

U.S. Tech Company Google Has Taken Down More Than a Dozen Accounts on YouTube, Claiming They Had Been Part of “Coordinated Influence Operations” From Iran.

IRAN NEWS

Iran's Health Ministry Spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari Said on Saturday That Some 132 More Iranians Have Died From Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Over the Past 24 Hours

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Many Books Can Be Written on Crimes of Arrogant Armies

TEHRAN (MNA) – Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei said that the killing of one hundred thousand people in the nuclear attack on Hiroshima indicates the arrogant, irreligious and immoral nature of US army.

In a tweet on the occasion of atomic bombing of Hiroshima by the US, Ayatollah Khamenei said, “In August 1945, the United States instantly killed 100,000 people with an atomic bomb in the city of Hiroshima!”

“This is the nature of an arrogant, irreligious, atheistic and immoral army.”

“If one wants to talk about the crimes of the armies of the arrogant powers, several books can and should be written.”

The United States detonated two nuclear weapons over the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 6 and 9, 1945, respectively, with the consent of the United Kingdom, as required by the Quebec Agreement. The two bombings killed between 129,000 and 226,000 people, most of whom were civilians, and remain the only uses of nuclear weapons in armed conflict.

UN Urged to Hold U.S. Accountable for Adventuristic Harassment of Airliner

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Iran has urged the UN to hold the United States accountable for harassment of an Iranian passenger plane by two U.S. warplanes over Syria last month, calling it an “adventuristic act” and “unlawful.”

In identical letters sent to UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres and the Security Council on Friday, Iran's Ambassador to the UN Majid Takht-Ravanchi complained that Mahan Airlines Airbus A310, which had taken off from Tehran and was heading to Beirut on July 23, “was aggressively and unexpectedly intercepted” by two American F-15 fighter jets in Syrian airspace.

In response to the U.S. warplanes’ “offensive and hazardous maneuvering” and in order to save the passengers’ lives, the pilot had to change altitude abruptly causing injuries to those onboard, he added.

Takht-Ravanchi also noted that in line with provisions of the Convention on International Civil Aviation, the Civil Aviation Organization of Islamic Republic of Iran had contacted Syrian authorities and called for “a prompt and accurate investigation” into the incident.

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Iran Inaugurates World's Biggest Methanol Plant



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - President Hassan Rouhani on Thursday inaugurated the world's largest methanol producing plant in the country's southern province of Bushehr.

In a ceremony held via videoconference on Thursday, President Hassan Rouhani ordered the opening of three energy projects in Bushehr and the western provinces of Lorestan.

The projects, completed with an investment of \$1.57 billion by the private sector, include Kaveh plant, known as the biggest methanol producing facility in the world, and Kimia Pars petrochemical factory in Bushehr, as well as a plant producing catalysts in Lorestan.

The three projects provide direct employment for 2,110 people.

Speaking during the ceremony, the head of state noted the event as a major step towards the country's economic development despite sanctions.

“The inauguration of three important national projects worth about \$1.6 billion is a valuable step in the development of the country,” Iranian president said.

“Investing in the petrochemical industry, which returns the finances within three or four years, is among the most important priorities of the country,” Rouhani said adding that he is delighted to inaugurate a major petrochemical project in Bushehr province.

Three petrochemical industry projects inaugurated by the president on August 7 include Kaveh Methanol company, Middle East Kimia Pars petrochemical complex and Lorestan Catalyst petrochemical complex.

According to Managing Director of National Petrochemical Company of Iran Behzad Mohammadi, in total, 27 petrochemical projects planned to be inaugurated during the next two years, out of which 17 plants will start operations till the end of the current Iranian year (began on March 20, 2020).

President Rouhani also said that Iran has inaugurated four projects so far and will continue to open 13 others till the end of the current Iranian year (March 20, 2021).

He said it is really pleasing that Iran has been able to open three economically-important projects that will help to the country's non-oil revenue, self-sufficiency, and employment.

Expressing happiness that these projects have been implemented by the Iranian knowledge-based enterprises, he said, “We are witnessing a big development in petrochemical products, which have doubled.”

He said that 23 years ago, the revenue of the country from petrochemical products was just one billion dollars; before his government, it was \$11 billion; and until the end of the Iranian year (March 20, 2021), it will double.

He added that the phase is to make \$37 billion a year in 2025.

UN Set to Reject U.S. Push to Extend Iran Arms Embargo

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is set for a showdown over a U.S. draft resolution to extend an Iranian arms embargo, with the motion lacking the minimum votes in favor to trigger any vetoes.

UN diplomats said opposition to the resolution is so widespread that the U.S. is unlikely to secure the nine votes required at the 15-member Security Council to force Russia and China to use their vetoes.

“The resolution takes a maximalist position on Iran,” one diplomat told AFP. Another said the draft “goes beyond the current provisions” of the ban on conventional weapons sales to Iran.

The embargo will expire on October 18 under UNSC Resolution 2231, which enshrined the 2015 nuclear deal — officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

However, Washington which unilaterally withdrew from the JCPOA in May 2018, seeks to keep the ban in place through a resolution.

“This is a car crash that everyone knows is going to happen,” New York-based UN expert Richard Gowan said, describing the US draft as a “poison pill of a text.”

“The focus should remain on preserving the JCPOA,” a third diplomat stressed.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced on Wednesday that the U.S. would put forward its anti-Iran resolution despite ardent opposition from Russia and China. Reports said the U.S. text effectively calls for an indefinite extension of the arms embargo on Islamic Republic and uses hawkish rhetoric.

In an article, titled “Document of the Week: US Pushes Doomed Iran Resolution at UN” and published on Friday, the Foreign Policy magazine predicted that US President Donald Trump's Iran gambit “has little chance of success.”

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ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

Ghadir-e Khum, the Fate Of Humans' Perfection

It is the tenth year of Hijra (Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)'s departure from Mecca to Median in AD 622) and the Prophet (PBUH) is on return from his last pilgrimage to Hajj. A considerable mass of people whose number was estimated at being around 120,000 are welcoming him till they reach an arid area near Mecca, called Ghadir-e Khum. It is midday of 18th of the lunar month of Dhul al-Hijjah that suddenly courier of Allah reveals His message to the Prophet, “O Apostle! Communicate that which has been sent down to you from your Lord, and if you do not, you will not have communicated His message, and Allah shall protect you from the people (verse 67, Chapter Ma'ida)” and the Prophet orders his entourage to stop and all of them descend on this arid and hot desert and make a pulpit from the camels' toolings for him so God's Messenger could make his announcement. Addressing the people, he says, “All praise is due to Allah and I take shelter to Allah from nafs amarah (carnalities)” and continues by asking his followers whether he is not superior to their egos. People unanimously confirms that he is definitely superior to their egos. Then he says to the participants, “It seems the time approached when I shall be called away (by Allah) and I shall answer that call. I am leaving for you two precious things and if you adhere to them both, you will never go astray after me. They are the Book of Allah and my Progeny, that is my Ahlul Bayt. The two shall never separate from each other until they come to me by the Pool (of Paradise).” Then he took 'Imam Ali (A)'s hand and raised it and declared, ‘To whomever I am his wali, this one is also his wali. My God, befriend whoever befriends him and be hostile to whoever is hostile to him.’ He repeated it three times and continued, “Oh Allah, make Ali (A) the axis of justice”, adding, “It is necessary the participants to make others know of this event.

The ceremony is still underway that Allah reveals the Prophet with another message, “This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed My favor on you, and chosen for you Islam as a religion.”

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MTN Considers Sale of Stake in Iran Ride-Hailing App Snapp

CAPE TOWN (Dispatches) - MTN Group Ltd. is considering selling its stake in Iran's ride-hailing app Snapp as it trims its e-commerce portfolio and plans an exit of the Middle East.

While Snapp retains top spot in Iran's ride-hailing market, MTN has identified it as a non-core part of its business, Ralph Mupita, chief financial officer of Africa's largest wireless carrier, said in an interview. Mobile operator MTN Irancell, on the other hand, remains key to the group, he said.

MTN's Chief Executive Officer Rob Shuter said this week that the company is changing focus to its home continent and will exit the Middle East where the environment is becoming “increasingly complex.” MTN owns 43% of Snapp, which generates two million fares a day in the country, and also provides courier, food and grocery deliveries.

Disposals in the Middle East will be done in a phased manner, with subsidiaries in Yemen, Afghanistan and Syria earmarked for sale first, and its 49% stake in mobile operator MTN Irancell in the next three to five years, Shuter said.

Irancell has grown its service revenues by a third and doubled its data sales in the past year amid challenges ranging from currency depreciation to high inflation, economic sanctions and the coronavirus pandemic, Mupita said.

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Mostazafan Foundation Ready To Help Deprived Families

TEHRAN (IP) - Head of Mostazafan Foundation (the foundation of oppressed people) said that coronavirus and economic problems have made things difficult for many families, and in such circumstances, Mostazafan Foundation is trying to help these families with supportive measures.

On the sidelines of the distribution of 10,000 dowries donated by the foundation to orphan girls, Seyyed Parviz Fattah added that according to the Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation and the Welfare Organization of Iran,

currently, about 8700 orphaned girls under the auspices of these two support institutions are on the verge of marriage and need dowry.

The head of the Mostazafan Foundation said that the foundation has provided about 1,300 series of dowries for other groups with the support of the Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation and the Welfare Organization in areas.

Fattah also said about the credit intended to provide 10,000 dowries for which 110 billion toman have been allocated.

No Difference between Hook, His Successor

TEHRAN (IFP) - Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman has downplayed the surprise departure of US State Department's point man on Iran Brian Hook, saying there is no difference between him and his successor.

"No difference between John Bolton, Brian Hook or Elliott Abrams; when it comes to the US Iran policy, American officials have been bitten off more than they could chew," Seyed Abbas Mousavi tweeted on Friday.

"Same applies to Mike Pompeo, Donald Trump AND their successors," he added, describing the US' Iran policy as a "bankrupt" one.

His comments came after U.S. State Secretary Mike Pompeo said on Thursday that Hook is leaving his post, and U.S. special representative for Venezuela, Elliott Abrams, will add Iran to his role "following a transition period" with Hook.

In a tweet on Friday, Secretary of Iran's National Security Council Ali Shamkhani said Hook is leaving the office without any success in carrying out his mission, just like Donald Trump's former national security advisor John Bolton.

The Trump administration's maximum pressure strategy was initially aimed at bringing about a "regime change" in Iran, but finally turned into "preventing Iran from becoming rich", Shamkhani noted.

After Hook, "Mike [Pompeo] may also be forced to pack and leave before Donald



[Trump]'s departure," he added.

Alireza Miryousefi, spokesman for Iran's mission to the United Nations in New York, has also downplayed Hook's departure, saying it "does not concern us and is not something we consider as a game-changer."

"The so-called 'maximum pressure' campaign waged by the US government has failed," he told Reuters.

"Iran is not on its knees, and will not do so regardless of who is in charge of implementing this bankrupt policy. Active Resistance," he added.

Speaker Calls for Steps to Realize Unity Among Muslim Leaders

TEHRAN (MNA) – Majlis Speaker has congratulated Eid al-Ghadir to the political and religious figures of the Shia world. In messages to political and religious figures of the Shia world on Saturday, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf congratulated the arrival of Eid al-Ghadir.

The speaker added, "In the current critical situation of the Islamic world and in the shadow of adhering to the Holy Quran and the Ahl al-Bayt (PBUH), it is necessary to take and realize our strong and unifying steps with unity and practice of the teachings of pure Islam."

Saturday marks Eid al-Ghadir, which is the day when the Prophet of Islam appointed Ali ibn Abi Talib (PBUM) -- the first Shia Imam -- as his successor and Muslims' next leader.

Prophet Mohammad announced his appointment on the way back from his last Hajj pilgrimage fourteen centuries ago.

Shia Muslims celebrate this auspicious occasion around the world.

Eid al-Ghadir comes eight days after another great festivity, called Eid al-Adha or the Feast of Sacrifice – an important festival on the Islamic calendar that marks the climax of the annual hajj pilgrimage in Mecca and Medina.

Islamic Republic Not to Leave Lebanese Nation Alone

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) stated here on Thursday that Iran will not leave the Lebanese nation alone in difficult conditions.

The Lebanese people are big stars of Resistance in the world of Islam, Major General Hossein Salami said addressing a local ceremony on Thursday morning.

The Lebanese nation has always been patient and resistant when dealing with incidents, the commander said referring to the recent tragic event that happened in Beirut which caused death to many people.

The commander went on to say that "all our capacities" are to be used for helping the Lebanese nation.

Iran tries to dispatch its humanitarian aid to Lebanon till the nation passes through the current conditions, General Salami noted.

"History will judge about Lebanese nation's patience [and resistance]," he added.

The August 4 Massive explosion at a warehouse keeping Ammonium-nitrate in Beirut, Lebanon, killed over one hundred people and wounded more than 4,000 others, according to reports.

U.S., Israeli Nukes Threaten Our Region

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Marking the 75th anniversary of the U.S. nuclear bombing of two Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said U.S. and Israeli nuclear arsenals are threatening our region, and it is "long overdue to end nuclear nightmare".

"75 years ago today, the U.S. gained the infamy of becoming the 1st and ONLY user of nuclear weapons. And against innocents. Today, US & Israeli nukes threaten our region. It's long overdue to end nuclear nightmare & the #MAD doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction," Zarif tweeted.

He posted the tweet on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of American B-29 bomber Enola Gay's dropping of atomic payload over the Japanese port city, killing 140,000 people.

The bombing utterly destroyed almost everything within 10 square kilometers in the downtown area. Many died immediately while others succumbed to their injuries or radiation-related illnesses weeks, months, and years later.

The bombing of Hiroshima was followed by the bombing of Nagasaki on August 9, which instantly killed more than 75,000 people.

Israel Regime's Sympathy for Beirut Incident Hypocritical

TEHRAN (MNA) –Foreign Ministry Spokesman Abbas Mousavi said that expressing sympathy of some countries, including Israel regime, for the Beirut incident is superficial and hypocritical.

While expressing sympathy with the Lebanese people in the wake of an explosion in Beirut, Mousavi said that Iran has sent two humanitarian aids to Lebanon, and its friendly assistance continues.

"After this incident, some humanitarian aids, especially from some Islamic countries, have been sent to Beirut. In the meantime, we witnessed the expression of sympathy of some countries, including Israel regime and the countries that had imposed sanctions on Lebanon, which is hypocritical and superficial," he said.

"Some Western and European countries, despite imposing sanctions against the Lebanese country and people, offered condolences, which is a sign of the

multifaceted action of these governments," he added.

Emphasizing that the Islamic Republic of Iran is ready to cooperate with Lebanon for the reconstruction of the port of Beirut, he said, "We stand with the Lebanese government and people."

Iran Stands by Lebanese People, Gov't

TEHRAN (IRNA)- Iran's Chief of Staff of Presidential Office underlined Iran's support for Lebanon and said Iran is standing by Lebanese people and government.

In a twitter message on Friday, Mahmoud Vaezi noted that following a massive blast in Beirut, Iranian people and government are in solidarity with the Lebanese people and government. A warehouse that contained ammonium nitrate caught fire in the Beirut Port on Tuesday afternoon, triggering a huge explosion.

The massive explosion rocked the Lebanese capital claiming more than 150 lives and injuring about 5,000 people.

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and many other Iranian officials have sympathized with Lebanon over casualties of Beirut explosion.

Correspondents Should Spread Happiness Across Country

TEHRAN (IRNA) - President Hassan Rouhani highlighted Thursday the heavy duty that the correspondents have in society to spread happiness and hope during the fight against the coronavirus pandemic.

Enemies are after making the people disappointed, President Rouhani said addressing an inauguration ceremony on three important national projects via video conference.

The president appreciated journalists and correspondents for their efforts to make people vigilant and aware of the enemies' plots.

Iran annually celebrates Reporters' Day which falls on August 7 this year.As the president said, the country today is in difficult conditions.

On one hand, there are enemies' maximum pressure and threats, and on the other hand, there is coronavirus pandemic, said the president censuring the enemies for trying to disappoint the nation.

He further commemorated the reporters and journalists who lost their lives during the fight against the deadly virus.

Iran, Lebanon Discuss Latest Developments on Beirut Explosion

TEHRAN (MNA) – Majlis Speaker's Special Aide for International Affairs Hossein Amir-Abdollahian met and held talks with Lebanese Ambassador to Tehran Hassan Abbas on the latest developments in Lebanon after the recent blast.

During the meeting, which took place at the residence of Lebanese ambassador to Iran, the two sides discussed the consequences of the Beirut explosion at various levels.

Earlier, Amir-Abdollahian called the United States the first beneficiary of Beirut incident, adding that the Zionist regime is the second beneficiary that abuses any damage to Lebanon, and it may be behind the scenes of this incident.

The explosion on Tuesday sent shockwaves across the city, causing widespread damage as far as the outskirts of Beirut. At least 150 people were killed and 5,000 wounded in a massive explosion.

Officials said they expect the death toll to rise further as emergency workers dig through the rubble to search for survivors.

Beirut's city governor Marwan Abboud said up to 300,000 people have lost their homes and authorities are working on providing them with food, water and shelter.

The cause of the explosion was not immediately clear. Officials linked the blast to some 2,750 tonnes of confiscated ammonium nitrate that were being stored in a warehouse at the port for six years.

Envoy Reaffirms Iran's Support For Afghan Peace Process

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Iran's ambassador to Kabul gave an assurance that Tehran will keep supporting the process of peace in Afghanistan.

In a meeting with Afghan Deputy Foreign Minister for Economic Cooperation Mirwais Nayeb, the Iranian envoy, Bahador Aminian, highlighted the deep-rooted ties between the two neighboring nations, saying Tehran will keep providing constant support for the peace process in Afghanistan.

The two diplomats discussed a broad range of issues in the meeting, including the problems that Afghan refugees face in Iran, education for Afghan children in Iran, as well as promotion of economic and cultural interaction between the two neighbors.

Aminian and Nayeb also talked about the plans to hold a consultative Loya Jirga meeting for peace, the regional and international consensus on the Afghan peace process, and immediate launch of the intra-Afghan negotiations.

In a telephone conversation with President of Afghanistan Ashraf Ghani on Saturday, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani expressed Tehran's support for the peace process in Afghanistan under the guidance of the Kabul government, hoping that the intra-Afghan negotiations would yield results with the inclusion of all Afghan groups.

Observing Health Protocols, Only Way to Avoid New Wave of COVID-19



TEHRAN (IP) – President Hassan Rouhani stressed that through careful observance of Health protocols the new wave of COVID-19 will be prevented.

"According to all available scientific evidence, accurate and correct implementation of health protocols is the only way to definitively fight the outbreak of the coronavirus," Hassan Rouhani said at a meeting of the specialized committees of the National Task Force for Fighting Coronavirus.

The president added: "National Task Force for Fighting Coronavirus has carefully examined the smart social distancing, the necessary instructions to ensure the best health of the people, along with providing suitable conditions for a normal life and established economic and livelihood activities of the people."

Rouhani stated: "In this regard, wherever it was felt that people's lifestyles should be changed, the issue was explained in a persuasive process with providing information for the people, and at the same time the necessary instructions were carefully recommended by experts in accordance with the standards."

There Will Be Good News About Coronavirus Treatment Soon

TEHRAN (IP)- Minister of health and medical education stated that soon there will be good news regarding the treatment of coronavirus.

Saeed Namaki said: "Our colleagues have gone through a difficult period at the height of the oppressive, inhuman sanctions and in financial hardship, and we have sacrificed martyrs in the medical service. Of course, in this difficult period, expressing compassionate kindness by different groups has encouraged the medical staff."

He added: "It is the first time that a national consensus has been formed with this intensity, and we will soon hear good news in the field of coronavirus treatment."

"I am grateful to the members of the media who portrayed all the efforts of the medical staff during the outbreak of COVID-19 outbreak," Namaki told reporters. "Journalists have always made great efforts to promote the culture of self-sacrifice in society, and they suffered a lot during this coronavirus period," Iranian minister of health and medical education concluded.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:09
■ Evening (Maghreb)	20:19
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:46
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:19

78. And remember David and Solomon, when they gave judgment in the matter of the field into which the sheep of certain people had strayed by night: We did witness their judgment.
Surah 21. The Prophets (78)

Iran Eyes Boosting Its Trade With Iraq to \$20b

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Head of Iran Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) says the current trade capacity of Iran with Iraq is \$9b per annum but with the outlook set by the government it is tp be enhanced to \$20b

Hamid Zadboum said that currently Iran has the control of 25 percent of Iraq's market and this capacity should be kept.

He noted that Iraq has never levied customs tariffs for Iranian goods and in case Iraqi government levies tariff, it is for all countries and it has not been only limited to Iran, reiterating that Iran does not also levy tariffs for a certain country because it means an economic war.

Zadboum also stated that the top 20 leading countries in exports have witnessed 10 to 15 percent decline in their exports due to the Coronavirus pandemic except China whose export volume is \$5,000b.

He further said Iran in the first four months of the current year has witnessed 40 percent fall in its exports due to sanctions and the virus pandemic and the decline was mostly because of the closure of border checkpoints in the first two months and at that time only two borders with Iraq and Afghanistan were open.



He said due to the pandemic, 31 land borders with Iran were closed and currently 29 out of 31 land borders are open and active.

Zadboum also urged the economic activists to focus on earning forex for the country otherwise exports without repatriating the forex is a useless thing.

He said Iran imports essential goods worth \$9 to \$14 billion per year for different sectors and in the current condition and economic war with the U.S. that all borders are closed, earning forex for imports of essential goods and raw materials is important.

He also said this year the country is focused on exports to the neighboring states and Iraq has the best potentials.

He admitted 71 percent of this year's exports are done through land and sea borders with the neighboring states. He reiterated that the country is determined to at least export goods worth \$41b like last year but it wants to increase the target.

He expressed hope by the reopening of the borders, exports to the neighboring states would accelerate and the earned forex would be repatriated into the country.

Iranian Ports Ink Sister Agreements With 40 Ports Worldwide

TEHRAN (MNA) – Deputy Minister of Roads and Urban Development said that Iranian ports have signed sisterhood agreements with 40 ports in the world.

Chief Executive of Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) Mohammad Rastad made the remarks on Wed. and added, "Trade ports are the most important criterion and indicator of activation of economy of a country."

He went on to say that activities in Iranian ports do not stop even for a moment, offering quality loading and unloading services to incoming and outgoing vessels.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has many capabilities and capacities in maritime sector, the issue of which is paid due attention in the international arena, Rastad stressed.

Turning to Iran's maritime transport fleet, he added, "the maritime transport fleet of the Islamic Republic of Iran is considered as one of the largest fleets in the world, so that country's ports enjoy the capacity of about 250 million tons per year."

In addition, the Islamic Republic of Iran is considered one of the important countries in the maritime field in the International Maritime Organization (IMO), he said.

All Iranian ports are busy active round-the-clock, for example, Imam Khomeini (RA) Port is busy in the field of loading and unloading basic goods, deputy roads minister highlighted.

Given its high capability and capacity, Iranian ports have inked sisterhood agreements with more than 40 ports in the world, he added.

Iran Exporting Mask Making Machinery

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The caretaker of Iran's Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade said that the country has now become an exporter of facial mask-producing machinery whereas it was an importer during the first days of the coronavirus outbreak.

Hossein Modarres-Khiabani said that the priority of his Ministry for "Surge in Production" is to use the empty capacities.

Iran continues boosting production as Supreme Leader

of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei has underlined the importance of the issue after naming the new Iranian calendar year (1399) as "Surge in Production."

Modarres-Khiabani said using the same method, Iran reached from the production capacity of 190,000 masks to 11m per day.

He added some clothing factories changed their products and started to produce masks in three shifts to help the country.

Mobarakeh Steel Company Discloses Its Production Volume

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The production of sponge iron, crude steel and pellets of the Iranian Mobarakeh Steel Company increased by 14.6 percent, 4.8 percent and 0.8 percent, respectively in the third month of the current year (May 21-June 20, 2020) compared to the same month last Iranian year.

According to the report, the company produced 2.27 million tons of raw steel, 2.44 million tons of sponge iron and 1.92 million tons of pellets in the third month.

"The company's sales of crude steel increased by 496 percent during the third month compared to the same month last Iranian year. The company's sales amounted to 19.9 trillion rials (about \$475 million) in the third month.

The company's sales value of cold steel and galvanized products amounted to 36 trillion rials (about \$857 million) and this is an increase of 50 percent compared to the same month last Iranian year, according to the report.

"In total, the company's sales were 79.8 trillion rials (about \$1.9 billion) in the third month. This is an increase of 25.8 percent compared to the same month last Iranian year," the report said.

Tehran, Baku Stress Expansion Of Bilateral Cooperation



TEHRAN (MNA) – Minister of Labor, Cooperatives and Social Welfare Mohammad Shariatmadari and Azerbaijan's Minister of Labor and Social Protection of the Population Sahil Babayev stressed on the expansion of bilateral cooperation.

The two sides discussed through videoconference on the development of bilateral cooperation in the fields of labor and social welfare.

Babayev stressed on the development of bilateral relations between Iran and Azerbaijan Republic, calling for Iran to share its experiences with them in the field of labor and social welfare.

Shariatmadari, for his part, stressed the importance of exchanging experience in the fields of work and social welfare between the two countries.

Stating that Iran as always stands by the Republic of Azerbaijan, he announced Iran's readiness to cooperate with this country in any filed.

First Rail Ambulance Launched

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran has launched its first rail ambulance on July 5 and plans to set up more rail ambulances, said Health Minister.

"This is the first step to have rail ambulances in the country; the government has already inaugurated three sea ambulances in the Persian Gulf during last Iranian year [started March 21, 2019] and an air ambulance," said Saeed Namaki.

"The number of ambulances across the country has increased and the number of motorcycle ambulances have doubled in big cities," the minister added.

"The medical emergency units play a very important role in the national health care system, as they provide numerous services across the country; these units helped saved lives of many patients last year," Namaki said.

"The medical emergency units and ambulances provide the most reliable services during the coronavirus spread," he added.

Aluminum Output Increases by 50%



MASHHAD (IRNA) - Caretaker of the Ministry of Industries, Mine and Trade Hossein Modarres-Khiabani said that today, under difficult economic conditions, aluminum production in the country has been increased by 50 percent.

Addressing inaugural ceremony of production line of Nafis Part Company in the industrial town of Zeberkhan, he added that opening of a new project is a thorn in the enemies' eye, and the production sector will continue to move strongly even in the most difficult economic conditions.

When the Korean auto giants left Iran, everyone expected the country's car industry to shut down, but car production showed an increase by 20%, and all this is the result of patience and resistance of elements of production, he said.

Congratulating 'Day of Reporter', Modarres-Khiabani said, "In the economic war we are involved in, journalists play a crucial role alongside the fighters of the industry and production sector."

Iran's Humanitarian Aid to Lebanon to Continue

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman said the Islamic Republic will continue its humanitarian aid to Lebanon in the wake of a massive deadly blast in the Arab country that killed more than 100 people.

"Undoubtedly, Iran's humanitarian aid to Lebanon will continue and the Islamic Republic will stand by the government and people of Lebanon amid the crisis," Seyed Abbas Mousavi said.

He once again extended Iran's heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families of the victims, calling on Muslim nations to step up their support for Lebanon.

Mousavi also said the Islamic Republic has plans underway to expand its support and help rebuild the infrastructure of Beirut amid its economic crisis.

On Wednesday, the Iranian Red Crescent Society sent the first batch of its humanitarian assistance to Lebanon following the deadly explosion.

Chief of the Iranian Red Crescent Society Karim Hemmati said Iranian charities and medical staff have declared their readiness to be deployed to Lebanon if needed. He said the health ministry has also offered to start the treatment of injured Lebanese in Iran.

Malaysia Arrests Ex-Finance Minister on Corruption Charges

KUALA LUMPUR (Reuters) - Malaysia's former finance minister Lim Guan Eng was arrested on Thursday in connection with corruption allegations over a \$1.5 billion undersea tunnel project, state news agency Bernama reported.

Lim, a senior opposition leader, will face one charge in court on Friday and two others next week, the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission said in a statement, although it did not immediately comment on the arrest.

His arrest follows a months-long investigation into graft allegations over an undersea tunnel project in the state of Penang, which he led as chief minister from 2008 until his appointment as finance minister in 2018.



Spain's Ex-King Juan Carlos Is in Abu Dhabi

MADRID (Reuters) - Spain's former king, Juan Carlos, has been staying at Abu Dhabi's exclusive Emirates Palace Hotel since leaving Spain aboard a private jet on Monday, newspaper ABC reported on Friday.

United Arab Emirates officials were not immediately available for comment. The Emirates Palace Hotel did not immediately respond to an emailed request for comment. Dogged by mounting corruption allegations, Juan Carlos abruptly announced his decision to leave Spain on Monday but there has been no official confirmation of his whereabouts, setting off an international guessing game.

ABC said a private plane en route from Paris to Abu Dhabi stopped off in the northwestern Spanish city of Vigo to pick up Juan Carlos, four security guards and one other person on Monday morning.



Hezbollah Categorically Denies Storing Arms at Blast Site



BEIRUT (AFP) - Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah on Friday strongly denied that his powerful Shiite movement had stored arms at Beirut's port, describing the cataclysmic explosion there as "a major tragedy".

"We have nothing in the port: not an arms depot, nor a missile depot nor missiles nor rifles nor bombs nor bullets nor (ammonium) nitrate," Nasrallah said in a televised speech three days after the blast in the Lebanese capital that killed more than 150 people. He called the explosion a "major tragedy and humanitarian catastrophe," saying it required a kind of response that would match its "exceptional" scale.

The blast injured at least 5,000 people and devastated entire districts of the capital, leaving some 300,000 people temporarily homeless. An investigation by authorities has so far led to 21 arrests, as well as travel bans and asset freezes.

Authorities had said a fire at the port had ignited tonnes of ammonium nitrate stored there for years, but President Michel Aoun said Friday it could have been caused by an attack. Aoun rejected calls for an international probe while Nasrallah urged "the army to investigate and announce its findings". He said the Lebanese military is in a prime position to do so because it is seen as a "trusted" institution by people and politicians across the spectrum.

The Hezbollah leader warned against delays in the probe, saying: "If the Lebanese state and the political class... do not reach a conclusion in the investigations this means... there is no hope to build a state."

International assistance swiftly flooded into Lebanon after the blast and French President Emmanuel Macron on Thursday made a snap, but influential, visit to Beirut, where he pressed leaders for change and announced an international aid conference in the coming days.

He met with several Lebanese leaders, including Hezbollah representatives on his one-day trip.

Nasrallah praised the international community for its outpouring of support in the wake of the blast, but singled out Macron's visit as "the most significant".

"We look positively at any assistance and any expression of sympathy towards Lebanon," he said. Hezbollah has also been a key ally of President Bashar al-Assad in neighboring Syria, where it fights alongside regime forces.

Rajapaksa Brothers Win by Landslide In Sri Lanka's Election

COLOMBO (Dispatches) - Sri Lanka's powerful Rajapaksa brothers have secured a landslide victory in the country's parliamentary election, according to final results.

Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa's Sri Lanka Podujana Party (SLPP) won 145 seats and can also count on the support of at least five allies in the 225-member legislature, according to the results released on Friday.

The SLPP's main opponent obtained just 54 seats in Wednesday's vote, which saw more than 75 percent of the 16.2 million eligible voters cast their ballots.

The prime minister is most likely to be sworn in the same position by his younger brother, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, and the huge win on Friday could enable them to change the constitution and strengthen the dynastic rule.

"Sri Lanka People's Front has secured a resounding victory according to official results released so far," Gotabaya Rajapaksa said in a Twitter message. "It is by belief that that the expectation to have a Parliament that will enable the



Trump Bans Dealings With Chinese Owners of TikTok, WeChat

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - U.S. President Donald Trump has issued an executive order banning any transactions with the Chinese owners of the apps TikTok and WeChat, starting in 45 days.

The orders came as the Trump administration said it was stepping up efforts to purge "untrusted" Chinese apps from US digital networks and called the Chinese-owned short-video app TikTok and messenger app WeChat "significant threats".

The TikTok app, owned by ByteDance, may be used for disinformation campaigns that benefit the Chinese Communist Party, and the U.S. "must take aggressive action against the owners of TikTok to protect our national security", Trump said in one order.

In the other, the US president said WeChat, owned by China's Tencent, "automatically captures vast swaths of information from its users" and that this data collection "threatens to allow the Chinese Communist Party access to Americans' personal and proprietary information".

The moves come as Washington and Beijing clash on an array of issues, ranging from the novel coronavirus pandemic and Beijing's policies in the South China Sea, Hong Kong and Xinjiang, to the US's support for Taiwan, which China claims as its own territory.

ByteDance and Tencent did not comment immediately.

China on Friday accused the United States of "arbitrary political manipulation and suppression" after Trump ordered the sweeping restrictions.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told a regular press briefing the US move came at the expense of American users and companies.

Earlier this week, Trump said he would support the sale of TikTok's U.S. operations to Microsoft Corp if the U.S. government got a "substantial

portion" of the sales price but warned he will ban the service in the U.S. on September 15.

The app has come under fire from US legislators and the Trump administration over national security concerns because China's ByteDance owns the technology. They claim the Chinese government could access US user data as a consequence of TikTok's ownership by ByteDance.

TikTok has repeatedly denied the claims.

Microsoft is currently in talks with ByteDance to buy TikTok operations in the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, and the Financial Times earlier on Thursday reported the US tech giant is now chasing a deal to buy all of the app's global business.

U.S. Imposes Sanctions On Hong Kong Leader

WASHINGTON (Dispatches)

- The United States on Friday imposed sanctions on Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam, the territory's current and former police chiefs and eight other officials for their role in curtailing political freedoms in the territory.

The sanctions were imposed under an executive order U.S.

President Donald Trump signed last month to punish China for its moves against dissent in Hong Kong and are the latest action by his administration against Beijing in the run-up to his November re-election bid.

As well as Lam, the sanctions target Hong Kong Police commissioner Chris Tang and his predecessor Stephen Lo; John Lee Ka-chiu, Hong Kong's secretary of security, and Teresa Cheng, the justice secretary, the U.S. Treasury Department said in a statement.



It said Beijing's imposition of draconian national security legislation had undermined Hong Kong's autonomy and allowed mainland security services to operate with impunity, "setting the groundwork for censorship of any individuals or outlets that are deemed unfriendly to China."

"Carrie Lam is the chief executive directly responsible for implementing Beijing's policies of suppression of freedom and democratic processes," it said.

"The United States stands with the people of Hong Kong and we will use our tools and authorities to target those undermining their autonomy," Secretary of the Treasury Steven Mnuchin said in the statement.

The sanctions freeze any U.S. asset of the officials and generally bar Americans from doing business with them.

Taiwan in Talks to Make First Purchase of Sophisticated U.S. Drones

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The United States is negotiating the sale of at least four sophisticated aerial drones to Taiwan for the first time, according to six U.S. sources familiar with the negotiations, aircraft that can keep watch over huge swathes of sea and land.

The SeaGuardian surveillance drones have a range of 6,000 nautical miles (11,100 km), far greater than the 160-mile range of Taiwan's current fleet of drones, potentially giving the island greater capacity to peer into China, observing its air force, missiles and other facilities. While the State Department tacitly authorized the sale of the unmanned aerial vehicles, two of the people said, it is not known whether the U.S. officials have approved exporting the drones with weapons attached, one of them said.

The deal must be approved by members of Congress, who may receive formal notification as soon as next month, two of the people said. Congress could block a final agreement. Such a sale would most likely anger China, which claims Taiwan as its own territory. Republican and Democratic U.S. senators introduced legislation on Thursday that would block the export, transfer or trade of many advanced drones to countries that are not close U.S. allies. Sales would be allowed to NATO members, Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, Japan and Israel. A deal with Taiwan would be the first drone sale after President Donald Trump's administration moved ahead with its plan to sell more drones to more countries by reinterpreting an international arms control agreement called the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR).

Taiwan's Defense Ministry declined to comment. While Taiwan's military is well-trained and well-equipped with mostly U.S.-made hardware, China has a huge numerical advantage and is adding advanced equipment of its own, including stealthy fighters, anti-satellite missiles and aircraft carriers.

Taiwan submitted its request to buy armed drones early this year, one of the people familiar with the talks said. The United States last week sent Taiwan the pricing and availability data for the deal, a key step that denotes official approval to advance the sale. It is, however, non-binding and could be reversed.

At Least 14 Dead as India Airliner Crashes on Landing

NEW DELHI (AFP) - At least 14 people were killed and 15 others were seriously injured Friday when an Indian passenger jet skidded off the runway after landing in heavy rain, officials said.

Air India Express said more than 190 passengers and crew were on board the plane, which left from Dubai and landed at Kozhikode airport in the southern state of Kerala.

Television pictures showed part of the fuselage of the jet ripped apart, although there was no sign of any fire.

"I can confirm at least 14 deaths overall. Another 15 passengers have critical injuries. It is still a developing situation," senior local policeman Abdul Karim told AFP.

"We have at least 89 people, many of them with serious injuries, admitted at different Kozhikode hospitals. The ambulances are still coming in," said Sujith Das, another senior police official.

"We have been told that all those who have survived the crash also have some form of injuries."

One of those killed was one of the two pilots, a Kerala state deputy said. Aviation regulator DGCA said the plane skidded off the end of the runway and "fell down in the valley and broke down in two pieces".

An Air India Express spokesperson said the aircraft appeared to have overshot the runway.

One television channel reported there had been a problem with the jet's landing gear.



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S, J, balcony
yard, & pkg
Fully Furn

Parsian

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Farmanieh (\$3000) 300sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, S, J, & F.F

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World Food Price Index Rises for Second Month in July

PARIS (Reuters) - World food prices rose in July, led by vegetable oil and dairy products, to extend a rebound from the previous month following sharp falls triggered by the pandemic, the United Nations food agency said on Thursday.

The Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) food price index, which measures monthly changes for a basket of cereals, oilseeds, dairy products, meat and sugar, averaged 94.2 points in July versus 93.1 points in June.

The June figure was revised from an initial estimate of 93.2.



IMF Lowers 2020 Oil Demand By 8% Amid High Uncertainties

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The coronavirus crisis will see global oil demand dropping by around eight percent this year, compared to last year, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), has said in a new report.

This year, oil prices will be 41 percent lower than in 2019, the IMF said in its 'Global imbalances and the COVID-19 crisis' external report. The direct impact of the low oil prices on oil trade balances will vary across economies, reflecting their dependence on oil exports and imports, according to the IMF.

The Fund's estimates for this year's global oil demand decline are in line with other forecasts such as the International Energy Agency (IEA), and Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). The Fund said the COVID-19 pandemic has caused a sharp decline in global trade, lower commodity prices, and tighter external financing conditions. At a global level, the latest IMF staff forecasts for 2020 imply a modest narrowing in current account surpluses and deficits by some 0.3 per cent of world gross domestic product (GDP), although subject to high uncertainty. Last month, the IEA said in its latest Oil Market Report that global oil demand was set to crash by 7.9 million barrels per day (bpd) this year, which was slightly more optimistic than last month's expectation of an 8.1-million-bpd demand drop.

The IEA, however, noted that the recent rise in COVID-19 cases and the reinstating of partial lockdowns in some countries continue to contribute to the uncertainty surrounding the world's global oil demand in 2020. This year, the world is expected to consume an average of 92.1 million bpd of oil, compared to the typical demand of 100 million bpd, the IEA said. OPEC, on its part, expects overall global oil demand to drop by 8.9 million bpd in 2020, before rising by 7 million bpd in 2021, when it will still be lower than demand in 2019. The oil price plunge and the production cuts after the coronavirus pandemic will hit oil exporters in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) hard, with the combined oil income for those countries expected to plummet by \$270 billion this year compared to 2019, the IMF said in its latest update on the region last month.

On the impact of remittances balances, the IMF noted remittances are highly vulnerable to the COVID-19 crisis because migrant workers are typically more exposed to the risk of unemployment and wage losses during recessions than are native workers. Migrant workers also work disproportionately in such sectors as food and hospitality, retail and wholesale, and tourism and transportation, which have taken a hit from the crisis. The decline in remittance inflows in percent of GDP is expected to be concentrated among a number of emerging market and developing economies. Citing World Bank data, IMF said World Bank 2020 forecasts an average 20 percent fall in remittance flows in 2020, based on an empirical model that links remittance inflows to migrants' incomes proxied by the nominal per capita incomes of the migrants' economies of destination.

For economies where remittance inflows represented more than five percent of GDP, such as Egypt, Guatemala, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka, the decline would imply significant hardship for many households and small businesses that rely on remittances, just as their domestic economies are hit by the synchronized nature of the COVID-19 crisis. While uncertainty is high, depending on the pace of economic recovery and risks of a second wave, effects on current account balances may persist, with remittances expected to rebound only partially (by 5 percent) in 2021.

Remittances declined sharply in April 2020, before partially rebounding in May. The direct annual impact on current account balances for some economies could exceed 1 percent of GDP. International tourism has been among the hardest hit sectors during the COVID-19 crisis, reflecting travel restrictions, although discussions on measures for lifting restrictions are underway. During the first four months of 2020 international tourism arrivals were about 50 percent lower than over the same period in 2019, with deeper declines for related indicators, such as international flight arrivals and hotel reservations.

India Urged to Focus on Protecting Economy

MUMBAI (Reuters) - India's policymakers should focus on protecting the economy as businesses struggle amid the coronavirus pandemic instead of being overly focused on what ratings agencies think, former Reserve Bank of India governor Raghuram Rajan said on Thursday.



"It is also important to convince both domestic and international investors that after the crisis associated with the pandemic is over, we will return to fiscal responsibility over the medium term, and the government should do more to convince them of that," Rajan told the Global Markets Forum.

India was placed under one of the strictest lockdowns in the world in late March for more than two months to stem the spread of the coronavirus, but cases have continued to rise steadily since the government eased restrictions in June, stymieing hopes of an economic recovery.

The government has announced several initiatives to help the poor and small- and medium-size businesses, but actual cash outflow from the government's measures has been estimated at just about 1% of GDP.

Several attribute the fiscal prudence to fear of a downgrade after Moody's cut India's rating and outlook in early June followed closely by a change in outlook from Fitch.

The central bank on its part too has reduced the key lending rate by 115 basis points on top of the 135 bps last year but decided to hold rates steady earlier in the day against market expectations as inflation pressures have risen. "The RBI and government have certainly been cooperating, but it seems like it is elsewhere, the ball is in the government's court to do more," Rajan said.

He said the RBI needs to focus on whether credit is reaching the stressed areas of the economy and also if the viable firms were able to access credit and not the unviable ones. "And I think that's where it has to focus its attentions, because resources, as you well know, are limited in India today." To ease debt strains on companies and lenders, the RBI on Thursday said it would allow restructuring of corporate loans by banks, a move that was widely awaited by the industry. Governor Shaktikanta Das said there was room to cut rates further but the central bank will ensure inflation stays within its target range. Most analysts expect it to reduce rates once inflation is brought under control.

Government officials too have suggested the possibility of any more fiscal stimulus being announced, would only come in the second half of the fiscal year, once a recovery has taken root and coronavirus cases have peaked.

"What India should focus on at this point is protecting its economic capabilities, so that when it has dealt with the virus it can go resume activity in a reasonable way. That should be the focus," Rajan said.

"And if it does that, there is no reason why the rating agencies will not see that as an appropriate policy."

Job Cuts Announced by U.S. Companies Jump 54% in July

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - U.S. employers announced another 262,649 job cuts in July as the COVID-19 pandemic continued to weigh on demand, the latest indication that the labor market recovery is losing steam.

The layoffs reported by global outplacement firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas on Thursday were up 54% from June. The job cuts, the third-largest monthly total since the coronavirus pandemic began, followed data this week showing a big step-down in private payrolls in July and further contraction in employment at manufacturing and services industries.

Hiring announcements totaled 246,507 in July, almost matching layoffs, Challenger, Gray reported.

"The downturn is far from over, especially as COVID cases rise around the country," said Andrew Challenger, senior vice president at Challenger, Gray. "Consumers are buying fewer goods and services, businesses are closing, and bankruptcies are rising." July's job cuts brought the total so far this year to 1.848 million, up 212% from the same period in 2019. The year-to-date layoffs are just 109,180 away from the record 1.957 million job cuts announced in 2001.

The weak labor market data raises the risk of a sharper slowdown in job growth in July. The Labor Department will publish its closely watched, and broader, monthly employment report on Friday. According to a Reuters survey of economists, nonfarm payrolls likely increased by 1.6 million in July, down from the record 4.8 million jobs created in June. According to Challenger, Gray & Christmas, COVID-19 was cited as the reason for 63,517 job cuts in July. The respiratory illness has been blamed for 1.075 million layoffs so far this year. The balance of job cuts in July were attributed to market conditions, a downturn in demand and bankruptcies.

Kuroda Warns of Renewed Constraints on Japan Economy From Pandemic

TOKYO (Reuters) - Bank of Japan Governor Haruhiko Kuroda warned that economic activity could be constrained "significantly" again if strict public health measures are reinstated to prevent a further spread of the coronavirus pandemic.

But he said that Japan was not slipping into deflation and that the central bank would continue with its efforts to achieve its elusive 2% inflation target.

"We're not in deflation, in the sense of sustained periods of price declines. It certainly took more time than we hoped for, but I'm sure we will achieve the target," Kuroda told an online seminar hosted by Columbia University on Wednesday.

Kuroda reiterated the BOJ's readiness to ramp up monetary stimulus "without hesitation" if needed to combat the hit to the economy from the pandemic. "Despite extremely high uncertainties, the Japanese and overseas economies are likely to improve gradually from the second half of this year," Kuroda said.

"But the pace of improvement is expected to be only moderate, since preventive measures (to contain the virus) will constrain economic activity," he said. Kuroda rejected criticism by some analysts that the BOJ was threatening its independence from government interference by monetizing public debt through aggressive bond purchases.

"Given the impact of COVID-19 (on the economy), the BOJ has purchased government bonds to maintain stability in the bond market and keep the entire yield curve at low levels," he said.

"This is monetary policy ... I don't think this kind of policy mix, or coordination (with the government) would make the central bank less independent," he added. Kuroda also said Japan's financial system was "quite safe and stable," countering concerns that the fallout from COVID-19 could trigger a banking-sector crisis.

"But if the COVID 19-driven downturn prolongs longer than expected, we have to be vigilant to the risks to financial system stability," he said.

Headache for OPEC As Market Signals Return of Crude Glut

SINGAPORE (Dispatches) - Rising OPEC and US oil supply, coupled with stalled economic and crude demand recovery, have pushed the futures market structure back to indicating a surplus, last observed during oil's collapse in April and May amid the coronavirus pandemic.

The development is a headache for OPEC, which had been hoping demand would recover quicker after a round of record global output cuts. The group will either have to consider further production cuts or tolerate lower oil prices for longer.

The surplus market structure, when prompt prices are weaker than future prices, is also a boon for traders, as they can store crude in the hope to resell it later at a profit. Royal Dutch/Shell, Total, Eni and Norway's Equinor have all reported bumper trading profits over the past week.

Front-month September Brent futures in the past week have been trading at a discount of \$2 per barrel to March 2021, the steepest discount since May, when lockdown measures against the virus outbreak cut global oil demand by a third.

The structure is known as contango and usually indicates an immediate oil surplus and hopes for a demand recovery in future months. The opposite structure is known as backwardation.

"OPEC's experiment to increase production from August could backfire as we are still nowhere near out of the woods yet in terms of oil demand," said Bjornar Tonhaugen, Rystad Energy's Head of Oil Market Research.

"The market will flip back into a mini-supply glut and a swing into deficit will not happen again until December 2020."

OPEC did not respond to a request for comment.

Howie Lee, economist at Singapore's OCBC bank, said the market was unconvinced demand was recovering and instead was choosing to buy further down the curve at a rising premium.

Record coronavirus infection and death rates in the United States and some other parts of the world are stoking fears that a new virus wave could further hit demand.

Many exchange traded funds were also spreading their long positions more equally across the curve after some asset managers were badly burnt by April's negative expiry of US front-month WTI crude futures, Lee said.

Brent spreads have historically been a good proxy for the global production-consumption balance as well as inventories. The physical oil market is also weakening.

Cash Dubai and DME Oman prices on Tuesday flipped into discounts to Dubai swaps for the first time since end-May due to weak demand including from China. Dubai August/September inter-month spreads also flipped from backwardation into contango in late July. Abu Dhabi, Iraqi and Qatari grades all fell to spot discounts to their official selling prices and some cargoes are still hanging unsold, according to three Asian traders.

UN Trade Meet Is Chance To Reset World Economy



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - The postponed ministerial gathering of the UN Conference on Trade and Development will take place in Barbados in April 2021, organizers said, tasked with rebuilding economies battered by the coronavirus crisis.

The quadrennial UNCTAD conference will be a "window of opportunity" to reset the way international trade operates, organizers said. The UN organization's 15th ministerial conference was initially scheduled for October 2020 in Barbados but was postponed because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It will now be held in the Caribbean island's capital Bridgetown next April 25-30. "The COVID-19 global emergency and its extreme repercussions have exposed the need for a fundamental rethinking of many of the assumptions that previously underpinned the international economic order," Mia Mottley, the prime minister of Barbados, said at a virtual signing ceremony for the hosting agreement.

"The crisis has provided the UNCTAD membership with a unique opportunity to be at the forefront of the new thinking and radical policy corrections that the situation now requires," she added.

The conference is the highest decision-making body of Geneva-based UNCTAD, which counts 195 member states and reports to the UN General Assembly.

Besides the climbing death toll -- now above 700,000 -- the pandemic has caused deep economic damage around the world.

"The global trading system has been woefully unprepared for this global health crisis," said UNCTAD Secretary-General Mukhisa Kituyi.

"UNCTAD 15 will shape the ambitions for a better recovery. Countries have realized the devastating limits of current development practices," the Kenyan former trade minister said.

"This gives us a window of opportunity to build the political will towards the systemic changes needed for truly better recovery, despite the current steep obstacles to international solidarity," he said. According to UNCTAD's estimates, developing countries need \$2.5 trillion immediately to start tackling the damage caused by the pandemic.

Traffic at Main Domestic Airport Back to Pre-Pandemic Levels

TEHRAN (PresTV) - A report shows number of flights processed at Mehrabad airport is back to pre-pandemic levels.

Air traffic at Iran's main airport for domestic flights has returned to vibrant conditions seen before the spread of the new coronavirus pandemic in the country.

A Thursday report by the official IRNA news agency said the number of flights recorded a day earlier at Tehran's Mehrabad airport had surged to 357 for more than 35,000 passengers.



China, Russia Ditch Dollar in Move Toward Financial Alliance

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia and China are partnering to reduce their dependence on the dollar -- a development some experts say could lead to a "financial alliance" between them.

In the first quarter of 2020, the dollar's share of trade between Russia and China fell below 50% for the first time on record, according to recent data from Russia's Central Bank and Federal Customs Service.

The greenback was used for only 46% of settlements between the two countries. At the same time, the euro made up an all-time high of 30%, while their national currencies accounted for 24%, also a new high.

Russia and China have drastically cut their use of the dollar in bilateral trade over the past several years. As late as 2015, approximately 90% of bilateral transactions were conducted in dollars. Following the outbreak of the U.S.-China trade war and a concerted push by both Moscow and Beijing to move away from the dollar, however, the figure had dropped to 51% by 2019.

Alexey Maslov, director of the Institute of Far Eastern Studies at the Russian Academy of Sciences, told the Nikkei Asian Review that the Russia-China "dedollarization" was approaching a "breakthrough moment" that could elevate their relationship to a de facto alliance.

"The collaboration between Russia and China in the financial sphere tells us that they are finally finding the parameters for a new alliance with each other," he said. "Many expected that this would be a military alliance or a trading alliance, but now the alliance is moving more in the banking and financial direction, and that is what can guarantee independence for both countries."

Dedollarization has been a priority for Russia and China since 2014, when they began expanding economic cooperation following Moscow's estrangement from the West over its annexation of Crimea. Replacing the dollar in trade settlements became a necessity to sidestep U.S. sanctions against Russia.

"Any wire transaction that takes place in the world involving U.S. dollars is at some point cleared through a U.S. bank," explained Dmitry Dolgin, ING Bank's chief economist for Russia. "That means that the U.S. government can tell that bank to freeze certain transactions."



The process gained further momentum after the Donald Trump administration imposed tariffs on hundreds of billions of dollars worth of Chinese goods. Whereas previously Moscow had taken the initiative on dedollarization, Beijing came to view it as critical, too.

"Only very recently did the Chinese state and major economic entities begin to feel that they might end up in a similar situation as our Russian counterparts: being the target of the sanctions and potentially even getting shut out of the SWIFT system," said Zhang Xin, a research fellow at the Center for Russian Studies at Shanghai's East China Normal University.

In 2014, Russia and China signed a three-year currency swap deal worth 150 billion yuan (\$24.5 billion). The agreement enabled each country to gain access to the other's currency without having to purchase it on the foreign exchange market. The deal was extended for three years in 2017.

Another milestone came during Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Russia in June 2019. Moscow and Beijing struck a deal to replace the dollar with national currencies for international settlements between them. The arrangement also called for the two sides to develop alternative payment mechanisms to the U.S.-dominated SWIFT network for conducting trade in rubles and yuan.

Lufthansa Plans Compulsory Lay-Offs as Forecasts Travel Slump to 2024



BERLIN (Reuters) - Lufthansa put German workers on notice of compulsory lay-offs on Thursday, saying tumbling air travel and slow progress in union negotiations meant cuts were unavoidable after it lost 1.7 billion euros (\$2 billion) in a single quarter.

The German airline, which secured a 9 billion euro state bailout in June, flew just 4% of prior-year passengers between April and June as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and expects capacity to increase to only around 50% by the end of the year and two-thirds of last year's level in 2021.

Its outlook is more pessimistic than rivals such as Air France-KLM, which expects to fly 80% of its pre-crisis flights next year, and British Airways and Iberia owner IAG, which forecasts capacity to be 24% lower in 2021.

Tentative signs of a European recovery have been undermined by new localised outbreaks and restrictions, while long-haul flights such as to the United States - which are important for Lufthansa - remain largely grounded due to rising infections.

Lufthansa Chief Executive Carsten Spohr said on Thursday he does not expect demand for air travel to return to pre-crisis levels until 2024, echoing a forecast last month by the International Air Transport Association (IATA).

The airline, which has already announced plans to cut 20% of its leadership positions and 1,000 administrative jobs, said it had run out of patience in talks with unions.

It aims to reduce 22,000 full-time jobs and said it had 8,300 fewer employees by the end of June, due mainly to people leaving jobs at its catering business and non-German businesses, which include Swiss, Austrian Airlines and Brussels Airlines.

The sharp drop in passenger numbers pushed Lufthansa to a quarterly adjusted operating loss of 1.7 billion euros, the worst performance in its 65-year history.

That was 300 million euros lower than the average analyst forecast in a company-compiled consensus, boosted by a strong performance in its cargo business which gained from a shrinkage in global air freight capacity.

Lufthansa plans to cut capital expenditure to 1.3 billion euros this year and next, below the levels of Air France-KLM and IAG.

And it expects to burn through around 400-500 million euros in cash per month for the rest of the year and hopes to get back to positive free cash flow in the course of 2021.

75th Anniversary of A-Bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki: Time to End the Nuclear Menace

By UN Secretary-General
António Guterres



This month marks the 75th anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, when humanity learned of the devastation a single nuclear bomb can unleash. The lingering suffering caused to the survivors, the hibakusha, should give us daily motivation to eliminate all nuclear arms. They have shared their stories so the horror experienced by Hiroshima and Nagasaki will never be forgotten. Yet the nuclear threat is growing once more.

A web of agreements and instruments has been constructed to prevent the use of these uniquely destructive weapons and ultimately to eliminate them. But that framework has idled for decades and is starting to erode. The potential that nuclear weapons will be used – intentionally, accidentally or as a result of miscalculation – is dangerously high.

Fuelled by mounting international tensions and the dissolution of trust, relations between countries that possess nuclear weapons are devolving into dangerous and destabilizing confrontations. As governments lean heavily on nuclear weapons for security, politicians are trading heated rhetoric about their possible use and devoting vast sums of money to improving their lethality, money that would be much better spent on peaceful, sustainable development.

For decades, nuclear testing led to horrific human and environmental consequences. This relic of a former age should be confined there forever. Only a legally-binding, verifiable prohibition on all nuclear testing can achieve this. The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty has proven its worth, yet some States have still to sign or ratify the treaty, preventing it from fulfilling its full potential as an essential element in the framework to eliminate nuclear weapons.

Along with climate change, nuclear weapons represent an existential threat to our societies. Most of the roughly 13,000 nuclear arms currently in global arsenals

are vastly more destructive than the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Any use would precipitate a humanitarian disaster of unimaginable proportions.

It is time to return to the shared understanding that a nuclear war cannot be won and must not be fought, to the collective agreement that we should work towards a world free of nuclear weapons, and to the spirit of cooperation that enabled historic progress towards their elimination.

The United States and the Russian Federation, as the possessors of some 90 per cent of nuclear weapons, are expected to lead the way. The "New START" treaty retains verifiable caps. Its extension for five years would buy time to negotiate new agreements, including by potentially bringing in other countries possessing nuclear weapons.

Next year, the United Nations will host the Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), one of the most successful international security agreements. It contains the only treaty-based commitments undertaken by the five largest nuclear-armed countries to pursue the elimination of nuclear weapons and imposes verifiable obligations not to acquire or develop nuclear weapons. It's near universal membership means the vast majority of the international community is bound by these commitments. The NPT Review Conference is an opportunity to stem the erosion of the international nuclear order.

Fortunately, most United Nations Member States remain committed to the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons. This is reflected in the 122 countries that supported the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. They understand that the consequences of any use of nuclear arms would be catastrophic. We cannot risk another Hiroshima or Nagasaki or worse. As we reflect on the suffering of the hibakusha, let us view this tragedy as a rallying cry for humanity and recommit to a world free of nuclear weapons.

Malaysia's Key Economic Sectors Gradually Recover

KUALA LUMPUR (Dispatches) - Malaysia's manufacturing, domestic tourism, agriculture and retail sectors have gradually recovered, said Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Economy) Datuk Seri Mustapa Mohamed.

While noting that the tourism sector was still struggling, Mustapa is optimistic that the sector could grow as it had been resilient with expenditure and numbers of travellers on the rise.

He noted that the sector had seen a 30 per cent increase in hotel's occupancy after the Movement Control Order was lifted.

According to Mustapa, although domestic tourism had shown a slight recovery, it could not recover completely as international tourism had not reopened. "We are looking at some figures to show our economy is recovering, such as the sales of vehicles by Proton, which recorded the best sales revenue in eight years recently, as well as the increase in domestic tourism."

"Malaysia posted a 0.7 per cent gross domestic product (GDP) growth in the first quarter (Q1) of 2020 to surprise most people who had expected the local economy to contract. For the second quarter, we know the number is expected to fall but the actual figure is still unknown. "We will get the numbers in a week or two. Overall, Malaysia's economy is still facing challenges but there are already signs of recovery," he told a media conference at the Economic Action Council (EAC) workshop series: Public Institutions and Governance here today.

Ghadir-e Khum...

FROM PAGE 1

As the result, Allah appointed Imam Ali (A) as the successor of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The late Allama Amini in his book Al-Ghadir has mentioned the narrators of the event of Ghadir chronologically as follows: 110 allies of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), 48 followers of him, 56 ulama of the second Hijra century, 92 ulama of the third Hijra century, 43 ulama of the fourth century, 24 ulama of the fifth century, 18 ulama of the sixth century, 21 ulama of the seventh century, 18 ulama of the eighth century, 16 ulama of the ninth century, 14 ulama of the tenth century 14 people, 12 ulama of the 11th century, 13 ulama of the 12th century, 12 ulama of the 13th century and 19 ulama of the 14th century.

So the Event of Ghadir in the reliable books of Sunnis, like the book "Musnad" written by Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal, the book "Sunan at-Tirmidhi" collected by Al-Tirmidhi, and the book "Al-Mustadrak" written by Al-Hakim al-Nishapuri, has been documented, and in any condition it is not deniable and Almighty God has issued all warnings to the humanity that first, they complete their religion and secondly He stipulated all evidences in the Holy Quran and has put the narrators of the event in different centuries. So one can dare to say based on all these clear calls that Ghadir-e Khum is the place for the fate of humans' perfection and if they resort to it and drown fully in it, they can purify their souls in order to reach perfection.



UN Urged to...

FROM PAGE 1

Iranian authorities also launched a probe after the plane returned from Beirut, he said, stressing that the results of both inquiries would be released "after the revision and finalization of the collected data and information."

"It is obvious that the act by the US fighter jets is a flagrant violation of the aviation security and freedom of civil aviation reflected in the 1944 Chicago Convention on International Civil Aviation and its relevant annexes as well as an infringement of the 1971 Montreal Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts against the Safety of Civil Aviation," Iran's UN envoy said.

He further expressed Iran's "strongest objections against this violation of international law" and emphasized that the country would pursue the issue through relevant international bodies. "It is incumbent upon the United Nations to reject such an unlawful and yet adventurous act and hold the United States accountable for this irresponsible behavior," he added.

Following the incident, the US Central Command (CENTCOM) said a single F-15 had made a "standard visual inspection" of the Iranian airliner at "a safe distance," a claim vehemently rejected by Tehran.

MTN...

FROM PAGE 1

MTN has found it tough to take money out of Iran, its second-largest market by subscribers, due to measures re-imposed by U.S. President Donald Trump. The Johannesburg-based company has about 3 billion rand (\$170 million) trapped in loans and dividends in the Middle Eastern country, said Mupita. MTN previously managed to repatriate \$1 billion from Iran before sanctions were reintroduced in May 2018.

The wireless operator has also been involved in a years-long legal battle over a telecoms license in Iran, although no claims have succeeded. Still, Mupita said MTN, which has been operating in Iran since 2006, has been treated well by its stakeholders in the country.

MTN has been on a drive to dispose of assets, to streamline its operations and generate cash to reduce debt. The company is also evaluating its stake in online retailer Jumia Technologies AG, Africa's first unicorn that was listed in New York last year. Jumia shares have risen 186% this year. "The shelf filing by Jumia means that the requisite initial filing with the U.S. SEC is in place to facilitate the sale of our shares when or if we consider appropriate in the future," said Mupita.

UN Set to...

FROM PAGE 1

The draft resolution "is a classic piece of Trumpian diplomacy. It is bold, aiming to impose sweeping legal obligations on countries to confront and seize vessels carrying Iranian cargo. It is punitive, looking to subject multiple Iranian individuals and entities, including the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, to an asset freeze and travel ban. And it is expected to secure little, if any, support from key Europeans allies, who feel the initiative would undercut the terms of the landmark 2015 Iran nuclear deal," the article said. Citing UN-based diplomats, it noted that Washington is expected to formally table the resolution on Monday, with plans to put it to a vote on Tuesday.

Bolt Did Not Get Fair Chance in Football

SYDNEY (AFP) - Sprint legend Usain Bolt Thursday claimed he wasn't given "a fair chance" to prove himself in Australia's A-League after a failed attempt to become a professional footballer.

The Jamaican, an eight-time Olympic champion, tried out with the Central Coast Mariners in 2018 after quitting athletics, hoping to fulfil a childhood dream to become a soccer player.

His quest garnered worldwide attention, which intensified when he scored two goals in a pre-season friendly.

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Garcia Rejects Man City Contract Extension

LONDON (Dispatches) - Manchester City defender Eric Garcia has turned down the offer of a contract extension at the Etihad Stadium, manager Pep Guardiola revealed on Thursday.

The highly rated 19-year-old centre-back has been linked with a return to his boyhood club Barcelona.

The Spaniard, who joined City from Barcelona in 2017, has made 19 first-team appearances this season.

"He told us he doesn't want to extend his contract with Manchester City," Guardiola told reporters on Thursday.

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SPORTS

SUNDAY AUGUST 9, 2020

Juventus, Real Madrid Knocked Out of Champions League

TURIN (Dispatches) - Despite continuing the domestic run, Sarri failed to give Juventus the flamboyant touch the club had been looking for as well as missing out on their main goal.

Ronaldo looks on after a chance goes begging against Lyon.

Ronaldo looks on after a chance goes begging against Lyon.Credit:AP

"We knew we needed courage, talent and a little bit of fortune," said Lyon coach Rudi Garcia. "We played a very good first leg as well but, with Cristiano Ronaldo, we knew we could have been knocked out at any moment.

"We don't need to put limits for us. We are one of the best eight teams in Europe, we know Manchester City are a better team but it's just one game, so our goal is the semi-final."

It was an uphill struggle for Juve from the moment they conceded an away goal in the 12th minute, albeit in controversial circumstances.

Rodrigo Bentancur appeared to get the ball cleanly off Houssem Aouar but referee Felix Zwayer pointed to the spot and chose not to look at the incident on the pitch-side monitor. Mitch Duke has been a fan favourite but could be gone by the end of the season.

Memphis Depay converted with a cheeky Panenka-style penalty which sent Wojciech Szczesny the wrong way. Ronaldo saw a free kick palmed away by Anthony Lopes but it was another controversial penalty which provided the hosts with their equaliser.

Miralem Pjanic's free kick struck Depay's elbow in the wall and, although his arm was close to his body, the referee gave another penalty, again without consulting the pitch-side monitor. Ronaldo converted.

Sevilla, Leverkusen Cruise Into Europa League Quarters

MADRID (Reuters) - Five-times winners Sevilla made light work of AS Roma when first half goals from Sergio Reguilon and Youssef En-Nesyri gave them a 2-0 win over AS Roma and sent them into the Europa League quarter-finals on Thursday.

Sevilla's win, in a tie reduced to a single match played in Duisberg, Germany, after the first leg was called off at the start of the COVID-19 outbreak, earned them a meeting with Wolverhampton Wanderers on Tuesday.

Former Spain coach Julen Lopetegui's side went ahead when Reguilon flew past Bruno Perez and scored with an angled shot which squeezed between goalkeeper Pau Lopez's legs.

Roma, who finished fifth in Serie A after winning seven of their last eight games, appeared to be coming back into the match when Sevilla struck again.

The La Liga side broke up a Roma attack, Lucas Ocampos was set free down the right and pulled the ball back for En-Nesyri to turn into an empty net shortly before halftime. Roma had Gianluca Mancini sent off in stoppage time.

The last eight will be played in four German cities as part of the mini-tournament, with the final on Aug. 21 in Cologne.

A ninth minute penalty from Raul Jimenez gave Wolves a 1-0 win over Olympiakos which took them through 2-1 on aggregate in a tie played over two legs.

The Mexican also tried his luck with an outrageous rabona shot before halftime which flew over. However, the English Premier League side did not have it all their own way as they reached their first European quarter-final since 1972.

Olympiakos enjoyed 62% possession and had a goal by Mady Camara chalked off in the 28th minute after a long VAR review for offside against Youssef El Arabi in the build up.

Bayer Leverkusen also went through by beating Rangers 1-0 at home to complete a 4-1 aggregate win and earn a quarter-final against Inter Milan on Monday.

Moussa Diaby struck the winner in the 51st minute, controlling Charles Aranguiz's through ball before thumping his shot into the roof of the net.



wall. But even he could not find the winner. City qualified by beating visitors Real Madrid 2-1 for a 4-2 aggregate triumph, with scorers Raheem Sterling and Gabriel Jesus taking advantage of two dreadful errors by Raphael Varane.

Having beaten the 13-times European champions home and away, City will now head to Lisbon for the Final Eight tournament where they will face Olympique Lyonnais, who progressed on away goals against Juventus in Friday's other game, on August 15.

Real, trailing 2-1 from the first-leg were without suspended skipper and defensive lynchpin Sergio Ramos at The Etihad and it showed, with the Spaniards looking shaky at the back throughout.

Madrid made a disastrous start, gifting City a ninth minute opener. French international Varane, having received a pass inside his own area from goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois, was robbed by Jesus and the striker slipped the ball to Sterling who slotted home his 100th goal for the club. There was a strong response from the Spanish champions, urged on by Ramos from the stands, with City keeper Ederson forced into fine saves to keep out efforts from Karim Benzema and Eden Hazard.

Ederson could do nothing, however, to stop a header from Benzema in the 28th minute, the Frenchman rising to power home from a pin-point cross from Rodrygo.

City created plenty more chances after the break but lacked the killer touch and it took another piece of calamitous defending by Varane to decide the tie in the 68th minute.

Having initially failed to head clear a long ball, Varane's attempted header back to Courtois was too weak and Jesus was alert again, nipping in to flick it past the Belgian keeper and make the score 2-1 on the night.

Murray, Clijsters Receive U.S. Open Wildcard Entries



NEW YORK (Reuters) - Former U.S. Open champions Andy Murray and Kim Clijsters each received wildcard entries to 2020 edition of the tournament, organisers said on Thursday.

The tournament will take place in a quarantined setting from Aug. 31-Sept. 13 in New York. The Western & Southern Open, which was relocated from Cincinnati this year, will be held from Aug. 20-28 as a warm-up event for the Grand Slam.

Murray, a former world number one who won his U.S. Open title in 2012, also received a wildcard entry into the Western & Southern Open, but said on Monday that players travelling to New York need assurance that they would not face mandatory quarantine after returning to Europe.

The 33-year-old Briton missed the tournament in 2017 and 2019 due to injury.

Clijsters, who won the tournament in 2005, 2009 and 2010, returned to action after nearly eight years away from the sport in 2020, competing in World TeamTennis' three-week season that kicked off in July at the Greenbrier resort in West Virginia.

The 37-year-old from Belgium also received a wildcard entry to the Western & Southern Open.

Kyrgios Unlikely to Play at French Open



MELBOURNE (Reuters) - Australia's Nick Kyrgios said he is unlikely to play at the French Open due to concerns about COVID-19.

Kyrgios, who on Sunday announced his withdrawal from the U.S. Open, told Australian television he planned to wait until it was safer to return to the tour.

"It's a very slim chance I'll play in Europe. Almost slim to none, to be honest," the 25-year-old told Channel Nine.

"I'm going to use this (time) to stay home, train, be with my family, be with my friends and I'm just going to act responsibly, and wait till I think there's better circumstances to play."

Kyrgios is no fan of clay or the French Open, which has been postponed from its

usual May-June dates to a September start due to the pandemic.

Last year, he said the French Open "sucks" before pulling out of the tournament, citing sickness.

The Aug. 13-Sept. 13 U.S. Open, which will be played without spectators, has been hit with a number of high-profile withdrawals including Australian women's world number one Ash Barty and men's world number two Rafa Nadal.

Canberra-based Kyrgios said it was an easy decision to pull out of the Grand Slam in New York.

"But even with the (Black Lives Matter) movement and the whole protests and that type of stuff going on over there, I just don't think at the moment it's the correct time to go ahead with sport, in my opinion," he said.

A fresh outbreak of COVID-19 in Melbourne has raised questions about whether the Australian Open can be held in January, with the city undergoing a second lockdown.

Organisers are planning for it to go ahead, without fans if necessary, but Kyrgios was unconvinced.

U.S. Open Will Still Be a Proper Grand Slam



MADRID (Dispatches) - (Reuters) - Rafa Nadal believes this year's U.S. Open champion will still feel like a Grand Slam winner despite the tournament losing some glamour due to the withdrawal of top players amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the Spaniard said on Wednesday.

The hardcourt Grand Slam, which starts on Aug. 31, lost its men's defending champion in singles with Nadal deciding against travelling to New York.

Women's world number one Ash Barty also pulled out last week, worried about significant risks due to COVID-19.

"The tournament is still big, it's a Grand Slam," Nadal told reporters during a video conference from Spain. "I am not that kind of a person, I am not that arrogant to say that the tournament in not big enough because I'm not playing.

"Of course, it will be a tournament under special circumstances but still a Grand Slam, and the winner will feel it, like a Grand Slam winner."

The United States has more than 4.79 million cases of COVID-19 and more than 157,000 have died. The U.S. Open organisers (USTA) are creating a bio-secure 'bubble' in New York to hold the tournament without spectators.

Hamilton Puts New Deal On Hold



SILVERSTONE (Reuters) - Six-times Formula One champion Lewis Hamilton said on Thursday he felt uncomfortable negotiating a lucrative contract extension with Mercedes during the COVID-19 pandemic as the team confirmed Valtteri Bottas was staying next year.

Hamilton is out of contract at the end of the year but looking sure to stay at the dominant champions, with no other available seat as competitive.

"Ultimately, honestly, it just doesn't feel like the right time," the Briton told reporters at the 70th Anniversary Grand Prix.

"When you think about so many people in the world that have lost their jobs, people that are unemployed, then to sit and negotiate a big contract — it just doesn't seem like the most important thing that I need to apply time to right this second."

Bottas's extension was expected, with champions Mercedes having made clear they intended to retain the 30-year-old Finn for a fifth successive season.

"I'm confident that we have the strongest driver pairing in F1 today and signing Valtteri is an important first step in retaining this strength for the future," said team boss Toto Wolff in a statement.