

Director General of Organization for Investment Economic and Technical Assistance of Iran Said Despite Maximum Sanctions Against, The Volume of Foreign Investment In Iran Has Tripled This Year

IRAN NEWS

Iran's Deputy Interior Minister for Security Affairs Once Again Reiterated That the Upcoming Run-Off Majlis Election on September 11, 2020, Will Be Held by Observing All Hygienic Protocols

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No Direct, Indirect Talks With U.S. Underway

TEHRAN (ILNA) - The informed source, who did not want to be named, told ILNA news agency that there are no direct or indirect negotiations with the United States.

Speaking to ILNA, the source added that the Europeans cannot be the initiators and carriers of a message or proposal to other countries without the consent of Iran.

While a familiar source told to ILNA on Thursday morning that Germany and the United Kingdom have made offered to the United States to lift non-targeted sanctions, the official told ILNA that "we have not had any negotiations with the United States or European countries."

A familiar source added that Germany, with the concurrence and support of the United Kingdom, has proposed that the United States, as a first step, temporarily lift non-targeted sanctions, which have the greatest economic impact on the Iranians.

The U.N. Security Council is preparing to vote this week on a U.S. proposal to extend an arms embargo on Iran, a move that some diplomats say is bound to fail and put the fate of a nuclear deal between Tehran and world powers further at risk.

The embargo is due to expire in October under a 2015 deal among Iran, Russia, China, Germany, Britain, France and the United States that prevents Tehran from developing nuclear weapons in return for sanctions relief.

Majlis Gives "Thumbs Down" to President's Pick for Industry Ministry



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – President Hassan Rouhani yesterday faced the first backlash from Majlis when it did not give vote of confidence to his pick as the new minister of industry, mine and trade.

In an open session on Wednesday, lawmakers didn't give their vote of confidence to the proposed minister of Industry, Mine and Trade, Hossein Modarres Khiabani.

President Rouhani did not show up in the session to defend his proposed minister due to the COVID-19 concerns and his First Vice President Eshaq Jahangiri attended.

A number of MPs talked before the voting process to support or to oppose the candidate.

Finally, the voting took place and with 104 votes in favor, 140 against and 10 abstentions, Khiabani failed to receive the vote of confidence.

Rouhani appointed Hossein Modarres Khiabani as the caretaker of the Ministry of Industry in mid-May to replace ex-minister Reza Rahmani.

Now president has to get Supreme Leader's approval for appointing a new caretaker for the ministry for three more months in order to pick another person for the job.

In the vote of confidence session, Modarres Khiabani addressing the lawmakers elaborated his programs in case he was given the vote of confidence.

He said enemies have targeted the economy and they want factories to close and production to halt.

He said one of his programs was to use young managers on course to gain industrial revolution. He also rejected some allegations over appointments of some unfit persons in the ministry, adding that he is against such moves and corruption and he combats with corruption and recommendation for appointment.

He also defended his record as the caretaker of the ministry, saying that he did not let the country face shortage of anti-Coronavirus related items.

Modarres Khiabani claimed that the ministry did not let any disrupt happen in the market due to the rise in the gasoline price.

His recent remarks about defending the hike in car prices faced a backlash during the session.

COVID-19 Kills 188 More Iranians

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Health Ministry spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari said on Wednesday that some 188 more Iranians have died from coronavirus disease (COVID-19) over the past 24 hours bringing the total deaths to 18,988.

Sadat Lari said on Wednesday that with the 188 new victims, the country's total COVID-19 deaths mounted to 18,988.

Some 2,510 new cases of infection with the COVID-19 were found over the past 24 hours, some 1,089 of whom were hospitalized, she added.

Sadat Lari noted that a total of 333,699 Iranians have been confirmed infected with the COVID-19, some 290,244 of whom have recovered or discharged from the hospitals.

Some 3,940 other COVID-19 patients are in critical condition and being treated in intensive care units, the spokeswoman said.

Sadat Lari added that 2,763,225 tests have so far been carried out in Iran.

U.S. Proposes Watered-Down Resolution on Iran Arms Embargo

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - The United States has reportedly proposed a simplified draft resolution to extend an arms embargo on Iran in an apparent bid to garner support in the United Nations Security Council.

The new text, as reviewed by Reuters on Tuesday, is as brief as four paragraphs and would extend the ban "until the Security Council decides otherwise."

Described by diplomats and analysts as "maximalist", the previous U.S. draft resolution was, however, more than a dozen pages long and was aimed at indefinitely extending the embargo.

Diplomats said that while the new simple draft text might win the United States some more votes, it was unclear if Washington could get the minimum nine votes needed as it was unlikely to convince veto-wielding Russia and China to abstain.

The UNSC is set to vote this week on a resolution proposed by the U.S. to extend an arms ban on Iran, but experts and diplomats say there is "zero chance" for the draft to pass.

The embargo is slated to expire in October under a 2015 UNSC-endorsed nuclear deal between Iran and six world states — Russia, China, Germany, Britain, France and the U.S.

Washington is, however, seeking to keep the arms ban in place through a UNSC resolution, threatening that it would use a provision in the agreement to trigger a return of all UN sanctions on Iran if the UN body fails to extend the embargo. Ironically Washington abandoned the deal in 2018.

The remaining signatories to the deal, even Washington's own allies, have repeatedly reminded the US that it is no longer a party to the deal and thus cannot use the provision to bring about a renewal of anti-Iran bans.

At the UNSC, the U.S. faces a rebuke from world powers, including its own allies, over its hostile push to secure an extension of the anti-Iran UN arms embargo. They have also cautioned that a return of UN sanctions on Iran would likely kill the nuclear deal because Iran would lose yet another major interest under the deal.

The U.S. has already reinstated its unilateral economic sanctions against Iran after leaving the deal in defiance of UNSC Resolution 2231, prompting Iran to suspend parts of its commitments to the landmark accord in response.

The vote on the draft resolution was set to be held on Tuesday but is postponed until later this week.

Iran Defense Power Not Threat to PG Littoral States

TEHRAN (MNA) – Addressing some certain Persian Gulf littoral states, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said that Iran's defense and weapons power is in the interest of the entire region and not a threat to these countries.

"We run the country under the toughest sanctions in history. The situation is not normal, but the situation is not the one that enemies expected. They thought we would not have resilience in a few months" said President on Wednesday in the cabinet session.

"The government and the nation have stood together for two and a half years and resisted against terrorist embargo and economic pressure," he added.

"The Americans, the Zionists and the reactionaries in the region thought that they would cause an economic crisis for our country with the sanctions, and this economic crisis would turn into a social and security crisis in the country but they failed in all three stages," Rouhani noted.

"Our neighboring countries should not let the United States abuse them and ask them to issue a statement," Iranian President said referring to the letter sent by the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (PGCC) to the UN Security Council.

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Qatar Rejects PGCC Chief's Statement

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Qatari official with Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs said on Wednesday that anti-Iran statement made by the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (PGCC) secretary general does not reflect views of the member states.

The positions of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council are usually issued by the meeting of foreign ministers of member states, and not through the statements of the Secretary-General, which represent the opinion of the General Secretariat, Mutlaq bin Majid al-Qahtani was quoted by Qatari media 'Al Jazeera' as saying.

The agreed positions of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council are usually issued by the meeting of foreign ministers of member states, and not through the statements of the Secretary-General, which represent the opinion of the General Secretariat only, he added. "We in Qatar do not see that the current sanctions on Iran lead to positive results and do not contribute to resolving crises, and the resolution of crises must be through dialogue, he noted.

"Iran is a neighboring country with which we have good neighborly relations, and it has a position that we value in the State of Qatar, the government and the people, especially during the unjust blockade on Qatar," he said. "While the blockading countries chose unilateral measures, the State of Qatar chose dialogue, and this is our policy always. We look forward to good relations with everyone and everyone," Majid al-Qahtani added.

Earlier, Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi in reaction to the statement of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (PGCC) to extend the arms embargo on Iran, emphasizing that the council is at the peak of its inefficiency and the statement has been issued unilaterally.

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Iran Air to Resume Flights to Vienna as of Aug 15

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The Airlines of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Iran Air) announced on Wednesday that its flight to Vienna will resume from Tehran on August 15.

With the Covid-19 outbreak, Iran Air cancelled many flights including to Austria and vice versa for several months. Following removal of restrictions, Iran Air announced its flight schedule to Vienna on Aug 15, from Imam Khomeini International Airport.

Iran Air resumes flights to Europe after a temporary halt over coronavirus.

On July 16, Emirates Airline announced that it will resume flights to Tehran as of July 17.

U.S. Has No Right to Invoke "Snapback" Mechanism

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Wednesday that the US proposed resolution for extension of arms embargo on Iran will not receive vote as the United States has no right to invoke "Snapback" mechanism.

Its three European allies have already declared explicitly that the U.S. cannot invoke the "Snapback" mechanism, Zarif told reporters after the cabinet session in Tehran this morning.

"Snapback" is a terminology in the context of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2231 which endorsed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

The UNSCR 2231 made the context of the JCPOA into law. The United States withdrew from the JCPOA in 2018 violating the Security Council Resolution 2231 and the International Law.

Meanwhile criticizing the EU's dependency on the U.S., Zarif said that this is the United States Department of the Treasury that determines EU's trade partners, not Europe itself.

"The United States failed to destroy Resolution 2231 despite two years of imposing the most brutal "maximum pressure" ever imposed on a nation," he said.

"The United States now hopes to eventually destroy the resolution by misinterpreting the provisions of the same resolution it left in 2018," he added.

"The United States wants to use its mechanism to destroy the United Nations, this



global institution," he noted.

Iranian Foreign Minister said, "If the Security Council is forced to abrogate its resolution by a member's bullying, it will witness several generations of backwardness in the achievement of multilateralism."

"The U.S. government is trying to replace its domestic law with international law," he added.

Zarif said, "The US Department of the Treasury now decides, instead of European governments. It makes decisions for European companies to do business with which companies, whether in connection with the implementation of Resolution 2231 or the implementation of the Nord Stream gas pipeline."

"The international community and the Security Council face an important decision: Do we respect rule of law, or do we return to law of the jungle?" he added.

"While Iran has proven its resilience and decisive response to malicious bullying, I am confident that members of the Security Council are thwarting the despicable electoral effort of the desperate U.S. administration to undermine the diplomatic success of the 21st century," Zarif highlighted.

UNSC to Reject U.S. New Resolution On Iran Arms Embargo Again

TEHRAN (MNA) - Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Iran to the United Nations Majid Takht Ravanchi called the new US resolution on Iran's arms embargo a violation of Resolution 2231, saying that the UNSC will again reject this move.

In a Wednesday tweet, Takht Ravanchi wrote, "Rebuffed by UNSC members, US was forced to retreat from its draft resolution on Iran arms embargo, and proposed another version—also violating 2231—today."

"The new draft is similar—in its NATURE and GOAL—to the previous," he added.

"Confident that the Council will—again—reject this move," he stressed.

According to Resolution 2231, the UN arms embargo on Iran will end on October 18. The Trump administration submitted a draft resolution to the UN Security Council last week aimed at destroying the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which is an international agreement approved by the Security Council, so that it may be able to extend the arms embargo on Iran as well as impose some new sanctions.

China and Russia have clearly announced that they will veto such a resolution, however, Foreign Policy has reported that Washington may even fail to attract the required 9 votes to pass the resolution in the first place.

Rouhani Urges All-Out Efforts to Develop Vaccine For COVID-19

TEHRAN (IFP) - The Iranian president has urged researchers to press ahead with efforts to produce a vaccine and medication for the novel coronavirus.

President Hassan Rouhani said the virus outbreak has given rise to a special situation for the whole world.

"Efforts should move full steam ahead on two paths of developing a medicine and a vaccine to cure and prevent infection with the virus," he said.

He said local researchers working to develop a vaccine for the virus should be supported.

"We assure our dear people that scientists, researchers and young experts in the country at knowledge-based companies as well as companies in charge with high motivation are trying round the clock to produce a drug and vaccine for coronavirus, and the government will lend full and necessary support for these attempts," the president noted.

He reiterated that health protocols must be observed as long as a vaccine and medication are not produced.

"As long as an approved vaccine and medication for the virus are not available to us, all of us should fully and precisely abide by health directives," he said.

Iran's Banana Imports At \$113m From March to July

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - A total of 173,062 tons of bananas -worth \$113.68 million- were imported into Iran during the first four months of the current Iranian year (March 20-July 21). Spokesman of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration, Rouhollah Latifi, said the imports were from Ecuador, India, Philippines, Turkey, Russia, Vietnam and the UAE.

Zahra Jalili-Moqaddam, director general of Agriculture Ministry's Tropical and Subtropical Fruit Bureau, said an average of 450,000 tons of bananas is imported into Iran every year. Domestic production of the fruit stands at around 120,000 tons per year.

According to the official, the domestic production capacity of bananas as well as other tropical fruits is higher than the current levels. "The Agriculture Ministry is prepared to grant incentives, bank facilities and subsidies to help farmers produce these fruits," she said.

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

TEHRAN (IFP) - A senior Iranian official says the U.S. presence in the region is illegitimate and a source of insecurity and instability.

Mahmoud Vaezi, the chief of staff of the Iranian president, made the comments in reaction to a letter by the [Persian] Gulf Cooperation Council (PGCC) secretary general who had called for the extension of the weapons ban on Iran.

"The maintenance of security and interests of regional countries is contingent upon confidence-building and cooperation within the region," he wrote in a tweet, urging the PGCC not to follow the United States.

"The recent move by the PGCC will result in insecurity and the most harm will be done to them," he said.

Getting on board with the United States' hostile policies against Iran, PGCC Nayef Falah Mubarak Al-Hajraf has, in a letter to the UN Security Council, called for the extension of Resolution 2231 and of the arms embargo against Iran.

Armed Forces Ready to Protect People Against Any Threat

TEHRAN (MNA) - A high-ranking Army general expressed the armed forces' readiness to protect people against any threat, at any level.

"The Iranian Army, along with all the armed forces, is ready to protect people against any type of threat, including the coronavirus pandemic," Deputy Coordinator of the Islamic Republic of Iran's Army Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari said on Wednesday during a visit to an Army unit that produces medical and healthcare equipment in Tehran.

He said, "The army has exerted all-out efforts to serve the people and fight the coronavirus, and it has provided excellent health services to the people."

"Of course, these services continue and the armed forces



are trying to take the burden off the people," he stressed.

According to Rear Admiral Sayyari, the Army had established a base to specifically address the pandemic issue.

The Army is preparing itself for the battle against the new virus, as the disease is predicted to have another peak during autumn and winter.

"More than 12,000 Army personnel are now active in different healthcare sections, including hospitals and laboratories, to contain the pandemic," the General said.

He urged all Army forces and the Iranian people to remain sensitive and active in the field until the coronavirus is uprooted in the country. The coronavirus has so far infected over 331,000 and killed more than 18,800 in Iran.

Police Ready for Cooperation With ECO Counterparts

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Islamic Republic of Iran's Police is ready for any collaboration with police forces of ECO member-states in line with fighting transnational crimes, drug trafficking and development of police diplomacy.

Deputy Commander of Iran International Police Brigadier General Kazem Mojtabaei in a meeting with ECO Deputy Secretary General Jandos Asanov hailed good communications between Iranian police and ECO officials, saying that due to the current situation, conferences of border commanders and anti-narcotics officials of ECO member countries will be held in the format of video conference.

Expressing pleasure over the meeting, ECO official called for using capabilities of Iran's international police, and development of communication between the two sides in order to improve security mechanisms.



Iranian, Russian Diplomats Discuss Promotion of Media Cooperation



TEHRAN (IFP) - Spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran Seyed Abbas Mousavi and his Russian counterpart have weighed plans to promote cooperation between Tehran and Moscow at a meeting held via videoconferencing.

In the videoconference meeting on Tuesday evening, Mousavi and Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova discussed the ways to enhance cooperation between the two countries in the media sphere and countering the untrue atmosphere the Western states have created.

The two spokespersons dismissed the claims raised by the Western states that the media is impartial and independent, stressing that unfortunately the media in the West has currently turned into an instrument for psychological warfare and propagating false news against the independent countries.

Mousavi and Zakharova also highlighted the growing relations between Iran and Russia in all fields, describing the close ties between the two countries and their common stances on various issues, including the regional cooperation and the opposition to the cruel Western sanctions, as an opportunity for closer cooperation between the Foreign Ministry spokespersons of the two nations.

They also talked about other issues such as the exchange of media delegations, preparing the ground for interaction between the media communities of the two countries, facilitating the interviews that the two countries' media conduct with each other's officials, and the plans to keep holding bilateral consultations between the Foreign Ministry spokespersons of the two countries and with the Foreign Ministry spokespersons of the other friendly and like-minded nations.

U.S. Urged to Cancel All Sanctions on Iran

Tehran (IP) - Foreign Ministry Spokesman said that under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and the UN Security Council's resolution No. 2231, the U.S. must cancel all the sanctions it imposed on Iran, after its withdrawal from the 2015-nuclear deal.

Seyed Abbas Mousavi on Tuesday, refuting some news quoted by anonymous sources on the temporary cancellation of a part of the so-called non-purposeful sanctions, called them as fake news with no certain purposes. Stressing that the topic of the U.S. and Europe's dispute is likely to be the failure of the US policies, Mousavi said that what is concerned with Iran is that the U.S. unilateral sanctions on the country are cruel and illegal.

Regional States Should Strengthen Cooperation in Combating COVID19

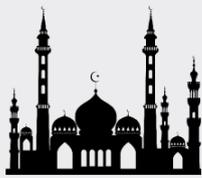
TEHRAN (MNA) - Minister of Health Saeed Namaki held talks with WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean Ahmed Al-Mandhari on the expansion of regional cooperation in the fight against coronavirus via videoconference.

The two sides discussed latest developments on the health issues, including the ways to fight against coronavirus.

During the meeting, Namaki stressed on the expansion of regional cooperation in the fight against COVID-19, expressing hope that this

cooperation would lead to the establishment of primary health care and the active participation of the countries and ensure universal access to essential health services.

According to the latest reports, 184 more Iranians have died from coronavirus (COVID-19) over the past 24 hours, bringing the total deaths to 18,800. Some 2,345 new cases of coronavirus were reported, increasing the total number of infections in Iran to 331,189.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:09
■ Evening (Maghreb)	20:15
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:50
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:23

84. So We listened to him: We removed the distress that was on him, and We restored his people to him, and doubled their number,- as a Grace from Ourselves, and a thing for commemoration, for all who serve Us.
85. And (remember) Isma'il, Idris, and Zul-kifl, all (men) of constancy and patience; Surah 21. The Prophets (84 - 85)

Iran Determined To Increase Its Non-Oil Exports to \$100b

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Head of Iran Trade Promotion Organization says non-oil export is the only way for cutting dependence on oil revenues and the country has potential to increase its non-oil exports to \$100b due to the needs of neighboring states.

Speaking in an interview Hamid Zadboum said that in the first quarter of the current year, Iran's non-oil exports slumped by 44 percent due to the sanctions and the outbreak of Coronavirus which led to the lockdown and closure of borders of other countries.

He said after the reopening of the borders, non-oil exports have grown but one cannot expect the growth as it was before the pandemic because it takes time.

Zadboum added that neighboring states have reopened their borders but still few borders are closed because of the virus. He emphasized that this slump in the exports is seen in most countries in the world and the amount of slump is very significant, admitting that those countries have no sanctions problems in their exports.

He said in the current condition non-oil export is very vital for Iran to replace its oil revenues which have been affected by sanctions. He said the total amount of non-oil exports last year stood at \$42b and this year despite the sluggish start in the first quarter of the current year, the country can repeat \$42b mark, admitting that all depends on the borders and restrictions.

Zadboum added that 15 neighboring countries import goods worth of \$1100 per annum and Iran can have major share of their markets and for this reason Iran can enhance its non-oil exports to \$100b annually. But he said to touch the \$100-billion mark;



infrastructures for exports should be improved. He said the current amount of exports to 15 neighboring countries is around \$24b but Iran can increase it significantly because those countries have good potentials for Iran's exports.

He also urged the exporters to improve quality of their products in order to stabilize their positions in the neighboring countries and in competition with their rivals.

Zadboum noted that Pakistan has good potential for Iranian goods to be exported there, adding that currently Iran's trade with Pakistan is around \$4b while it could be raised to some \$16b.

He said Pakistan is a bigger market comparing to Iraq and most goods needed by Pakistan are produced in Iran but Iraq's market is almost limited comparing to Pakistan and currently Iran accounts for has 25 percent of Iraq's market while its share of Pakistan market is very low. Zadboum noted that during the sanctions era, the role of neighboring states is very important for Iran's exports and earnings, and currently Iraq is the major destination for Iran's exports among the neighboring states.

He admitted that Iran's non-oil exports reached \$50b in 2011 and it has been a record but the country can get past that record and even reach \$100b mark.

He said devaluation of national currency is to the benefit of exporters and it encourages them for more exports.

Int'l Stock Market to Be Launched on Kish Island

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Secretary of Iranian Free Zones High Council Morteza Bank says by launching all necessary infrastructures, the international stock market will come on stream in two months on Kish Island.

Speaking on the launch of international stock market in the country, Mr. Bank said that a new ground for trade in the stock market under the banner of international stock market will be launched on Kish Island which will cooperate with all global mechanisms.

He reiterated that a separate system for trade is to be set up in the international stock market whose regulations and settlements and language will be based on the international regulations and standards.

Mr. Bank noted that all legal conditions in this stock market will be in compliance with international laws and regulations.

He added that all details for activities and investment in the international stock market have been handed over to the Supreme Council of Iran Stock Exchange and its primary license after determining domestic and foreign shareholders will be published.

Mr. Bank expressed hope necessary infrastructures of the international stock market would be launched in two months in order that trade in the market simultaneously kicks off. He reiterated that all foreigners or Iranians overseas can take advantage of this market by international currencies and they can buy shares related to different sectors of free zones.

Mr. Bank said this market will attract new capitals into the national stock market system and will boost it by foreign investments.



Iran-Russia Permanent Navigation Line to Be Launched

TEHRAN (ILNA) - A member of the Iran-Russia Joint Chamber of Commerce announced the operation of a permanent container-carrying ship line between the two countries in the Caspian Sea.



Jalil Jalalifar said on Tuesday that the departure of the first ship will occur in September 2020 between Russia's Lotus Astrakhan free trade zone and Iran's free trade zones of Anzali (in northern Iran) and Chabahar (in southeastern Iran).

Jalalifar referred to acceptance of the volume of cargo from one container, regular calendar voyages between the ports of Astrakhan and Anzali, as well as the northern ports of Iran, and fixed tariffs not dependent on the market or season, as the advantages of the new navigation line and said the first voyage is scheduled for September 2020.

He pointed to Iran's north-south corridor and said with the launch of the Iran-Russia permanent shipping line, a significant amount of goods from India, Pakistan, and the Persian Gulf states will be sent to Russia via the north-south corridor.

The U.S. is concerned about strong relations between Iran and Russia as well as a Chinese trade deal with Iran.

Iran' Sponge Iron Production at 11% Hike

TEHRAN (MNA) – According to Iranian Mines & Mining Industries Development & Renovation, during the first 4 months of the current year, the production of sponge iron and crude steel production increased by 11% and 8%, respectively.

According to a report by Iranian Mines & Mining Industries Development & Renovation, large companies' chain steel production including concentrate, pellets, sponge iron, and crude steel has increased in the first four months of the current Iranian year by one, 2, 11 and 8%, respectively, compared to the same period last year.

During this period, the production of concentrate and pellets has reached more than 16 million and 14.7 million tons, respectively, and the production of sponge iron and



crude steel has exceeded 10.5 million and 7.4 million tons.

Also, it is reported that for the first time, the production of aluminum in the first 4 months of the current year reached about 139 thousand tons.

The report suggests that the total aluminum production of Iranian companies has reached 138,781 tons, that this amount is more than

67% of the production performance of the same period last year.

During 4 months of this year compared to the same period last year, the production of the copper cathode has increased by one percent and the amount of Copper Anode production has increased by 3% during this period as well.

Russia, a Valuable Market for Iran

TEHRAN (IP) - Iran's former ambassador to Belarus said that Russia can be a valuable market for Iran and that most of the products that Iran is seeking in the West

can be supplied by Russia.

Abdollah Hosseini emphasized that since Russia has more than 20 million Muslims, 2 million in Moscow,

Iran, and Russia can improve their cooperation due to these commonalities.

Hosseini said that Russia is considered one of the top countries in the world regarding science and they have performed many scientific projects successfully.

He made the remarks on Tuesday in a meeting held at the International Association of Muslim University Professors, attended by some Iranian and Russian diplomats, to discuss strategic relations between Iran and Russia and expand the cooperation between the two countries.

He highlighted that the Caspian Sea is one of the most important issues between the two countries in both economic and security aspects.

"If we take a look at history, we can see that when the two countries were united, success has been achieved; What happened in Syria and OPEC are clear examples of the fact," the former ambassador added.

"Expanding tourism between Iran and Russia is also recommended," he concluded.

Senior Researcher at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian National Academy of Sciences, Elena Dunaeva for his part said that Russia tries to create peace and stability in the region and have peaceful relations with all countries there.

Dunaeva added that military cooperation is suggested between two countries, although both countries consider their own unity and national interests first.

Referring to the unstable condition of the oil and gas market, she noted that Iran and Russia can reach agreements to improve that market's condition and agree on the price and the amount of export.

"Two countries can reach a positive conclusion after trusting each other fully," she concluded.

FAO Supplies Iran With More Equipment to Fight Locust

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) delivers two more consignments of desert locust control equipment and materials to Iran to further enhance national technical capacity to prevent and decrease the damages caused by this migratory pest.

As part of an ongoing Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP) emergency project being funded by FAO and implemented in close cooperation with Iran's Plant Protection Organization (PPO) under the Ministry of Agriculture-Jahad, the Organization hands over 57 Ultra Low Volume (ULV) pesticides sprayers (including 50 handheld and seven knapsack sprayers) along with 10.4 metric tonnes of ULV Deltamethrin pesticides, worth over USD 100 thousand, to PPO.

"Procured through the FAO allocated fund, these pieces of equipment and materials, including current deliveries as well as 25 vehicle-mounted sprayers handed over previously, will boost the technical capacity of Iranian authorities to control and decrease the volume and extent of pest infestations in the country," said Mahnaz Shabani, the FAO Pest Management Specialist.

Emphasizing the criticality of desert locust early warning system, Shabani also asserts, "FAO will supply Iran with laptops and smartphones and a locally modified and simplified graphical version of a digital platform named eLocust3 for Android smartphones to enhance the dedicated national efforts to track, monitor and report on the desert locust invasion in the country."

"Providing high-level learning opportunities for three Iranian master trainers as



well as conducting training workshops for 320 plant protection and agriculture officers, drivers and plant protection organization provincial heads in five southern desert locust-stricken provinces of the country, are among the other important components of this USD 500,000 TCP project being implemented by the Organization in Iran," added the FAO Pest Management Specialist.

Entitled Urgent Action for Capacity Building to Control Desert Locust Infestation in the Islamic Republic of Iran, this TCP project will also facilitate the development of an integrated desert locust management strategy for the country and assist the national authorities in fielding the recommended guidelines to further improve monitoring and disaster risk reduction of pest infestations in Iran.

As per Mr Mahmoud Chalaki, Deputy Head of General and Public Pests of PPO, "over 406,000 ha of lands and rangelands have been chemically treated across the country during the last nine months. The presence and density of desert locust have been decreased in Iran as the pest migrated to summer-breeding areas in the border of Pakistan and India. However, there are still serious concerns that this pest on its way back towards the west of summer breeding areas in November infest the country again."

FAO, being the UN specialised agency dedicated to increasing food and nutrition security, is implementing similar projects in other desert locust-affected countries, all aimed to support its Member States in managing the threat posed by this pest.

New Zealand Puts Auckland Under Lockdown

AUCKLAND (Dispatches) - New Zealand announced on Tuesday it was shutting down its largest city, Auckland, after four new cases of COVID-19 were discovered in the city, the first evidence of domestic transmission after being coronavirus-free for 102 days.

New Zealand's successful fight against COVID-19 was hailed globally and the Pacific island nation of 5 million was seen as one of the safest places, as the pandemic raged globally.

Director General of Health Ashley Bloomfield said the four cases were within one family in South Auckland. One person is in their 50s. They had no history of international travel. Family members have been tested and contact tracing is under way.



Colombia's Duque Faces Probe Over 2018 Campaign Funding

BOGOTA (AFP) - Colombia's top electoral body said Tuesday it had launched an investigation into whether President Ivan Duque and his party violated campaign financing rules in the 2018 election that brought him to power.

In a statement, the National Electoral Council said the probe would determine if Duque and his Democratic Center party committed any "violation of electoral regulations on campaign financing," specifically related to a suspected \$300,000 donation from a Venezuelan magnate. The case is based on wiretaps conducted by the public prosecutor that unveiled conversations about the alleged donations from the businessman, Oswaldo Cisneros.



Lebanese Call for Downfall of President, Other Officials



BEIRUT (Reuters) - Angry and grieving protesters on Tuesday read aloud the names of at least 171 people killed in last week's explosion at Beirut port and called for the removal of Lebanon's president and other officials they blame for the tragedy.

Gathered near "ground zero", some carried pictures of the victims as a large screen replayed footage of the mushroom cloud that rose over the city on Aug. 4 after highly-explosive material stored for years detonated, injuring some 6,000 people and leaving hundreds of thousands homeless. "HE KNEW" was written across an image of President Michel Aoun on a poster at the protest venue. Underneath, it read: "A government goes, a government comes; we will continue until the president and the parliament speaker are removed."

Reuters reported that the president and prime minister were warned in July about the warehoused ammonium nitrate, according to documents and senior security sources. Aoun, who has pledged a swift and transparent investigation, tweeted on Tuesday: "My promise to all the pained Lebanese is that I will not rest until all the facts are known."

Residents of Beirut were still picking up the pieces as search operations continued for 30 to 40 people still missing and security forces fired tear gas at stone-throwing protesters in the fourth such day of unrest.

"Our house is destroyed and we are alone," said Khalil Haddad. "We are trying to fix it the best we can at the moment. Let's see, hopefully there will be aid and, the most important thing: hopefully the truth will be revealed."

Lebanese have not been placated by Monday's resignation of Prime Minister Hassan Diab's government and are demanding the wholesale removal of what they see as a corrupt ruling class they brand as responsible for the country's woes. "We will not forget until nooses are erected (for the leaders)," one man said at Tuesday's demonstration after he read out some of the victims' names shown on the screen. Diab, announcing his cabinet's resignation, blamed endemic graft for the explosion, which was the biggest in Beirut's history and compounded a deep financial crisis that has ravaged the currency, paralysed the banking system and sent prices soaring.

"I said before that corruption is rooted in every juncture of the state but I have discovered that corruption is greater than the state," Diab said, blaming the political elite for blocking reforms.

Talks with the International Monetary Fund have stalled due to lack of progress on reforms and a row between the government, banks and politicians over the scale of vast financial losses.

For many Lebanese, the explosion was the last straw in a protracted crisis over the collapse of the economy, corruption, waste, negligence and dysfunctional government. The blast left a crater more than 100 metres across on dock nine of the port, the French ambassador tweeted following a visit to the site by French forensic scientists supporting an investigation into the disaster.

The Beirut port mirrors the sectarian power system in which the same politicians have dominated the country since the 1975-90 civil war. Each faction has its quota of directors at the port, the nation's main trade artery.

"It's a good thing that the government resigned. But we need new blood or it won't work," said silversmith Avedis Anserlianin in front of his demolished shop.

Diab formed his government in January with the backing of the powerful Iranian-backed Hezbollah group and its allies, more than two months after Saad Hariri, who had enjoyed the support of the West and Gulf states, resigned as premier amid anti-government protests against graft and mismanagement.

Aoun is required to consult with parliamentary blocs on who should be the next prime minister, and is obliged to designate the candidate with the most support. The presidency has yet to say when official consultations will take place.

U.S. Watchdog Report Cites Civilian Casualties in Saudi Arms Deal

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The United States State Department's Office of the Inspector General (OIG) has found the administration of President Donald Trump skirted laws regulating US arms sales to avoid notifying Congress and to evade concerns about civilian casualties in the war in Yemen and about human rights in Saudi Arabia.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo issued an emergency certification in May 2019 to advance the sale of \$8.1bn in weapons to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates without obtaining normal approvals from Congress, said the OIG. The Inspector General report (PDF), while finding that Secretary Pompeo did not break US law, concluded that the State Department did not adhere to longstanding practice under the 1976 Arms Export Control Act.

The State Department "did not fully assess risks and implement mitigation measures to reduce civilian casualties and legal concerns", the report said. Further, the Inspector General found that the State Department "regularly approved arms transfers to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates that fell below" legal thresholds requiring notification to Congress.

These approvals included precision-guided-munition components that Congress had placed holds on but for which the law did not require notification "below those thresholds", according to the OIG report.

In addition, the State Department "withheld significant information in the classified annex necessary to understand OIG's finding and recommendation".

Pompeo's emergency certification had the effect of circumventing review by Congress of the sales. At the time, members of Congress were seeking to block the transfer of military equipment to Saudi Arabia and the UAE because of the civilian death toll from the US-backed air campaign in Yemen. Tens of thousands of Yemenis, many of them civilians, have been killed by the Saudi-UAE air strikes - often with American-made weapons, targeting information and aerial refuelling support.

The Saudi-UAE air raids hit farms, schools, water supplies, and energy sources, triggering what the United Nations has described as the world's worst humanitarian crisis.



Fresh Clashes in Belarus as Opposition Leader Flees Country

MINSK (Dispatches) - Belarusian opposition leader Svetlana Tikhonouskaya said on Tuesday she had fled abroad for the sake of her children after strongman leader Alexander Lukashenko's claim of victory in Sunday's presidential election prompted bloody street protests.

Tikhonouskaya, a 37-year-old former English teacher who took her husband's place on the ballot after he was jailed, fled to neighbouring Lithuania. She urged her compatriots not to oppose the police and to avoid putting their lives in danger.

But unrest erupted for a third night in a row on Tuesday as security forces fired rubber bullets and stun grenades to disperse thousands of protesters who took to the streets accusing Lukashenko, in power since 1994, of swindling the vote.

A Reuters witness saw security forces detaining dozens of people and beating protesters in the street. Another saw security forces smashing car windows and dragging some people out of vehicles to attack them. A third saw at least two news photographers being attacked and their cameras damaged.

Car horns blared in solidarity with the opposition, and people marched, clapped and shouted "go away". The European Union earlier accused Lukashenko's government of "disproportionate and unacceptable violence" and said it was reviewing its relations with Minsk.

Although Tikhonouskaya's husband Syarhei, an anti-government blogger, remains in jail in Belarus, she was reunited with her children in Lithuania. She had moved them earlier after receiving anonymous threats about their safety.

"You know, I thought that this whole campaign had really toughened me up and given me so much strength that I could handle anything," she said in an emotional video.

"But, probably, I'm still the weak woman I was in the first place. I have made a very difficult decision for myself," she said, adding that the political tumult in Belarus was not worth anyone losing their life for. "Children are the main thing in life," said Tikhonouskaya.

Turkish Drone Kills 2 Iraqi Officers In Kurdish Region

BAGHDAD (AFP) - Two high-ranking Iraqi officers were killed Tuesday in what the army said was a "blatant Turkish drone attack" in the autonomous Kurdish region, where Ankara has for weeks been raiding militant positions.

The strike killed two border guard battalion commanders and the driver of their vehicle, the army said in a statement.

It is the first time members of the regular Iraqi forces have been killed since Turkey launched a cross-border ground and air operation in mid-June against Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) rebels in the mountainous terrain of northern Iraq.

Iraq has already summoned the Turkish envoy in Baghdad twice in protest at Ankara's operations on its soil.

Ihsan Chalabi, the mayor of Sidakan in the north of Arbil province, told AFP that the drone had targeted "Iraqi border guard commanders while they were in meetings with PKK fighters".

Witnesses had reported clashes earlier in the day between PKK and Iraqi forces, and local sources said the drone strike targeted an emergency meeting called to try to calm the tensions.

At least five civilians have been killed since the start of the Turkish campaign in June.

Ankara has announced the death of two of its soldiers, and the PKK and its allies have reported the deaths of 10 fighters and supporters.

The PKK, which is blacklisted as a terrorist group by Ankara and its Western allies, has waged an insurgency against the Turkish state since 1984.

It has long used the rugged terrain of northern Iraq as a rear base to wage attacks on Turkey, which in turn had set up military positions inside Iraqi territory to fight them.

The Kurdish authorities, dominated by the Democratic Party of Kurdistan (KDP) see the PKK as rivals but have never been able to uproot them from their northern Iraqi bases.



Biden Chooses Kamala Harris For White House Running Mate

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden on Tuesday picked Senator Kamala Harris as his choice for vice president, making her the first Black woman on a major-party U.S. presidential ticket and giving him a partner well prepared to go on the attack against Republican President Donald Trump.

With social unrest over racial injustice rocking the country for months, Biden had been under increasing pressure to select a Black woman as his running mate. Harris is also the first Asian-American on a major presidential ticket. In Harris, a 55-year-old senator from California who made her own run for the White House, Biden gains an experienced politician already battle-tested by the rigors of the 2020 presidential campaign as they head into the final stretch of the Nov. 3 election.

Biden on Twitter called Harris "a fearless fighter for the little guy, and one of the country's finest public servants." Harris wrote on Twitter that Biden could "unify the American people because he's spent his life fighting for us."

Biden and Harris will appear together on Wednesday at an event in his hometown of Wilmington, Delaware, the campaign said.

Harris, who became only the second Black female U.S. senator in history when elected in 2016, will be relied on to help mobilize African Americans, the Democratic Party's most loyal constituency. Four years ago, the first dip in Black voter turnout in 20 years contributed to Democrat Hillary Clinton's upset loss to Trump.

Biden, whose founding campaign was rescued by Black voters in South Carolina's primary in February, needs their strong support against Trump. They will be crucial in battleground states such as Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, where Trump narrowly prevailed in 2016, as well as Republican-leaning southern states like Georgia and Florida that polls show have become competitive this year. Biden served as vice president for eight years under President Barack Obama, the first Black U.S. president.



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Egypt's Inflation Eases to Slowest Since November

CAIRO (Dispatches) - The annual rate remains below the lower bound of the central bank's target range for the end of the year, set at 9% plus or minus 3 percentage points.

Consumer prices in urban parts of Egypt grew at the slowest annual level since November as food costs fell, according to data from the state-run statistics agency, CAPMAS.

The annual rate decelerated to 4.2% from a year earlier in July, compared with June's 5.6%, defying some analyst expectations for a moderate acceleration. Food and beverage prices, which comprise the largest single component in the inflation basket, fell 1.5% in July.



IMF Calls on Lebanon to Restore Solvency of Public Finances

BEIRUT (Dispatches) - The International Monetary Fund has urged Lebanon to restore the solvency of the public finances and to audit the accounts of the Central Bank and other state institutions in order to unlock billions of dollars in assistance to the Lebanese people.

These remarks were made by Kristalina Georgieva, managing director of the IMF, at the end of the high-level "International Conference on Support to Beirut and the Lebanese People" after the Aug. 4 explosion.

President Michael Aoun Sunday participated in a virtual video conference with French President Emmanuel Macron, U.S. President Donald Trump and heads of European, Arab and Asian countries in a bid to raise urgent financial aid to help the Lebanese who were affected by the explosion at Beirut Port earlier this week. "Over the last months we have been engaged intensely with the Lebanese authorities, as well as with civil society and the international community, on a reform package aimed at addressing the deepening crisis, strengthening governance and accountability, and restoring confidence in the economy. Unfortunately these discussions have yet to yield results," Georgieva said.

She said that this is the moment for Lebanese policymakers to unite and address the severe economic and social crisis.

"It is also a moment for the international community to stand by the country and its people - with urgent humanitarian assistance, and support for reforms to pull Lebanon from the brink of economic collapse," the head of IMF said.

She underlined the need to restore the solvency of public finances and the soundness of the financial system.

"Current and future generations of Lebanese must not be saddled with more debts than they can ever repay. This is why the IMF requires debt sustainability as a condition for lending. And the financial system must be solvent - those who benefitted from past excessive returns need to share the burden of bank recapitalization, to protect the life savings of the vast majority of ordinary Lebanese depositors," Georgieva said.

She called on Lebanon to take more measures to avoid capital outflow from the country.

"To put in place temporary safeguards to avoid continued capital outflows that would further undermine the financial system while reforms are taking hold. This includes adopting legislation to formalize capital controls in the banking system and eliminate the current multiple exchange rate system to help protect Lebanon's international reserves while reducing rent-seeking and corruption."

She underlined the need to take steps to reduce the protracted losses in many state-owned enterprises.

"There must be more predictability, transparency and accountability - with comprehensive audits of key institutions, including the Central Bank."

Georgieva said that an expanded social safety net has to be in place to protect the most vulnerable people because the citizens must not be asked to bear the brunt of this crisis.

"Commitment to these reforms will unlock billions of dollars for the benefit of the Lebanese people. This is the moment for the country's policymakers to act decisively. We stand ready to help."

Singapore Warns of Slow Recovery

SINGAPORE (Reuters) - Singapore's record recession was deeper than first thought in the second quarter, data showed on Tuesday, signalling a lengthy path to recovery as the coronavirus pandemic dealt a major blow to Asia's trade-reliant economies.

The city-state has been hit hard by COVID-19 with the country under a lockdown for most of the second quarter to curb the spread of the virus.

"The painful truth is this - we are not returning to a pre-COVID world. Recovery will be some time yet," said trade minister Chan Chun Sing. The government said it now expects full-year GDP to contract between 5% and 7% versus its previous forecast for a 4% to 7% decline. The transport and tourism hub is facing the biggest downturn in its history, expected to wipe out years of previous economic expansion.

"The forecast for 2020 essentially means the growth generated over the past two to three years will be negated," said Chan, adding that the data was the economy's worst quarterly performance on record.

Gross domestic product (GDP) fell a record 13.2% year-on-year in the second quarter, revised government data showed, versus the 12.6% drop seen in advance estimates. The economy plunged 42.9% from the previous three months on an annualised and seasonally adjusted basis, also a record and larger than the 41.2% contraction in the government's initial estimates.

The slump marked the second consecutive quarter of GDP contraction for the global finance hub - having declined 0.3% year-on-year in the first quarter and 3.1% quarter-on-quarter - meeting the definition for a technical recession.

The data pointed "to a slower and sluggish economic recovery," said Chua Hak Bin, an economist at Maybank.

He said strict border controls, social distancing rules and foreign worker shortages will weigh on the pace of the recovery, even though lockdown measures have been relaxed.

The Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) had eased its monetary policy in March, while the government pumped in nearly S\$100 billion (\$72 billion) worth of stimulus to blunt the impact of the pandemic.

MAS chief economist Ed Robinson said on Tuesday that its monetary policy "stance remains appropriate including and forestalling a broadening or deepening of disinflationary pressures." He added that MAS' key currency gauge, called NEER, had remained near the middle of its policy band since April.



OECD Sees South Korea Growth to Outperform All Others This Year

SEOUL (Reuters) - South Korea will take the smallest hit to growth of any advanced economy this year after it was able to limit the spread of the coronavirus without imposing severe lockdowns, the OECD said on Tuesday. South Korea's gross domestic product will fall just 0.8% in 2020, a slight improvement from the 1.2% downturn in GDP forecast in June, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) said in a report on Asia's fourth biggest economy.

That is considerably milder than the OECD average of a 7.5% contraction for this year, and far outperforms the 7.3% and 6.0% shrinkage seen for major economies the United States and Japan, respectively.

"South Korea is seen as an example in the OECD, not only with its (virus) containment strategies but also with its focus on investing in future growth engines for the economy," said Ko Hyoung-kwon, South Korea's ambassador to the OECD.

Private consumption is expected to slowly pick up as the government eases its guidelines on social distancing, although a protracted global recession is set to drag down exports and investment, the OECD said in its report.

It recommended the Bank of Korea to consider further monetary policy easing if low inflation and sluggish activity persist, and also urged the bank to look at more unconventional policies given it has little space left for more rate cuts.

The BOK has slashed its policy interest rate by 75 basis points since March to 0.5% KROCRTE=ECI, working in tandem with a 277 trillion won (\$231 billion) stimulus package rolled out by the government to fight the economic fallout from the pandemic. South Korea emerged as an early success story in containing the virus among its 51 million people after a severe outbreak in Daegu in March, basing its approach on vigorous testing and tracing strategies.

It is still battling small but persistent clusters of infections, having reported 14,660 cases and 305 deaths.

Oil Companies Start to Take Back Crude From U.S. Emergency Reserve

LONDON (Reuters) - Energy companies have begun taking back millions of barrels of oil from the U.S. government's emergency stockpile after renting storage in the facility to help manage a glut of crude this spring after energy demand collapsed during COVID-19

lockdowns, a Department of Energy website showed on Monday.

Since Aug. 1, the companies have taken back 2.2 million barrels of oil of the 23 million barrels they agreed to store in the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, or SPR, from April through June. The companies have until March 31, 2021 to take back the oil after renting the space for a small fee.

Nine oil companies including Exxon, Chevron and Alon USA rented the space from the reserve, a series of underground salt caverns on the Texas and Louisiana coasts, an Energy Department official said in April.

An oil trader said that at least two companies, Exxon and Atlantic Trading & Marketing Inc (ATMI), a U.S. arm of French oil major Total SA, had taken back the 2.2 million barrels.

The taking back of the oil from the SPR might slow commercial inventory drawdowns as companies prioritize selling the barrels, market sources said.

Exxon had won the lion's share of the total space while ATMI had won about 600,000 barrels of storage space, another trade source said.

Exxon did not immediately comment and an ATMI spokeswoman declined to comment.

Oil prices collapsed in the spring due to the pandemic's crushing of fuel demand at the same time that major crude producers Saudi Arabia and Russia engaged in war over oil market share.

President Donald Trump tried to help domestic oil producers manage the oil price hit by ordering Energy Secretary Dan Brouillette to fill the SPR to the top, or purchase about 77 million barrels of oil. But Congress failed to fund that order, leaving the department with little choice but to rent space in the facility.

UK Job Losses Hit Decade-High

LONDON (Reuters) - The number of people in work in Britain has suffered the biggest drop since 2009 and signs are growing that the coronavirus will take a heavier toll on the labour market as the government winds down its huge job-protection scheme.

Led by a record plunge in the self-employed, 220,000 fewer people were working in the three months through June, official figures showed on Tuesday. Separate tax data for July showed that the number of staff on company payrolls had fallen by 730,000 since March, sounding the alarm about a potentially much bigger rise in joblessness. Mounting job losses are expected as Britain winds down its job-retention scheme, which has covered around one in three private-sector jobs. It is due to close at the end of October.

"A real concern is that this is just the first wave of bad news for the jobs market," said Gerwyn Davies, senior labour market adviser at the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development.

"The fact that reduced hiring rather than increased firing of permanent staff is the main cause of the jobs slowdown to date bodes ill for the coming months if more employers turn to redundancies as a last resort." Finance minister Rishi Sunak said the government's support programs were working but job losses were inevitable.

"I've always been clear that we can't protect every job, but ... we have a clear plan to protect, support and create jobs to ensure that nobody is left without hope," he said. A string of companies plan layoffs, ranging from British Airways and London's Evening Standard newspaper to retailers WH Smith and Selfridges. The unemployment rate unexpectedly held at 3.9%. But that reflected more people who had given up looking for work and therefore were not considered unemployed, and 300,000 people who said they were working but getting no pay, the Office for National Statistics said.

Economists polled by Reuters had expected the unemployment rate to rise to 4.2%. Last week, the Bank of England forecast the jobless rate would hit 7.5% at the end of this year.

BoE Deputy Governor Dave Ramsden told The Times the central bank still had "significant headroom" to ramp up its huge bond-buying stimulus program again if needed.

The ONS is expected to announce on Wednesday that Britain's economy has fallen into a recession with a 21% slump in the size of the economy in the second quarter.

Tuesday's figures showed the number of self-employed people fell by a record amount in the three months to June, led by older workers. The number of employees rose - something the ONS said was partly accounted for by workers reclassifying themselves as employed.

The number of people claiming universal credit - a benefit for those on low pay as well as the unemployed - rose to 2.689 million in July, leaping by 117% from March.

Pay fell by the most in more than 10 years in the April-June period, down 1.2%, reflecting how workers on the job retention scheme receive 80% of their salary. Excluding bonuses, pay fell for the first time since records began in 2001.

Japan's Current Account Surplus Shrinks to Five-Year Low



TOKYO (Reuters) - Japan posted its smallest current account surplus in more than five years in June, Ministry of Finance data showed on Tuesday, mainly due to a slump in exports, highlighting the heavy hit to external demand from the coronavirus pandemic.

The current account surplus was 167.5 billion yen (\$1.58 billion), the smallest monthly surplus since January 2015, a finance ministry official said.

That compared with a median forecast for a 110 billion yen surplus and a 1.177 trillion yen surplus in May. The current account balance has maintained a run of uninterrupted monthly surpluses for six years.

Exports plunged 25.7% in June from a year ago, hit hard by falling shipments of cars and car parts to the United States, the data showed. That was slightly smaller than a 28.9% annual decline in May.

Imports shed an annual 14.4%, following a 27.7% annual fall in May. As a result, the trade deficit in June widened to 157.7 billion yen.

A 99.9% drop in foreign tourists due to immigration restrictions imposed over the health crisis sent the travel account to a 157.7 billion yen deficit in June, the data showed. Weakening overseas demand has raised worries of a prolonged downturn for the world's third-largest economy, with some analysts seeing the impact from the COVID-19 crisis on corporate and household sentiment lasting into next year.

A Reuters poll showed analysts expect gross domestic product data, due to be released on Monday, to show the economy shrank an annualised 27.2% in the second quarter. Japan's economic activity has picked up in recent months after the government lifted a coronavirus-related state of emergency at the end of May. But the virus has made a worrying revival, especially in highly populated areas.

Iranian Documentary Wins At Greek Film Festival

TEHRAN (MNA) – Mahmoud Reza's documentary 'Kiarostami and His Missing Cane' has won an award at the 2020 edition of Ierapetra International Documentary Film Festival in Greece.

The feature documentary has won an award in "INTERNATIONAL & EUROPEAN FEATURE LENGTH DOCUMENTARIES AWARDS" section of the festival.

"Kiarostami and His Missing Cane" is a narrative of the Iranian distinguished film director's outlook on life and cinema, which describes the vision and worldview of this filmmaker.

Held from August 1 to 10, the Greek festival screened documentaries showing the traditions, culture, customs, popular culture, and modern industrial civilization of a country common to Europe.



Russia Becomes First Country to Approve a COVID-19 Vaccine

MOSCOW (Reuters) - President Vladimir Putin said on Tuesday that Russia had become the first country in the world to grant regulatory approval to a COVID-19 vaccine after less than two months of human testing, a move hailed by Moscow as evidence of its scientific prowess.

The vaccine still has to complete final trials, raising concerns among some experts at the speed of its approval, but the Russian business conglomerate Sistema has said it expects to put it into mass production by the end of the year.

Russian health workers treating COVID-19 patients will be offered the chance of volunteering to be vaccinated in the coming weeks, a source told Reuters last month.

Regulatory approval paves the way for the mass inoculation of the Russian population and authorities hope it will allow the economy, which has been battered by fallout from the virus, to return to full capacity.

Kirill Dmitriev, head of Russia's sovereign wealth fund, hailed the development as a historic "Sputnik moment", comparable to the Soviet Union's 1957 launch of Sputnik 1, the world's first satellite.

The vaccine will be marketed under the name 'Sputnik V' on foreign markets, he said.

Dmitriev said Russia had already received foreign requests for 1 billion doses. International agreements had been secured to produce 500 million doses annually, with the vaccine also expected to be produced in Brazil.

He said clinical trials were expected to start soon in the United Arab Emirates and the Philippines.

But only about 10% of clinical trial are successful, and the speed at which Russia has moved, approving a vaccine before the final stages of trials to test safety and efficacy are over, has worried some scientists, who fear Moscow may be putting national prestige before safety.

Speaking at a government meeting on state television, Putin dismissed those concerns, saying the vaccine, developed by Moscow's Gamaleya Institute, was safe and that it had even been administered to one of his daughters.

"I know that it works quite effectively, forms strong immunity, and I repeat, it has passed all the needed checks," said Putin.

He said he hoped mass production would start soon.

The vaccine's approval by the health ministry comes before the start of a larger trial involving thousands of participants, commonly known as a Phase III trial.

Such trials, which require a certain rate of participants catching the virus to observe the vaccine's effect, are normally considered essential precursors for a vaccine to receive regulatory approval.

The Moscow-based Association of Clinical Trials Organizations (ACTO), a trade body representing the world's top drugmakers in Russia this week urged the health ministry to postpone approval until that final trial had been successfully completed.

In a letter to the ministry, it said there were high risks associated with registering a drug before that happened.



"It is during this phase that the main evidence of a vaccine's efficacy is collected, as well as information on adverse reactions that could appear in certain groups of patients: people with weakened immunity, people with concomitant diseases and so forth," it said.

Some international experts have also questioned the speed at which Russia approved its vaccine.

"Normally you need a large number of people to be tested before you approve a vaccine," said Peter Kremsner from the University Hospital in Tuebingen, currently testing CureVac's COVID-19 vaccine in clinical trials.

"In that respect, I think it's reckless to do that (approve it) if lots of people haven't already been tested."

Duncan Matthews, a professor of intellectual property law at Queen Mary University of London, said news of a potential COVID-19 vaccine was to be welcomed, "but safety must be the priority".

"The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the European Medicines Agency (EMA) have fast-track approval procedures for emergency humanitarian use and we need to see evidence that Russia is adopting an equally prudent approach," Matthews said in an emailed comment.

More than 100 possible vaccines are being developed around the world to try to stop the COVID-19 pandemic. At least four are in final Phase III human trials, according to WHO data.

Iran Defense Power...

FROM PAGE 1

"The letter was not the result of an official meeting of Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (PGCC), and only the secretary wrote a letter to the UN Security Council requesting an extension of the arms embargo on Iran," he added.

"I want to advise some certain Persian Gulf littoral states that Iran's defense and weapons power is in the interest of the entire region. We use our weapons and facilities to defend our country and confront enemies and foreign aggression" Rouhani said.

"Iran's defense power is not a threat to your countries. Those who loot your property and sell you weapons to bomb your neighbors and destroy the Yemeni people are acting against you. We are on your side," he stressed.

Referring to the invasion of Iraq's former dictator Saddam to Kuwait, Rouhani said, "On the day Saddam invaded Kuwait, Iran was the first country in the region issued an official statement to condemn his act."

"We helped Kuwait and its people in practice, and we did not help Saddam in this regard," he added, saying, "In practice, we have shown that we support the neighboring countries and seek stability in the region."

"If we had given Saddam a green light, he could occupy Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the UAE the day after he occupied Kuwait," Iranian President highlighted.

He went on to say, "If Iran had not stood for the stability in the region, Saddam would have swallowed all your countries."

"As we used to be your brother and supporter, today we are your supporter too," he stressed.

President added, "U.S. policy was unsuccessful against Iran, and Iran will succeed in its programs in accordance with the law, regulations and national and regional interests."

Referring to the Beirut explosion and suffering of the Lebanese people, he said, "Now it is not the time to abuse the incident. Today we all should help the Lebanese people."

"Iran sent two planes carrying humanitarian aids to Lebanon on the first day. In recent days, Iran also sent two other planes to Beirut. We sent medicine, equipment and materials needed by the Lebanese people," he added.

"In a phone call with the Lebanese president, I promised to help them, saying Iran is even ready to help in the reconstruction of the port," Rouhani said, adding, "We call on other countries to help Lebanon in this situation."

Adidas Has Seen No Impact on Sales From Race Row



BERLIN (Reuters) - Adidas (ADSGn.DE) has seen no impact on its sales from employee complaints over racism at the German sportswear company that led to the departure of its human resources boss, Chief Executive Kasper Rorsted said on Tuesday.

Karen Parkin stepped down in June after a group of employees called for an investigation over her handling of racism at the company which she had described last year as "noise" only discussed in America.

Rorsted, speaking at Adidas's annual shareholder meeting which was held online, was asked by a shareholder if sales had been affected by the complaints.

"We haven't seen our customers shunning purchases," he said.

Adidas has said that it has not given enough credit in the past to the many prominent Black athletes and celebrities - like James Harden and Kanye West - as well as Black employees and consumers who have helped to make it successful.

Rorsted said on Tuesday that employees had told him there were not enough equal opportunities for all at the company: "That is not acceptable. So it's a priority for us to make Adidas an even more diverse and inclusive company."

Adidas has reopened four stores damaged during U.S. protests over the police killing of George Floyd and plans to reopen a fifth, Rorsted told the meeting.

He said the company was not dealing with any legal complaints connected with the race issue.

Adidas said last week it expected sales to recover and profitability to bounce back in the third quarter assuming there are no new major lockdowns as it benefits from more people exercising and dressing down as they work from home.

Leaders Urged to Enable World's Youth to Enjoy Lives of Safety, Dignity and Opportunity

TEHRAN (UNIC) - United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in his message on International Youth Day, 12 August 2020, called on leaders and adults everywhere to do everything possible to enable the world's youth to enjoy lives of safety, dignity and opportunity and contribute to the fullest of their great potential.

The full text of his message reads:

The theme of this year's International Youth Day - "Youth Engagement for Global Action" -- spotlights the ways in which the voices and activism of young people are making a difference and moving our world closer to the values and vision of the United Nations Charter.

This year's Youth Day occurs as the lives and aspirations of young people continue to be upended by the COVID-19 pandemic. Some have lost their lives, and many have seen family members and other loved ones perish.

The vulnerabilities of young refugees, displaced persons, young women and girls and others caught up in conflict or disaster have grown more acute.

A generation's very formation has been jeopardized, their steps towards adulthood, identity and self-sufficiency thrown off course.



Some have taken on care burdens or are suffering from increased risks of hunger, violence in the home or the prospect of never being able to resume their education.

But this generation is also resilient, resourceful and engaged. They are the young people who have risen up to demand climate action.

They are mobilizing for racial justice and gender equality and are the champions of a more sustainable world.

They are peacebuilders promoting social cohesion at a time of social distancing, advancing an end to violence globally and advocating harmony at a time of rising hatred.

Many are young women who have been on the frontlines in mobilizing for justice and climate action -- while also serving on the frontlines of the COVID-19 response.

Realizing the promise of this generation means investing far more in young people's inclusion, participation, organizations and initiatives.

I call on leaders and adults everywhere to do everything possible to enable the world's youth to enjoy lives of safety, dignity and opportunity and contribute to the fullest of their great potential.

Thank you.

India Plans to Step Up Economic Offensive Against China

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - Planning further escalation of its economic offensive against China, the Indian government is considering increasing customs duty on some 20 products including laptops, cameras, textiles and aluminium goods, and also place some steel items under import licensing, according to a Times of India report.

The report quoted sources saying that the issue is now before the finance ministry, which had earlier rejected the proposal from the commerce and industry ministry. The revenue department may soon notify some tariff hikes.

"It is not a China-specific duty action but an overall increase in customs duty, although the idea is to focus on products which are coming in large volumes from China," an official was quoted by Times of India as saying.

Amid the heightened tensions between India and China following the Galwan Valley faceoff in June this year where 20 Indian soldiers lost their lives, the Indian government banned 59 China-linked apps, which included some of the highly popular ones like TikTok, Helo and UC Browser. Further targeting Chinese trade and investments in India, the government barred Chinese companies from participating in highway projects including those through joint ventures and also not allow Chinese investors in micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs).

In April, the Indian government modified the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) policy which would require the government's approval for nations sharing a border with India to invest in the country.

The rising sentiment for boycotting Chinese products and relying more and more on Made in India products is something that will eventually lead to a decline in Chinese investment in the country and also send a clear message to the neighbouring country against its preferential treatment on cross-border trade.

Hong Kong Imports To Be Labelled Made In China

WASHINGTON (AFP) - Goods imported from Hong Kong must be marked "made in China" to be sold in the United States as part of Washington's punitive response to a sweeping clampdown on the city, U.S. customs authorities were set to announce Tuesday.

Last month President Donald Trump retaliated to Beijing's imposition of a tough new security law in Hong Kong by removing special trading privileges for the financial hub, which in 2018 sold goods worth \$6.3 billion to the United States.

Among the biggest categories of these imports were electrical machinery, precious metals and stones, and plastics. "With respect to imported goods produced in Hong Kong, such goods may no longer be marked to indicate 'Hong Kong' as their origin, but must be marked to indicate 'China,'" said a draft document from U.S. Customs and Border Protection due to be published Tuesday.

It comes at a time of rapidly deteriorating relations between China and the US -- although fears the world's two biggest economies could renew their damaging trade war were tempered by weekend talks to renew a January tariffs pact.

Until recently, Washington had treated imports from Hong Kong differently to goods from the rest of China, in recognition of the city's semi-autonomous status.

However after Beijing imposed the security law in June to quell last year's huge and often violent pro-democracy protests, Trump vowed that this would change.

The customs document said the move was in accordance with an executive order made by Trump last month, "due to the determination that Hong Kong is no longer sufficiently autonomous to justify differential treatment in relation to China".

A 45-day grace period would be granted to importers following the announcement to allow them time to ensure no goods were marked "made in Hong Kong", it added.

Trump's order, signed on July 14, also ends preferential treatment for Hong Kong passports, revokes licence exceptions for certain exports, suspends Washington's extradition agreement with the city and stops any joint police training.

The United States last week imposed sanctions on a group of Chinese and Hong Kong officials -- including city leader Carrie Lam -- in response to the crackdown.

China condemned the sanctions as "barbarous" and imposed retaliatory sanctions on some senior American politicians and leading human rights campaigners.

Presidents Cup Returning To Royal Montreal in 2024

LONDON (Reuters) - The Presidents Cup will return to Royal Montreal Golf Club in 2024, the PGA Tour said. Royal Montreal, the oldest golf club in North America, held the Canadian Open on 10 occasions, most recently in 2014, and was home of the 2007 Presidents Cup. The announcement means Royal Montreal will join Royal Melbourne Golf Club in Melbourne, Australia as the only courses outside the United States to host multiple Presidents Cups.

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Sturridge Sets Sights on Premier League Return

LONDON (Reuters) - Former Liverpool and Chelsea forward Daniel Sturridge says he has unfinished business in the Premier League and a return to England would be the best move for his stalling career. Sturridge, 30, has been without a club since March, when he terminated his contract with Turkey's Trabzonspor after being banned for four months by the English Football Association (FA) for breaching its betting rules. The England international said that while he would listen to offers from clubs in other leagues, a return to the Premier League would be in his best interest.

Kuzma's Trey Carries Lakers Past Nuggets



DENVER (Dispatches) - Kyle Kuzma's 3-pointer with 0.4 seconds left lifted the Los Angeles Lakers to a 124-121 victory over the Denver Nuggets near Orlando. LeBron James had 29 points and 12 assists for the Lakers, who snapped a three-game losing streak. Anthony Davis finished with 27 points, and Kuzma contributed 25. Reserve guard PJ Dozier had 18 points to lead the Nuggets, who had eight players reach double figures. Michael Porter Jr. had 15 points on 6-of-6 shooting, including 3-of-3 on 3-pointers. Jamal Murray had 14 points, Paul Millsap scored 13 and Nikola Jokic chipped in 12 for Denver. The Nuggets rested their starters for much of the fourth quarter, and the loss left them 1 1/2 games back of the Los Angeles Clippers for the No. 2 seed in the Western Conference with two games remaining. The two teams meet Wednesday.

Toronto Raptors 114 - Milwaukee Bucks 106

Chris Boucher had a career-best 25 points to go with 11 rebounds, and Toronto defeated Milwaukee for the first time this season as both teams played without key players. Matt Thomas added a career-best 22 points for the Raptors and Norman Powell had 21 points and eight rebounds. Pascal Siakam added 14 points for Toronto. Kyle Korver scored 19 points for Milwaukee, Khris Middleton had 17, and George Hill netted 14.

Phoenix Suns 128 - Oklahoma City Thunder 101

Devin Booker scored 35 points and Phoenix continued its surprising undefeated run through the NBA bubble, cruising past short-handed Oklahoma City. Booker, who sat out the fourth quarter, notched his 90th career 30-point game and tied Suns legend Walter Davis for most 30-point games in franchise history. Mikal Bridges and rookie Cameron Johnson added 18 points each for the Suns, who have won all six seeding games in the bubble and remain in the thick of the race for a postseason berth. Darius Bazley's 22 points and 10 rebounds led the Thunder. Oklahoma City, which lost a 15-point lead in the first half, has already clinched a playoff spot and is 3-3 in the bubble.

Halep Grinds Out Win on Return to Court in Prague

PRAGUE (AFP) - Simona Halep won her opening match of the WTA Prague Open on Tuesday, defeating Polona Hercog 6-1, 1-6, 7-6 (7/3) to relaunch a season disrupted for nearly six months by the coronavirus pandemic. Top seed Halep needed two and a half hours to overcome Slovenian world number 46 Hercog on clay in the Czech capital, blowing six match points in the decider before prevailing in a tie-break. The second-ranked Halep will meet Barbora Krejickova in the round of 16. The reigning Wimbledon and former French Open champion was appearing in her first match on tour since securing her 20th career title at the Dubai Championships in February. She pulled out of the first post-lockdown WTA tournament in Palermo last week over virus concerns, and is yet to make a final decision whether to play at the US Open later this month. The tournament in Prague is Halep's first trip abroad since February, having spent the lockdown in her native Romania.

Williams Made to Work For Win on WTA Return

LOS ANGELES (AFP) - A rusty Serena Williams made a winning return from her six-month coronavirus hiatus on Tuesday, defeating lowly ranked Bernarda Pera in three sets to advance to the second round of the WTA Top Seed Open tournament in Kentucky. Williams, who before Tuesday had not played a competitive game since a Fed Cup appearance in February, was forced to come from behind to defeat world number 60 Pera 4-6, 6-4, 6-1 in two hours and 15 minutes at the Top Seed Tennis Club in Lexington. "I haven't played in so long," Williams said afterwards. "It was good for me to play three sets and win a match in three sets." The 38-year-old former world number one looked to be flirting with an early exit in the second set, but recovered from 0-40 down at 4-4 before holding and eventually winning the set to level.

Sevilla, Shakhtar Reach Europa Semis

DUISBURG (Reuters) - Sevilla midfielder Lucas Ocampos headed a late goal to snatch a 1-0 win over Wolverhampton Wanderers as they reached the Europa League semi-finals on Tuesday after the English side paid the price for an early penalty miss. Raul Jimenez saw his hesitant spot kick easily saved by goalkeeper Bono in the 13th minute of the single-leg tie and Wolves failed to muster a shot on target after that as former Real Madrid and Spain coach Julen Lopetegui's side took control. Five-times winners Sevilla, who will face Manchester United in the last four in Cologne on Sunday, enjoyed 73% of possession and won 14 corners to none for Wolves in a one-sided game. Wolves, playing in their first European quarter-final for 48 years, appeared to feel the effects of a marathon season which saw them play 59 matches, including 17 in the Europa League starting at home to Crusaders on July 25 last year.

Spurs Sign Southampton's Hojbjerg



LONDON (Reuters) - Tottenham Hotspur have signed Denmark midfielder Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg from Southampton on a five-year deal with full back Kyle Walker-Peters moving in the opposite direction on a similar contract, the Premier League clubs announced on Tuesday. Financial details of the transfer were not disclosed but British media reported that Spurs have paid Southampton an initial fee of around 15 million pounds to sign the 25-year-old Hojbjerg who had a year left on his contract. Hojbjerg made 134 appearances for Southampton in all competitions after joining the south-coast club from Bundesliga side Bayern Munich in 2016. "What was very important for me is that I wanted to play in a club where I could see myself for many years," Hojbjerg said in a video posted on the Spurs Twitter account.

"Tottenham was just the one. I'm very proud... I think there's a fantastic future ahead for the club. And I wanted so much to be a part of that." The Denmark international had been stripped of the Saints captaincy in June when he made his intention to leave the club clear to manager Ralph Hasenhuetl by refusing a contract extension. Southampton confirmed that they had signed 23-year-old Walker-Peters, who spent the second half of last season on loan at the club. British media put the fee at 12 million pounds. "It was not easy for Kyle when he arrived here. He needed some time to adapt to our style of play, and then we had this period where we could not be together as a team," Hasenhuetl said in a statement. "But you could see from how he performed when we came back that he had worked a lot in this time, both on his physical condition and also on his understanding of our own game. It says a lot to me about this player that he was able to do this."

Alcantara Set to Leave Bayern



BERLIN (AFP) - Bayern Munich chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge said Tuesday he is "cautiously optimistic" of keeping David Alaba but is braced to lose Liverpool target Thiago Alcantara once the Champions League finishes in Lisbon. Having routed Chelsea 7-1 on aggregate in the last 16 following Saturday's 4-1 win in Munich in the return leg, Bayern face Barcelona in the quarter-finals on Friday in a clash of European heavyweights. With a year left on their contracts, both defender Alaba and central midfielder Alcantara are stalling over extensions. Alcantara, 29, who has been heavily linked to Liverpool, has long since signalled to the club that he wants to leave. So far, the Spaniard, who has won the Bundesliga title in each of his seven seasons in Munich, has rejected all of Bayern's efforts to keep him. "It is known that he wants to do something new. If a club comes to us and offers a fair sum, we will deal with it," Rummenigge said with an air of resignation at a media event in Munich on Tuesday. However, he is "cautiously optimistic" about keeping Alaba, because "we are working on a solution". Austrian star Alaba, 28, refused to talk about his future after Saturday's victory over Chelsea.

Kuznetsova Latest to Withdraw From U.S. Open

NEW YORK (Reuters) - Former U.S. Open champion Svetlana Kuznetsova has joined a growing list of players who have decided not to play in this year's tournament due to concerns over the COVID-19 pandemic. The Russian world number 32 announced her decision on Instagram where she also said she would skip the Western & Southern Open which is being held in New York this year instead of Cincinnati as a lead-up to the Aug. 31-Sept. 13 U.S. Open. "Due to an unfavourable situation caused by coronavirus, and therefore the inability to get together all my team, I made a difficult decision to refuse to participate in Cincinnati and the U.S. Open," said Kuznetsova. "I feel very sad, because I have been waiting for these tournaments so much, but the pandemic changes all plans. I hope the situation will be more positive by the next tournaments." The 35-year-old Kuznetsova beat compatriot Elena Dementieva in the 2004 U.S. Open final to win the first of her two career Grand Slam titles.

