

Health Ministry Spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari Said Yesterday That Some 216 More Iranians Have Died From Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Over the Past 24 Hours Bringing the Total Deaths to 16,982

IRAN NEWS

Majlis Speaker Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf Yesterday Met And Held Talks on Different Issue With Chairman of the Russian Duma's Foreign Affairs Committee Leonid Slutsky

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Intelligence Forces Dismantle U.S.-Based Terrorist Group

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iran's Ministry of Intelligence announced on Saturday that its forces have dismantled a U.S.-based terrorist group.

Iran's Ministry of Intelligence announced on Saturday that its forces have inflicted a major blow to a terrorist group based in the U.S.

The forces have reportedly arrested the head of a terrorist group named "Thunder" in the U.S.

Following sophisticated intelligence operations, the forces arrested Jamshid Sharmahd who led his terrorist operations from the U.S.

He was responsible for 2008 blast in Seyed al-Shohada Mosque in Shiraz which left 14 people martyred and 215 other injured.

The terrorist group had also planned to carry out several large-scale operations in recent years which have been foiled including, bombing Sivand Dam in Shiraz, Imam Khomeini Mausoleum, and Tehran Book Fair.

U.S. Has No Choice, But to Leave the Region

TEHRAN (IP) - Senior Spokesman for Iran's Armed Forces said the Persian Gulf has nothing to do with the US and they must leave the region as soon as possible.

Brigadier General Abolfazl Shekarchi on U.S. claim which announced that Iran has acted out of the rule by its recent military exercise in the Persian Gulf stated: "Iran occasionally holds military exercise in the region."

"The aim to hold such occasional military exercises is varied. Iran intends to increase its defense power," said Brigadier General Abolfazl Shekarchi.

The high ranking official went on to say that the other aim is enhancing Iran's deterrence power.

"Holding such military drills does not mean that Iran is a threat to regional countries," Senior Spokesman for Iran's Armed Forces said.

General Abolfazl Shekarchi was speaking to the Iran Press on the sideline of the inauguration ceremony of over 2,500 projects for deprived people, held on Friday with IRGC Deputy Commander Rear Admiral Ali Fadavi, Senior Spokesman for Iran's Armed Forces Brigadier, Mohamad-Reza Yazdi, Chief commander of Tehran's Mohammad Rasoulallah Division and other relevant officials in attendance aiming at eradicating deprivation and poverty. 207

COVID-19 Restrictions to Remain In Force Until Vaccine Available



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – President Hassan Rouhani says restrictions enforced to contain the spread of coronavirus will remain in place until further notice.

President Rouhani said the directives issued by the National Coronavirus Headquarters are binding on everybody.

"Strict measures should remain in effect until an appropriate vaccine is made available," he said in a meeting of the National Headquarters of Fight against.

"People should put health issues first and foremost," he said, adding: "We are in a situation where wearing masks are mandatory and everyone should wear them."

The President noted: "At the National Taskforce for Combating Corona, we decided to ban gatherings throughout the country."

The president thanked people for cooperating with the National Coronavirus Headquarters in implementing health protocols.

"Figures show around 10 provinces in the country which were in a tough situation in previous weeks have now passed the peak of the disease and will, God Willing, reach a point of stability and calm in the coming days on the back of abidance by health directives," President Rouhani said.

He then touched upon the upcoming month of Muharram when mourning ceremonies are normally held each year.

"Regulations have also been approved for the month of Muharram and mourning ceremonies, which will be finalized, approved and communicated by next week" he added.

The president said anyone who does not comply with health protocols should be punished.

"The way to tackle this disease is to do tests and identify infected people, and we should get to know who carries and can transmit the virus, so that they can be isolated from society after being spotted," he said.

"Our second duty is to identify and separate from society all individuals who were in contact with infected people," he said.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the president stressed the need to increase the number of hospital beds, provide the necessary equipment and recruit more medical personnel to help fight the disease.

Tehran, New Delhi to Sign Preferential Trade Agreement Pact

TEHRAN (IFP) - Iran and India are to hold negotiations to further enhance mutual cooperation in the trade sector.

The sixth round of talks to sign a preferential trade agreement between Tehran and New Delhi to facilitate mutual trade will be held in the presence of economic and political experts of both countries.

That was announced in a meeting between the head of the Iran Trade Promotion Organization and Indian Ambassador to Tehran Gaddam Dharmendra.

In the meeting, the Iranian side underscored the importance of strengthening reciprocal trade ties and the need for preferential trade talks between the two countries to continue. He expressed Iran's readiness to immediately make arrangements for the sixth round of preferential trade negotiations between Iran and India via videoconference.

The top Indian ambassador, in turn, touched upon the seventieth anniversary of the resumption of diplomatic ties between the two countries, and said New Delhi remains committed to promoting relations with Iran.

Although Iran-India talks on the signing of a mutual preferential trade pact began more than a decade ago, and despite the fact that five rounds of talks have been held on that so far, this agreement has not been signed yet.

Iran Urged to Force South Korea To Unfreeze Assets

TEHRAN - Fereydoun Entezari, a former Iranian ambassador to South Korea, has suggested that Tehran should take certain actions to force Seoul to release its money frozen illegally in South Korea.

In an interview with ISNA, Entezari said that the Iranian government should not show leniency towards South Korea's action.

"The money which has been blocked in South Korea belongs to the people of Iran. Currently, the people and the country need money so much. So, we can apply powerful and controlled diplomacy in this respect to make this issue a public demand and make the South Koreans fulfill it," he said.

The former ambassador added that direct talks will yield a better result.

Entezari also suggested, "We can pursue the issue through international diplomacy including filing complaint in international bodies."

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U.S. Cannot Disarm Lebanon's Hezbollah Through Sanctions

MOSCOW (PressTV) - The Russian ambassador to Beirut says U.S. officials are under the illusion that they can disarm the Lebanese Hezbollah resistance movement through sanctions.

"Disarming Hezbollah is the primary purpose of US sanctions... I do not think that such a goal would be achieved through this method. The United States will not manage to force Hezbollah into laying down its weapons. This is an illusion," Zasyupkin said in an exclusive interview with Beirut-based Arabic-language al-Mayadeen television news network on Friday. In late October 2018, U.S. President Donald Trump's administration imposed a new round of sanctions on Hezbollah, targeting individuals and international organizations that do business with the group.

"Over the past year, we have levied the highest sanctions ever imposed on Hezbollah, in a single year, by far. Just a few moments ago, I signed legislation imposing even more hard-hitting sanctions on Hezbollah to further starve them of their funds. And they are starving for them," Trump said during an event in Washington, DC, that marked the 35th anniversary of an attack on US marine barracks in the Lebanese capital of Beirut.

Zasyupkin added, "We (Russia) have made efforts in Syria. This is not only beneficial to Syria, but also to Lebanon as it protects the country against the potential threat of terrorism. If terrorism prevails in Syria, it will be easy for thousands of terrorists to cross into Lebanon, and this would lead to the partitioning of the country."

He noted that Iran plays a positive role in the Middle East region, condemning the recent harassment of an Iranian passenger plane flying from Tehran to Beirut by two U.S. fighter jets over Syria. "Americans are creating problems and violating international law. The goal is to create tensions and reestablish their presence, role and influence," the Russian diplomat said. He went on to say that the balance of power in Syria is changing. "Over the past four years, the balance of power had been in the interest of terrorists. The ensuing terrorism allowed outsiders, including the U.S.-led coalition, to come into play."

"I think Americans have numerous problems there (in Syria), but al-Tanf region is still under their control. They are clinging to the area in order to have influence. Their main goal is to sever ties between Iran and Syria," Zasyupkin pointed out. He noted that Moscow honors the principle of non-interference in Syria's domestic affairs, lauding "close relations" between Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Syrian counterpart Bashar al-Assad as well as military forces of the two countries.

Zasyupkin said Russian and Syrian institutions are closely cooperating with each other in various fields, including combat against terrorism, maintenance, reconstruction and humanitarian activities. Elsewhere in his remarks, the Russian ambassador pointed to the recent rafts of economic sanctions against Syria under the so-called Caesar Act.

Washington Maximum Pressure Policy on Iran Costly Failure

TEHRAN (PressTV) - A former U.S. under secretary of state for political affairs, who was the chief negotiator in the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, has criticized President Donald Trump's "maximum pressure" campaign against Tehran as an instance of his "painful" and "costly" foreign policy failures.

In an article titled "The Total Destruction of U.S. Foreign Policy Under Trump," Wendy Sherman enumerated the failures of the Trump administration in the face of Russia, China, North Korea and Iran.

"Trump's approach to Iran is another painful and costly example. Over three years after the Trump administration withdrew from the nuclear deal, Iran has more highly enriched uranium... more operating nuclear facilities, more sophisticated technology," she wrote in her article published by The Foreign Policy magazine on Friday.

"U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Iran envoy Brian Hook advertise this as a campaign of 'maximum pressure,' but their ultimate objective—which they insist is not regime change—remains a mystery," she added.

The U.S. unleashed the so-called maximum pressure campaign against Iran in 2018, when it unilaterally scrapped the 2015 nuclear agreement, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

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Budapest Announces Readiness To Develop Ties With Tehran

TEHRAN (IP) - The Speaker of the National Assembly of Hungary issued a message announced readiness to develop cultural and scientific cooperation with Iran.

In his message to Majlis Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, the Speaker of the Hungarian National Assembly Mr. Laszlo Kover expressed hope for the development of mutual cooperation in the fields of

culture, education, and science.

"I am confident that by relying on the friendship between the two nations, we can further strengthen our mutually beneficial cooperation, which is rooted in our respect for each other, and develop our cultural, educational and scientific relations," László Kövér concluded.

Tehran Resolved to Broaden Comprehensive Ties With Baghdad

TEHRAN (IFP) - Iran's president has expressed Tehran's preparedness to expand its all-out relations with Iraq in a wide range of fields.

In a Friday phone conversation with Iraqi President Barham Salih, President Hassan Rouhani congratulated him and the Iraqi government and people on Eid al-Adha, describing it as a manifestation of the unity of world's Muslims.

"Fortunately, throughout history, a deep bond between the two peoples has been established, which become more transparent on these occasions, and I hope that with the containment of coronavirus, the people and officials of the two countries will be able to visit more."

The President described the Iraqi Prime Minister's recent visit to Iran as positive and an opportunity to discuss issues of mutual interest, and expressed hope that the decisions and agreements between the two countries' officials would be implemented as soon as possible and that economic relations and trade exchanges between the two countries would be enhanced.

Rouhani emphasized, "The Islamic Republic of Iran is determined to develop



comprehensive relations with Iraq and is ready to cooperate and transfer its experiences to the country in fighting coronavirus."

At the same phone conversation, Iraqi President Barham Salih congratulated the Iranian government and people on the Eid al-Adha, and said, "The manifestation of this great feast is the unity of Muslims and I hope in the current world conditions and the outbreak of coronavirus, unity and cooperation among all countries in the region will develop more than before."

Appreciating Iran's support and assistance to Iraq in the fight against coronavirus, the Iraqi President described the Iraqi Prime Minister's visit to Iran as positive and stressed the need for cooperation and joint efforts to develop relations and implement agreements between the two countries.

He added, "Comprehensive development of relations and cooperation with Iran is an inviolable principle in Iraqi foreign policy."

Iranian, Azeri Presidents Discuss Boosting All-Out Ties

TEHRAN (IFP) - The Iranian president and his Azeri counterpart have conferred on the need to enhance relations between Tehran and Baku on all fronts.

In a phone call on Friday, President Hassan Rouhani of Iran told Ilham Aliyev that Tehran and Baku have enjoyed good, cordial and growing relations in recent years on the back of efforts by both countries' officials.

"All-out promotion of relations with the Azerbaijan Republic is of significance to us, and I hope we will soon see mutual agreements in different sectors implemented, especial the two countries getting linked via the Rasht-Astara railroad," said Rouhani.

President Rouhani also touched upon Iran's success in fighting coronavirus, saying, "We are ready to share with the Azerbaijan Republic our experience in fighting coronavirus and to work closely with the country in that regard," he noted.

President Rouhani said officials of both countries can hold consultations via videoconference amid the coronavirus pandemic.

The Azeri president, in turn, said he is confident that the two countries will work together closely to further boost mutual ties.

Armenia a Bridge Between Iran, EAEU

YERVAN (IP) - The Ambassador of Iran to Armenia said that Armenia as a bridge between Iran, EAEU and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) has a good regional capacity to expand Iran's economic cooperation with the member countries of the union.

Abbas Badakhshan Zohouri, Ambassador of Iran to Armenia, stated that Armenia is Iran's land bridge with the Eurasian Economic Union member states, which is an important capacity for the two countries to expand bilateral and multilateral economic cooperation.

Ambassador also added: "After a month-long halt of trading between the two countries, exports and imports between Iran and Armenia have now returned to the pre-Corona era."

"Iran and Armenia have great potential for cooperation in various fields, and the Joint Commission has identified all the basic requirements for cooperation," Mr. Zohouri added.

He stressed that the specialized talks between Iran and Armenia are taking place step by step in various fields within the framework of the Joint Commission on Cooperation.

Zohouri stated that various projects are being implemented between Iran and Armenia; one of these projects is the road construction project from the Norduz border to Yerevan.

The diplomat added that another plan is the third line of Iranian gas exports to Armenia, in exchange for receiving electricity from this country, which increases the share of electricity received.

2nd Round of Iran-Ukraine Plane Crash talks to Be Held in October

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - First round of Iranian delegation's talks in Ukraine ended on Friday while the second round is slated to be held in Tehran in October.

Iranian delegation, headed by Deputy Foreign Minister Mohsen Baharvand, traveled to Kiev on July 30 to discuss the various aspects of plane crash.

Baharvand sat down for talks with Ukrainian foreign minister and his deputy during his visit to the country.

During the meeting of visiting Iranian delegation with

Ukrainian Deputy Foreign Minister Yevgeny Yenin and the Ukrainian expert delegation, various technical and legal aspects of the incident were examined and it was also agreed to continue cooperation between the two countries on the same issue.

The appointment of expert groups and the timing of the second round of talks in Tehran in October were among the most important agreements reached during the first round of talks. During the meeting with the Ukrainian Minister of Foreign Affairs, the two sides stressed the need to maintain bilateral relations, and settlement of the issue of plane crash quickly.

Iran Congratulates Switzerland on National Day

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's president has, in a message, congratulated his Swiss counterpart on the occasion of Swiss National Day.

In his message to Simonetta Sommaruga, the head of the Federal Council of the Swiss Confederation, Rouhani "wholeheartedly congratulated her as well as the government and people of that country on Swiss National Day." "On the threshold of the 100th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Swiss Confederation, I believe friendly and age-old relations between the two countries will further expand by tapping into the diverse potentialities for cooperation within the framework of a roadmap for ties," he added.

He also asked God Almighty to bestow success and health upon his Swiss counterpart, and prosperity upon the Swiss government and people.

The Swiss National Day is the national holiday of Switzerland, set on 1 August. Although the founding of the Swiss Confederacy was first celebrated on this date in 1891 and annually since 1899, it has only been an official holiday since 1994

Increasing Border Relations Guarantees Economic Security

TEHRAN (MNA) - Foreign Ministry Spokesman Abbas Mousavi said that increasing border relations and developing economic cooperation will contribute to the region's economic security.

He made the remarks on Friday evening on the sidelines of his visit to the Astara Port Special Economic Zone. Emphasizing the importance of expanding economic cooperation with neighbors, especially the friendly and neighboring country of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Mousavi said, "Foreign Ministry has a special focus on expanding cooperation with neighboring countries."

"The increasing border relations and developing economic cooperation will contribute to the region's economic security," he added.

"Astara enjoys three borders of rail, land and sea, and the implementation of the Astara-Rasht railway is also high on the agenda of the officials", he said.

Mousavi stressed the need for implementing Astara railway wharf project in the vicinity of Azerbaijan Republic, saying, "In the near future, as the Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the Republic of Azerbaijan, I will consult with the officials of the neighboring state regarding this project."

Iran, Brazil Stress Expansion of Bilateral Relation

TEHRAN (MNA) - The Iranian Ambassador to Brasilia Hossein Gharibi met and held talks with Brazilian Parliament Speaker Rodrigo Maya on the expansion of bilateral relations.



During the meeting, the two sides stressed the need to maintain and expand bilateral relations in all fields, as well as the interaction and role of the parliaments of the two countries in promoting and diversifying bilateral economic relations.

Referring to the history of friendly relations between Iran and Brazil, Gharibi stressed the need for double cooperation to compensate economic damage in the post-corona era as a serious issue between the two countries.

Emphasizing the importance of bilateral relations with Iran and bilateral parliamentary diplomacy, Brazilian Parliament Speaker Rodrigo Maya considered the promotion of trade relations between the two sides important.

Iran's Steel Producing Capacity Grows

TEHRAN (MNA) - Chief Executive of Kaveh Pars Mining Industries Development Holding revealed the growth of steelmaking capacity in the country in the current year (started March 21, 2020).

Seyed Mohammad Atabak said that 1.2 million tons of steel will be added to the current production capacity of the country annually upon the operation of second phase of South Kaveh Steel Making Plant.

The second phase of South Kaveh Kish Steel Making Plant became operational concurrent with the Eid al-Adha (Feat of Sacrifice) in the country on Fri., he added.

This giant project became operational through taking advantage of expertise and technical knowhow of domestic engineers, Atabak emphasized.

According to the Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade, planning is underway to achieve production of 55 million tons of steel in 2025 Outlook Plan, so that the production capacity of steel sector hit more than 35 million tons last year (ended March 20, 2020).

By complete operation of its production capacity up to 2.4 million tons of steel ingots per annum, South Kaveh Kish Steel Making Plant was turned into one of the largest producers and exporters of steel ingot in the country, he highlighted.

The Ministry of Industry put volume of steel ingots produced in the country last year (ended March 20, 2020) at 27.2 million tons, expandable to 30 million tons before the termination of the current year (to end March 20, 2021).

Two Iranian Border Guards Martyred

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Two Iranian border guards have lost their lives during an operation in the country's northwestern province of West Azarbaijan near the border with Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdistan region.

The Law Enforcement Force of the Islamic Republic of Iran announced that the guards lost their lives as several smugglers sought to sneak through the border undetected near the city of Sardasht, located some 730 kilometers (453 miles) west of the capital, late on Friday and were trying to import contraband items.

The report identified the two fallen border guards as Sergeant Matin Saedi and Private Mehdi Maleki, adding that the bandits were captured and their goods confiscated.

Back on May 29, three Iranian border guards were killed during clashes with members of a terrorist group in the same area.

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

Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) announced back on June 24 last year that its forces had dismantled a four-member gang of terrorists in West Azarbaijan province.

Gov't Urged Not to Be Shaken If Arms Embargo Extended

TEHRAN (MNA) - Chairman of Iranian Parliament National Security and Foreign Policy Commission said that government should not be shaken if Iran's arms embargo is extended at the UN Security Council.

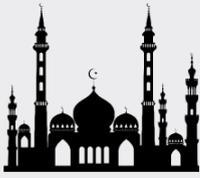
Speaking on Saturday, Mojtaba Zonnour added, "Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran should announce what measures it will take in case Iran's arms embargo is extended at UN Security Council."

In response to a question that what measures the government should take for the prevention of extension of Iran's arms embargo, he stated, "if Iran's arms embargo is extended in UNSC, it must show perseverance and endurance against enemies and the government should not deal with the issue from a position of hesitation and weakness." He further pointed out that the government should not deal with the issue from the position of weakness, rather, it should stand firmly against audacity and deviation that the enemy wants to create seriously.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Zonnour emphasized, "The government must put extensive diplomacy on its agenda against extension of arms embargo and raise the legitimacy of the Islamic Republic of Iran and invalidity of demands of other sides in the world seriously."

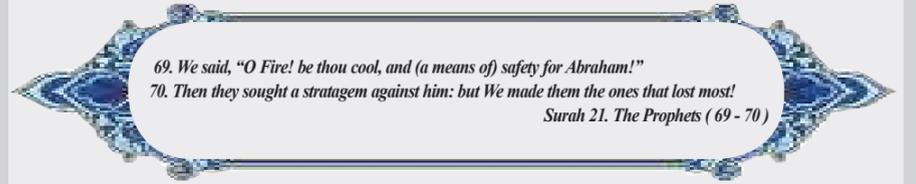
The government should activate its political diplomacy in this field and also influence members of the UN Security Council as well as other decision-making countries on this issue, he reiterated.

When enemies of the Islamic Republic of Iran examine the benefit and cost which will be inflicted on themselves, they will certainly not dare to make such as an attack, so that the government should put this issue into serious consideration, Zonnour emphasized.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:10
■ Evening (Maghreb)	20:27
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:38
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:14



Tehran, the Biggest Blood Consumer City of Iran

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – The spokesman of Iran Blood Transfusion Organization (IBTO) says more than 2 million units of blood and blood products are donated in the country per annum, adding that AB Negative blood group is the rarest blood group in the country and Tehran is the biggest blood consumer city of the country.

Speaking to ISNA, Dr. Bashir Hajibeigi said that last year, over 2.5 million people went to the blood transfusion centers in the country to donate blood, adding that some 2.1m people could donate their blood and some 490, 000 people were found ineligible for donation.

On the amount of blood needed in the country, he said some 920 hospitals in the country receive blood and blood products from IBTO offices and in metropolis Tehran, Tehran's IBTO office meets the demands of some 170 hospitals and medical centers.

He added that some 3,000 units of blood and its products are requested in Tehran per day, reiterating that Tehran Province has the most blood donors and blood consumers in the country.

Hajibeigi added that consumption of blood in Sistan and Baluchistan, Fars, Gilan, Fars, Mazandaran, Bushehr, Khuzestan and Kerman provinces is higher because of the huge number of Thalassemia patients.

He further said that the organization acts based on the demands and needs of blood banks of hospitals, adding that whatever hospitals request, IBTO provides them with blood and blood products. He admitted sometimes because of huge demand for blood products like platelets, IBTO faces shortage in supply but it is mostly temporary.



Hajibeigi noted that over 2m units of blood per annum were collected by the organization and most of it is turned into the blood products. He said over 3.5m units of blood products are produced from over 2m units of blood and the amount has met the demands of medical centers of the country so far.

He added that when the demands from the medical centers for blood rises, the IBTO starts its propagation and culturalization of blood donation, and consequently the amount of blood donation rises.

He reiterated that O Positive is the dominating blood group in the country with 33 percent while 25 to 26 percent of people have B positive, 27 to 28 percent A Positive, 8 to 9 percent AB Positive and only 10 percent of people have negative blood groups.

He further said that AB Negative is the rarest blood group in Iran and only one percent of people have AB Negative blood group.

He said O Positive is dominating blood group in the country and its donation and consumption is higher than other blood groups.

Hajibeigi noted that blood donation has increased in Iran in recent years as the figure reached 60 percent last year.

President Hails CBI Performance

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - President Hassan Rouhani has voiced his approval of the Central Bank's diverse methods to provide foreign currency for importing essential goods and commodities to local population.

"The use of a variety of methods to provide the currency needed to import basic goods and raw materials, in coordination with exporters and importers, is effective and should be continued," Rouhani said in a conversation with the governor of the Central Bank Abdolnasser Hemmati.

Rouhani also talked about the latest measures of the Central Bank to control liquidity.

He asked Hemmati to provide the government with the necessary proposals for non-inflationary methods of financing the construction, infrastructure and services projects, using the existing liquidity in the country.

IME Witnesses Growths In Its Weekly Trade



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - While over 712,569 MT of commodities worth over \$1,166m were traded last week on the Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME), the trading volume and value experienced growths of 74 and 40 percent, respectively.

According to the report from IME International Affairs and PR, on the domestic and export metal and mineral trading floor of IME, 166,640 MT of various products worth close to \$467m were traded last week.

On this trading floor, 159,918 MT of steel, 6,040 MT of copper, 120 MT of molybdenum concentrates, 18 MT of precious metal concentrates, 550 MT of zinc as well as 16 kg of gold bullion were traded by customers.

The report declares that on domestic and export oil and petrochemical trading floors of IME, 545,273 MT of different commodities with the total value of \$704m were traded.

On this trading floor, 230,000 MT of VB feed stock, 152,938 MT of bitumen, 67,207 MT of polymer products, 36,360 MT of chemical products, 940 MT of insulation, 49,500 MT of lube cut oil, 50 MT of argon, 1,378 MT of base oil, 1,000 MT of slaps waxes as well as 5,900 MT of sulfur were traded.

Furthermore, 650 MT of commodities were traded on the IME's side market.

Quarterly Exports To Pakistan Up 26%

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The value of Iran's exports to Pakistan through the border in the southeast of the country has risen 26 percent during the first quarter of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-June 20), compared to the same period of time in the previous year, an Iranian provincial official announced.

Davoud Shahraki, the head of Industry, Mining, and Trade Department of Sistan-Baluchestan Province, in the southeast of Iran, put the worth of quarterly exports at \$131.457 million, ILNA reported.

The official said that commodities valued at over \$528 million have been exported from Sistan-Baluchestan to Pakistan in the past Iranian calendar year, and put the value of Pakistani products imported to Iran via the province at \$162 million in the previous year.

Earlier this month, the spokesman of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) announced that Iran's three more border points with Pakistan were reopened.

"Exports and imports through the three trade borders (in Sistan-Baluchestan) with Pakistan are fully resumed," Rouholah Latifi said on July 6.

Russian, Chinese Banks Refrain From Serving Iranians



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Chairman of Iran-China Joint Chamber of Commerce says currently there is no banking transaction with Russia and China and if an individual with Iranian passport wants to enjoy banking services, he will be denied by both countries' banks.

Speaking to ILNA, Majid Reza Hariri said that Iran's current problem is not just the SWIFT issue but the issue is that no bank is ready to cooperate with Iran because of being suspect for money laundering regardless of the U.S. sanctions.

Recently Reuters reported that Chinese banks have been urged to leave SWIFT system's messaging and to launch its own Chinese version due to the U.S. sanctions. Hariri said that Iran's problem for trade is not the SWIFT because no bank is ready to cooperate with Iran because of money laundering.

He said Iran is currently facing with two major problems in its banking system: the U.S. sanctions which risk any country cooperating with Iran and Iran's rejection of joining the FATF which has created problem. Hariri added that the FATF in recent weeks by writing to the world banking system has called Iran a risky country whose financial transactions should be highly controlled.

He admitted that today there is no banking transaction with Russia and China and even an individual with Iranian passport wants to get banking service in both countries, he is denied.

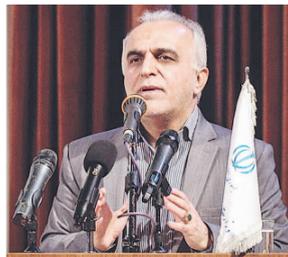
Trade Volume in Stock Market Climbs 625% in 4 Months

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The value of trades in Iranian stock market has risen 625 percent during the first four months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-July 21), compared to the same period of time in the past year, Finance and Economic Affairs Minister Farhad Dejjasand announced.

The minister also said that the value of four-month trades at this market has increased 145 percent since the beginning of the current Iranian year, IRIB reported.

Dejjasand put the value of initial public offerings (IPOs) in the Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), and Iran's over-the-counter (OTC) market, known as Iran Fara



Bourse (IFB), at 137 billion rials (about \$3.261 million) during the first four months of the present year, and said the figure is nearly two and half times more than that of the whole previous year.

The official went on to say, "We try to save the liquidity attracted by the capital market and lead it toward production and development."

As announced by the head of Iran's Securities and Exchange Organization (SEO), the amount of liquidity absorbed by Iran's capital market reached 500 trillion rials (about \$12 billion) during the first quarter of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-June 20).

Hasan Qalibaf-Asl said, "It is while the total amount of liquidity entered into this market stood at 300 trillion rials (about \$7.14 billion) during the past year."

NDF Allocates Some \$381m to Implement Modern Irrigation Systems

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - National Development Fund (NDF) has allocated 16 trillion rials (about \$380.9 million) for the implementation of modern irrigation systems in the country's farmlands during the current Iranian calendar year (started on March 20), an official with the Agriculture Ministry said.

According to Abbas Zare, project manager of Agriculture Ministry's new plan for irrigation systems development, this year, 162,000 hectares of farmlands are planned to be equipped with modern irrigation systems, of which 32,000 hectares have been equipped and 130,000 hectares are under operation.

As reported by ILNA, Zare noted that the Agriculture Ministry's plan for the development of new irrigation systems has been defined in line with the resilient economy programs and has a direct impact on the country's food security and self-sufficiency. So far, more than 2.4 million hectares of the country's farmlands have been equipped with modern irrigation systems, the official said.

"With the effective support of the government, the implementation of this project has, so far, helped reducing the water consumptions in the equipped lands by 44 percent and increased their production by 30 percent," Zare noted.

"The consumption of fertilizers and pesticides have also been reduced by up to 30 percent," he added.

The project manager had earlier noted that the ministry's plan for developing new irrigation systems has witnessed a significant leap in the past three years.

TPO Determined to Facilitate Export to Syria

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) said that his organization is determined to facilitate the export of technical and engineering services to Syria, TPO new portal reported.

Emphasizing the significance of the Syrian market for the export of Iranian services, Hamid Zadboum said that this issue is being investigated in two expert sessions of the TPO.

During a meeting between Syrian Prime Minister Hussein Arnous and an Iranian delegation in Damascus on June 17, the two sides explored the ways to further develop economic cooperation between Iran and Syria which have been targeted by the U.S. sanctions.

Iran-Syria economic collaboration still continues in line with the guidelines of the leaders of the two countries, Arnous said in the meeting.

Syria has a comprehensive plan to develop the agricultural and food industries to increase the stability of the Syrian people in the face of sanctions, he added.

Head of Headquarters for Developing Iran's Economic Cooperation with Iraq and Syria Hassan Danayefar who was heading the visiting Iranian delegation, for his part, reiterated that his country is standing alongside Syria to counter economic sanctions.

He noted that the Iranian delegation's trip to Damascus took place to offer economic help, stressing the significance of joint coordination for overcoming all the obstacles on the way of economic collaboration.

Iran and Syria have been taking major steps for the expansion of their mutual trade ties. The two sides have exchanged numerous trade delegations and Iranian private companies are investing in various fields of the Syrian economy like providing construction materials especially cement and working on several reconstruction projects.

Bolsonaro Says Nothing to Fear

RIO DE JANEIRO (AFP) - Fresh off a bout of COVID-19, President Jair Bolsonaro said Friday nearly everyone will probably end up catching the new coronavirus, urging Brazilians to "face up to it" and saying there was nothing to fear.

The far-right leader's latest bid to downplay the pandemic came as Brazil closed in on the grim milestone of 100,000 people killed by the virus, the second-highest death toll in the world, after the United States.

Bolsonaro, who is just coming off three weeks in quarantine with a case of the virus, pointed to his own case as an example.



British PM Puts Brakes on Eased England Lockdown

LONDON (Dispatches) - British Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced on Friday that a relaxation of lockdown rules in England set for Aug. 1 will be postponed by at least two weeks as the rate of coronavirus transmission across the country rises.

"At every point I have said our plan to reopen society and the economy is conditional - it relies on continued progress against the virus," Johnson said. "We should now squeeze that brake pedal to keep the virus under control," he added. As of Saturday, casinos, bowling alleys, skating rinks, and beauty parlors were all due to open, as were indoor performances and wedding receptions of up to 30 people. This relaxation of rules will be postponed by at least two weeks.



Iraq PM Promises Early Parliamentary Polls for June 2021



BAGHDAD (AFP) - Iraq will hold its next parliamentary elections nearly a year early, the premier announced Friday, as he seeks to make good on promises he offered when he came to power.

"June 6, 2021, has been fixed as the date for the next legislative elections," said Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhemi, who took the reins in May after months of protests forced his predecessor to resign. "Everything will be done to protect and ensure the success of these polls," Kadhemi said in a televised speech.

Elections in Iraq are sometimes marred by violence and often by fraud.

The next parliamentary elections had originally been due to take place in May 2022.

But months of protests began in October, with thousands taking to the streets of Baghdad and across the south.

Demonstrators demanded that the political system be dismantled, pointing to endemic corruption and what many see as the malign influence of sectarian interests.

Kadhemi was nominated in April, months after Adel Abdel Mahdi stepped down -- the first time a premier has resigned before the end of his term since the U.S.-led invasion of 2003.

Kadhemi's government on Thursday said a total of 560 people had died in protests since October.

Nearly all were demonstrators killed at the hands of the security forces, according to an adviser to the premier.

Abdel Mahdi's government proposed to parliament a new electoral law that was quickly passed late last year.

But the section detailing voting procedures and constituency boundaries has not been finalised, according to diplomats and experts.

It was not clear what role Iraq's election commission -- regularly accused of bias -- would have in organising the polls.

The United Nations mission in Iraq (UNAMI) welcomed Kadhemi's announcement.

"Early elections fulfil a key popular demand on the road to greater stability and democracy in Iraq," it said in a statement.

"The United Nations is ready to provide support and technical advice as requested by Iraq to ensure free, fair and credible elections that win the public's trust."

The 2018 election was marred by a record low turnout of 44.5 percent, according to official figures. Independent observers believe the true turnout was much lower.

Massive Protests In Russia's Far East Rattle Kremlin

KKABAROVSK (AFP) - Locals say a struggle for democratic freedoms is unfolding in the far eastern Russian city of Khabarovsk, where the arrest of a popular governor has unleashed massive protests.

"Sometimes I feel like crying with joy when I see everyone so united," 21-year-old student Yekaterina Ishchenko told AFP. For the last three weeks, she and thousands of other residents of the city 6,000 kilometres (3,700 miles) east of Moscow have taken to the streets, with another huge rally due on Saturday.

For Ishchenko, this is her first taste of political activism.

Tens of thousands attended a rally last weekend, according to journalists and activists, while police put the figure at just 6,500. Such protests are rare in the region seven time zones away from the capital, where most opposition protests take place.

They were sparked by the arrest on July 9 of regional governor Sergei Furgal.

Investigators accused the 50-year-old former businessman of ordering two contract killings and an attempted murder 15 years ago.

He was flown to Moscow where he is being held in custody.

His supporters see the probe as aimed at removing an overly independent politician, elected in 2018 after standing against an incumbent from the ruling party backing President Vladimir Putin. "It's a slap in the face for us. We voted for him!" said 72-year-old pensioner Marina Beletskaya.

Furgal is a member of the nationalist party LDPR which is generally loyal to the Kremlin.

He became a popular governor, with supporters describing him as energetic and ready to listen. Locally, his level of popularity rivalled Putin's.

"After we elected Furgal, the capital of the Far Eastern Federal District was moved from here to Vladivostok," said 22-year-old Victoria Sakharova, a sales assistant, referring to the port city on the Pacific coast.

"This was clearly because we elected an opposition candidate."



Republicans, Democrats Both Doubt About Fair Election

NEW YORK (Reuters) - Americans across the political spectrum have widespread concerns that November's U.S. election will be marred by fraud, interference or efforts to suppress the vote, according to a new Reuters/Ipsos poll released on Friday.

About half of the registered voters in the United States, including some 80% of Republicans surveyed, say they are concerned that an increase in voting by mail will lead to widespread fraud in the Nov. 3 election, the poll showed.

The finding suggests that a wide swath of the country may have trouble accepting the result of the election, which is expected to see a surge in mail-in voting due to the coronavirus pandemic. Republican President Donald Trump is trailing his Democratic opponent, former Vice President Joe Biden, in opinion polls.

It also shows that Republicans are sharply aligned on the issue with Trump, who has been attacking the use of mail-in ballots for months, and on Thursday for the first time raised the idea of delaying the election, which he cannot do.

The poll, taken on Wednesday and Thursday partially before Trump's tweet, also found broad concerns in both parties about the integrity of the election, with nearly three quarters concerned about voter suppression or possible election interference.

In 2016, U.S. intelligence agencies determined that Russia meddled in the presidential election to damage Democrat Hillary Clinton's campaign and sow distrust of American democracy. The poll found 74% of registered voters were concerned about "organised voter fraud by political actors hoping to sway the results of the elections," including seven of 10 Democrats and eight of 10 Republicans.

About 73% of registered voters also said they were concerned about "voter suppression," including eight of 10 Democrats and six of 10 Republicans.

Democrats and voting rights groups say mail-in voting is a way to protect voters from the virus, and that a failure to guarantee that option amid a pandemic will disenfranchise millions of Americans, especially the poor and African Americans who are deemed more vulnerable to the virus and who tend to vote Democratic.

Security Forces Head Off Anti-Government Protests in Zimbabwe

HARARE (Reuters) - Streets were deserted and businesses shut in Zimbabwe's two main cities on Friday after security forces were deployed to prevent anti-government marches called by activists over corruption and economic hardship.

Protesters stayed away. Job Sikhala, an opposition lawmaker and one of the protest organisers, said the heavy security presence showed a state afraid of its citizens. He added: "Protracted demonstrations will be the way forward."

He is among more than a dozen activists who are in hiding and who police say they are seeking for promoting Friday's protests.

In Bulawayo and central Harare, the capital, businesses were shut as police and soldiers patrolled the streets. Shops also stayed shut in some Harare townships, including Mbare - a hotbed of past protests.

President Emmerson Mnangagwa has said the protests constitute an "insurrection" by the opposition.

His ZANU-PF party this week branded the U.S. ambassador in Harare a "thug," accusing him of funding protests. Brian Nichols has criticized the

government for failing to tackle corruption and for persecuting opponents.

Mnangagwa's opponents say his government is resorting to the authoritarian streak of the Robert Mugabe era of banning protests, and abducting and arresting critics.

Popular anger has risen over an economic crisis marked by inflation running above 700%, shortages of foreign currency and public hospitals crippled by strikes and a lack of medicine.

Police spokesman Paul Nyathi said main opposition spokeswoman Fadzayi Mahere and novelist Tsitsi Dangaremba were among five people arrested for inciting public violence after protesting in their neighbourhood.

Human rights lawyers said more were detained. British Ambassador Melanie Robinson expressed concern over reports of abductions, arrests and threats targeting those exercising their rights.

Scores were killed during a crackdown on the last major protests in January 2019. Opponents say Mnangagwa is exploiting a COVID-19 lockdown to stifle dissent, after he imposed an overnight curfew and restricted free movement last week.



Fauci Urges Caution on China And Russia Virus Vaccines

WASHINGTON (AFP) - Anthony Fauci, the United States' top infectious disease official, raised concerns Friday regarding the safety of COVID-19 vaccines under development by China and Russia.

Several Chinese companies are at the forefront of the global vaccine race, while Russia has said it hopes to be the first in the world to produce a vaccine for the public, with a target date of September.

But the medicines will likely face heightened scrutiny given that the regulatory systems in both countries are far more opaque than they are in the West.

Fauci, who was asked during a Congressional hearing whether the U.S. could make use of Chinese or Russian vaccines if they arrived first, indicated that was unlikely.

"I do hope that the Chinese and the Russians are actually testing the vaccine before they are administering the vaccine to anyone," he said.

He added: "Claims of having a vaccine ready to distribute before you do testing, I think, is problematic, at best."

"We are going very quickly. I do not believe that there will be vaccines, so far ahead of us, that we will have to depend on other countries to get us vaccines."

Last month, Chinese media announced a coronavirus vaccine developed by CanSino Biologics was being used to immunize the Chinese military -- making it the first approved for people, albeit in a limited population.

Many scientists however raised ethical concerns because the vaccine has not yet begun its final stages of testing.

Two other Chinese companies Sinovac and Sinopharm, have launched final phase three trials in Brazil and the United Arab Emirates, respectively.

China, where the virus originated, has largely brought its outbreak under control and has therefore had to turn to other countries to test its vaccines.

The trials in Brazil and the UAE will be watched particularly closely, given China's history of vaccine and other health scandals.



Shanon
(adviser)

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S, J, balcony
green yard
Fully Furn

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Gheitarieh (\$1800) 180sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, S, J, balcony, & gym
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U.S. Slaps Sanctions on Chinese Paramilitary Body in Xinjiang

WASHINGTON (AFP) - The United States on Friday imposed sanctions on a major paramilitary group with vast interests in China's northwestern region of Xinjiang, accusing it of abuses against Uighurs and other mostly Muslim groups.

The Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, which runs its own settlements, universities and media in the region geared at China's Han majority, will have any US-based assets frozen, the Treasury Department said. "The United States is committed to using the full breadth of its financial powers to hold human rights abusers accountable in Xinjiang and across the world," Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said in a statement.



OPEC July Oil Output Surges as Persian Gulf Voluntary Cuts End

LONDON (Reuters) - OPEC oil output has risen by over 1 million barrels per day (bpd) in July as Saudi Arabia and other Persian Gulf members ended their voluntary extra supply curbs on top of an OPEC-led deal, and other members made limited progress on compliance.

The 13-member Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries pumped 23.32 million bpd on average in June, the survey found, up 970,000 bpd from June's revised figure, which was the lowest since 1991.

OPEC and allies agreed in April to a record output cut as the coronavirus crisis hammered demand.

An easing of lockdowns and lower supply have helped oil climb above \$40 (30.45 pounds) from April's 21-year low of below \$16 a barrel, although concerns of a second wave are keeping a lid on gains. "Upside potential will continue to be in short supply so long as the COVID hangover lingers," said Stephen Brennock of oil broker PVM.

OPEC, Russia and other producers, a group known as OPEC+, agreed to cuts of 9.7 million bpd, or 10% of global output, from May 1. OPEC's share, to be made by 10 members from October 2018 levels in the case of most countries, is 6.084 million bpd.

In July, they delivered 5.743 million bpd of the pledged reduction, equal to 94% compliance, the survey found. Compliance in June was revised up to 111%.

July's increase is the biggest since April, when OPEC briefly pumped at will before the latest supply cut was agreed.

To further support the market, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates had pledged to cut by an extra 1.18 million bpd in June only. This helped curb output last month to OPEC's lowest since 1991, excluding membership changes, based on Reuters surveys and OPEC figures.

The biggest rise in supply in July came from Saudi Arabia, which pumped 8.4 million bpd, up 850,000 bpd from June and close to its quota, the survey found. The United Arab Emirates and Kuwait also boosted output close to their targets.

Iraq and Nigeria, which boosted compliance in June and were laggards in previous OPEC+ deals, did not make any further cuts in July, the survey found, with Iraq boosting exports. Both have pledged to make additional reductions in later months.

"The low prices are making life difficult for those OPEC countries that are required to cut their production additionally," said Eugen Weinberg, analyst at Commerzbank.

Iranian and Libyan supply held steady in July and Venezuelan output dropped further. All three are exempt from voluntary cuts because of U.S. sanctions or internal issues limiting output.

Libyan output has plunged since January due to a blockade of ports and fields by groups loyal to eastern-based commander Khalifa Haftar.

The Reuters survey aims to track supply to the market and is based on shipping data provided by external sources, Refinitiv Eikon flows data, information from tanker-trackers such as Petro-Logistics and Kpler, and information provided by sources at oil companies, OPEC and consultants.

Portugal's GDP Slumps 14.1% in Q2

LISBON (Reuters) - Portugal's gross domestic product shrank 14.1% in the second quarter of 2020, the biggest contraction ever, as lockdowns imposed to contain the spread of the coronavirus hit key sectors of the economy.

In a flash estimate, the National Institute of Statistics (INE) said that between April and June this year, the country's GDP plunged 16.5% compared with the same period in 2019, affected by collapsed private consumption, investment and exports. "It is a number which will be remembered in the history of Portuguese economy, a consequence of strong confinement, particularly between mid-March and the end of April, which affected almost all economic sectors," said Filipe Garcia, economist at Informacao de Mercados Financeiros consultants.

Portugal's two largest trading partners, Spain and Germany, also recorded major contractions in GDP in the second quarter of the year, 18.5% and 10.1% respectively.

In yet another sign of weak domestic demand, INE said consumer inflation fell 1.3% in July after growing 0.9% in June.

The country had seen some of its strongest growth streaks in the past few years after leaving behind the 2010-13 economic and debt crisis.

Last year, Portugal's GDP grew 2.2% while unemployment was 6.5%, near record lows. But the economy depends on tourism, which accounts for up to 15% of GDP and has suffered from the coronavirus lockdowns in Portugal and abroad.

The coronavirus is set to leave long-lasting scars on the country's economy, with the Bank of Portugal predicting Portuguese GDP will contract 9.5% in 2020, the biggest recession in a century. The government estimates it will fall 6.9%.

The pandemic is also threatening Portugal's unemployment rate, which rose to 7% in June from a revised 5.9% in May as tens of thousands of jobs were wiped out by the coronavirus.

But the overall number is likely to be substantially higher. Many workers stopped looking for jobs in the lockdown, meaning they were left off unemployment statistics.

The southern Algarve region, usually packed with visitors but now nearly deserted, was badly hit, with the number of registered unemployed in June jumping 231% to more than 26,000 people.

Portugal, which has reported a total 50,868 coronavirus cases and 1,727 deaths, began lifting its lockdown on May 4, but localised outbreaks in and around the capital, Lisbon, have worried authorities at home and abroad.



Aso Warns Against Rapid Rise in the Yen

TOKYO (Reuters) - Japanese Finance Minister Taro Aso described the yen's recent rise as "rapid" on Friday, signalling concern that a strong currency could add pain to an export-led economy already in recession because of the novel coronavirus.

The yen's recent appreciation comes as the world's third-largest economy has been bottoming out from its deepest postwar slump, with authorities juggling a restart of economic activity with efforts to prevent a second wave of coronavirus infections.

The currency had been stable at around 107 yen to the dollar under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe administration, Aso told reporters after a cabinet meeting.

"Stability is important, so I'm closely monitoring it with a sense of urgency."

The dollar hit a 4-1/2-month low of 104.195 yen JPY= on Friday as investors worried that a recovery in the U.S. economy could be stymied by a second wave of coronavirus.

Japanese shares closed lower on Friday as the safe-haven yen strengthened on dismal U.S. data, while the resurgence of COVID-19 cases dampened hopes of a swift economic rebound, prompting authorities to discuss a response to market moves.

"The government and the Bank of Japan will keep a close watch on underlying market and economic trends and tackle as one as needed," Kenji Okamura, vice finance minister for international affairs, told reporters after a routine meeting with officials from the central bank and the Financial Services Agency.

A Japanese government panel acknowledged on Thursday that the economy peaked in October 2018 and fell into recession, suggesting it was struggling long before its more recent coronavirus slump.

"We have taken steps to support domestic demand rather than external, helping employment and household income improve, which led to a moderate economic recovery," Aso said.

Aso said exports accounted for less than 20% of Japan's economy, shrugging off any immediate impact from the yen's rise but the fact that he warned against the currency's gains underscored authorities' struggle to boost external demand.

Japanese authorities tend to fire warning shots against excessive currency volatility and disorderly moves at a time of market strains.

Tokyo has stayed out of the currency market since 2011 when it intervened heavily by selling the yen to prevent a strong currency from hurting an economy facing damage from a devastating earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster.

Huawei Asks Germany Not to Shut It Out of Building 5G Networks



BERLIN (Reuters) - Huawei's top manager in Germany has appealed to the government not to shut it out of building 5G mobile networks, Der Spiegel said on Friday, after Britain decided to purge the Chinese firm's equipment from its network on security grounds.

Chancellor Angela Merkel's government has put off a decision on tougher certification rules until after the summer break, amid pressure from some lawmakers who sympathise with U.S. calls to ban Huawei outright.

"The government's approach of setting the same, tough security criteria for all is the right way to ensure networks are secure," Huawei's representative in Germany, David Wang, told the weekly news magazine.

Germany's three mobile operators are all customers of Huawei, which has had a presence in the country for 15 years. None have found any evidence to support U.S. allegations that its equipment is unsafe, Wang added.

Britain this month ordered Huawei equipment to be removed from its 5G network by the end of 2027, while France has told operators to rip out Huawei 5G gear by 2028 without announcing a public ban, sources say.

Deutsche Telekom, the German market leader, began building its 5G network under existing agreements and only signed a contract with the Chinese provider last month. Its 5G network now covers nearly half the population.

Analysts and industry sources say Deutsche Telekom, which opposes a Huawei ban, is seeking to pre-empt such an outcome by rolling out most of its 5G network before a political decision is taken.

Spanish-controlled Telefonica Deutschland said this week it had signed backup 5G contracts with other telecoms vendors to cover the risk that Huawei ends up being barred from the German market.

U.S. Consumer Spending Rises for Second Straight Month

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - U.S. consumer spending increased for a second straight month in June, setting up consumption for a rebound in the third quarter, though the recovery could be limited by a resurgence in COVID-19 cases and the end of expanded unemployment benefits.

The Commerce Department said on Friday that consumer spending, which accounts for more than two-thirds of U.S. economic activity, rose 5.6% last month after a record 8.5% jump in May as more businesses reopened. Consumers stepped up purchases of clothing and footwear. They also spent more on healthcare, dining out and on hotel and motel accommodation.

Economists polled by Reuters had forecast consumer spending would advance 5.5% in June. When adjusted for inflation, consumer spending increased 5.2% last month after surging 8.4% in May.

The data was included in Thursday's advance gross domestic product report for the second quarter, which showed the economy shrinking at a record 32.9% annualized rate as consumer spending tanked at a historic 34.6% pace.

With June's increase, inflation-adjusted consumer spending has pulled out of April's deep hole, though it remains below its pre-pandemic level. This puts spending on a higher growth trajectory heading into the July-September quarter.

But the explosion of COVID-19 infections, especially in the densely populated South and West regions where authorities in hard-hit areas are closing businesses again and pausing reopenings, is casting doubt on the magnitude of the expected surge in third-quarter consumer spending.

Sri Lanka Tea Buyers led by Iraq, Turkey, Russia in 2020 First Half

COLOMBO (Dispatches) - Sri Lanka produced 129.04 million tons of tea in the first half of 2020 down 18.76 percent from a year earlier, and exported 129 million tons, down 14.50 percent, with Iraq, Turkey, Russia and Iran the top buyers, a tea broker said.

Sri Lanka saw production and sales disruption after a Coronavirus lockdown was imposed on March 20, but the sector gradually came back to operation as the government selectively allowed economic activity to resume.

Iraq had bought 16.2 million tons in the first half of 2020, down from 19.6 million tonnes in 2019, Turkey 15.7 million tonnes down from 18.1 million tonnes, customs data published by Ceylon Tea Brokers showed. Russia bought 14.4 million of Ceylon tea down from 14.9 million from a year earlier while Iran bought 8.9 million tons.

Other CIS countries had bought, 6.7 million tonnes whereas China bought 5.0 million tonnes and Chile 4.6 million tonnes.

Syria had bought 3.5 million tons of tea from Sri Lanka and Saudi Arabia 3.4 million tons and UAE bought 3.3 million tons of tea.

Sri Lanka sold 56.8 million kilograms of bulk tea in the first six months of 2020 bringing in 42.7 billion rupees, down from 59.9 million kilograms (44.4 billion rupees) a year earlier.

Sri Lanka sold 54.2 million kilograms of tea in packets amounting to 43.7 billion rupees, down from 69.4 million kilograms a year earlier.

Low grown led the table with 75.4 million kilograms produced mid grown amounted to 22.7 million kilograms and high grown amounted to 30.8 million kilograms.

Total quantity of tea exported for the month of June 2020 including Re-Exports with imported Tea amounted to 23.69 million kilograms, showing a decline of 0.42 million kilograms or 1.73 percent compared to the same period last year. Total export earnings showed an increase of 1.39 billion rupees as against the corresponding month in 2019.

Sri Lanka earned 106 billion rupees from tea exports in the first six months in 2020.

In the month of June production was 26.8 million kilograms down from 27.5 million kilograms last year.

Production for June, elevation-wise breakdown showed that 57.1 percent of tea produced was Low Grown while only 15.9 percent were Mid grown teas and 27 percent of High grown teas were produced.

Tea auction prices showed mixed trends for the last few auctions as the market now operated after a price correction triggered by pre-lockdown bulk purchases following a period of teas starvation back in April.

“The Alien” to Go on Screen At Hong Kong Festival

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iranian film ‘The Alien’ (Namo) directed by Nader Saeivar, has made it into the competition program of the 44th edition of the Hong Kong International Film Festival. The synopsis of ‘The Alien’ reads, “In an ordinary Iranian town, two mysterious strangers in a car begin to park daily at the same spot for hours. This unusual occurrence causes paranoia among

the locals, who suspect them to be national security.”

The film has also screened at 70th Berlin International Film Festival. The Hong Kong International Film Festival Society (HKIFFS) is a charitable, non-profit and non-governmental organization dedicated to the discovery and promotion of creativity in the art and culture of film.



Spain Dives Into Deep Recession

MADRID (Reuters) - The coronavirus crisis has pulverised Spain's economy, triggering its worst recession since the civil war, with collapsed tourism numbers boding ill for hopes of a swift rebound.

Hit by one of Europe's worst outbreaks and strictest lockdowns, the economy came to a virtual halt in March and remained paralysed until the end of June.

It shrank 18.5% in the second quarter, a drop so harsh it wiped out all the recovery achieved since the 2008 global financial crisis, figures from the National Statistics Institute showed on Friday.

“It's a war economy,” said one Mallorca hotelier, Lluís Rullán, who has only reopened one of his two establishments and was limiting costs and staff to a minimum due to scant visitors.

The government had counted on tourists from northern Europe and further afield driving a third quarter recovery, but quarantines and travel advisories have dashed hopes as Spain battles with new localised outbreaks of the COVID-19 disease.

Rullán, who operates in Soller in northwest Mallorca, had planned for 60% occupancy for August but now expects barely 20% for what should be the high summer season.

After Britain required travellers to Spain to quarantine on return, Germany dealt another blow on Friday, putting three Spanish regions - including Catalonia, home to Barcelona - on its list of high-risk areas.

“Not only has the Spanish economy been one of the worst hit in the euro zone by the pandemic, it also looks set to make a much weaker recovery than its neighbours,” said analysts at Capital Economics.

Spain normally received about 80 million visitors annually and has depended on tourism for about 12% of economic output.

The government has forecast contraction of 9.2% in 2020 as a whole, surpassing the fall during Spain's 2008-2013 financial crisis, but expects 6.8% growth in 2021.

“I fear something worse because in the previous crisis we had health and now we don't,” said pensioner Amelia Martín, walking in Madrid with a mask on.

Spain insists it is not experiencing a second wave of the coronavirus and recent increases are still far from the peak.

But Alex Lazarowicz, a British artisan brewer in Barcelona, whose business has suffered from the local resurgence in cases, said things were not improving: “Everything is empty. People no longer go inside the bar.”

With the economy hibernating and most shops closed until reopening began in



May, private spending and investment plummeted in the second quarter, inflicting a much greater blow on Spain's economy than European counterparts including Germany, France and Italy, the data showed.

The second-quarter contraction came after a 5.2% drop in the first three months, at that stage the worst quarter in modern records. Historians say only the 1936-39 civil war hit harder.

The third quarter will now be weaker than expected, said Raymond Torres, chief economist of thinktank Funcas, forecasting that Spain might manage to rake in from tourist income for the whole year what it usually gets in the third quarter alone.

Some sectors, though, recorded positive data in the second quarter, such as agriculture, driven by strong demand for food. A stimulus package and health measures also helped boost public spending.

“Let's be positive, fight and think that if everybody pushes, we will get Spain out of this,” said retail shops owner Inigo Crespo, who had to close one shop after the lockdown started and is unsure if can keep his other businesses running.

Surge in Damaged Cash as Worried South Koreans Try To Microwave the Virus



SEOUL (Reuters) - Worried South Koreans are putting banknotes in their microwaves and washing machines, damaging the bills in their attempts to cleanse them of the coronavirus.

The central bank said on Friday that people had exchanged three times as much burnt money in the past six months as in the same period last year, much of it thought to be from botched efforts to disinfect bills.

A Bank of Korea official told Reuters that the amount of money returned to the bank after being burnt between January and June had risen to 1.32 billion won (845,784 pounds) from 480 million (304,529.8 pounds) in the same period last year.

“There was a considerable amount of bills being burnt in the microwave ovens in the first half of this year,” the official said, referring to efforts to prevent the coronavirus.

In a statement, the bank said overall a total of 2.69 trillion won worth of damaged notes and coins were destroyed and of that it exchanged 6.5 billion won worth in the first half of 2020.

Besides using microwaves or ovens to heat the bills, some people also put them in their washing machines, the bank said.

In one example given by the bank, a person surnamed Um came in to redeem at least 35.5 million won in notes damaged after he had put them in the washing machine.

Um only recovered 22.9 million won, losing at least 35% of the original money, which he had received as condolence donations for funeral expenses for a family member, the BOK said.

Another case involved a person surnamed Kim, who put 5.2 million won in the microwave to sterilise the money against COVID-19. But the damage was limited so Kim was able to redeem most of the money.

In March, the BOK said it was quarantining bank notes for two weeks to remove any traces of the coronavirus and even burning some as part of efforts to stem the outbreak.

EU Approves Alstom's Purchase of Bombardier Rail Unit

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - The European Commission gave French engineering giant Alstom the green light to buy Canadian train-maker Bombardier Transport on Friday, a year-and-a-half after blocking a mega-merger with Germany's Siemens.

Paris and Berlin were infuriated when Brussels blocked the former plan to build an all European giant but the Canadian tie-up should now go ahead -- with conditions.

Alstom will have to divest itself of some of its plants, but the new entity could still be of a scale to compete with the Chinese world-leader in the sector, CRRC.

“Going forward, a stronger combined Alstom and Bombardier entity will emerge,” EU competition commissioner Margrethe Vestager said.

“Thanks to the comprehensive remedies offered to solve the competition concerns ... the Commission has been able to speedily review and approve this transaction.”

Alstom's chief executive, Henri Poupart-Lafarge, had earlier in the day expressed confidence the decision would go his way this time.

“The dialogue with Brussels has been extremely fluid, extremely rapid since we announced the transaction with Bombardier in February, so five months later we have the decision,” he stressed.

“I believe that a dialogue of trust has been established. Is this the consequence of the difficulties of the previous dossier or not? I don't know,” he added, referring to the blocked Siemens tie-up.

In order to appease Vestager's anti-trust concerns, Alstom gave an undertaking to sell off some of its assets, including a French plant in Reichshoffen in Alsace which employs 780 people.



Before these concessions, the new group would have had a turnover of 15.5 billion euros per year and 76,000 employees.

Had the European Commission been worried that the project might have hurt competition, it could have launched a more detailed investigation, which would have lasted about four months.

Alstom had notified Brussels in mid-June of the planned acquisition of its competitor Bombardier Transport for six billion euros in a deal to be finalised in the first half of 2021.

The two groups have a virtual monopoly on rolling stock in France, where they work together regularly, as they do on the Paris Metro and RER suburban transport network.

The threat of Chinese competition had already been cited as a reason for Siemens' planned takeover of Alstom, which was blocked by the Commission in February 2019.

But Brussels feared an overly dominant position in Europe in rail signalling and high-speed trains.

The EU should not help to create “fed and pampered” industrial champions, but let competition drive innovation, Vestager had argued.

Alstom had fewer overlapping operations with Bombardier than with the German group, which helped win approval of the deal.

Bombardier's subsidiary Bombardier Transportation is based in Berlin and runs the largest railway plant in France, with 2,000 employees, in Crespin in the north of the country.

Alstom, meanwhile, operates many smaller sites and last year, before the coronavirus crisis, its order book peaked at 40.9 billion euros.

Energy and Legal Framework Reforms Will Usher Stability Into Iraq

LONDON (Dispatches) - The International Energy Agency's executive director Fatih Birol says Iraq can end gas flaring, which is sapping its economy of billions of dollars a year, within six to twelve months, if the political will is there.

“If there is determined action, it can be as quickly as six months to one year,” Dr Birol said in an exclusive interview with The National. “It cannot be completely finished but we can have achieved a lot of progress there.” Dr Birol stressed the need to end gas flaring, which is costing Iraq both financially and environmentally.

The World Bank estimates that about 16 billion cubic meters of gas from Iraqi fields was flared in 2015, costing the economy billions in lost revenue. A 2018 study by Siemens said Iraq could save about \$5.2 billion (Dh19.1bn) over four years by reducing the amount of gas flared from its fields.

“We need to stop gas flaring to generate electricity and Iraq needs to diversify its economy from oil and to develop its industry,” Dr Birol said.

“Gas can be used to feed the industry sector, it can be food processing, ceramics or other types of sectors which create jobs and diversify the economy ... this is not rocket science. It has been proven and can be easily done.”

Ending flaring would also be in line with the World Bank's global ‘Zero Routine Flaring by 2030’ initiative, which seeks to end the burning of about 140 billion cubic meters of natural gas annually, which contributes to climate change and causes more than 300 million tons of carbon dioxide to be emitted into the atmosphere.

In addition to Iraq's dysfunctional gas sector, it is also vulnerable as a result of its reliance on gas imports from neighboring Iran that are more expensive than market rates and add to its financial woes.

Iran exports 1,200 to 1,500 megawatts of electricity to Iraq daily, in addition to 38 million cubic meters of natural gas, according to the Iran-Iraq Joint Chamber of Commerce. Last June, Iraq signed a two-year contract to continue the imports – despite US sanctions.

Iran Urged to...

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“If the mentioned strategies yield no result, Iran can use its power in the Strait of Hormuz and Persian Gulf to deal with South Korea and make the country fulfill the Iranian people's (legitimate) demand,” the former diplomat proposed.

Iran is escalating pressure on the East Asian country to release about \$7 billion of oil-export revenues, saying Seoul is buckling to pressure from its U.S. ally and illegally withholding funds needed to counter the coronavirus outbreak.

Iran is the hardest hit country by the coronavirus in West Asia.

In late June, central bank governor Abdolnasser Hemmati said Iran will take back its dollars from South Korea through legal and international methods.

Yonhap reported that South Korea was set to hold virtual talks with Iran later Wednesday about expanding humanitarian trade like medicine exports, following the first such shipment to Tehran in May upon receiving a sanctions exemption from the U.S.

Washington Maximum...

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Following its withdrawal, Washington targeted the Iranian nation with the “toughest ever” economic sanctions.

It is currently dialing up efforts to kill the JCPOA completely through pushing the remaining parties to the multilateral agreement to extend a UN arms embargo on Tehran.

Elsewhere in her article, Sherman, a professor at Harvard University, said Trump lacks any “discernible objective” in its foreign policy and is only focused on obtaining foreign help for his re-election.

“As a result of Trump's failures, the Middle East is further from peace and closer to the next Palestinian uprising than when he took office, the people of Cuba and Venezuela face a bitter future, the promise of African renewal is sidelined, and there is no real challenge to either Russia or China,” she wrote.

“The only possible conclusion is that the objective in Trump's relations with other countries is not national security but Trump's security. Nothing else explains the vacuous and vain approach of a foreign policy without objectives, without strategy, without any indication that it protects and advances US interests.”

Iran Discusses Completion of Astara Railway With Azerbaijan

TEHRAN (IP) - Foreign Ministry Spokesman said that accelerating the implementation of the Astara railway in the north-south corridor was discussed with the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Abbas Mousavi said on Friday that the synergy and serious efforts of the executive agencies in Iran are required to complete the Astara railway dock project.

He described Astara city, northern Iran, as the forefront of the country, which enjoys rail, ground, and sea borders, and said that the construction of the Astara-Rasht railway is also on the relevant executive agencies' agenda.

Astara Railway which connects Iran and the Azerbaijan Republic was inaugurated in March 2018, with Azerbaijan pledged \$ 60 million of investment to build the Astara railway dock and Astara-Rasht railway line.

Currently, freight trains of Russia and the Republic of Azerbaijan enter the Astara railway port and either unload or load their cargoes.

After the connection of the port and the Astara-Rasht railway, the north-south railway corridor will be completed, and transferring goods from the southernmost ports to Astara in the north as well as the departure from the country will be feasible.

MotoGP Abandons Hopes of Racing Outside Europe This Season

PARIS (Dispatches) - MotoGP scrapped the remaining 2020 races planned outside Europe on Friday, announcing the cancellation of Grands Prix in Argentina, Thailand and Malaysia.

All three had been postponed until an unspecified date because of the coronavirus pandemic.

In their place, MotoGP announced a season-ending race in Europe, at a location to be announced after August 10, for November 2.

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Nigeria's Osimhen Joins Napoli From Lille

ROME (AFP) - Nigeria forward Victor Osimhen has signed for Serie A side Napoli from French outfit Lille, the two clubs announced on Friday.

Neither club officially gave details of the transfer, but a source from Lille who was familiar with the transfer told AFP that the Ligue 1 team would receive 70 million euros (\$82.8 million) with add-ons potentially worth 10 million euros. Italian media report however that Napoli have shelled out 50 million euros before add-ons. Either figure would be a club record transfer fee paid by Napoli.

Kyrgios Rips Boring Rival as Ugly War of Words Explodes

SYDNEY (Dispatches) - It's safe to say Nick Kyrgios and Borna Coric won't be having a beer with one another anytime soon.

The tennis rivals have been engaged in a war of words after Kyrgios took aim at all those who played in the ill-fated Adria Tour.

Coric, one of four players to test positive for coronavirus at the Balkans event last month, fired back this week, suggesting criticism from Kyrgios, who has a hot-headed reputation on court, was not credible.

"I read what he wrote, but I simply don't care since he likes to be a 'general after a battle'," Coric told the Jutarnji List newspaper.

"If someone else was teaching lessons I would have maybe understood, but Kyrgios ... It's somehow not realistic.

"But ok, it's his style, that's how he functions, I have no problem with that neither does it bother me on personal level."

Kyrgios responded on Twitter late Wednesday by saying: "You should care. Do you have rocks in your head?"

"Again, you can stand up for your mates, I'm just trying to hold them accountable. When I said what I said, I didn't intend to bother. They are tennis players, they aren't special.

"Just as I thought, Coric intellectual level = 0," he added, ending his tweet with an emoji of a doughnut.

He then called out Coric for ignoring Dimitrov's warning about the effects of the coronavirus and how he was impacted.

Not content to let the feud die down, Coric has since fired back by suggesting the Aussie firebrand is being hypocritical about preaching good behaviour.

The Serbian star then suggested Kyrgios must either be extremely bored or he's had too much red wine, in what would appear to be a pointed reference to the Aussie's boozy social media chat with Andy Murray.



The 25-year-old Aussie has a habit of getting in the last word and his response to Coric's post was particularly scathing.

"Again. Joking about a global pandemic. Shows your maturity level champion. Gonna be good to see you next, see if that peanut of a brain has grown," Kyrgios wrote.

"But yes, a tad bored watching your boring ass tennis and personality bringing absolutely zero to the sport," he added in a follow-up tweet.

Kyrgios has previously lashed German Alexander Zverev as "selfish" after he was spotted partying despite vowing to self-isolate following the Adria Tour.

Meanwhile four-time Grand Slam champion Kim Clijsters was among four major title winners given wildcards Thursday into the WTA field for a US Open tuneup event next month in New York.

The 37-year-old Belgian was joined in the wildcard field for the Western and Southern Open by Japan's Naomi Osaka and Americans Venus Williams, Sloane Stephens and Caty McNally.

The event, typically staged in Cincinnati two weeks before the US Open, was moved to Flushing Meadows and will be played August 20-28 inside the National Tennis Center bubble without spectators as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

US Open play will begin there on August 31.

Clijsters, a mother of three, returned to the WTA Tour this year after retiring in 2012.

She was ousted in her first match at Dubai in February and in Monterrey in March.

World Cup Winner Hoewedes Retires at 32

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Benedikt Hoewedes, a German World Cup winner, said on Friday that he is retiring aged 32 for family reasons.

He made 44 appearances for Germany at centre-back and full-back and played every minute on the way to triumph in the 2014 World Cup in Brazil. He played more than 330 times for Schalke before spending the 2017-18 season on loan at Juventus and then moving to Lokomotiv Moscow for two seasons. The Russian club agreed to release Hoewedes from his contract in June.

"I was recently with my wife and son in a camper van in the south of France," Hoewedes told Der Spiegel magazine in an interview published on Friday. "I noticed how happy I was to see my son next to me. Football seemed so unimportant."

"My son is 21 months old and during my time in Moscow I wasn't able to enjoy it. And I suffered from it," he said. "It's difficult to take the plunge, to give up playing in front of sold-out stadiums. Maybe this period with the coronavirus and these ghostly matches was a harbinger."

Hoewedes also criticized the "brutal" development of football, which "is moving further and further away from the fans".

He is the seventh 2014 world champion to hang up his boots. Two weeks ago, former Borussia Dortmund player Andre Schuerrle surprisingly retired at the age of just 29.

Napoli President Concerned About Playing in Barcelona

ROME (Reuters) - Napoli President Aurelio De Laurentiis has said he is concerned about his side having to travel to Spain for their Champions League clash against Barcelona amid a spike in COVID-19 cases in the country.

UEFA confirmed this month that the remaining Champions League and Europa League round of 16 second-leg ties that were postponed because of COVID-19 in March would be played in the stadiums of the home teams.

The final stages of the Champions League, from the quarter-finals onwards, will be played as a mini-tournament in Portugal and the Europa League in Germany.

"I hear a lot of perplexity and fear coming from Spain and they're acting like nothing is wrong. What does it take to say, 'Don't go to Barcelona but rather go to Portugal, Germany or Geneva?'" the Guardian quoted De Laurentiis as saying.

"If they've decided to play the Champions League in Portugal and the Europa League in Germany, I think we can go to Portugal or Germany for the last 16. I don't understand why it should stay in a city that has a really critical situation."

Napoli's last-16 tie with Barcelona is poised at 1-1 ahead of the second leg at the Camp Nou on Aug. 8.

There has been a surge in COVID-19 positives in Spain with thousands of new cases reported on a daily basis, taking the country's total tally to over 303,000 cases.

Players from Sevilla, Real Madrid and Almeria tested positive for the virus this week.

Murray Predicts More U.S. Open Withdrawals

LONDON (Reuters) - Britain's Andy Murray expects some of the top male players to follow women's world number one Ash Barty in skipping next month's U.S. Open in New York due to concerns over the coronavirus pandemic.

Australian Barty said on Thursday she was not comfortable travelling to the United States amid the pandemic for the hardcourt Grand Slam, which begins on Aug. 31.

Pirlo Returns to Juventus as Under-23 Coach



TURIN (Reuters) - Juventus have appointed their former World Cup-winning midfielder Andrea Pirlo as coach of the Under-23 side, the Serie A champions said.

Pirlo, widely regarded as one of the greatest midfielders of his generation, spent a decade at AC Milan before making the switch to Juventus, where he won four league titles and

an Italian Cup during a four-year spell.

He left Juventus in 2015 and ended his playing career with Major League Soccer club New York City.

"Today marks the start of a new adventure for Andrea Pirlo and Juventus, who return to work together five years later. Andrea is ... the new coach of the Under-23 team," Juventus said in a statement.

"A new challenge awaits now, for a return that can only make Juventus fans happy. Welcome back, Coach Pirlo!"

Pirlo won 116 caps for Italy and helped them to World Cup success in 2006.

PSG Win French League Cup

PARIS (AFP) - Pablo Sarabia scored the winning penalty in a shoot-out as Paris Saint-Germain warmed up for their assault on the Champions League in Lisbon by defeating Lyon in Friday's French League Cup final in another domestic treble.

The Spaniard's successful kick came after Keylor Navas saved from Bertrand Traore and allowed PSG to win 6-5 on penalties after the game at the Stade de France finished 0-0 at the end of extra time.

The victory comes a week after they beat Saint-Etienne 1-0 in the French Cup final, the first competitive match on French soil since the coronavirus shutdown.

They had previously been awarded the Ligue 1 title by virtue of being top when the season was ended in April with 10 rounds of matches unplayed because of the health crisis.

The victory for Thomas Tuchel's team came after they had the better of a terse final on a sweaty night, but they badly missed the injured Kylian Mbappe.

The masked France superstar watched from the stands as Lyon kept PSG at bay for two hours before having Brazilian defender Rafael sent off for chopping down Angel Di Maria on the edge of the box late in extra time. Mbappe was injured in last week's French Cup final, suffering a sprained ankle that looks likely to rule him out of the Champions League quarter-final against Atalanta in Lisbon on August 12.



Blatter Calls for Infantino To Be Suspended

BERN (Reuters) - Former FIFA president Sepp Blatter has called for his successor, Gianni Infantino, to be suspended by the global soccer body after criminal proceedings were opened against Infantino in Switzerland.

Swiss authorities said on Thursday that proceedings had been launched against the current FIFA boss by a special prosecutor looking into meetings he had with Swiss Attorney General Michael Lauber. Lauber and Infantino have denied wrongdoing.

"For me, the situation is clear, that the FIFA ethics committee has to open a case against Mr Infantino and so it has to suspend him," Blatter, 84, said in a statement to Reuters.

FIFA did not immediately reply to a request for comment on Blatter's statement.

Blatter, who was FIFA president for 17 years, himself was suspended and later banned by FIFA's ethics committee after he became the subject of criminal proceedings in Switzerland in 2015.

The investigation is still ongoing and Blatter, who has denied wrongdoing, has not been charged. It centred on a payment of two million Swiss francs (1.6 million pounds) made in 2011 to then UEFA president Michel Platini with Blatter's approval for work the Frenchman had done a decade earlier.

Blatter was banned for eight years, reduced to six on appeal, and Platini also for eight years, reduced to four. Platini denied wrongdoing.

