the Iranian passenger plane is a very dangerous game by the US and Zionist regime.

Shireen Mazari in a tweet on Wednesday said: An extremely dangerous game of brinkmanship by the US and Zionist regime over Middle Eastern airspace - an already volatile region.

Iran's Mahan Air flight 1152 was on its way to Beirut, Lebanon, when it was intercepted and threatened by two US F-5 military jets over Syria. Some of its passengers were injured when the pilot made a sudden lowering altitude in the air of Lebanon before landing at Beirut airport.

In an interview with IRNA last week, the former deputy commander of Pakistan Air Force, Air Marshal (ret'd) Qaisar Hussain criticized the aggressive approach of Western powers, including Washington on the territory of other countries, saying that the action of U.S. fighter jets against Iranian passenger plane is a wrong and unjustifiable move.



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Jannati Hopes Al-Saud to Come to Its Senses

TEHRAN (MNA) – The Secretary of the Guardian Council expressed hope that the evil of Saudi Arabia comes to its senses soon and the situation of the Yemeni people improve with the destruction of this regime.

Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati yesterday referred to the crime of Al-Saud for killing Iranian pilgrims in 1987 who had attended the ceremony of Disavowal of Polytheists in Hajj, adding,

“Unfortunately, inhuman attacks of Saudi Arabia on Yemen and the oppression of the innocent people of this country continues.”

Of course, the patience and resistance of the Yemeni people, who are enduring all the hardships by the Saudi regime are appreciable, said Jannati, and expressed hope that the evil of Saudi Arabia to come to its senses soon and that the situation of the Yemeni people improves with the destruction of this regime.

U.S. Urged to End Illegal, Unlawful Measures

TEHRAN (IRNA) – Government Spokesman Ali Rabiee said that the U.S. must terminate its illegal and unlawful moves before it is too late.

“The Islamic Republic of Iran will not be a spectator of America’s provocations,” he pointed out.

With regard to the harassment by the U.S. jet fighter jets of the Iranian passenger plane, he stated that the report and complaint on the issue have been submitted to the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and Iran is investigating all other legal options simultaneously.

The U.S. is not committed to the aviation laws and regulations, he said noting that the responsibility of any upcoming incident that will endanger the lives of civilians of the passenger planes will fall on it and the Americans should be waiting for the consequences.

The U.S. government has long been unable to hear the viewpoints of American experts and cannot realize Iran’s realities, he further noted.

A maximum pressure policy has failed, he said, adding that the US’ Secretary of State continues to provide false information to the President of America.

He went on to say that U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is determined to deceive his boss (President Donald Trump) and this is the path that John Bolton pursued for one year.

Iran has no enthusiasm for the partisan and domestic policies of the United States, he underlined.

Rabiee added that Iran and Russia have many common interests and concerns that need to handle them in a constant relationship between the officials of the two countries.



The recent letter of Iranian President Hassan Rouhani to his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin is also according to the parties’ coordination about these issues and the future of cooperation between Iran and Russia.

He further noted that when the United States has adopted a hostile attitude towards the nations of Iran and Russia in various fields, the exchange of ideas between presidents is natural and can accelerate the progress of the affairs.

Rabiee said that it is sometimes essential that a part of this coordination would take place at the foreign ministers’ level and sometimes at the presidents’ level. Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif’s visit along with transferring President Rouhani’s message to President Putin was a successful diplomatic effort at both levels.

“In general, this visit had two goals. One is about the US effort to continue the arms embargo of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which needed negotiations to be carried out at higher levels with the Russian Federation. Another goal is to extend the agreement “we have had with the Russian Federation for twenty years in all fields”, he pointed out.

U.S. Harassment of Iranian Airliner Disgraceful

TEHRAN (MNA) – In reaction to the U.S. harassment of an Iranian airliner in Syria, Iranian President’s Chief of Staff Mahmoud Vaezi said that the U.S. act is disgraceful and contrary to international standards.

“The Americans have used all their policies over the past two years, whether in sanctions, maximum pressure, and propaganda warfare and they tried all means to put pressure on the Iranian nation,” Vaezi said on Wednesday.

“The act of U.S. harassment of a Mahan airliner is a disgraceful act and contrary to international standards,” he added.

“By harassing of the Iranian Mahan airliner, the US intended to provoke a security reaction in Iran to cause public concern,” he said.

Referring to Brian Hook’s visit to regional countries and U.S. efforts to extend arms embargo on Iran, Vaezi said, “His visit to various countries regarding to Iran’s issue shows the weakness of the US.”

“They will certainly not succeed,” he stressed.

40,000 Foreign Students Study at Iranian Universities

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Managing director of foreign students’ affairs at the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology (MSRT) said that some 40,000 foreign students study at Iranian universities.

Abdolhamid Alizadeh said that more than 2,000 foreigners get admissions from Iranian universities each year, 500 of whom pay tuition fees. Alizadeh urged the Iranian universities to attract more foreign students in a bid to increase their revenues. He said that foreigners study at Iranian universities observe their protective health protocols and proceed with academic studies.

According to statistics, of the 40,000 foreign students in the country, 29,000 are studying at universities run by the science ministry and the rest are students at Islamic Azad universities and universities affiliated to the health ministry.

The foreign students who study at Iranian universities are from 129 nationalities.

Iran Trade Volume Exchange With China Must Increase

TEHRAN (MNA) - A member of Iranian Parliament National Security and Foreign Policy Commission said that Iran’s trade volume exchange with the East especially China must increase, for, western countries showed that they are not trustworthy.

Ebrahim Azizi said that senior officials of the Establishment and also lawmakers consider the national interests when signing contracts with world countries.

While concluding agreements with other countries, government officials focus on safeguarding the independence of the country, he reiterated, adding, “We believe that country’s trade exchange volume with Eastern countries especially China should increase and most legislators in the Iranian Parliament emphasize on increasing trade exchange volume with the People’s Republic of China.”

The Islamic Republic of Iran needs to establish more interaction and relations with countries that have established more economic and foreign policy relations with the country over the past years, Azizi highlighted.

Countries that have shown hostility to the Islamic Republic of Iran since the victory of the Islamic Revolution are not trustworthy, he said, adding, “if suitable ways are paved for the country to establish more relations with Eastern countries in the current situation, it will be a very strong response to the lack of commitments of Western countries towards Iran.”

Western countries especially the United States have difficulty settling their own internal crises and are unable to resolve their problems, he said, adding, “under such circumstances, Iran should seek to strengthen its ties with neighboring and economically powerful countries like China.”

Foreign Applicants Take Part in 16th Resistance Int’l Film Festival

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Some 1,260 works from Central and South America, Europe, Asia, Middle East and Africa have requested to attend the 16th Resistance International Film Festival.

According to the secretariat of the event, 460 works from Asia, 280 works from Central and South America, 325 works from Europe and 90 others from African have so far registered for participation.

India with 248, Turkey with 63, Spain with 30, Brazil with 51 and Russia with 29 works are now on top of the participants’ list.

Deadline for sending world to secretariat will be July 30.

Iranian, Qatari Diplomats Discuss Mutual, Regional Issues



TEHRAN (IFP) - Tehran and Doha have discussed a whole range of issues, including the enhancement of bilateral tie.

That came in a meeting in Doha between Ali-Asghar Khaji, a senior advisor to the Iranian foreign minister for special political affairs, and Qatari State Minister for Foreign Affairs Soltan bin Saad Al-Muraikhi.

The two sides exchanged views on issues of mutual interest, namely the promotion of mutual political and economic relations and the holding of a joint commission of the two countries in the near future.

The also discussed the ongoing developments in the region and stressed the need to move forward with consultations.

The top Iranian diplomat then touched upon recent trips to the region by American authorities, dismissing them as a move to further stoke Iranophobia and instability in the region.

Tehran, Baku Underscore Development of Ties

BAKU (IP) - During the meeting of the Ambassador of Iran to Azerbaijan Javad Jahangirzadeh with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan Jeyhun Bayramov, the development of Tehran-Baku relations and cooperation was emphasized.

During the meeting, held on Tuesday on the occasion of the end of Jahangirzadeh’s mission, Bayramov expressed satisfaction with the development of brotherly relations and cooperation between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Islamic Republic of Iran based on respect, mutual support, and historical friendship.

Referring to the cooperation between the two countries in multilateral and regional issues and relations, he appreciated the Islamic Republic of Iran’s reaction to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which is based on international law and the protection of territorial integrity, and Iran’s fair position on the recent conflicts between Republic of Azerbaijan and Armenia.

The Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran also pointed out that during his mission, capacities were used to develop relations between the two countries, and assured that the new Ambassador of Iran will spare no effort in deepening and developing relations between the two countries.

Emphasizing Iran’s support for the territorial integrity of the Republic of Azerbaijan and referring to the messages of the Vice President and Spokesman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran and MPs regarding the recent conflicts between Azerbaijan and Armenia, he said that the concerns of the Republic of Azerbaijan are also Iran’s concerns.

Iran Successful in All Fields Despite 40 Year of Sanctions

TEHRAN (MNA) – An Iranian diplomat said that despite the 40 years of oppressive U.S. sanctions, Iran has been able to achieve great progress in the fields of science, industry, military, medicine, agriculture, IT, nuclear, nanotechnology.

Nasser Kanani Chafi, the head of Interest-Section of Islamic Republic of Iran in Cairo, wrote in an article on the occasion of the death anniversary Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the fugitive Shah of Iran in Cairo, Egypt on August 26, 1980.

On this basis, he made some statements over the achievements of the Islamic Republic of Iran and added that “historically Iran is neither a weak and degenerate country nor an interventionist and colonialist country. The fact is that the Islamic Revolution happened four decades ago to preserve

national independence and oppose the intervention and domination of foreign powers, including the United States.”

Kanani went on to explain that Iran is also an economically developing country that, despite 40 years of oppressive sanctions by the US, has succeeded in the fields of science, industry, military, medicine, agriculture, IT, nuclear, nanotechnology and other new technologies and in producing strategic agricultural products has reached self-sufficiency as well.

Having a large number of specialist physicians and modern medical centers, today Iran treats many patients of regional countries as well as exporting many pharmaceutical items and medical equipment to global markets, he wrote.

Tehran, Seoul to Confer on Development of Humanitarian Trade

TEHRAN (MNA) – Following the first humanitarian shipment to Tehran in May under the U.S. sanctions, Iran and South Korea will hold virtual talks on Wednesday about expanding humanitarian trade like medicine exports.

The discussion will focus on how to match Iran’s demand for medicine and medical equipment with what South Korean exporters can offer, Yonhap news agency reported.

Lee Seong-ho, deputy foreign minister for economic affairs, will lead the South Korean side comprised of officials from other ministries and trade agencies. Among the Iranian officials attending the meeting will be Mohammad Reza Shannehsaz, head of Iran’s Food and Drug Administration, and its central bank officials.

In late May, South Korea sent to Tehran US\$500,000 worth of medicine for hereditary diseases.

Iran is struggling to return the funds frozen by foreign banks amid a shortage of hard currency in the country which has been contending with the coronavirus pandemic over the past months.

Tehran has already given an official warning to Seoul over the frozen assets.

South Korea is citing U.S. sanctions as an excuse for not releasing Iran’s money and in case the diplomatic efforts do not lead to constructive results and South Korea continues to obey the US’ policies, Iran may officially sue South Korea as Seoul refrains from paying off its oil debts to Tehran.

Bank Loans to Economic Sectors up 50% in Q1

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN- Iranian banking system has paid 2.247 quadrillion rials (about \$53.5 billion) of facilities to domestic economic sectors during the first quarter of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-June 20), which was 50.5 percent more than the figure of the first quarter of the previous year.

According to the data provided by the Central Bank of Iran (CBI), working capital loans paid to different economic sectors were 1.406 quadrillion rials (about \$33.476 billion) accounting for 62.6 percent of the total provided facilities in the first quarter, IRNA reported.

As reported, the total working capital loans provided in the mentioned period increased by 59.2 percent compared to the figure for the same period of time in the past year.

The Iranian banking system has paid 9.749 quadrillion rials (over \$232 billion) of facilities to domestic economic sectors in the past Iranian calendar year 1398 (ended on March 19), registering a 26-percent rise from its preceding year.

Working capital loans paid to different economic sectors were above 5.261 quadrillion rials (about \$125.26 billion) accounting for 54 percent of the total provided facilities in the said period.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:10
■ Evening (Maghreb)	20:31
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:35
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:12

65. Then were they confounded with shame: (they said),
 "Thou knowest full well that these (idols) do not speak!"
 66. (Abraham) said, "Do ye then worship, besides Allah, things that can neither be of any good
 to you nor do you harm?"
 Surah 21. The Prophets (65 - 66)

Iran to Pay for Basic Commodities Through Iraqi Banks

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC NEWS

TEHRAN - Head of Iran-Iraq Joint Chamber of Commerce, Yahya al-Eshaq, said on Wednesday that Iran will pay for basic commodities being purchased from different countries via Iraqi banks as per an agreement with Iraqi Government on payment of arrears to Iran.

The Iraqi debts to Iran are for the country's energy imports including electricity and gas from Iran.

Speaking to IRNA correspondent, Al Eshaq said that Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi agreed to pay arrears to Iran during his visit to Iran last week.

Noting that the two countries are determined to increase trade to \$20 billion a year, he said that during al-Kadhimi's visit, the two sides agreed on completing Shalamche-Basra railway as well as dredging up the bordering Arvand River.

He said that both Tehran and Baghdad have underlined the need to continue with trade exchanges despite the lockdown in the aftermath of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, observing all the protective health protocols.



The Iraqi prime minister visited Iran last week as his first foreign visit after being appointed to the post which indicated the significance of relations between the two countries.

On Friday an Iranian trade official claimed a company has been established in Iraq which will make purchases on behalf of the Iranian government to settle Baghdad's accumulated debts to Iran amounting to \$5 billion.

The secretary-general of the Iran-Iraq chamber of commerce Hamid Hosseini told Fararu website in Tehran that the money in question is deposited in Trade Bank of Iraq (TBI). He added that based on a mutual agreement Iran will provide the new company with list of "goods, commodities and raw materials" it needs, and the company will buy the goods and ship it to Iran.

Kuwait Resumes Flights to Iran

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Kuwait Airways announced that flights to 20 countries, including Iran, will resume on August 1.

According to the Kuwait News Agency, The airlines that will resume operations belong to the UAE, Bahrain, Oman, Lebanon, Qatar, Jordan, Egypt, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Ethiopia, Britain, Turkey, Iran, Nepal, Switzerland, Germany, Azerbaijan, Philippines and India.

The Kuwait Airways organization had previously suspended all flights to and from several countries, including Iran, to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus.

On March 13, 2020, Kuwait suspended all flights to and from the country's international airport until further notice. Kuwait records 65,419 cases of infection and 442 deaths since the outbreak of the virus in the country.

Iran, Afghanistan To Link Rail Networks By November 2021



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The deputy Urban Affairs Minister announced that Iran is building a railway for Afghanistan.

In an interview with ILNA news agency correspondent, Kheirollah Khademi said that according to the schedule, this project should be put into operation in November 2021.

"Some 76 km of this railway is in the Iranian soil and 62 km of the railway in Afghanistan."

He said that 30 kilometers of the railway track has been constructed so far.

According to the report, a railway track from Chabahar Port to Central Asia will extend Afghanistan's connectivity in the region.

"Economic engagements between Iran, India, and Afghanistan would be strengthened through this railway track," Khademi stressed.

The managing director of Iran's Construction and Development of Transportation Infrastructures Company (CDTIC) also added "The railway track project was a long-term project which would be implemented despite economic sanctions against Iran."

"At present, all Iranian trade with Afghanistan is done through sea and roads and if a rail network is established between the two countries, most of the cargo will be transferred by railways."

He added that the rail link can lay good outlook for future trade exchange between both states, adding that the network can attract some part of shipment which is carried out through border route of Dogharoon to Milak, adding that the rail network can be used also for carrying passengers.

Iran, Turkmenistan Willing to Enhance Bilateral Ties

MASHHAD (IRNA) - Iran's Ambassador to Turkmenistan Gholamabbas Arbab Kholes said on Tuesday that Turkmens, like the Iranians, are keen on developing trade relations and they continue to maintain business ties even amid coronavirus outbreak, which has created restrictions for international trade.

Addressing a meeting of Khorasan Razavi Foreign Economic Relations Advisory Council, he added that the province's trade is a pioneer in Central Asia and has a great potential for development in various sectors such as transit, trade, energy, health medicine, tourism, academic and research cooperation, as well as cultural exchanges.

Reopening of Turkmenistan-Iran border in June was the result of talks and consultations between high-ranking officials of the two countries, as the conditions of trade via railways returned to normalcy after four and half a month when borders were closed. "Video conference talks are to be held soon between the officials and experts in the field of transit of the two sides, and we try to prevent interruption of trade and regional transit connections and the continuation of exchanges by road, in addition to railways, while upholding health protocols," he said.

The issue of establishing a joint economic commission between Iran and Turkmenistan is also on the agenda, Arbab Kholes said, noting that undertaking joint ventures, holding exhibitions and developing cross-border trade and customs cooperation are among the measures being implemented by both sides, he said.

"We are pursuing the launch of direct flights between Ashgabat and some cities of our country and we have officially announced readiness of the Iranian side in this regard to Turkmenistan," he said.

Golgohar Co. Briefs President of Its Performance

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The meeting between President Hassan Rouhani with petrochemical and steel producers was held on Monday and the CEO of Golgozar Mining and Industrial Company was present and briefed the president of the performance of the company.

According to reports, during the meeting President Rouhani pointed to the rise in production in the circles of steel chains, adding that fortunately all circles of steel chains from concentrate and pellet to sponge iron have been doubled in the past seven years and it is good news.

In the meeting, the CEO of Golgozar Mining and Industrial Company Eng. Jamshid Mollarahman as the



representatives of companies active in the iron ore talked about the rise in production capacity of steel chain products and developments in the exploration of mines and mineral industries as well as infrastructures in Golgozar Company.

He then pointed to the latest development on the project for transfer of water from the Persian Gulf as the important project in the works by Golgozar Company.

Eng. Mollarahman noted that in the current year, the company has plans for inaugurating 14 projects which they would cost over 16,000b tomans totally and create 4400 direct and indirect jobs, and invited the President for inauguration of the company's developmental projects.

Development Is the Bridge for Materializing Surge in Production

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The CEO of Hormozgan Steel Company (HOSCO) says the company is focused on implementing its developmental projects because development is the key for achieving surge in production goal.

Speaking at an online presser after the annual general meeting of the company, Mr. Farzad Arzani answered the questions of reporters.

In the beginning of the presser, Mr. Arzani said that the priority of the company this year is to meet the demands of the domestic market and the company has had interactions with slab and rolling producers and it has been decided that some 900,000 tons of HOSCO's steel products are sold in the domestic market and the rest which will be around 620,000 tons would be exported to the international markets.

He said so far the company has not had any problem in getting necessary license from the industry ministry for exports, adding that HOSCO produces slab.

Arzani reiterated that HOSCO has one of the best quality slabs in the county



steel companies in the region like HOSCO.

He reiterated that the priority for hiring in the company is the native forces and the natives will form the company's workforce.

and it tries to improve highly its quality. He added that the defect in slab production has been minimized from 1.88 percent in 2018 to 1.63 percent in 2019 and it is still decreasing.

He then pointed to the company's actions for launching its developmental projects for increasing the production capacity from 1.5m tons to 2m tons, adding that some projects have started and they are in the works, reiterating that the company is to launch a plant for producing wide rolling sheet with production capacity of 1.2m tons and tenders for the projects have been published.

Arzani noted that according to plans, Hormozgan Province will become the third pole of steel industry in the country, and to this end, the total steel production capacity in the Persian Gulf Special Economic Zone in the province should hit 10m tons and the task for increasing the production has been handed over to the



ISFAHAN - The CEO of Esfahan Steel Company (ESCO), who was present in the meeting of President Hassan Rouhani with producers and activists in steel and petrochemical industries, hailed the president for the meeting and said that in the meeting, he briefed the participants of the activities of ESCO and invited the president to attend the inauguration ceremony of PCI project and launching the Furnace No.1 of the company.

Mr. Mansour Yazdizadeh termed the president's remarks in the meeting as very encouraging for producers in steel industry for achieving the surge in production goal, and termed very crucial holding such meetings for resolving problems in the production sector of the country.

He also assessed the president's special attention to the woes of producers and resolving them as the positive result of the meeting, adding that the result of pursuing the problems will be soon announced and it can be very important for removing hurdles in way of production in the country.

President Rouhani on Monday and during his meeting with producers and activists in the petrochemical and steel industries emphasized that self-reliance in valuable productions in petrochemical and steel industries is an important achievement for the country, noting that the country has invested some \$14b for progressing the second phase of development in the petrochemical industry and some \$8b more for progress of the third stage which will bear fruit by 2024.

The president hailed all activists in petrochemical and steel industries, adding that due to endeavors of all producers and investors especially in these two industries, the government and country have stood strongly against the foreign pressure.

Jordan Denies Reports It Sent Arms to Armenia

AMMAN (Dispatches) - Jordanian authorities denied reports Tuesday the kingdom sent arms to Armenia during clashes on the Armenia-Azerbaijan border earlier this month.



Jordan said the Azerbaijan Ambassador to Amman Rasim Rzayev was summoned.

The move came one day after a statement by the Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry on the summoning of Jordanian envoy in Baku Sami Abdullah Ghosheh.

The ministry expressed “astonishment” at the Azerbaijani diplomat for summoning the Jordanian ambassador and said Ghosheh was told that the meeting was for talks rather than a summoning.

Belarus President Survives Coronavirus

MINSK (Reuters) - Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko said on Tuesday he caught the coronavirus and recovered “on his feet” without showing any symptoms, sounding a defiant tone as he addressed military leaders in Minsk.

Lukashenko, 65, has resisted calls for strict lockdown measures to contain the pandemic, dismissing fears about COVID-19 as a “psychosis” and suggesting remedies such as drinking vodka, taking saunas and playing ice hockey.

Public frustration over his handling of the pandemic has fuelled the biggest protests in years against his rule ahead of a presidential election on Aug. 9. He has jailed two of his main electoral rivals in a widening crackdown on dissent.



Six U.S. States See Record COVID-19 Deaths



NEW YORK (Reuters) - A half-dozen U.S. states in the South and West reported one-day records for coronavirus deaths on Tuesday and cases in Texas passed the 400,000 mark as California health officials said Latinos made up more than half its cases.

Arkansas, California, Florida, Montana, Oregon and Texas each reported record spikes in fatalities.

In the United States more than 1,300 lives were lost nation-wide on Tuesday, the biggest one-day increase since May, according to a Reuters tally.

California health officials said Latinos, who make up just over a third of the most populous U.S. state, account for 56% of COVID-19 infections and 46% of deaths. Cases are soaring in the Central Valley agricultural region, with its heavily Latino population, overwhelming hospitals. The state on Tuesday reported 171 deaths.

Florida saw 191 coronavirus deaths in the prior 24 hours, the state health department said.

Texas added more than 6,000 new cases on Monday, pushing its total to 401,477, according to a Reuters tally.

Only three other states - California, Florida and New York - have more than 400,000 total cases. The four are the most populous U.S. states.

California and Texas both reported decreases in overall hospitalizations as Dr. Anthony Fauci, a top U.S. infectious diseases expert, saw signs the surge could be peaking in the South and West while other areas were on the cusp of new outbreaks.

Fauci said early indications showed the percentage of positive coronavirus tests rising in Ohio, Indiana, Tennessee and Kentucky. The rise in U.S. deaths and infections has dampened early hopes the country was past the worst of an economic crisis that has decimated businesses and put millions of Americans out of work.

The trend has fueled a bitter debate over the reopening of schools in the coming weeks. President Donald Trump and members of his administration have pushed for students to return to class, while some teachers and local officials have called for online learning.

“We will fight on all fronts for the safety of students and their educators,” Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, said during the union’s virtual convention on Tuesday. “It’s the 11th hour; we need the resources now.”

The Texas Education Agency, the state’s overseer of public education, said it would deny funding to schools that delay in-person classes because of orders by local health authorities related to the pandemic.

Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton issued guidance that health authorities cannot impose “blanket” school closures for coronavirus prevention. Any such decision is up to school officials, he said.

Taliban Declare Three-Day Ceasefire During Eid



KABUL (AFP) - The Taliban on Tuesday declared a three-day ceasefire during the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Adha starting Friday, marking the second such truce in just over two months in Afghanistan.

The offer came soon after President Ashraf Ghani said peace talks with the Taliban could begin “in a week’s time”.

“All the mujahedeen (Taliban fighters)... are ordered to refrain from carrying out any operation against the enemy during the three days and nights of Eid al-Adha,” Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said in a statement.

But any attack “by the enemy” would be met with force, he added.

There was no immediate response to the ceasefire offer from the Kabul government, but in an address at the presidential palace, Ghani earlier said a crucial prisoner swap with the Taliban is almost complete.

“To demonstrate the government’s commitment to peace, the Islamic Republic will soon complete the release of 5,000

Taliban prisoners,” Ghani said, referring to the number of insurgent inmates the government originally pledged to free under the auspices of a U.S.-Taliban deal signed in February.

“With this action, we look forward to the start of direct negotiations with the Taliban in a week’s time,” Ghani added.

He also urged the Taliban to agree a “permanent and comprehensive ceasefire” during talks aimed at ending Afghanistan’s nearly 19-year-old war.

“The ball now is in the court of the Taliban and the international community,” Ghani said.

Last week, the Taliban said they too were ready to hold negotiations straight after Eid -- provided the prisoner swap had been completed. The militants declared a similar three-day ceasefire in May at the end of the holy month of Ramadan.

That truce, which Afghan forces also observed, prompted widespread relief across Afghanistan. But it was short-lived, with the insurgents resuming deadly attacks straight afterwards.

U.S.-Russia Launch Talks in Vienna on Nuclear Arms Control

VIENNA (Dispatches) - The United States and Russia have entered a new phase of talks on nuclear arms control in Vienna, with working groups comprising government experts from both sides starting to meet for the first time.

Over the course of three days, starting Tuesday, the groups of experts will deal with military doctrines and potentials, transparency and verification, as well as with security in space, according to the Russian foreign ministry.

The new format was set up in June in negotiations between US arms-control envoy Marshall Billingslea and Russia Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov in the Austrian capital.

The talks are taking place less than a year before the expiration of the New START agreement, the last remaining nuclear arms-control deal between the countries, which together possess about 90 percent of the world’s nuclear weapons.

The U.S.-Russia Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty, which has banned nuclear-capable, land-launched missiles with a range between 500km (310 miles) and 5,500km (3,417 miles), ended last year, after the U.S. initiated a pull-out, accusing Moscow of cheating.

Washington also wants China to take part in the arms control negotiations, but Beijing has made it clear that it is not interested.



Turkey Slams UN Decision on Cyprus Peacekeeping Force

ANKARA (Dispatches) - The Turkish Foreign Ministry late Tuesday slammed a decision by the UN Security Council (UNSC) that extended the mandate of a peacekeeping force on Cyprus Island.

The ministry said extending the mandate for six months, unanimously adopting Resolution 2537 (2020) without the consent of Turkish Cypriots is against the rules and principles of the UN.

The United Nations Peaceke make a legal arrangement with Turkish Cypriot authorities regaeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) needs tording its presence on the island, it said. Turkey reiterated that despite legal deficiencies, the UNFICYP continues its activities on the island only through the well-intentioned approach of TRNC and Ankara supports the statement of the Foreign Ministry of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) on the issue.

It said it is a thought-provoking situation that while the Security Council is calling for cooperation between the two parties on the island, it also ignores the issue of fair sharing of hydrocarbon resources as one of the areas of cooperation.

The ministry said Turkey has repeatedly stressed issues related to the Eastern Mediterranean can be resolved through cooperation on hydrocarbon

resources of the Turkish and Greek Cypriots sides as equal partners of the island. It added that with the same understanding, it is possible to establish a direct contact mechanism between military authorities indicated in the council decision between TRNC Security Forces Command and its Greek equivalent.

The ministry said as noted in the last UNFICYP report of the UN Secretary-General, the main obstacle to the lack of effective cooperation between the two parties is the concern of the Greek Cypriot side to recognize the Turkish Cypriot side, in other words, to accept it as an equal partner.

It underlined that the mentality of the Greek Cypriot side is the reason why efforts for the solution on the island have been inconclusive for more than 50 years.

It added that biased statements regarding the solution of the Cyprus issue in the decision, unfortunately, encourage the irreconcilable attitude of the Greek side.

In 1974, following a coup aiming at Cyprus’ annexation by Greece, Ankara had to intervene as a guarantor power. In 1983, the TRNC was founded. The decades since have seen several attempts to resolve the Cyprus dispute, all ending in failure. The latest one, held with the participation of the guarantor countries -- Turkey, Greece, and the UK -- ended in 2017 in Switzerland.



Trump on Fauci’s High Approval Ratings: “Nobody Likes Me”



WASHINGTON (Reuters) - President Donald Trump groused on Tuesday about medical expert Anthony Fauci’s high approval ratings and joked that “nobody likes me” as he struggles to improve his standing with voters for his handling of the coronavirus pandemic.

“It can only be my personality,” said Trump.

Fauci, an infectious disease expert who is on Trump’s coronavirus task force, is one of the most trusted people in government and many Americans listen to his advice diligently on how to protect themselves from infection.

Trump, on the other hand, has drawn criticism over his handling of the pandemic, putting him in jeopardy of losing the Nov. 3 presidential election to Democrat Joe Biden. The subject of Fauci came up at a news conference where Trump defended his support for malaria drug hydroxychloroquine as a hedge against the virus. Trump said he felt the drug worked “in the early stages.”

Most public health experts say hydroxychloroquine should not be used to treat the coronavirus because it could lead to heart and other problems.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration last month revoked its emergency-use authorization for hydroxychloroquine to treat COVID-19 after several studies cast doubt on its effectiveness.

Trump said he and others in his administration deserved plaudits for their handling of the virus, not just Fauci and another prominent member of the task force, Deborah Birx.

“He’s working with our administration and for the most part we have done pretty much what he and others, Dr. Birx and others, who are terrific, recommended. And he’s got this high approval rating. So why don’t I have a high approval rating and the administration with respect to the virus? We should have a very high (approval rating),” Trump said.

“So it sort of is curious, a man works for us, and yet they’re highly thought of and nobody likes me. It can only be my personality,” he said.



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OMV Trims Dividend Proposal Amid Slump in Consumption

VIENNA (Reuters) - Austrian oil and gas group OMV trimmed its 2019 dividend proposal by 0.25 euros (0.22 pounds) to 1.75 euros per share on Tuesday in response to a slump in consumption.

Like its rivals, OMV has had to react to a collapse in oil and gas prices and falling margins as demand for refined oil products such as gasoline, diesel and jet fuel has dropped

due to global travel restrictions and business disruptions.

OMV will report second-quarter results on Wednesday and 15 analysts on average forecast a fall in core profit to 52 million euros from 1.05 billion euros a year earlier.

Shareholders will decide on the dividend, which would be unchanged versus last year, at OMV's annual meeting on September 29.



Spain Slams UK, Germany for Advising Tourists to Stay Away

MADRID (Reuters) - Spain reacted angrily on Tuesday to recommendations from Britain and Germany that their citizens avoid its islands and beaches because of an increase in coronavirus cases during what should be the height of the tourism season.

With advisories piling up on top of a quarantine order from Britain for returning travellers, Spain, which depends on summer visits by sun-seeking northern Europeans, is facing a major blow to any hopes of reviving its economy.

Tourism accounts for just over 12% of Spain's GDP and nearly 13% of jobs. The country lost one million jobs between April and June, its biggest ever quarterly decline, and fears steeper losses as the summer season crashes.

"It's very unfair because it's not based on any sanitary criteria," Francina Armengol, the head of the key tourist Balearic region, told Cadena Ser radio of the travel advisories.

Britain's decision had no logical explanation, Armengol said, adding that the archipelago's contagion rate was lower than that of the United Kingdom. The northern Spanish Aragon region said the no-travel advisories were "discriminatory". Their comments chimed with those of Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, who on Monday said it was a mistake for Britain to have considered Spain's overall coronavirus rate rather than having a granular, regional approach.

On the streets of Madrid, the reaction was one of outrage.

"It annoys me because it's not as though they were especially better off than us," said Madrid resident Isabel Garcia, who works in marketing. "Everyone is in a bad way, and the fact that they pick on Spain... It seems wrong." But Britain stood firm, saying it would stick to the sudden quarantine announced on Saturday and its late Monday move to extend a travel advisory against travel in mainland Spain to the Canary and Balearic islands. Prime Minister Boris Johnson said on Tuesday Britain would take action to impose quarantines on other countries should COVID-19 infections rise.

"I'm afraid if we do see signs of a second wave in other countries, it is really our job, our duty, to act swiftly and decisively to stop travellers coming back from those places seeding the disease here in the UK," he told reporters. The only glimmer of hope for Spain came from Britain's junior transport minister Charlotte Vere, who said that while London would continue to make decisions on a country-wide basis, it was looking at setting quarantine rules for different regions "in the future". She gave no timeframe.

Spanish Foreign Minister Arancha Gonzalez Laya said Madrid was working on convincing London to soften its stance.

"We are still talking to British authorities, explaining that the outbreaks in Spain are under control ... and making sure that the measures taken by Britain respond to epidemiological criteria and no other criteria that have nothing to do with COVID," Laya told reporters in Athens. Britons make up the biggest group of foreign tourists in Spain, with some 18 million travelling there last year, just over a fifth of the total number of visitors. Some 11.2 million Germans visited Spain, making them the second-largest group.

Britain's quarantine alone could cost Spanish tourism 10 billion euros (\$11.73 billion) in lost revenue, Jorge Marichal, the head of tourism association CEHAT, told La Sexta television. Spain has recorded 278,782 coronavirus cases and 28,434 deaths, but the infection rates, which have jumped since a nationwide lockdown ended in June, vary widely from region to region. Catalonia and Aragon have seen the highest increases in the past weeks.

China's Fuel Exports Poised for a Strong Rebound

SINGAPORE (Reuters) - China's gasoline and gasoil exports are set for a strong rebound in July and August, industry sources said, as companies make the most of rising global fuel demand and higher prices to pare back growing fuel inventories.

Fuel exports from Asia's top gasoline and third-biggest gasoil exporter fell 50% in May and stayed weak in June. But now that an easing of coronavirus lockdown restrictions is boosting economic activity, fuel demand and prices, exports are poised to rise rapidly.

This will add supply pressure on the international fuel market, which has been struggling with subdued demand owing to the pandemic.

Refiners produced a record amount of fuel in June, after importing record volumes of crude for two months running, to satisfy growing demand as the Chinese economy gradually reopened after lockdown. While China's diesel appetite typically slows in the

third quarter, refineries are making the most of higher oil prices above \$43 a barrel to get rid of excess fuel.

"With very significant inventory build-ups in recent months, we expect Chinese clean product exports to return to first quarter 2020 levels (in the near term)," said Philip Jones-Lux, energy market analyst at JBC Energy.

Volumes could rise further in August to a four-month high of 1.5 million tons, FGE added.

The record amounts of crude oil China imported in May and June, according to customs data, suggests the forecasts for gasoline and gasoil exports have room to be revised higher still. China received 47.97 million tons of crude in May and 53.18 million last month, bought on the cheap when crude prices fell below \$20 a barrel in April.

Exports could rise in August to 1.6 million to 1.65 million tons, FGE and energy consultancy Energy Aspects said respectively.



Saudi Arabia Posts \$29b Deficit in Q2

DUBAI (Reuters) - Saudi Arabia posted a deficit of 109.2 billion riyals (22.5 billion pounds) in the second quarter this year as low oil prices hurt revenues, according to a finance ministry report on quarterly budget performance.

The coronavirus crisis has hurt the non-oil sectors of the world's largest oil exporter this year, adding to the impact of historic price lows on the economy.

Oil revenues declined by 45% year-on-year in the second quarter to \$25.5 billion (19.80 billion pounds). Total revenues dropped 49% to nearly \$36 billion.

Total second-quarter expenditures dropped annually by 17% to around \$65 billion, the document showed. "A pullback in spending is essential for containing the deficit," said Monica Malik, chief economist at Abu Dhabi Commercial Bank.

"The proactive stance of the government was already reflected in the austerity measures announced in April. However, these will dampen the recovery outlook," she said.

Facing a deep recession this year, Saudi Arabia has introduced measures such as removing a cost-of-living allowance for state employees and tripling value-added tax to 15% to bolster state revenues.

The International Monetary Fund has estimated the Saudi economy could shrink by 6.8% this year, a figure Saudi officials have said was "pessimistic".

Economists have said that tripling VAT could hold back recovery as restrictions aimed at reducing the spread of the coronavirus are lifted.

Saudi Arabia, which in the first three months of the year posted a \$9 billion deficit, has raised \$12 billion in international markets so far this year and has borrowed 41.1 billion riyals (\$10.96 billion) in the domestic market, the document showed.

Finance Minister Mohammed al-Jadaan said this month that the kingdom plans to tap international debt investors at least once more this year.

British Airways Faces Strike Threat Over Job Cuts

LONDON (Reuters) - British Airways faces strike action over its plans to cut jobs, pay and conditions, the trade union representing cabin crew said, piling more pressure on the airline which has been hard hit by the coronavirus crisis and quarantine rules.

Trade union Unite has written to British Airways to say it planned to defend its

members by immediately moving towards industrial action, in what it said was a reaction to the airline's plans to fire and rehire thousands of workers.

Any strike action would add to BA's existing woes after Britain imposed a 14-day quarantine on arrivals from Spain on Sunday, dealing a blow to what is already a slow recovery in air travel being seen by BA and other airlines.

Asked about the possible industrial action, BA said it had to adapt to survive and called on the union to work towards finding a solution, as the airline has done with the pilot union BALPA, whose members will vote on a deal agreed with BA.

A BA spokeswoman said: "We will continue with the proper, lawful consultative process and we will keep inviting union representatives to discuss our proposals to the serious challenges we face. It is not too late to find solutions ... and to protect jobs."

Unite's general secretary Len McCluskey said in a letter seen by Reuters addressed to BA Chief Executive Alex Cruz and dated July 27 that BA planned to fire and rehire staff on Aug. 7.

"We will work every hour between now and then, to convince you not to do so," McCluskey said, adding that the letter should be taken as an intention to move towards industrial action with immediate effect.

BA said in April that it would need to cut up to 12,000 jobs to survive the pandemic, which wiped out travel for months and which won't recover for years.

It is currently flying only around 15% of its normal schedule and faces difficulties in its biggest markets, the United States and India, which are subject to UK quarantine rules.

Global Air Traffic Won't Return to Pre-Crisis Level Before 2024

PARIS (AFP) - Global air traffic will not return to levels seen before the coronavirus pandemic until at least 2024, the International Air Transport Association said on Tuesday.

Uncertainty about the timing of border reopenings is the main factor, IATA's chief economist Brian Pearce told a news conference.

"We now are expecting 2019 levels not to be reached until 2024 which is a year later than what we had previously expected," he said.

The outlook depends on how countries manage "to control the virus", he said.

New British restrictions on travel with Spain had "created a lot of uncertainty", he said.

"What we haven't seen is a wide spread of reopening, particularly for long haul, particularly for inter-Atlantic travel," he said.

Any recovery in the second half of the year would be "slower than we hoped" after a weaker-than-forecast rebound in May and June.

Because of rising COVID numbers in some countries, the reopening of international borders would take longer than previously forecast, he said.

For 2020 as a whole, IATA now expects a 63-percent drop in air traffic, worse than its previous forecast of 55 percent, Pearce said.

IATA, which groups 290 airlines, projects their income to be amputated by half this year compared to 2019.



IMF Approves South Africa's \$4.3b Loan



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The Executive Board of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) approved South Africa's request for emergency financial assistance of SDR 3,051.2 million (US\$ 4,286.5 million or 100 percent of quota) under the Rapid Financing Instrument (RFI) to meet the urgent balance of payment (BOP) needs stemming from the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic is evolving in South Africa at a challenging time. With severe structural constraints to growth, economic activity has weakened over the last decade despite significant government spending, resulting in high unemployment, poverty, and income inequality. Like in other emerging economies, financial market volatility has increased during the pandemic, but the financial system is showing resilience.

The RFI will help fill the urgent BOP needs originating from the fiscal pressures posed by the pandemic, limit regional spillovers, and catalyze additional financing from other international financial institutions. It will complement the authorities' strong policy response to the crisis and their planned post-COVID-19 fiscal consolidation and reforms to promote growth that benefits all South Africans. The authorities have committed to manage the IMF's emergency financial assistance with full transparency and accountability.

Following the Executive Board's discussion, Mr. Geoffrey Okamoto, First Deputy Managing Director and Acting Chair, issued the following statement:

"South Africa's economy has been severely hit by the COVID-19 crisis, reporting the highest number of cases in sub-Saharan Africa. A deep economic recession is unfolding as the decline in domestic activity and disruptions in the global supply chain resulting from the COVID-19 shock have added to a pre-existing situation of structural constraints, subdued growth, and deteriorating social outcomes.

"The authorities responded swiftly to the crisis. The June Supplementary Budget Review presented to Parliament contains a plan to reprioritize budget appropriations toward health and mitigation spending and devote additional budgetary outlays to protect the poor, the unemployed, and the most affected businesses. The South African Reserve Bank (SARB) took strong and timely action by lowering significantly the policy rate and ensuring adequate liquidity conditions in the financial system.

"The emergency financing under the RFI will help fill the urgent BOP needs that emerged as a result of the pandemic and thus contain the economic disruption and its regional spillovers. The RFI will also help catalyze other disbursements. The authorities' commitment to transparently monitor and report all use of emergency funds is crucial to ensuring COVID-19-related spending reaches the targeted objectives."

Iran Exports over \$5m Flowers, Plants in Q1

TEHRAN (MNA) – Spokesman of the Islamic Republic Customs Administration (IRICA) said that Iran exported more than \$5 million worth of flowers and plants in the first three months of the current year (from March 21 to June 22). Seyed Rouhollah Latifi revealed the remarks and added that more than 2,356 tons of various types of flowers and plants,

valued at \$5,333,660, were exported from the country to 23 world countries in the same period. With purchasing more than 1,543 tons of flowers, valued at \$2,389,694, neighboring Iraq is considered as the main buyer of Iranian flowers and plants in this period, followed by Vietnam, the Netherlands and Armenia respectively, he added.



Air Pollution Greatest Risk to Global Life Expectancy

PARIS (AFP) - Air pollution cuts life expectancy for every man, woman and child on Earth by nearly two years, according to data released Tuesday which experts said showed poor air quality is “the greatest risk to human health”.

The Air Quality Life Index (AQLI) said that as the world races to find a vaccine to bring the COVID-19 pandemic under control, air pollution would continue to cause billions of people to lead shorter and sicker lives across the globe.

The index converts particulate air pollution -- mainly from the burning of fossil fuels -- into its impact on human health.

It found that despite significant reductions in particulate matter in China -- once one of the world’s most polluted countries -- the overall level of air pollution had stayed stable over the past two decades.

In countries such as India and Bangladesh, air pollution was so severe that it now cuts average lifespans in some areas by nearly a decade.

Authors of the research said the quality of the air many humans breathe constituted a far higher health risk than COVID-19.

“Though the threat of coronavirus is grave and deserves every bit of the attention it is getting, embracing the seriousness of air pollution with a similar vigour would allow billions of people to lead longer and healthier lives,” said Michael Greenstone, creator of AQLI.

Nearly a quarter of the global population lives in just four south Asian countries that are among the most polluted -- Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan.

AQLI found that these populations would see their lifespan cut by five years on average, after being exposed to pollution levels 44 percent higher than 20 years ago.

It said that particulate pollution was also a “significant concern” across southeast Asia, where forest and crop fires were combining with traffic and power plant fumes to create toxic air.

Some 89 percent of the region’s 650 million people live in areas where air pollution exceeds the World Health Organization’s recommended guidelines.



While places such as the United States, Europe and Japan have succeeded in improving air quality, pollution still takes an average of two years off life expectancy worldwide, AQLI said.

Bangladesh was found to have the worst air quality of any country, and around 250 million residents of India’s northern states will lose eight years of life on average unless pollution is brought under control.

Several studies have shown exposure to air pollution is also a key COVID-19 risk factor, and Greenstone urged governments to prioritise air quality after the pandemic.

“No shot in the arm will alleviate air pollution,” said Greenstone, from the Energy Policy Institute at the University of Chicago.

“The solution lies in robust public policy,” he said.

Russia Locks Onto Southeast Asia to Boost Arms Sales



JAKARTA (Dispatches)- Battered by protracted Western sanctions, Russia has intensified efforts to sell arms to Southeast Asia, looking to lift its economy and diversify diplomatic relations in an increasingly polarized world.

Lyudmila Vorobieva, Moscow’s ambassador to Jakarta, expressed high hopes this month for Indonesian purchases of Russian Sukhoi Su-35 fighter jets. The Southeast Asian country had signed a contract to buy 11 of these planes for the equivalent of \$1.1 billion back in 2018, though the U.S. has hinted at sanctions on Indonesia should the deal go through.

“Sanctions will not prevent the purchase of high-quality Russian arms,” Vorobieva told reporters. Indonesia, which regards the Su-35s as its new mainstay fighters, is monitoring moves by Russia and the U.S.

Russia and Vietnam also affirmed military cooperation at a virtual meeting of high-ranking defense officials July 3. Moscow has exported submarines and other equipment to Vietnam in the past, as well as tanks to Laos in January. Russia produced 28% of the arms in value terms procured by members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations between 2010 and 2019, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute reports, up from 24% between 2000 and 2009.

In contrast, the U.S. sank to 18% from 23%. China’s share more than doubled between the two decades, but it still trails far behind Russia at roughly 8%.

Russian arms are said to be cheaper than U.S. and European alternatives. Some ASEAN countries like Indonesia and Thailand have cut defense spending in response to the coronavirus pandemic even as China increases activities in the South China Sea, making Russian military equipment an attractive option.

“Russia is flexible on payment methods other than cash, which gives it an edge in developing economies,” said Shinji Hyodo, director of policy studies at Japan’s National Institute for Defense Studies. Indonesia is slated to make half its payment for the Su-35 jets with exports of palm oil, rubber and other products.

Moscow sees arms exports to Southeast Asia as a way to lift the country’s economy, which has suffered under lengthy sanctions led by Washington. It also is pursuing multilateral cooperation in anticipation of a further decoupling between the U.S. and China. Russia seeks to diversify its economic relationships in Asia by selling nuclear power technology and information technology to Southeast Asian markets, according to Vassily Kashin, a research fellow at the Institute of the Russian Far East.

Greater Russian involvement in Southeast Asia also gives the region more diplomatic options. With the South China Sea as a flash point for Washington and Beijing, ASEAN members worry they will be forced to choose between the two powers. Russia “could become a negotiation chip for us with the U.S. and China,” said a source at the Indonesian Foreign Ministry.

Venice Film Festival Saved With Focus on Italian Fare

ROME (AFP) - The Venice Film Festival will put the accent on homegrown Italian cinema in September among its eclectic offering of international films, as the prestigious festival goes forward facing unprecedented challenges in the time of coronavirus.

In a chaotic festival year that has seen the cancellation of rival competitions, shuttered film production and movie theatres across the globe, the festival in Italy’s beloved canal city will proceed from September 2 to 12 with 18 films vying for the top award, the Golden Lion.

The films in the main competition include those shot by auteurs hailing from Mexico, Azerbaijan, Israel, Russia, Iran, Japan, and India, among other countries, organisers said on Tuesday at a press conference, noting that some were submitted from countries “still threatened by the virus”.

“Cinema has not been overwhelmed by the tsunami of the pandemic, but retains an enviable vitality,” said festival director Alberto Barbera, while warning that some “spectacular titles” would be missing, still blocked by ongoing lockdowns around the world.

“The heart of the festival is saved,” Barbera said.

Four of the main competition films are Italian: “Le Sorella Macaluso,” from director Emma Dante, who made her Venice debut in 2012, Claudio Noce’s “Padrenostro” about Italy’s wave of terrorism in the 1970s seen through children’s eyes, “Notturmo” by 2013 Golden Lion winner Gianfranco Rosi, which was shot over two

years in Syria, and “Miss Marx” by Susanna Nicchiarelli about Karl Marx’s youngest daughter.

The highest profile film in competition, which has already received Oscar buzz, is US director Chloe Zhao’s “Nomadland,” starring two-time Oscar winner Frances McDormand and Academy Award “Best Actor” nominee David Strathairn.

Opening the festival, but out of competition, will be Daniele Luchetti’s “Lacci” (The Ties), a feature set in Naples about a marriage threatened by infidelity, the first time in over a decade that Venice’s opening film has been Italian.

The Biennale di Venezia, as it is called in Italian, has taken on outsized importance this year as film festivals across have the globe have cancelled, including Venice’s main competitor, the glamorous Cannes Film Festival on the Cote d’Azur, originally planned for May.

Although familiar scenes of throngs of paparazzi snapping photographs of A-listers on the red carpet and screaming crowds behind barricades hoping for autographs from their favourite stars may be unlikely, the 77th edition of the festival promises to offer an wide range of film styles, including auteur films, horror and gangster films, documentaries as well as comedies.

Fifty countries are represented in the festival, and within the main competition eight out of the 18 films were directed by women, a figure Barbera called “extremely significant.”

Enemy Has Failed...

FROM PAGE 1

The president stated that in the production sector, our producers did a great job. That is producers who have done great work in our important industries, to which a large part of non-oil exports depend on today.

Referring to the 10% growth in steel and 49% growth in aluminum compared to last Iranian year (starting on March 21, 2019), Rouhani said: “Production has increased in all our basic industries, meaning that the enemy has not been able to close our large factories, and even factories are working more since last year.”

Rouhani stated that since the implementation of Iran’s agreement with Eurasia Union until the end of June, Iran’s exports to Eurasian countries have increased by 63%. Despite the fact that we have had a corona outbreak globally since March and we have been facing restrictions like other countries and the borders are not normal, Iran’s exports have increased.

The President stated that the enemy has not knocked us down economically and has not been able to stop our exports, adding: “Of course, there are problems that we must work together to be solved. Some problems are solvable and part is due to sanctions and corona.”

He stated that in recent weeks, the enemy has taken other ways, adding: “Another way for the enemy is to create divisions and differences in the country. Earlier this year, despite Corona, the enemy became interested in discord between branches of the government, but we overcame this conspiracy.”

Iraq to Import Power...

FROM PAGE 1

The country also wants to revive an agreement signed in 2019 to link its power grid to the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council’s network and import 500 MW of electricity through a connection from neighboring Kuwait. The Persian Gulf Cooperation Council includes Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE and Oman.

Baghdad has completed 80% of the work on the Iraqi side of the power link with the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council Interconnection Authority.

“With regards to the GCCIA, work was postponed because of the coronavirus and economic situation,” Musa said. “If the GCCIA starts work now, we expect it will take up to 14 months to complete work on the connection.”

The U.S. Department of State, Iraq and the PGCC issued a joint statement on July 16 emphasizing the importance of the GCCIA-Iraq power link.

“The Government of Iraq, Persian Gulf Cooperation Council, and United States have renewed their full support for the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council Interconnection Authority project to connect the electricity grids of Iraq and the PGCC,” the statement said. “The United States is committed to facilitating this project and providing support where needed.”

U.S. Presence...

FROM PAGE 1

“Today, liberalism and communism, which one hundred years ago and fifty years ago were considered the most prominent gifts of Western civilization, have completely undermined and their incurable defects have become apparent; The system based on that one has collapsed, and the system based on the other is in deep crisis and on the verge of collapse,” Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei said.

He highlighted that today, not only the cultural model of the West - which emerged from the beginning with shame and disgrace - but even its political and economic model of money-based democracy and discriminatory class capitalism has shown its inefficiency and corruption.

Ayatollah Khamenei underscored that today, there are many elites in the Islamic world who, with pride and honor, challenge all the epistemological and civilizational claims of the West and explicitly show the Islamic alternatives. He said:” Today, even some Western thinkers, who used to arrogantly present liberalism as the end of history, are forced to retract that claim and admit their theoretical and practical confusion.”

Elsewhere in his remarks, the Leader of the Revolution, stating that we consider all Muslim nations as our brothers, and treat non-Muslims who have not entered the opposition front with kindness and justice, added that we consider the grief and suffering of Muslim communities as our suffering and try to remove it.

“We make it our constant concern to help oppressed Palestine, to sympathize with the wounded body of Yemen, and to care for the oppressed Muslims anywhere in the world. We consider it our duty to advise the leaders of some Muslim countries; rulers who, instead of relying on their Muslim brother, take refuge in the arms of the enemy and endure the humiliation and coercion of the enemy for a few days for personal gain, and auction off the dignity and independence of their nation - those who accept the survival of the oppressive Zionist regime and openly and secretly shake hands with them - we advise them and warn them of the bitter consequences of this behavior,” he emphasized.

The Leader stated that we consider the U.S. presence in the West Asian region to the detriment of the nations of this region and cause of insecurity, destruction, and backwardness of the countries. Regarding the current developments in the United States and its anti-discrimination movement, our firm position is to stand with the people and condemn the cruel behaviors of the racist government.

IRGC Fires...

FROM PAGE 1

During the held Payambar-e Azam 14 (The Great Prophet) war games in south Iran, IRGC successfully launched underground ballistic missiles for the first time in the world, the commander said.

“The missiles were launched without any launch platforms or other usual utilities,” he described.

“These missiles burst out of the ground to hit the set targets,” he added.

The IRGC commander informed in a tweet on Wednesday that the name and features of this type of missiles would be kept confidential.

The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) on Wednesday launched the second day of the final stage of a military exercise in southern Iran.

The IRGC forces also practiced a missile combat operation by firing Hormuz and Fateh ground-to-ground missiles and a ballistic missile. The air defense units also exercised pinpoint firing at aerial targets.

A range of homegrown drones, including Shahed-181, Mohajer, and Bavar, launched a strike on the targets, while various types of sea-to-sea and coast-to-sea missiles were fired in the war game.

The IRGC troops also exercised offensive mine-laying operations and tactics to cut off the naval connections of the hypothetical enemy.

The military exercise is underway in Iran’s southern province of Hormozgan, western parts of the Strait of Hormuz, and the Persian Gulf.

Iran Trade...

FROM PAGE 1

Iran exported \$11.4 billion worth of products to other countries in the first three months of last year.

The Islamic Republic of Iran exported 40.0 million tons of products in the first three months of the last year, showing a 21.9 million-ton decline in the current year’s corresponding period.

Also, the Islamic Republic of Iran imported \$7.6 billion worth of products in the first three months of the current year, registering a 26.8 percent decline as compared to the same period of last year.

Dembele, Lenglet And Griezmann Return

BARCELONA (AFP) - Barcelona welcomed back three injured French players, Ousmane Dembele, Antoine Griezmann and Clement Lenglet, as they resumed training ahead of their Champions League match against Napoli. The club did not give any indication that the trio would be fit for the second-leg match against Napoli on August 8. "The good news of the day was to see Lenglet and Griezmann doing individual work on the pitch," said Barcelona on their website as the squad returned after a few days of rest following the end of La Liga.

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Cycling's Milan-San Remo Rerouted

PARIS (AFP) - The Milan-San Remo one-day cycling classic scheduled for August 8 has been rerouted after local government opposition to its itinerary, stretching the already lengthy race to an epic 299km. The Italian sports daily La Gazzetta dello Sport said 13 of 16 municipal authorities in the Savona province, near Italy's original coronavirus hot-spot in Lombardy, had registered opposition to the race crossing their territory. The new route also adds a 5km climb, 30km from home to an already ultra-tough race that is often decided on the Poggia climb outside San Remo.

Federer Drops Retirement Hint

ZURICH (Dispatches) - The Swiss maestro encouraged his followers to repeatedly hit a ball up and down a wall from centimetres away to ensure their racket-work is precise when they hit the court again.

Roger Federer dropped the latest hint he is considering retiring by admitting: "I'm at the end of my career."

But he insisted there is still plenty of life in his 38-year-old body as he targets one last achievement, another Olympic gold medal.

The veteran star, who turns 39 in August, will miss the remainder of the 2020 season when it restarts.

He underwent surgery on his problematic right knee in February but had to have a second op when his recovery was not going to plan.

Speaking to SRF Sport, Federer admitted he will call time on his incredible career when his body tells him enough is enough.

He said: "It is already clear that I am at the end of my career. I cannot say what will be in two years. That's why I plan year after year. I'm still happy right now."

"But when the cogwheels don't grip anymore, I stop. When I am old, I will surely play tennis. But no longer train but just 'ball'."

"It will be a very interesting step not to always work on something and only to play with colleagues." Are we in the end days of tennis royalty?



But one of his primary goals for his next comeback is glory in Tokyo. Federer won gold for Switzerland in the doubles at Beijing 2008 then was beaten by Andy Murray in the singles final four years later on Wimbledon's Centre Court.

And he revealed he is desperate to get his hands on another medal at next summer's rearranged Games. The Swiss legend added: "Olympics are always special."

"I'm excited to see what Tokyo will be like and hope the Games can take place in 2021. Of course I want a medal there. No matter whether in singles, doubles or mixed."

"I'm not there yet. If you have been on the tour for 20 years, you are happy to have a quieter year. The right preparation starts about three months before the Games – you don't think about it beforehand."

Meanwhile Angelique Kerber has parted ways with Dieter Kindlmann and rehired Torben Beltz as her coach, the former world number one's management team have said, restoring a partnership that helped the German win two of her three Grand Slam titles.

The 32-year-old has not won a title since picking up her third Grand Slam at Wimbledon in 2018 under then coach Wim Fissette.

Kerber, currently ranked 21st in the world, has had multiple stints with Beltz since they first started working when she turned professional in 2003.

She had the most successful year of her career in 2016 when she won the Australian Open and U.S. Open, finished runner-up at the WTA Finals, and rose to No. 1 in the world.

Kerber split with Beltz the following year. The WTA Tour is set to restart on Aug. 3 in Italy after a five-month halt due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Real Madrid Striker Mariano Tests Positive for Coronavirus

MADRID (AFP) - Real Madrid forward Mariano has tested positive for coronavirus, the La Liga champions announced on Tuesday.

"After the COVID-19 tests carried out yesterday on our first team footballers by the Real Madrid Medical Services, our player Mariano, tested positive," Real said in a statement.

"The player is in perfect health and is complying with the protocol of isolation at home."

Mariano did not join the Real squad as players returned from a post-season break to start training for their Champions League last 16 showdown at Manchester City on August 7. The 26-year-old has not appeared in that competition this season.

The Dominican international, who returned to Real in 2018 after a successful season at Lyon, played little in the recently finished La Liga season due to competition for places and injuries.

He made only five substitute appearances as Real won their 34th Spanish title, scoring once, an added time goal against Barcelona.

Dettori Guides

Stradivarius to Record Fourth Goodwood Cup

LONDON (AFP) - Frankie Dettori and trainer John Gosden recorded their second piece of racing history in a matter of days as Stradivarius won a fourth Goodwood Cup on Tuesday, the opening day of the Glorious Goodwood Festival.

Dettori looked in trouble halfway down the straight of the Group One contest as he was blocked by a wall of four horses.

However, the 49-year-old Italian managed to get Stradivarius out of trouble and target the front-running Nayef Road and Irish Derby winner Santiago.

Once Dettori got upsides Santiago and Nayef Road, he and the three-time Ascot Gold Cup champion were not to be denied.

Stradivarius's record run comes after super mare Enable won a historic third King George VI and Queen Elizabeth Stakes at Ascot on Saturday.

"What a horse," exclaimed Dettori, who was winning it for joint record fifth time.

"He was giving away over two stone to Santiago and made light of it. "Everyone was racing to beat him and yet he still gets out and wins. He is an amazing horse."

England Seal West Indies Series Win

MANCHESTER (Dispatches) - Stuart Broad joined one of cricket's most exclusive clubs when he took his 500th Test wicket on Tuesday as England completed a series-clinching win over the West Indies at Old Trafford.

The 34-year-old became just the seventh bowler and fourth pacemen to reach the landmark when he had opener Kraigg Brathwaite plumb lbw for 19 on the fifth day of the third Test.

Broad ended the series when he had Jermaine Blackwood caught behind as the West Indies, set a huge target of 399 for victory, collapsed to a meagre 129 all out in under 38 overs.

Broad finished with a match return of 10-67 in addition to the dashing 62 he made batting at No 10 in England's first innings 369 that featured Ollie Pope's 91.

Federer still holds the record for men's Grand Slam singles titles on 20, one ahead of Rafael Nadal. The last three of those came in the 13 months after returning from knee surgery, winning the 2017 and 2018 Australian Opens as well as an eighth Wimbledon crown in between.



Klopp's Liverpool side won the Premier League title with seven games to spare and they finished the season 18 points clear at the top of the table.

The German coach pipped Leeds United boss Marcelo Bielsa, Wycombe Wanderers manager Gareth Ainsworth and last year's winner Chris Wilder of Sheffield United to the Alex Ferguson Trophy — named after the former Manchester United manager.

Klopp Wins LMA Manager of the Year Award

LONDON (Reuters) - Liverpool boss Jurgen Klopp was named League Managers' Association (LMA) manager of the year on Monday after guiding the Merseyside club to their first top-flight title in 30 years.

Klopp's Liverpool side won the Premier League title with seven games to spare and they finished the season 18 points clear at the top of the table.

The German coach pipped Leeds United boss Marcelo Bielsa, Wycombe Wanderers manager Gareth Ainsworth and last year's winner Chris Wilder of Sheffield United to the Alex Ferguson Trophy — named after the former Manchester United manager.

"I'm absolutely delighted to be named the winner ... for this wonderful Sir Alex Ferguson Trophy, named after a man that I admire so much," Klopp said.

"Everything we have accomplished at Liverpool this year couldn't have been done without the superb input of my coaching staff; they make us a really special bunch of football brains."

"I love to work with my coaches, my players and everyone at LFC and, of course, I am thankful for the support from all our wonderful Liverpool fans."

Bielsa landed the Championship award after guiding his side to the title and a return to the Premier League after an absence of 16 years.

Chelsea Women's boss Emma Hayes was named Women's Super League manager of the year after helping the club to a league and League Cup double.

Ferrari Not Competitive in F1

ROME (AFP) - Ferrari chairman John Elkann has admitted that the iconic car manufacturer's Formula One team "is not competitive" after a miserable start to the 2020 season that has left them far behind dominant Mercedes.

"This year, we are not competitive mainly because of a series of design errors in the car," Elkann said in an interview with the Gazzetta Dello Sport published on Tuesday.

"We had a series of structural weaknesses that have been around for a long time, especially in aerodynamics. We also lost engine power. The reality is that our car is not competitive. It has been seen on the track and it will be seen again."

Ferrari driver Charles Leclerc finished second in the Austrian Grand Prix earlier this month, the first race of a season delayed by the coronavirus pandemic, but it was already clear that the Scuderia's car had problems.

Leclerc and teammate Sebastian Vettel then crashed into each other at the Styrian Grand Prix on the same track a week later, before the pair were lapped by winner Lewis Hamilton in his Mercedes in Hungary. Four-time world champion Vettel finished sixth at the Hungaroring while Leclerc was 11th, forcing team chief Mattia Binotto to admit he was not surprised after realising at pre-season testing that the SF1000 car was slower than hoped.

Leclerc has 18 points from three races, already significantly behind Lewis Hamilton's leading 63-point haul, while Vettel has just nine. Ferrari last won the F1 driver's championship in 2007 and the constructors' title a year later, but Elkann, part of Italy's powerful Agnelli family and chairman of Fiat Chrysler, says there is reason to be optimistic.



Japan's WTA Pan Pacific Open Tennis Scrapped

TOKYO (AFP) - The WTA Pan Pacific Open in Japan, one of Asia's top women's tennis tournaments, has been scrapped for the first time because of the coronavirus, organizers said Tuesday.

The cancellation of the event, which was scheduled for November and was won by Japan's Naomi Osaka last year, follows last week's axing of all international tennis tournaments in China for 2020.

The Pan Pacific's demise ends a continuous run for the tournament since 1984 and leaves Asia with only one Women's Tennis Association event, October's Korea Open, on this year's coronavirus-wrecked schedule.

It is also another blow for sport in Japan after the Tokyo Olympics, originally due to start last week, were postponed for a year over COVID-19.

"We were trying to find ways (to hold the Pan Pacific Open), such as having no audience or limiting the number of spectators," organizers said in a statement.

"But we reached the tough conclusion that we have to cancel the tournament given the difficulty of ensuring the safety" of all involved, they added.

The tournament had already been postponed from September to November, with organisers hoping the delay would allow them to hold the event.

Last year's Pan Pacific Open drew outside attention in Japan thanks to hometown hero Osaka, who became the first Japanese player to win the tournament since Kimiko Date in 1995.

Her victory was all the sweeter for occurring in the city of Osaka, where the charismatic star was born.

