

Iran's Ambassador to Iraq Iraj Masjedi on Sunday Hailed the Steps Taken by the Government of the Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi to Bolster Baghdad-Tehran Ties

IRAN NEWS

Iran's Ambassador to the UN in a Letter to the UN Chief Filed Iran's Complaint Over U.S.' Support for Terrorist Group 'Tondar', Saying the U.S. Is Responsible for Its Terrorist Crimes in Iran

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President Advises Moderate Campaign Against Coronavirus

TEHRAN (IRNA) - President Hassan Rouhani on Sunday advised moderate campaign against coronavirus. Defining "the moderate path" as one in which activities are not closed down but protocols are observed, President Rouhani said when 77% of the people were observing the protocols, the casualties were two-digit, but when observance of the protocols dropped to 17%, the second wave of the dangerous breakout started.

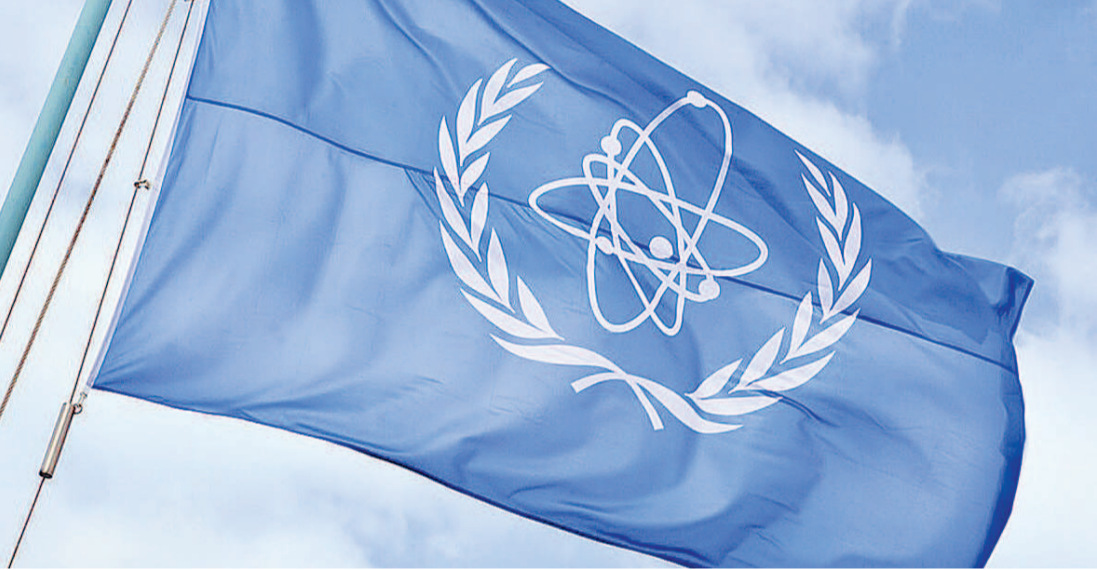
Speaking at the National Task Force for Fighting Coronavirus, Rouhani said the medical staff did a great job and now 30% of hospital beds are empty, he added that the virus is going to stay around for at least six months, so people need to observe the protocols accurately.

He added that economic, educational, and social activities cannot be totally shut down, but the life-style as it was before coronavirus is not possible either; therefore, a moderate path would be a preference.

People should live one year taking care of them; if protocols are ignored, we will be driven to dangerous trouble, he said.

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Tehran Warns About Saudi Arabia's Covert Nukes Program



TEHRAN (IFP) - Iran's ambassador to international organizations has warned about Saudi Arabia's covert nuclear program, urging the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to probe into the "non-transparent" program.

After some information was released about the construction of a yellow cake production facility by Riyadh, Kazem Gharibabadi asked the International Atomic Energy Agency to make the issue transparent by presenting a report to members of the world body.

He said Saudi Arabia is developing and performing a very non-transparent nuclear program.

"Although Saudi Arabia is a member of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), and has signed a bilateral comprehensive safeguards agreement with the agency, it unfortunately keeps refusing to accept inspections by the agency," said the top Iranian diplomat.

"Despite repeated requests by the agency over the past few years, Saudi Arabia has not reformed its obligations in such a way that would allow inspections by the agency," he added.

He said Saudi Arabia has no operating research and power reactors, so it is pointless for the country to be seeking to produce yellow cake.

"This issue coupled with the Saudis' covert actions in the nuclear domain and its refusal to allow IAEA inspectors to enter the country along with Riyadh's destabilizing moves in the region will further fuel concerns about a possible covert nuclear weapons program run by the country," he said.

The top diplomat said the international community will brook no diversion from a peaceful atomic program and will confront any such diversion.

"If Saudi Arabia seeks to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, it should live up to relevant IAEA commitments and act in a fully transparent manner," he said.

Earlier The Wall Street Journal writes in a bombshell investigative reported, "Saudi Arabia has constructed with Chinese help a facility for extracting uranium yellowcake from uranium ore, an advance in the oil-rich kingdom's drive to master nuclear technology, according to Western officials with knowledge of the site."

The WSJ identified the location based on intelligence sources and unnamed Western officials as in a desert area outside al-Ula in northwest Saudi Arabia. "The facility, which hasn't been publicly disclosed, is in a sparsely populated area in Saudi Arabia's northwest and has raised concern among U.S. and allied officials that the kingdom's nascent nuclear program is moving ahead and that Riyadh is keeping open the option of developing nuclear weapons," WSJ continues.

163 More Added to Iran's COVID-19 Death Toll

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Health Ministry spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari said on Sunday that some 163 more Iranians have died from coronavirus disease (COVID-19) over the past 24 hours bringing the total deaths to 18,427.

Sadat Lari said on Sunday that with the 163 new victims, the country's total COVID-19 deaths mounted to 18,427.

Some 2,020 new cases of infection with the COVID-19 were found over the past 24 hours, some 961 of whom were hospitalized, she added.

Sadat Lari noted that a total of 326,712 Iranians have been confirmed infected with the COVID-19, some 284,371 of whom have recovered or discharged from the hospitals.

Some 4,022 other COVID-19 patients are in critical condition and being treated in intensive care units, the spokeswoman said.

Sadat Lari added that 2,686,498 tests have so far been carried out in Iran.

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ViewPoint Beirut's Wound Was Wound of Negligence

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

The massive explosion in Beirut port shocked the world. Some 2,750 metric tons of ammonium nitrate stored at a warehouse in a port which was the vital economic vein of Lebanon is considered a negligence in its absolute sense of the word, even if it is said that ammonium nitrate with the chemical formula of NH4NO3 is a chemical fertilizer and it is used for nitrifying the soil for improving productivity in cultivation but being at the same time an explosive material. Ammonium nitrate is used mostly place of fertilizer (urea) and nitrogen accounts for 34 percent of each gram of ammonium nitrate and this gives to this material both explosive potential and power for more durability in the atmosphere.

Agro experts believe the advantage of ammonium nitrate to urea is its sustainability in the soil because the existence of nitrogen prolongs the longevity and durability of a fertilizer. But among the explosive materials, ammonium nitrate is not considered as a material with explosive property but in case heat or detonator causes a burning in this material, it definitely functions like an explosive material with accelerated blast waves.

Beirut blast is today the result of this kind of explosion that the fire in the lateral warehouse close to this material has caused a destructive and unbelievable act. The news and reports coming from Beirut all show that all Lebanon's officials and Judiciary were aware of storage of this huge amount of ammonium nitrate in the port.

After the blast in the port, Reuters in a report said a ship carrying 2,750 tons of a highly combustible chemical from Georgia to Mozambique was confiscated in 2013 and the cargo was kept in this warehouse till the legal case was sorted out. This seemingly Russian ship is named the Rhosus, sailing under a Moldovan flag, docked in Beirut in September 2013.

Lebanese TV channel LBCI had earlier reported that this huge amount of ammonium nitrate with explosive power was being carried by the Rhosus when it had technical problems while sailing from Georgia to Mozambique. When the ship was being directed to the port, it was found that the ship's cargo was ammonium nitrate. So this chemical material was removed from cargo vessel Rhosus and deposited in warehouse 12, to ensure port safety till the legal case was settled.

According to the latest reports and remarks of security experts, the explosion happened during welding whose sparks hit the firecrackers at the warehouse and the firecrackers acted like a detonator for the ammonium and caused the huge blast.

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Iran's Real Oil Exports Might Be Much Higher Than Estimated

LONDON (Dispatches) - TankerTrackers.com, a company that tracks and reports shipments and storage of crude oil says Iran probably exports twice as much oil as estimated.

In its latest report, the online service has referred to India's tanker Giessel that recently received its cargo from an Iranian oil tanker in the Sea of Oman and delivered it to China.

Various cases of transferring Iranian oil shipments to other tankers in the middle of oceans have been reported. Such operations are aimed at covering up the source of oil shipments and movements of tankers.

Based on the data provided by Kpler, an international data intelligence company, Giessel's case was first reported on August 6. According to TankerTrackers.com, the Indian oil product tanker initially sailed into the Strait of Hormuz early in May, then returned to the Sea of Oman. Its tracking signal deceptively showed that it was still heading westward, through the Persian Gulf.

Furthermore, TankerTrackers.com has published a picture of the two million-barrel-capacity Giessel loading oil near a smaller Iranian tanker. Based on the same report, Giessel, owned by the Indian Vega shipping company, received one million barrels of oil from the Iranian tanker and transferred the cargo to China. The Iranian oil tanker Fortune is anchored at the dock of El Palito refinery near Puerto Cabello, May 25, 2020 At the same time, Vega has refused to respond to questions raised by NBC, which had aired Tanker Trackers' findings.

Giessel arrived in China on June 13 and unloaded its cargo, but in its June report, Chinese customs said that no oil was imported from Iran that month.

A source, who wanted to remain anonymous, said that the cargo was delivered to China as Indonesian oil.

Chinese Customs data show that Beijing imported 1.6 million barrels of Indonesian oil in June.

Kpler had also said that Iran exported 60,000 barrels of oil per day to Malaysia between January and May. Nevertheless, Malaysian Customs data show that Kuala Lumpur has not bought any oil from Iran. So, these cargoes have been delivered to China as Malaysian crude. In the first seven months of 2020, Kpler data show that Iran exported 230,000 barrels per day, which is 90% less than before the sanctions. The company says Iran's daily oil exports are likely to be over 600,000 barrels, twice more than what was estimated before.

China and Syria are the only countries that officially buy oil from Iran. Official Chinese customs data show that it imported 70,000 barrels of oil per day from Iran in the first half of the year, except in June.

Iran Not Officially Notified of Ship Seizure Off Pakistan

TEHRAN (PressTV) - A senior official from Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) says it has not been officially informed of a reported move by Pakistani authorities to detain a tanker carrying Iranian oil into the neighboring country.

Hossein Abbasnejad said that if any ship seizure involving Iran had taken place in Pakistan, the Pakistani authorities would have given Iran an official notice.

However, the official, who serves as head of PMO's Maritime Affairs Department, did not deny reports in the Pakistani media that an Iranian-flagged ship had been detained off Karachi's Port Qasim allegedly because the ship was violating U.S. sanctions against Iran.

"The country of Pakistan has not issued an official notice to us as the country having the tanker registered under its flag about confiscation of the ship," Abbasnejad told the semi-official Fars news agency.

The comments came a day after Pakistani newspaper the Express Tribune cited a senior Pakistani senator as claiming that an Iranian ship had been detained while trying to smuggle oil into Pakistan using forged documents.

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IRGC Nabs Perpetrator Of Sound Bomb

TEHRAN (IP) - The public relations department of the IRGC Ground Force's Quds Regional Base in southeastern Iran announced on Saturday that the IRGC intelligence forces have captured the main element who had planted a sound bomb in Zahedan a few days ago.

The perpetrator of the sound bomb detonation in Sadra Street of Zahedan has been arrested and efforts are

underway to capture the other elements involved in the terrorist activity, it added.

After planting a sound bomb in a ditch in the street in Zahedan on August 5, members of the terrorist group had called the Police to report an accident in Sadra Street. As soon as the Police forces reached the site, the terrorists detonated the explosives, injuring four cops and damaging a Police patrol car.

Iranian Mayors Express Readiness To Help Beirut

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – New Head of Iran's Civil Aviation Organization (CAOI) in his introductory ceremony said that the country has bought several planes during the sanctions era and at the same time new airlines have been launched.

In a letter from the Assembly of Mayors of Iranian Metropolises sent on Friday, Tehran Mayor Pirouz Hanachi and 17 other mayors of Iran's big cities expressed their sincere condolences to Jamal Itani, the mayor of Beirut.

The Iranian mayors said the tragic incident in Beirut had "caused deep grief and sorrow." "Hereby, we, the mayors of the metropolises of Iran, express our deepest condolences and sympathy to the dear and bereaved people of Lebanon and all those affected by the tragic blast, and wish a speedy recovery for the injured," the letter said.

The Iranian mayors also expressed their full readiness to help the citizens and the municipality of Beirut return to normal conditions, Press TV reported.

They also underlined the need for boosting unity and empathy among regional countries as the only way to maintain peace and tranquility.



"The municipalities of Iran's metropolises will stand by the citizens and officials of Beirut," the Iranian mayors concluded.

A huge blast killed scores of people in the Lebanese capital on Tuesday, August 4, displaced as many as 300,000 citizens and left around 5,000 wounded.

Iran's first cargo of humanitarian aid comprising 95 tons of food and medicine arrived in Beirut on Thursday.

Appreciating the performance of the Iranian Red Crescent Society (IRCS), Lebanese Health Minister Hamad Hassan said on the same day that Iran is at forefront of providing assistance to Beirut blast's victims.

Majlis Must Be Financially Productive

TEHRAN (IP) - Deputy Chairman of the Iranian Parliament said that the legislative body must try to generate wealth more in the year of the surge in production.

Ali Nikzad referred to the Leader's remarks regarding the surge in production in the current year, adding that the priorities of all the commissions of the parliament are livelihood, economy, and culture, and all the lawmakers try to make the executive bodies act positively so that we can see a surge in production this year.

The Development Commission is committed to build one million houses and must provide facilities in this regard, and the Industrial Commission must produce more steel and cement than the country's need to regulate the market so that it could be exported, he noted.

Nikzad stated that Parliament is ready in the year of 'surge in production' to achieve self-sufficiency in agriculture and automobile manufacturing, and whatever leads to a surge in production in all areas.

Referring to the fact that the government must also remove the obstacles to the surge in production, Nikzad concluded that the heads of branches of power, the banking system, the stock, and the liquidity owned by people must contribute to local production as well.



Tehran for Expanding Ties With Dhaka



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN – Majlis Speaker Mohammad Baqher Qalibaf has expressed his country's desire to strengthen relations with Bangladesh on all fronts.

"It is hoped that with our concerted efforts, our relations in various fields of bilateral and multilateral realms will be further developed and expanded upon," he said.

The Iranian Parliament Speaker made the remarks in a letter sent to his Bangladesh counterpart Dr Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury.

He thanked Dr Chaudhury for sending a message of congratulations on the occasion of his election as the new Speaker of the Iranian Parliament.

Speaker Qalibaf emphasized the role of parliamentary relations in fostering the bonds of amity and in solidifying the friendly ties of any two countries, according to Iranian Embassy in Dhaka.

The Iranian Parliament Speaker drew attention of Bangladesh Speaker to the long-standing approach adopted by the Iranian Parliament to attach great significance to strengthening parliamentary ties with the countries of the world including the Jatiya Sangsad of the brotherly nation of Bangladesh in order to serve mutual interests.

He prayed to the Almighty for the parliamentarians of Bangladesh good health and even more success and more prosperity and well-being to the government and people of the friendly nation of Bangladesh.

U.S. Should Account for Supporting, Sheltering Terrorist Groups

TEHRAN (FNA) - Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for International and Legal Affairs Mohsen Baharvand blasted Washington for supporting and nourishing terrorist groups, saying that the international community should make the U.S. accountable.

"The U.S. government should account to the international community for providing shelter, residence, communication tools and satellite TVs, financial backup, freedom for overt actions and advocacy for terrorist groups and terrorist acts," Baharvand said.

He added that the U.S. adopts such irresponsible measures not only against Iran but also against China, Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua, Iraq and many other countries.

"The international community should make the U.S. accountable for its illegal acts and stop this boring silence," Baharvand said.

Zarif Signs Memorial Book at Lebanon's Embassy in Tehran

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, attended Lebanon's Embassy in Tehran on Sunday to sign a memorial book in the honor of the victims of a devastating blast in the Lebanese capital.

Zarif had earlier issued a condolence message on his Twitter account in Arabic Language in which he said,

"Our thoughts and prayers are with the great and resilient people of Lebanon. As always, Iran is ready to provide



assistance in any way which may seem necessary. Stay strong Lebanon."

Also in a phone conversation with his Lebanese counterpart Charbel Wehbe, the Iranian foreign minister voiced Iran's readiness to provide humanitarian supplies to the disaster-hit people of Beirut.

A major blast in Beirut Port on Tuesday evening left at least 158 people dead and 6,000 others injured. Some 21 people are still missing.

Red Crescent Erects Field Hospital in Lebanon

TEHRAN (IFP) - The Iranian Red Crescent Society has set up a makeshift hospital in the Lebanese capital, Beirut, as part of its efforts to help the Arab country after the massive blast that hit Beirut port.

The hospital was inaugurated in a ceremony attended by Iranian Ambassador to Beirut Mohammad-Jalal Firooznia, who also visited the depot of Iran's humanitarian aid to Lebanon. "Until now, four plane-loads of humanitarian aid for Beirut people sent by the Islamic Republic of Iran have arrived in Lebanon," said the top diplomat on the sidelines of his visit.

"We are monitoring the situation and, if need be, we are prepared to send in more shipments," he said.

He underscored that Iran stands ready to help Lebanon and will heavily contribute to reconstruction work following the disastrous explosion in Beirut.

The ambassador underscored that the Red Crescent of the Islamic Republic of Iran acted well in the wake of the Beirut incident.

"Health and medical equipment as well as medicines along with expert teams were sent to Lebanon in the shortest time possible, which should be appreciated," he noted.



Economic Council of Iranian Embassies to Be Established

TEHRAN (ILNA) - The new Iranian ambassador to the Republic of Azerbaijan Abbas Mousavi announced the formation of the Economic Council of Iranian embassies in the Caspian littoral states.

Abbas Mousavi, the new Iranian ambassador to Azerbaijan, said during a visit to Maku, northwestern Iran, on Saturday that "Azerbaijan is important for Iran in various dimensions, so the role of Anzali, Aras and Maku free zones in developing trade and economic interactions between the two countries cannot be ignored.

Emphasizing the need to strengthen economic relations between Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan, Mousavi added, "In order to strengthen economic sectors of the Iranian embassies in the Caspian littoral states, an economic council will be formed."

The current Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman has recently been appointed as the new Ambassador to the Republic of Azerbaijan and is scheduled to serve as spokesman until next month (September).

Spokesman Hails Journalists' Efforts to 'Make Untold Stories Heard'

TEHRAN (IFP) - The spokesman for the Iranian government has appreciated efforts by journalists who, he said, are the ones that can render foreign propaganda campaigns ineffective.

Ali Rabiei made the comment in a message marking the National Journalists' Day. "We commemorate the Journalists' Day at a time when Iran's society and journalists' community are going through the most complicated and toughest times in modern history," he said in his message. "Never ever has the Iranian society been exposed to such mental turbulence," he added.

He said hegemonic powers are making "huge media investments" to trigger mental collapse and break the society's resistance.

"Sanctions, the high paper and publishing costs coupled with unemployment along with the coronavirus-stricken economy have all gripped freelance and independent journalism," he added. He then urged journalists to make untold stories heard and boost public trust in order to help overcome problems.

America Trying to Make Iranians Tired of Islamic Revolution

TEHRAN (MNA) – A senior Iranian cleric pointed to the U.S. animosity against the Islamic Republic, noting that US officials' dreams will never come true.

"People have to believe that America is our enemy and is always trying to make people tired of the Islamic Revolution," Ayatollah Mohammad Ali Movahhedi Kermani, Tehran's provisional Friday prayers leader, said.

"Americans think that they can witness a day when Iranian people are tired and stand against the Revolution, but this is an illusion and just a dream for U.S. leaders," he added.

The cleric went on to lament some individuals inside the country who favor starting talks with the US and paying attention to Washington's demands. He noted that these individuals can be 'dangerous' for the country in case they are given a responsibility in the establishment.

U.S. has a long history of adopting hostile measures against Iran as they can be traced back to organizing the 1953 coup, which all has killed the trust of Iranian people in Washington. Recently, President Donald Trump withdrew from the UN-endorsed JCPOA and unilaterally imposed harshest economic sanctions against Tehran in hope of pressuring Iran into a new deal.

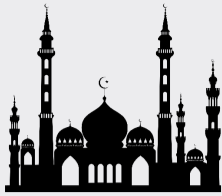
Foreign Ministry Joins Equality Maneuver

TEHRAN (MNA) – The staff at Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs have offered some 12 billion rials to the 'Equality and Sincere Assistance Maneuver'.

In a statement on Sunday, the ministry said that its staff have donated 12,692,600,000 rials (nearly \$55,000 USD) to the Maneuver which aims to help those families affected by the pandemic and its economic aspects.

The maneuver was launched by the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei some weeks after the COVID-19 restrictions were set in place.

People from all walks of life and different organizations across the country have joined the campaign to deliver money or foodstuff to those families that are having a hard time coping with the economic situation amid the pandemic.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:09
■ Evening (Maghreb)	20:18
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:47
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:20

79. To Solomon We inspired the (right) understanding of the matter: to each (of them) We gave Judgment and Knowledge; it was Our power that made the hills and the birds celebrate Our praises, with David: it was We Who did (all these things).
Surah 21. The Prophets (79)

Iran Has Bought Large Number of Planes Amid Sanctions

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – New Head of Iran's Civil Aviation Organization (CAOI) in his introductory ceremony said that the country has bought several planes during the sanctions era and new airlines have been launched.

TEHRAN – New Head of Iran's Civil Aviation Organization (CAOI) in his introductory ceremony said that the country has bought several planes during the sanctions era and at the same time new airlines have been launched.

Toraj Dehghani Zanganeh said that air industry since late year has been struggling with crisis due to the Coronavirus pandemic and there is no bright outlook for the exit from the current condition.

He noted that ICAO had announced that air industry will come out of the crisis by 2022 but later it revised its forecast and claimed the industry might revive by 2024 but all predictions are updated and nobody knows when everything will be normal.

Dehghani Zanganeh added that Iran's air industry had already been struggling with the U.S. cruel sanctions and Americans have tried to ground Iran's air industry.

He hailed the outgoing head of CAOI Mr. Ali Abedzadeh and called him Iran's air industry superman who imported several planes to the country during the sanctions era and several airliners have been set up.

He noted that the maintenance of all planes in the country is done by domestic experts and several knowledge-based air companies have been established that all



indicate the air industry in the country is dynamic and alive.

He also pointed to some valuable measures taken during Mr. Abedzadeh's term, like privatizing the ticket fare which solved many problems of the air industry in the country.

Meanwhile Abedzadeh, for his part, defended his performance in the office despite criticisms, saying that there is no dependence in the national air industry and even the budget of CAOI is independent from the government budget.

He said when he started his work in the organization, there were several cases open in the courts against the organization but all of them were gradually settled and tranquility returned to the airlines and airports.

He criticized some reactionary people who distort the whole aviation industry and they cause disappointment in the industry due to their lobbies in the supervisory bodies.

Abedzadeh noted that since the first day in the office, his critics have tried to

IME Witnesses 58% Growth In Its Weekly Trade

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - While over 572,763 MT of commodities worth over \$1,190m were traded last week on the Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME), the trading volume on its metal and mineral trading floor experienced a growth of 58%.



According to the report from IME International Affairs and PR, on the domestic and export metal and mineral trading floor of IME, 264,125 MT of various products worth close to \$626m were traded last week.

On this trading floor, 252,323 MT of steel, 7,020 MT of copper, 3,650 MT of aluminum, 120 MT of molybdenum concentrates, 12 MT of precious metal concentrates, 1,000 MT of zinc ingot as well as 8 kg of gold bullion were traded by customers.

The report declares that on domestic and export oil and petrochemical trading floors of IME, 308,170 MT of different commodities with the total value of \$510m were traded.

On this trading floor, 88,500 MT of VB feed stock, 51,278 MT of bitumen, 67,073 MT of polymer products, 35,727 MT of chemical products, 890 MT of insulation, 54,000 MT of lube cut oil, 50 MT of argon, 1,802 MT of base oil as well as 8,950 MT of sulfur were traded.

Furthermore, 401 MT of commodities were traded on the side market of the IME.

Gov't to Create 41,000 Manufacturing Jobs Until March



TEHRAN (PressTV)- Iran's caretaker minister of industries says tens of thousands of new jobs are planned to be created in the country's manufacturing sector by March 2021.

Hossein Modarres Khiabani said that a total of 200 new manufacturing projects worth 170 trillion rials (nearly \$7.4 billion) will be fully launched by the end of the current Iranian calendar year.

He said those "propelling manufacturing projects" will create more than 41,000 new jobs across Iran.

The caretaker minister added that the government and the private sector are working on a total of 4,000 unfinished projects in the manufacturing sector with an eye to make them ready for use by August 2021 when the current administrative government leaves office.

Despite facing the mounting pressure of economic sanctions imposed by the US, Iran has managed to boost infrastructure investment through various financing measures. A main focus of the investment plans has been on developing Iran's energy and manufacturing sectors as the government believes they can help the economy diversify away from oil and prepare it to recover more quickly once the American sanctions are eased.

Increased manufacturing output has helped the economy better cope with the sanctions over the past two years mainly through exports of various products to neighboring countries. Modarres said Iran has a visionary plan to localize production of manufacturing machinery and equipment for which Iran spends over \$3.2 billion each year in imports.

He said the country had managed to save around \$300 million between March and July through local production for a series of equipment and machinery that used to be supplied by foreign companies.

Iran Ready to Expand Trade With Kurdistan Region

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran is ready to start technical negotiations with the Kurdistan Region over the opening of two important free trade zones following similar agreements made with Baghdad, the Iranian Consul-General in Sulaimani told Rudaw.

"We are ready and we have completed the preliminary work at both border crossings, namely Parvizkhan and Bashmakh, to establish these free zones," Mehdi Shushtari told Rudaw's Samya Hassa on Saturday evening.

"The legal procedure has finished, it has been approved and even the budgets have been allocated and we hope that the work begins in the near future," he added.

Parvizkhan and Bashmakh are two important border crossings linking Iran's Kermanshah and Kurdistan provinces to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. While the onset of the novel coronavirus brought trade between Iran and Iraq to standstill, trade largely continued between Iran and the Kurdistan region through these border crossings. The impact of the coronavirus pandemic has meant that trade level between Iran and Iraq will stand at around nine billion dollars this year - four billion less than last year.

Kermanshah alone has 371 km of land bordering the Kurdistan Region and Iraq, with six border crossings and border markets.

"Last year, in total three billion dollars was the level of exports to Iraq and Syria. Kermanshah is the supplier of foreign currency to the country in relation to non-petroleum exports," Hedayat



Hatami, a top economic official in Kermanshah was quoted by IRNA as saying on July 23.

Shushtari's comments come at a time that U.S. sanctions have crippled Iran's ability to export its petroleum, a main source of the country's foreign currency.

Iran's trade volume with Iraq and the Kurdistan Region has stood at around 13 billion dollars in recent years, just over half of which is through around half a dozen land border crossings with areas under the control of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). Iranian officials,

including President Hassan Rouhani, have repeatedly said that they want to increase the volume to 20 billion dollars in coming years.

Shushtari spoke about several issues, including the quality of goods entering Iraqi and Kurdish markets as well as the shelling of border areas, which has burned hundreds, if not thousands, of acres of forests.

"As the Islamic Republic of Iran, the stability and the security of Iraq and the Region is important to us, we see the stability of the Region and Iraq as part of our own security and naturally in order to establish security in the border area, we do our utmost," Shushtari said.

The shelling of the border area, he added, was "in response to the terrorist actions of some known groups which unfortunately use the Region's soil to attack our border areas, towns and villages and sometimes even our border forces."

"In particular in the past several months, several terrorist actions have been launched from KRG soil against the Islamic Republic and of course this is a red line for any country and any state," he said.

Iran Trying to Fill Exports Gap With Turkey

TEHRAN (MNA) – Chairman of Iran-Turkey Joint Chamber of Commerce said that the country is trying to compensate four-month export gap with neighboring Turkey which happened as a result of spread of coronavirus global pandemic.

Mehrdad Sa'adat pointed to the latest situation of admitting Iranian trucks at Turkish border and impact of the coronavirus outbreak on trade volume exchange between the two countries of Iran and Turkey and reiterated, "We try to compensate a four-month export gap with Turkey."

"Presently, we are facing the long queue of trucks at borders," he emphasized.

Turkey refrains from accepting more Iranian trucks due to the outbreak of COVID-19, he said, adding, "Talks are underway with Turkish officials to increase the number of Iranian export and transit trucks for entering Turkey."

This is while Turkey has been named as Iran's fifth export target market in the first four months of current year (from March 21 to July 22) as Iran exported 43,000 tons of products, valued at \$405 million, to neighboring Turkey, he stressed.

According to IRICA, five percent of Iran's total non-oil commodities were exported to Turkey in this period.

Elsewhere in his remarks, he pointed to the volume of products imported into the country from Turkey and added, "some 1,870,000 tons of products, valued at \$1,178,000,000, was imported into Iran from Turkey."

Iran, Iraq Resume Trade Via Shalamcheh Border

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN- Iran and Iraq resumed trade through Shalamcheh border, Mehr news agency reported on Sunday, quoting an Iranian provincial official.

Seyed Ali Mousavi said, "Today, the international border of Shalamcheh was reopened and traders of the two countries resumed their activities." Exports of non-oil goods, including foodstuffs, fruits, vegetables, and meat, as well as technical and engineering services, resumed at this border on July 6, according to an agreement reached with the Iraqi side, Mousavi announced. According to Mousavi, 21,000 tons of non-oil goods worth \$95 million exported to Iraq after resuming of Shalamcheh border on July 9, after a four-month shut down due to the outbreak of coronavirus.

404,000 Tons of Copper Concentrate Produced in 4 Months

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN- Production of copper concentrate in Iran hit 403,994 tons during the first four months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-July 21), IRNA reported.

As reported, production of copper concentrate during the four-month period of this year was one percent higher than that of the same period of time in the previous year.

In early May, four development projects worth 40 trillion rials (about \$952.3 million) were inaugurated in the copper sector of Kerman Province in the southeast of Iran.

President Hassan Rouhani put the projects into operation through video conference.

The projects inaugurated in Khatoon Abad Copper Complex included increasing the capacity of copper smelting in the complex, building a copper concentrate storage, construction of a sulfuric acid production plant, and an oxygen supplying unit.

Sustainable Production Duration At Platform 8 of S. Pars Increases

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Director of Petroleum and Gas Engineering Department of Pars Oil and Gas Company says after the massive acidizing operation in the wells of Platform 8 of South Pars gas field, the duration of sustainable production of the platform increased by two years.

Ali Akbar Majid pointed to the activities underway for achieving the set goals of the company for keeping the production in the gas field of South Pars, adding that the executive operation for perforation of layer K1 in the well and massive acidizing of 6 wells of Platform SPD8 ended on July 31, and by successful implementation of the operation, the duration for sustainable production from this platform will increase by two years.

Majid reiterated that the operation was carried out by the department in collaboration with operation and backup department of the company by employing the capable domestic contractors.

He added that by reviewing the results of this operation, the company would start planning for similar operation in some other wells of Platforms 6 and 8 of South Pars.

Venezuela Jails Two Americans Over Failed Invasion

CARACAS (AFP) - Two former U.S. soldiers have been sentenced to 20 years in prison in Venezuela on charges including terrorism, after a failed bid to invade the Caribbean country last May, Attorney General Tarek William Saab said.

Luke Alexander Denman, 34, and Airan Berry, 41, "admitted" to "conspiracy, association (to commit crimes), illicit trafficking of war weapons and terrorism" over the attempted invasion, allegedly aimed at toppling President Nicolas Maduro, Saab said on Twitter around midnight Friday.

They were sentenced during a court hearing, he said, and posted photographs of vehicles, weapons and identity documents.



South Korea Floods, Landslides Kill 26

SEOUL (Reuters) - At least 26 people have died after 46 days of heavy rains in South Korea, with the country's longest monsoon in seven years causing more flooding, landslides and evacuations on Saturday.

Nearly 5,000 people had been evacuated as of 4:30 p.m. local time on Saturday (0730 GMT), according to Ministry of the Interior and Safety data, as rains battered the southern part of the Korean peninsula. Ten people are missing.

About 100 metres (109.36 yards) of levee collapsed at the Seomjin River in the southern edge of the peninsula on Saturday and flooded the area, an official at the South Jeolla province said, with about 1,900 people evacuated in the province including about 500 from around the river.



Lebanese Protesters Storm Ministry Buildings as Anger Grows



BEIRUT (Reuters) - Lebanese protesters stormed government ministries in Beirut and trashed the offices of the Association of Lebanese Banks on Saturday as shots rang out in increasingly angry demonstrations over this week's devastating explosion.

The protesters said their politicians should resign and be punished for negligence they say led to Tuesday's blast, the biggest ever to hit Beirut, that killed 158 people and injured more than 6,000, compounding months of political and economic meltdown. A policeman was killed during the clashes, a spokesman said. A policeman at the scene said the officer died when he fell into an elevator shaft in a nearby building after being chased by protesters.

The Red Cross said it had treated 117 people for injuries on the scene while another 55 were taken to hospital. Policemen wounded by stones were treated by ambulance workers. A fire broke out in central Martyrs' Square.

Dozens of protesters broke into the foreign ministry where they burnt a portrait of President Michel Aoun, representative for many of a political class that has ruled Lebanon for decades and that they say is to blame for its current mess.

"We are staying here. We call on the Lebanese people to occupy all the ministries," a demonstrator said by megaphone. About 10,000 people gathered in Martyrs' Square, some throwing stones. Police fired tear gas when some protesters tried to break through the barrier blocking a street leading to parliament, a Reuters journalist said.

Police confirmed shots and rubber bullets had been fired. It was not immediately clear who fired the shots. Riot police shot dozens of teargas canisters at protesters, who hit back with firecrackers and stones. TV footage showed protesters also breaking into the energy and economy ministries. They chanted "the people want the fall of the regime", reprising a popular chant from the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011. They held posters saying "Leave, you are all killers".

The U.S. Embassy in Beirut said the U.S. government supported the demonstrators' right to peaceful protest and urged all involved to refrain from violence. The embassy also said in a tweet that the Lebanese people "deserved leaders who listen to them and change course to respond to popular demands for transparency and accountability".

Prime Minister Hassan Diab said the only way out was early parliamentary elections. The protests were the biggest since October when thousands of people took to the streets in protest against corruption, bad governance and mismanagement.

"You have no conscience, you have no morality. Go home! Leave! Resign, Enough is enough," shouted one of the protesters. "What else do you want? You brought us poverty, death and destruction," said another.

Soldiers in vehicles mounted with machine guns patrolled the area. Ambulances rushed to the scene.

"Really the army is here? Are you here to shoot us? Join us and we can fight the government together," a woman yelled. Tuesday's blast was the biggest in Beirut's history. Twenty-one people were still reported as missing from the explosion, which gutted entire neighbourhoods.

The government has promised to hold those responsible to account. But few Lebanese are convinced. Some set up nooses on wooden frames as a symbolic warning to Lebanese leaders.

"Resign or hang," said one banner at the demonstration.

Top Afghan Council Urges Release of All Taliban Inmates



KABUL (Dispatches) - Afghanistan's Loya Jirga, the highest consultative body of elders, on Saturday urged the government to release the remaining 400 Taliban prisoners to push forward the peace process.

On the second day of the grand assembly in the capital Kabul, Abdullah Abdullah, chairman of the Supreme Council of National Reconciliation, said a majority of participants voted in favor of releasing the Taliban inmates.

The fate of the remaining captive insurgents - a particularly thorny issue between Kabul and the Taliban - was one of the main aims of the grand moot, which ends on Sunday.

Abdullah said the over 3,000 participants held detailed deliberations on other top priority matters as well, and have voiced support for the government's calls for a permanent cease-fire and international guarantees that the Taliban will not resort to violence again.

They also agreed that the much-stalled intra-Afghan talks should start at the earliest, he said. President Ashraf Ghani, addressing the inaugural session on Friday, had conveyed that the government was keen to commence negotiations immediately. "[...] The sooner you [council participants] decide, the better it

is so that the talks between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Taliban begin," he said.

He also defended the need for a democratic system in the country, saying the elders of Afghanistan had gathered "to strengthen democratic values, unity and ensure support for economic development."

The event has caught global attention as it is being held amid ongoing peace negotiations between the Taliban and the U.S.

The U.S. State Department also hoped that the grand moot, along with consolidating national support for peace in Afghanistan, would determine the fate of the remaining Taliban prisoners, which remains "the last obstacle to the start of intra-Afghan negotiations."

The Taliban, however, have downplayed the importance of the Loya Jirga.

"It is imperative that all sides understand the need of this time and refrain from creating obstacles for the present opportunity," the group said in a statement on Wednesday.

Belarus Holds Election as Street Protests Rattle Strongman President

MINSK (Reuters) - Belarus votes in an election on Sunday pitting President Alexander Lukashenko against a former teacher who emerged from obscurity to lead the biggest challenge in years against the man once dubbed "Europe's last dictator" by Washington.

The 65-year-old Lukashenko is almost certain to win a sixth consecutive term but could face a new wave of protests amid anger over his handling of the coronavirus pandemic, the economy and his human rights record.

An ongoing crackdown on the opposition could hurt Lukashenko's attempts to mend fences with the West amid fraying ties with traditional ally Russia, which has tried to press Belarus into closer economic and political union.

A former Soviet collective farm manager, Lukashenko has ruled since 1994.

He faces a surprise rival in Svetlana Tikhanouskaya, a former English teacher who entered the race after her husband, an anti-government blogger who intended to run, was jailed.

Her rallies have drawn some of the biggest crowds since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. Human rights groups say more than 1,300 people have been detained in a widening crackdown.

Foreign observers have not judged an election to be free and fair in Belarus for a quarter of a century. Despite an election commission ban on the opposition holding an alternative vote count, Tikhanouskaya urged her supporters to monitor polling stations.

"We are in the majority and we don't need blood on the city streets," she said on Saturday. "Let's defend our right to choose together."

Portraying himself as a guarantor of stability, Lukashenko says the opposition protesters are in cahoots with foreign backers, including a group of 33 suspected Russian mercenaries detained in July and accused of plotting "acts of terrorism".

Tens of Thousands in Fresh Anti-Kremlin Rally

KHABAROVSK (Dispatches) - Tens of thousands of people took to the streets in Russia's Far East for a fifth consecutive weekend as anti-Kremlin rallies showed little sign of dying down on Saturday.

The rallies in the city of some 600,000 people on the border with China is a major show of defiance against Moscow's policies and present a headache for President Vladimir Putin, observers say.

The demonstrations were sparked by the sudden arrest of Khabarovsk's popular governor in a murder probe but has since acquired a wider, distinctly anti-Kremlin agenda.

Protesters demand that regional governor Sergei Furgal be either released or tried in Khabarovsk.

Putin last month dismissed Furgal over a "loss of confidence" in his ability to govern and appointed a controversial new official in his place.

Protesters said they were incensed by what they call a blatant disregard for their feelings and opinions.

Elena Ogly, 38, said that the Kremlin should either fulfil protesters' demand or face a long-term opposition movement.

"We elected him honestly. We love him," said Ogly, referring to Furgal. "I think that this will either grind to a halt when the president gives us his answer or will not stop at all," she told AFP.

Furgal's supporters say the charges against him are political and payback for his popularity.

In 2018, he won the governor's seat from a representative of the ruling United Russia party who was backed by Putin.

Entrepreneur Yevgeny Savinov suggested that protests could spread across the country because Russians are "fed up" with "corruption, lies, and propaganda."

"This will only grow and spread across Russia," the 37-year-old said.

"Authorities have been playing a dangerous game."



Thousands Protest In Poland Demanding Release of LGBT Activist

WARSAW (Reuters) - Several thousand people waving rainbow flags protested on Saturday in the centre of Warsaw to demand the release of an LGBT activist accused of hanging rainbow banners over statues and damaging an anti-abortion campaigner's van.

Crowds chanted "Give us Margot back!" and "Rainbow does not insult you!" outside Warsaw's Palace of Culture. The peaceful gathering applauded activists hanging another rainbow flag on a statue in front of the Palace, while police officers filmed the performance and the protest leaders.

On Friday the police detained 48 people, who were trying to stop the authorities from jailing Margot, the activist accused of hanging flags on statues of Jesus and others and destroying a van of an anti-abortionist.

"We are here to protest against the fact that these people were detained by the police," Mateusz Wojtowicz, 24, a payroll specialist, told Reuters.

The police started releasing detained protesters on Saturday, but not Margot. She is a member of the activist group "Stop Bzdurom". The group have said they hung flags on statues last week as part of a fight for LGBT rights, an issue thrust into the heart of public debate in Poland during last month's presidential election.

The commissioner for human rights at the Council of Europe, a rights watchdog, called for the immediate release of the activist.

"Order to detain her for 2 months sends very chilling signal for freedom of speech and LGBT rights in Poland," Commissioner Dunja Mijatovic tweeted.

The ruling nationalist Law and Justice (PiS) party says LGBT rights are part of what it calls an invasive foreign ideology that undermines Polish values and the traditional family.

Condemning Friday's protest, Justice Minister Zbigniew Ziobro said authorities had to act or face "even more violent" attacks by activists.



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J, L.balcony
marble floor
Fully Furn

Shanon (adviser)

Pasdaran Villa (\$4000)
1000sq.m
5bdrs, S/p
S, J, & pkg
green yard
Fully Furn

Parsian

(\$3000) Gheitarieh
300sq.m, 3bdrs
roof garden, S/p
S, J, pkg, & F.F

kamranieh (\$2400) F.F
300sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p
Sauna, Jacuzzi, pkg

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Italy Seeks 28.5b Euros in EU's SURE Unemployment Aid

MILAN (Reuters) - Italy has asked the European Union to tap its SURE unemployment scheme for 28.5 billion euros (\$33.6 billion) after extending furlough support to help the economy withstand the hit from the COVID-19 crisis. The Italian government on Friday approved a new stimulus package worth 25 billion euros, setting aside roughly half of that sum to support employment. Italy extended temporary layoff schemes for up to 18 weeks, setting conditions and requiring firms not to cut jobs to qualify for state aid.



Iraq Pledges Full Compliance With OPEC+ Oil Cuts

JEDDAH (Dispatches) - Iraq has pledged to meet in full its obligations under the OPEC+ oil production cuts that have been credited with rebalancing global crude markets after the mayhem of April's "Black Monday" when prices crashed around the world.

In a telephone call between Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman Al-Saud, Saudi Arabian energy minister, and his Iraqi counterpart, Ihsan Ismail, the two men reaffirmed their commitment to the cuts, which have helped to pull the oil price back from historic lows.

Brent crude, the global benchmark, has more than doubled in the past three months.

Under tough economic pressure, Iraq had struggled to meet the full cuts, but Ismail promised to reach 100 percent this month. Iraq has now committed itself to an ambitious program of compensation to make up for past overproduction.

Iraq will further reduce production by 400,000 barrels per day this month and next, Ismail said, bringing its total cut to 1.25 million barrels daily. That level of cuts could be adjusted when final estimates of compliance are assessed by the six "secondary sources" that monitor OPEC+ output. "The two ministers stressed that efforts by OPEC+ countries toward meeting production cuts, and the extra cuts under the compensation regime, will enhance oil market stability, help accelerate the rebalancing of global oil markets, and send a constructive signal to the market," a joint statement added.

Prince Abdulaziz thanked Ismail for his efforts to improve Iraq's compliance with the agreement. Iraq had been the biggest laggard in the move toward 100 percent compliance by the 23 members of the OPEC+ alliance. Officials in Riyadh told Arab News that Iraqi compliance had reached about 90 percent, a high level by the country's previous standards but still short of the new targets. Saudi Arabia has been forcefully advocating full compliance with the targets in an effort to remove oil from the global market as demand is still badly affected by the economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The oil market will be under the spotlight later this month when the joint ministerial monitoring committee of OPEC+ energy ministers convenes virtually in the most recent of the monthly meetings set up to oversee the state of the global industry.

Oil had another strong week on global markets, breaking through the \$45 barrier for the first time since early March on signs that the glut in U.S. oil stocks was easing, as well as reductions in the amount of "floating crude" stored in tankers on the world's oceans. The price spiked on news of the Beirut explosion, which some analysts believed could herald a deterioration in regional security and a threat to oil exports.

Brent crude was trading at \$44.70 on international markets. These were the details of the news Iraq pledges full compliance with OPEC+ oil cuts for this day. We hope that we have succeeded by giving you the full details and information. To follow all our news, you can subscribe to the alerts system or to one of our different systems to provide you with all that is new.

It is also worth noting that the original news has been published and is available at Arab News and the editorial team at AlKhaleej Today has confirmed it and it has been modified, and it may have been completely transferred or quoted from it and you can read and follow this news from its main source.

Thousands of BA Staff to Lose Jobs

LONDON (Reuters) - Thousands of British Airways staff will be sent letters telling them they have lost their jobs on Friday, as the airline pushes ahead with a plan to cut employee numbers by 29% in the face of bitter opposition from unions.

British Airways, owned by IAG, said in April it would need to axe up to 12,000 of its 42,000 staff to survive the COVID-19 pandemic and remain competitive.

But the plan has met fierce resistance from cabin crew union Unite which said on Friday it would also keep fighting against pay cuts for existing staff.

BA said that 6,000 employees had decided to take voluntary redundancy, while thousands of others would receive a letter in the coming days to tell them their fate.

Following a selection process, staff will hear whether they still have a job or not, and if they do, whether they will be required to accept a new contract or stay on their old one.

Unite has accused BA of "industrial thuggery" and it is trying to win support from lawmakers to strip BA of airport slots.



BA is currently only flying about 20% of its normal schedule and burning through 20 million pounds per day. "We are having to make difficult decisions and take every possible action now to protect as many jobs as possible," a spokesman for BA said.

Rival airlines Lufthansa and Air France-KLM have also announced job cuts. Unite, which has already threatened BA with strike action, called on the airline to offer the same deal that it has agreed with its pilots to other staff.

"We will do everything in our power to prevent compulsory redundancies and attacks on workers' wages by a boardroom with billions in the bank," Unite said in a statement. British Airways agreed a deal last week with pilots union BALPA for a pay cut of about 20% and some compulsory job cuts estimated around 270.

Fitch Affirms Russia at 'BBB'; Outlook Stable

LONDON (Dispatches) - Fitch Ratings has affirmed Russia's Long-Term Foreign-Currency Issuer Default Rating (IDR) at 'BBB' with a Stable Outlook.

A full list of rating actions is at the end of this rating action commentary.

Russia's 'BBB' IDRs balance its credible and consistent policy framework, and robust public and external balance sheets, underpinned by a solid sovereign net foreign assets position and low government debt, with low growth prospects, high commodity dependence and weak governance indicators relative to peers. The Stable Outlook reflects Fitch's view that Russia's policy response to the unprecedented shock of the COVID-19 pandemic and extreme volatility in oil prices will contribute to anchor macroeconomic stability improvements and preserve the strength of the sovereign balance sheet. Moreover, a strong commitment to inflation targeting, exchange rate flexibility and a prudent fiscal strategy support Russia's increased resilience to shocks and reduce the impact of oil price volatility on the economy.

Fitch forecasts Russia to contract by 5.2% in 2020 due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and containment measures on domestic demand and exports. Oil production cuts under the OPEC Plus agreement will likely shave around 1pp to 2020 growth. We expect growth to recover to 3.6% in 2021 and 2.5% in 2022 under our baseline scenario, supported by a relaxed monetary policy stance and the implementation of the National Economic Recovery Plan to support income, employment and investment recovery, as well as sectors of the economy affected by the pandemic. Weaker global growth and/or a strong resurgence of coronavirus pose downside risks in the near term.

Fitch forecasts Russia's federal government deficit to reach 5.1% of GDP in 2020, from a surplus of 1.8% in 2019, reflecting weaker oil prices (average price of USD35/b for Brent in 2020) and production cuts eroding oil revenues, weaker tax collection and the government anti-crisis budget measures estimated at 3% of GDP in 2020. Weakening in regional and local government revenues will take the general government deficit to 6.0% in 2020, slightly below the projected 6.5% deficit for the 'BBB' median.

The government will temporarily relax its 2017 budget rule in 2020-2021 by increasing primary expenditure above the ceiling determined by base oil prices (USD42.4 in 2020 and USD43.4 in 2021) and non-oil revenues. Fitch anticipates that Russia will return to its structural primary deficit target of 0.5% of GDP by 2022. Based on this assumption, we expect the federal deficit to decline to 3.2% of GDP (3.8% general government) in 2021 and to 0.8% (1.1% general government) in 2022 reflecting a gradual recovery in oil and non-oil revenues) as well as a gradual withdrawal of stimulus measures.

The government's track record of fiscal consolidation and already announced revenue measures, such as lifting the income tax rate for high earners to offset some expenditure increase, provides confidence that the government will preserve prudent fiscal planning under the budget rule.

Russia will accommodate increased financing needs by relying on the domestic market (net domestic borrowing of 3.5% of GDP), deposits resulting from unexecuted spending (0.8% of GDP) and transfers from the National Wealth Fund (NWF; 0.8% of GDP). Local and regional government will finance its fiscal shortfall through a mix of local borrowing and use of deposits. Fitch expects NWF liquid assets to remain above 7.0% of GDP in 2020 and the government has additional deposits of 6.6% of GDP. US sanctions presently constrain the sovereign from issuing in US dollars, but Russia has indicated it could re-enter international markets in euros in 2020-2021.

General government debt is projected to rise to 18.5% of GDP in 2020 (federal 15.8%), up from 14.6% in 2019, but remain as the lowest in the 'BBB' category (projected median of 52.0% of GDP). The projected fiscal consolidation, limited exposure to currency risks and lower financing costs will stabilise debt at around 20.0% of GDP (federal 17.2% of GDP) by 2022.

U.S. Black-White Unemployment Rate Gap Widens Again in July

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - (Reuters) - The gap in the U.S. jobless rate between whites and Blacks widened for a third straight month in July, making the gulf between the races the widest in more than five years, Labor Department data released on Friday showed.

The rate for both races fell in July, but the rate for whites dropped more, by 0.9 percentage point to 9.2%. The rate for Blacks dropped by 0.8 percentage point to 14.6%, widening the gap to 5.4 points.

The average unemployment rate for all demographic groups fell by 0.9 percentage points to 10.2% from 11.1%.

The COVID-19 pandemic, which has triggered the deepest U.S. recession since at least the Great Depression, has also laid bare economic inequalities between the races that have persisted for years even as a record-long economic expansion brought the unemployment rate to 50-year lows before the outbreak.

Job losses during the coronavirus downturn have fallen hardest on Blacks, Hispanics and women, wiping out much of the gains they had enjoyed in the final leg of the expansion.

Blacks were the only major demographic group whose jobless rate decline in July was smaller than the national average. The largest decline was for Asians, for whom it fell by 1.8 points to 12%, followed by a 1.6 point drop to 12.9% for Latinos.

At 14.6%, the unemployment rate for Blacks was the highest among the racial and ethnic groups tracked by the Labor Department. It was higher still for Black men at 15.2%, down from 16.3% in June, while for Black women the rate dropped to 13.5% from 14%.

The widening spread between racial group jobless rates in the last three months has reversed years of gains toward slowly bringing unemployment rates between Blacks and whites closer to parity.

Turkey's Economic Indicators Positive, Fluctuation in Lira Not Here to Stay

ANKARA (Dispatches) - The recent fluctuations are specific not only to Turkey but to all other global economies as well, experts say, stressing that, once the currency stabilizes, the country would continue to attract investments with its sound structure.

With heightened ambiguity on the long-term effects of the global health crisis brought by the coronavirus pandemic, world economies continue to suffer, while emerging markets, such as Turkey, are vulnerable to different variables. The excessive market volatility amid high fluctuations in exchange rates and the recent depreciation of the Turkish lira, however, are relatively short-term developments, and the country will recover from them, experts argue against the backdrop of positive macroeconomic indicators in the country.

"We are in a period of emerging market weakness right now. Turkey's currency has depreciated along with other emerging market currencies, actually faring better than Brazil and South Africa in 2020 and slightly worse than Mexico. This should have been expected. When global crises hit, emerging market currencies suffer," Turkish economist Taha Meli Arvas said, noting that the important metric to watch is "how quickly these countries emerge from this crisis, one which is the worst since the Great Depression."

On Friday, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan also commented on the recent spike in the U.S. dollar-Turkish lira disparity. "The Turkish economy is structurally strong, recent fluctuations in exchange rates are temporary and the Turkish lira will bounce back to the normal level depending on global developments," Erdogan also said during a press conference in front of the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque in Istanbul. The president added that all other numbers indicate an upward trend and that despite some difficulties Turkey will maintain its strength during this challenging period of the pandemic. The gross national income (GNI) was \$236 billion (TL 1.7 trillion) in November 2002 when the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) first took office while it had reached \$754 billion by 2019, Erdogan said. The per capita GNI has also increased. The country's employment was 19.6 million back in 2002 and has increased to around 28.8 million in 2019, Erdogan stressed, noting that the country's exports jumped from \$36 billion to \$180 billion in the same period. Employment and the export businesses were also a priority during the pandemic and started showing positive results of measures taken during that period, he added.

Aging Economies May Benefit Less From Fiscal Stimulus

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Fiscal stimulus in economies with a younger population has a significantly positive effect on growth, but the effect is much weaker in aging economies, a blog authored by Jiro Honda and Hiroaki Miyamoto on the IMF website says.

"In the midst of the current COVID-19

pandemic, policymakers around the world are undertaking fiscal stimulus—a combination of spending increases and tax reductions—to support their economies. Even before the present crisis, the importance of fiscal policy has been increasing, with monetary policy constrained by near-zero interest rates. Our new staff research finds that age also matters when considering fiscal stimulus. Specifically, we find that fiscal policy isn't as effective in boosting growth in economies with older populations, compared to economies with younger populations," the report says.

"We looked at 17 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development countries from 1985 to 2017, and split the sample into two groups by looking at the ratio of old people among population. In the aging economies, the average old-age dependency ratio (defined as the ratio of people 65 and older to those between 15 and 64 years old) is 26.5 percent whereas in non-aging economies it is 18.9 percent," the IMF blog states.

"On a more granular level, an aging economy behaves this way because its labor force isn't growing, while its public debt tends to be high, and, therefore, fiscal stimulus has weaker effects on private consumption and investment. This is because the working age population is more likely than retirees to benefit from fiscal stimulus through effects such as increased corporate hiring. Furthermore, many pensioners are on fixed incomes whose consumption remains steady or even declines over time. In addition, population aging could reduce potential growth (by lowering labor input and productivity), with which fiscal stimulus may induce less private investment. The "older" the economy and the higher its debt, the less impact fiscal stimulus has on growth," the report noted.

Final Report of Flight 752 Incident to Be Published Soon

TEHRAN (MNA) – Minister of Roads and Urban Development said that the final report of Ukrainian passenger plane incident will be published soon.

“The findings of the aviation accident investigation committee and the information of the plane’s black boxes were collected, and it is scheduled that Iranian

and Ukrainian delegations to reach a final conclusion and issue a final statement soon,” said Mohammad Eslami on Sunday regarding the publishing time of information of black boxes of Flight 752, the Ukrainian passenger plane that was mistakenly downed near Tehran in January 2020.



U.S. Sanctions Branded Clowning Actions

HONG KONG (Reuters) - Beijing’s top representative office in Hong Kong said on Saturday that sanctions imposed by Washington on senior Hong Kong and Chinese officials were “clowning actions” that would not frighten or intimidate Chinese people.

Separately, the Hong Kong government said the sanctions were “shameless and despicable” and represented “blatant and barbaric” interference in China’s internal affairs.

“We will not be intimidated,” a government spokesman said.

The United States on Friday imposed sanctions on Luo Huining, the head of China’s Liaison Office, as well as Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam and other current and former officials that Washington accuses of curtailing political freedoms in the global financial hub.

The move accelerates rapidly deteriorating Sino-U.S. ties, more than a month after Beijing imposed sweeping national security legislation on Hong Kong that drew condemnation from Western governments and sent a chill across the city.

“The unscrupulous intentions of the U.S. politicians to support the anti-China chaos in Hong Kong have been revealed, and their clowning actions are really ridiculous,” the Liaison Office said in a statement. “Intimidation and threats cannot frighten the Chinese people.”

Luo, the most senior mainland political official based in the Chinese-controlled territory, said U.S. sanctions on him indicated he was doing what he “should be doing for my country and Hong Kong”, according to the statement.

Luo has oversight over the implementation of the contentious security law that allows mainland security agents to be officially based in China’s freest city for the first time.

As well as Luo and Lam, the sanctions target Hong Kong police commissioner Chris Tang and his predecessor Stephen Lo; John Lee, Hong Kong’s secretary of security, and Teresa Cheng, the justice secretary. Xia Baolong, the director of the Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office in Beijing, was also named.

Police chief Tang told local media on Saturday that maintaining the security of the country and Hong Kong was his responsibility, and foreign sanctions were meaningless.

The sanctions freeze any U.S. assets of the officials, prohibit them from carrying out business in the country and generally bar Americans from doing business with them.

Beijing-backed leader Lam has previously told local media she has no assets in the United States. Hong Kong financial regulators moved to calm market fears on Saturday, as banks in the city grappled with the implications of the sanctions. The markets watchdog said it was not aware of any aspect of the sanctions that would affect how financial firms carry out their normal operations in the city.

Washington said the “draconian” security law had undermined its autonomy and set “the groundwork for censorship of any individuals or outlets that are deemed unfriendly to China.” The U.S. sanctions come a week after Hong Kong postponed a Sept. 6 election to the Chinese-ruled city’s legislature by a year, citing a spike in coronavirus cases, prompting democracy activists to question whether the pandemic was the real reason.

Washington said the election delay was the latest example of Beijing undermining “the democratic processes and freedoms that have underpinned Hong Kong’s prosperity.” The security legislation targets what Beijing broadly defines as secession, subversion, terrorism and collusion with foreign forces with up to life in prison.



Beijing and the Hong Kong government have said the law will not affect rights and freedoms, and that it is needed to plug security loopholes. They said it will only target a small minority of “troublemakers.”

Fifteen people have been arrested under the law so far, including four aged 16-21 who were detained last week.

Beijing imposed the legislation directly on Hong Kong just before midnight on June 30, circumventing the city’s legislature, and leaving the city’s officials in the dark on the details of the law until it was implemented. The law has steered China further on a collision course with the West, prompting countries including Australia, Canada and Britain to suspend extradition treaties with Hong Kong.

The legislation allows agents to take suspects across the border for trials in Communist Party-controlled courts, one issue that has raised alarm at home and overseas. Some Hong Kong people have fled the city to set up home overseas, while immigration consultants have reported a surge in inquiries of people looking to leave.

Hong Kong authorities have issued arrest warrants for six pro-democracy activists who fled the city and were suspected of violating the new security.

Some political analysts say the security law coming directly from Beijing and bypassing Hong Kong’s legislature signals the start of a more authoritarian rule in the semi-autonomous city and a march toward mainland control.

Critics of the law say it erodes basic rights and freedoms, guaranteed when the former British colony returned to Chinese rule in 1997, while supporters say it will bring stability after a year of often-violent anti-government and anti-China unrest.

Beirut’s Wound Was...

FROM PAGE 1

LBCI also reported that due to the explosion, all the stored wheat in the other warehouses and silos were destroyed completely and all buildings of silos have become useless and the port is almost destroyed. What the media say about



this blast is important but unbelievable. Hours after the blast two official media outlets Al-Arabia TV channel and the British newspaper the Independent blamed Israel for the explosion, claiming this is the cost that Lebanese people are paying for the presence of Hezbollah forces in the country.

Managing Director of Iranian conservative Persian daily Kayhan, Mr. Hossein Shariatmadari, in an article by bringing some reasons claimed that Saudi Arabia is today an Arab country and at the same time one of the closest countries to the Zionist regime and one cannot accept that Al-Arabia which reflects the policies of Saudi Family accuses the Zionist regime of committing such a horrible crime of explosion in Beirut. But why does it do it? This is the question. Al-Arabia has said, “Hezbollah should be eliminated from the political and security scenes of Lebanon in order that such a similar accident would be avoided any more.”

If we see it as the Zionist regime’s threat against Lebanon, expressing the threat through the pen of the Saudi Family’s media is just a media issue and it cannot be reasonably true. I believe that the Beirut’s wound is because of Lebanese Judiciary and port officials’ negligence and fanning the flame of such seditious assumptions is not to the benefit of anyone.

President Advises...

FROM PAGE 1

He said people should constantly wash their hands and observe personal hygiene, wear masks and follow the social distancing protocols, and also avoid congregation.

President Rouhani said that next week, instructions will be discussed to adopt punitive measures against those found guilty of ignoring the protective protocols putting at risk safety of the other people.

Everyone should observe the protocols; and when one gets sick, they need to stay home quarantined for two weeks, not just a couple of days, even if they themselves do not have severe symptoms, he said, adding that those patients not observing the protocols can infect others.

He said that there should be a punishment for those not observing the rules and put at risk health of the other people.

163 More Added...

FROM PAGE 1

She said the high-risk “red” zones include Tehran, Qom, Mazandaran, East Azarbaijan, Isfahan, Ardabil, Yazd, Markazi, Khorasan Razavi, North Khorasan, Alborz, Semnan, Gilan, Golestan, and Kerman provinces.

The “orange” zones also include Lorestan, Hormozgan, Ilam, Fars, Hamadan, Bushehr, West Azarbaijan, Qazvin, Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari, Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad, and Zanjan provinces, she added.

Iran Not Officially...

FROM PAGE 1

Abdul Rehman Malik, who chairs the Pakistani Senate’s Standing Committee on Interior, said that it was an American watchdog that first informed Islamabad that it should take legal action against the Iranian ship.

Malik said that the ship had used forged papers to smuggle oil into Pakistan, a claim he said was based on media reports published in the country.

Since withdrawing from an international deal on Iran’s nuclear activity in 2018, the United States has been pressing countries around the world to stop buying Iranian oil.

Although the sanctions have affected the demand for Iranian oil, American officials have largely failed to stop oil cargoes that have set off from Iranian ports to deliver crude and other oil products to customers around the world.

UK Confident of Brexit Trade Deal as EU Changing Tone

LONDON (Reuters) - Britain’s top minister overseeing Brexit talks said on Friday he was confident a free trade deal would be clinched with the European Union as there had been a distinct change of tone from the bloc in recent weeks allowing progress to be made.



The United Kingdom left the EU on Jan. 31 but the main terms of its membership remain in place - including being in the EU customs union and single market - during a transition period until the end of this year, during which time both sides hope to negotiate a new free trade accord.

“I’m confident that there will be a deal, I think there has been a welcome change in tone over the last few weeks,” Michael Gove told reporters in Portadown in the British province of Northern Ireland.

“The omens are good for a deal. Now of course there is some tough talking to do,” Gove said. “I believe that there will be a successful negotiated outcome.”

While Britain has always said it believed a deal was possible, the tenor of the comments from Gove - one of the most senior Brexit supporters in Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s government - was distinctly more positive than in recent months.

In late May, for example, Gove was demanding that the EU break the impasse in talks.

Failure to reach a deal would convulse global trade just as the world comes to terms with the economic destruction sown by the novel coronavirus.

The EU is willing to compromise by softening its demand that Britain heed the bloc’s rules on state aid in the future, diplomatic sources told Reuters earlier this month.

They said Brussels could go for a compromise entailing a dispute-settling mechanism on any state aid granted by the UK to its companies in the future, rather than obliging London to follow the bloc’s own fair-competition rules from the outset.

“The relationship that we have with the European Union is constructive, pragmatic and impressive,” Gove said, adding that he thought a deal could be done though there was more work to do.

Britain and the EU have planned more trade negotiations all the way until Oct. 2, less than a fortnight before a summit where the bloc hopes to endorse any agreement with London.

Economic Meltdown Threatens Europe’s War on Plastic

OURÉM (Reuters) - Giving a new life to plastic trash gets Carlos Bento out of bed every morning. But the coronavirus pandemic has seen revenues drop up to 40% at Micronipol, the large recycling facility he runs in central Portugal, and it faces an uncertain future.

Micronipol produces recycled polyethylene, the base for plastic bags and bottles. The product is piling up at its warehouses as clients, facing their own economic struggles, shelve their recycling goals. They are opting for cheaper alternatives: non-recycled plastics made from hydrocarbons.

As lockdowns were put in place worldwide, a drop in demand for oil pushed prices to historic lows, making virgin plastics - already becoming cheaper than the recycled equivalent - even more affordable.

“If we are no longer competitive and if we lose cash we have two options: either someone has to subsidise us so we can keep working or we have to shut down,” said Bento, as he stood near a pile of colorful recycled plastic bales.

Lower virgin plastic prices could spell disaster for the future of European recyclers like Micronipol.

In Europe, virgin polyethylene terephthalate (PET) was over 7%, or 60 euros (\$71) per ton, cheaper than the recycled equivalent last month, data from S&P Global Platts showed.

Industry group Plastic Recyclers Europe said firms in most European Union member states have signalled their recycling facilities have drastically reduced their operations and, in many cases, closed their lines for at least a few months.

“Without well-functioning and profitable plastics recycling there is no alternative, no environmentally sound option for plastic waste management,” said Antonino Furfari, the group’s managing director. “This waste will be incinerated or dumped.”

Piotr Barczak, senior policy officer for waste at the European Environment Bureau, called for a tax to be slapped on all virgin plastics to eliminate the price gap.

The impact of the pandemic on recyclers is especially concerning at a time when consumption of plastics is expected to double to 600 million tons per year in the coming two decades, according to a report by Zero Waste Europe NGO.

And as countries struggle to cope with the economic impact of the health crisis, fears abound that environmental policies are being left behind.



EU Environment Commissioner Virginijus Sinkevicius told Reuters in a written interview that while the Commission had received relatively few requests for extensions or exemptions from EU environmental rules due to the pandemic, the crisis had a “significant impact” on countries’ administrative capacities.

The EU is to ban a range of single-use plastic items by 2021, a huge ambition which could now be under threat as more and more consumers and restaurants become more dependent on disposable plastic products due to contagion fears.

Portugal’s Environment Secretary of State Ines dos Santos Costa said her government’s ambition to cut disposable plastic products “still stands” but the pandemic has transformed models of production and consumption worldwide.

Not far from Portugal’s capital Lisbon, recycling sorting facility Amarsul has raised concerns about the vast amounts of plastic gloves and masks it has been receiving.

“If the ongoing habit of using disposables continues, we may take a step back we will have to fix later,” said chief executive Sandra Silva, adding that a recycling-based economic model “cannot stop because there is a pandemic.”

Europe generates around 26 million tons of plastic waste annually, but less than 30% of that is collected for recycling. Experts say existing targets to improve plastic recycling could be in danger of not being met.

Sandra Castro, head of Extruplas firm that makes wooden-like outdoor furniture from plastics it recycles, is hoping the current situation is no more than a temporary bump in the road.

“We need the industry to be able to provide a solution to the waste we produce,” Castro said.

But for Sirpa Pietikainen, Finnish member of the European Parliament, the only way to tackle plastic pollution, which some scientists say is fuelling climate change through greenhouse gas emissions, is to produce less waste.

“If you thought the coronavirus crisis was bad for the economy, climate change will be 100 times worse - and then you will not only talk about losing GDP points, you will talk about access to medication, water and food,” she said.

“We really need to act now.”

Zarco Pips Quartararo For Czech MotoGP Pole

BRNO (Dispatches) - Johann Zarco claimed a surprise pole for this weekend's Czech MotoGP on Saturday three hundredths of a second ahead of championship leader Fabio Quartararo.

The Ducati-Avintia rider pipped his French compatriot who won the opening two rounds of the coronavirus-curtailed season from pole for Yamaha's satellite SRT team.

Quartararo's team-mate Franco Morbidelli will start in third for Sunday's race in Brno with seven-time champion Valentino Rossi in 10th and Andrea Dovizioso back in 18th.

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Tindall Replaces Howe In Bournemouth Hotseat

LONDON (Dispatches) - Jason Tindall said on Saturday he is ready for the challenge of returning Bournemouth at the first time of asking to the Premier League after replacing Eddie Howe.

The 42-year-old is steeped in the club's history having played 199 times for them and then was former team-mate Howe's assistant for 12 years which included a 21 month spell at Burnley.

Howe left the post last Saturday after the Cherries five year stay in the Premier League ended.

Bayern, Barcelona Reach Champions League Quarterfinals

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Bayern Munich cruised past Chelsea to win 4-1 on Saturday, gaining them a place in the Champions League quarter-finals with a 7-1 aggregate. They will be joined in the last eight by Barcelona, who were victorious at home against Napoli, thanks to a fired-up Lionel Messi.

The Bavarians, who won the domestic league and Cup double, quickly killed off the tie with a ninth minute Lewandowski penalty, after having won 3-0 in London in the first leg in February.

Bayern will be on an 18-game winning streak across all competitions as they head into next week's Final Eight tournament in Lisbon.

Polish striker Lewandowski, with 53 goals in 44 matches in all competitions this season, turned provider to set up Ivan Perisic in the 24th minute as the hosts showed no lack of fitness despite a five-week gap since their last competitive game.

This was a world-class display from Lewandowski who played a hand in all four goals, adding a late header to his pair of assists.

Chelsea, who conceded seven goals in a two-legged European tie for the first time, got onto the scoresheet with Tammy Abraham's tap-in from a Manuel Neuer pass a minute before the break.

Bayern substitute Corentin Tolisso restored their two-goal lead in the 76th and Lewandowski headed in his second eight minutes later to make it 13 goals in the Champions League this season.

Bayern coach Hansi Flick also changed both defensive midfielders, Thiago Alcantara and Joshua Kimmich, for the final 20 minutes.

It paid off two-fold as moments later



Tolisso, on for Alcantara, made it 3-1 when he turned home Lewandowski's pass on 76 minutes.

Alvaro Odriozola, on for Kimmich, then supplied the silky cross on 84 minutes which Lewandowski headed home for his 53rd goal in 44 games this season.

The Bundesliga and German Cup champions will meet Barcelona next Friday in Lisbon for a place in the semi-finals.

Messi led Barcelona to a 3-1 win at home to Napoli on Saturday for a 4-2 aggregate victory which took the club into the Champions League quarter-finals for the 13th consecutive season where they face Bayern Munich.

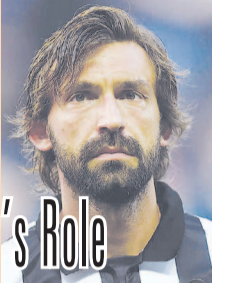
The Catalans had a shaky start but took the lead in the 10th minute with a powerful header from a corner by Clement Lenglet before Messi scored a superb second in the 23rd, seeing off four defenders to curl the ball into the far bottom corner.

Messi had the ball in the net again soon after following a superb team move but the goal was harshly ruled out for handball by the Argentine following a VAR review, although Messi later won a penalty which Luis Suarez converted for Barca's third.

Napoli got one back when Lorenzo Insigne converted a spot kick at the end of the first half and were the better side after the interval but Barca survived to set up a mouth-watering clash with Bayern in the Final Eight tournament in Lisbon next Friday.

Barcelona will have to improve significantly to match Bayern, who advanced after putting seven past Chelsea over two legs and are arguably favorites to win the tournament.

Juventus Hand Pirlo His First Manager's Role



TURIN (Reuters) - Serie A champions Juventus stunned Italian football on Saturday by naming World Cup-winning midfielder Andrea Pirlo as manager on a two-year contract even though their former player has no previous experience in the role.

Pirlo, 41, was promoted to the senior job one week after being named coach of Juve's under-23 side, who play in the Italian third tier, and without having taken charge of a match.

The decision came hours after the Turin club sacked coach Maurizio Sarri following their Champions League last-16 exit to Olympique Lyonnais on away goals on Friday.

Former Chelsea manager Sarri had been in charge for one season and led Juve to a ninth successive Serie A title but still fell well short of the enormous expectations at the club, who have set their hearts on winning the Champions League.

The presence of five-times World Player of the Year Cristiano Ronaldo in attack has increased expectations.

"Today's choice is based on the belief that Pirlo has what it takes to lead from his debut on the bench an expert and talented squad to pursue new successes," Juve said in a statement here

Martic Sets Up Semifinal Against Kontaveit

PALERMO (Reuters) - Top seed Petra Martic held her nerve in two tiebreaks to beat Belarusian qualifier Aliaksandra Sasnovich 7-6(5) 7-6(3) to seal a place in the Palermo Ladies Open semi-finals.

She next faces 24-year-old Estonian fourth seed Anett Kontaveit who hit 57 winners to end Italian teenager Elisabetta Cocciaretto's dream run with a 6-1 4-6 6-1 win.

Martic, having come through a gruelling three-setter with Liudmila Samsonova on Thursday, was forced to concede a break in the opening set against Sasnovich before fighting back to take it to a tiebreak in which she prevailed.

The Croatian then established a 4-1 lead in the second set and looked to be headed for a straightforward victory before Sasnovich clawed her way back, saving three match points until Martic converted the fourth in the tiebreak.

"I had to adjust from my match yesterday. The points were longer and it was more physical," Martic told reporters in a virtual news conference.

"It was a tough two sets, but I'm really happy that, even though things weren't going my way at the end of the second set, I managed to pull through.

The tournament is the first in five months since the Tour was suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic and Martic said she felt the effects of not playing competitive tennis for so long.

"I had two tough matches and my body's holding up well. I have no major issues," Martic added. "Just maybe soreness that I'm sure we all have in the first tournament back. It feels nice to be reminded of how it feels to be that kind of tired."

Wildcard Cocciaretto had upset sixth seed Donna Vekic in the second round but struggled against Kontaveit as she lost the first set. The Italian recovered to win the second but Kontaveit raised her level to claim the final four games in the third.

Ronaldinho Moves Closer to Release From Paraguayan Ordeal



ASUNCION (Reuters) - Former World Cup winner Ronaldinho Gauchinho moved a step closer to ending his Paraguayan ordeal on Friday when prosecutors said they would not oppose a "conditional suspension" of the case that would allow him to return to Brazil.

The twice World Player of the Year was arrested on March 6 along with his brother and business manager Roberto Assis after they tried to enter Paraguay with adulterated Paraguayan passports. They were held in jail for 32 days before being conditionally released on April 7 after paying \$1.6 million in bail.

Ronaldinho, the former Barcelona, Paris St-Germain and Flamengo player who turned 40 while in jail, has been held under house arrest in a Paraguayan hotel for four months since.

According to a document seen by Reuters on Friday, and also reported in Paraguayan and Brazilian media, prosecutors in the case said they found "no elements to prove that Ronaldo de Assis Moreira had a direct participation in obtaining the irregular documents."

They have recommended that Ronaldinho be released after paying a \$90,000 fine and identifying a fixed abode in Brazil. He would also have to present himself to Brazilian authorities every three months.

Officials asked for a two-year suspended sentence and a \$110,000 fine for his brother Roberto but agreed to let him leave Paraguay.

They said that while Ronaldinho was unaware he was using an adulterated passport, Roberto knew.

Both men have said they were innocent and their lawyer has always maintained their detention was "arbitrary, abusive and illegal."

Hamilton on Top as Mercedes Set Pace



LONDON (AFP) - Lewis Hamilton set the pace as he and his Mercedes teammate Valtteri Bottas traded fastest laps as the 'black arrows' dominated Saturday's final practice at the 70th Anniversary Grand Prix.

Championship leader Hamilton, who has a 30 points lead ahead of Bottas after four rounds of this year's COVID-19 delayed championship, clocked a best lap in one minute and 26.621 seconds.

This left Bottas adrift by more than a tenth of a second with their nearest rival Lando Norris of McLaren more than half a second down in third place ahead of the two controversial 'pink Mercedes' of Racing Point.

Nico Hulkenberg, standing in for coronavirus victim Sergio Perez, was fourth ahead of Lance Stroll by a fraction of a hundredth of a second, the duo showing the pace that has stimulated complaints and appeals against their legality.

Racing Point on Saturday morning confirmed their intention to appeal the stewards' verdict, announced on Friday, that their brake ducts were illegal, the docking of 15 points and a 400,000 euros fine. Four rival teams, Ferrari, McLaren, Renault - who initiated the appeals process last month - and Williams also gave notice of appeal, believing the sanctions to be too lenient.

Varane: This Defeat Is Mine



MANCHESTER (Reuters) - Real Madrid defender Raphael Varane took full responsibility for his side's 2-1 defeat at Manchester City on Friday after making two catastrophic errors which saw the Spanish side knocked out of the Champions League 4-2 on aggregate.

"I wanted to show my face because this defeat is mine," French international Varane told reporters after the last-16 second leg at The Etihad Stadium.

"I have to take all the responsibility for this match. We played well in the game, we'd prepared well for it, but at this level if you make mistakes you end up paying a lot for them."

The 27-year-old Varane, a four-time Champions League winner with Madrid and a world champion with France, was missing his usual defensive partner Sergio Ramos who was suspended and the Frenchman lost his concentration in two crucial moments.

Gabriel Jesus dispossessed the defender in his own area and teed up Raheem Sterling to tap in the opening goal after nine minutes before Karim Benzema equalised later in the first half.

After the break, Varane weakly headed the ball back towards his goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois and Brazilian forward Jesus nipped in to score the second in the 68th and effectively end Real's chances of turning the tie around. "I can't explain the errors but I have to accept them. This is a complicated moment for me," added Varane, who has made over 300 appearances for Real since joining from Lens in 2011.