

Press Service of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic Said on Saturday That Iran Has Rendered Second Batch Of Emergency Supplies to Kyrgyzstan on August 14

IRAN NEWS

Russian Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the International Organizations in Vienna Mikhail Ulyanov in a Message Ruled Out Concerns Over Expiry of Arms Embargo on Iran as Groundless

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IRGC Slams UAE-Israel Normalization

TEHRAN (MNA) – The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) has condemned a recent deal aimed at normalization of relations between the Israeli regime and the United Arab Emirates, saying it is a betrayal to the Islamic Ummah.

In a statement on Saturday, IRGC termed the new deal as a historical folly and a stab on the back of the Muslim World, stressing that a dangerous future awaits the supporter of this deal.

“The shameful agreement to normalize relations between the United Arab Emirates and the Zionist regime, which has been designed by the leadership of the terrorist and inhumane regime of the United States, is one of the biggest historical betrayals against the ideals of Jerusalem al-Quds, and a poisonous dagger on the Islamic Ummah, especially the resistance movement and the oppressed nation of Palestine.”

“This move will not fulfill the Zionists’ interests, but by nullifying the dream of a new Middle East, it will hold a dangerous future for the United States and its supporters,” it stressed.

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COVID-19 Kills 161 More Iranians

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Health Ministry spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari said on Saturday that some 161 more Iranians have died from coronavirus disease (COVID-19) over the past 24 hours bringing the total deaths to 19,492.

Some 2,245 new cases of infection with the COVID-19 were found over the past 24 hours, some 943 of whom were hospitalized, Sadat Lari said.

She added that with the 161 new victims, the country's total COVID-19 deaths mounted to 19,492.

Sadat Lari noted that a total of 341,070 Iranians have been confirmed infected with the COVID-19, some 295,630 of whom have recovered or discharged from the hospitals.

Some 3,911 other COVID-19 patients are in critical condition and being treated in intensive care units, the spokeswoman said.

Sadat Lari added that 2,836,252 Coronavirus tests have so far been carried out in Iran.

U.S. Gets Humiliating Response At UN Over Iran Arms Ban



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran has hailed the UN Security Council's rejection of unilateralism following the US failure to get the world body to extend a UN arms embargo on Iran.

Iran's Ambassador to the UN Majid Takht Ravanchi said all countries, especially members of the UN Security Council, are duty-bound to make every effort to uphold values, objectives and principles stipulated in the UN Charter. The Security Council on Friday gave a “No” vote to a U.S.-drafted anti-Iran resolution.

“Appeasement has never served the common interests of humanity; on the contrary, it has only emboldened bullies,” he said. “We are beholden to ourselves and the future generation, which will have to live with the consequences of our actions or inaction,” he said.

His comments came after the Security Council rejected the U.S. resolution to extend an arms embargo on Iran that is due to expire in October.

Only one member state voted in favor of the U.S. resolution, and all other members either rejected the resolution or abstained from voting.

Most international media claimed the U.S. has suffered a humiliating defeat at the United Nations as its proposal to extend a global arms embargo on Iran was resoundingly rejected by the member states with only one country supporting it.

In the Security Council vote on Friday, Washington got support only from the Dominican Republic for its resolution to indefinitely extend the embargo, leaving it far short of the minimum nine “yes” votes required for adoption.

Eleven members on the 15-member body, including France, Germany and the United Kingdom, abstained.

Russia and China strongly opposed extending the 13-year ban, which was due to expire on October 18 under a 2015 nuclear deal signed between Iran and six world powers.

The scale of the defeat on Friday underlined U.S. isolation on the world stage ahead of a major diplomatic confrontation that threatens to consume the Security Council and further sap its authority.

In his response to the vote, the US secretary of state, Mike Pompeo, lashed out at other member states.

“The Security Council’s failure to act decisively in defense of international peace and security is inexcusable,” he said in a statement issued even before the result of the vote had been declared.

Zhang Jun, China’s ambassador to the UN, said in a statement that the result “once again shows that unilateralism receives no support and bullying will fail”.

Washington could now follow through on a threat to trigger a return of all UN sanctions on Iran using a provision in the nuclear deal, known as snapback, even though U.S. President Donald Trump had unilaterally abandoned the accord in 2018. On Thursday, the US had circulated to council members a six-page memo outlining why Washington remains a participant in the nuclear accord and still has the right to use the snapback provision.

In a statement after the vote, U.S. Ambassador to the UN Kelly Craft said Washington has “every right to initiate” the snapback mechanism, and added: “In the coming days, the United States will follow through on that promise to stop at nothing to extend the arms embargo.”

Israel Shivering With Fear for Its Existence

BEIRUT (PressTV) - Israel suffers from the military and psychological defeat of the 33-day war of 2006, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah says, drawing attention to the occupying regime's fear for its existence.

The secretary general of Lebanon's resistance movement made the remarks during a televised speech broadcast by the Arabic-language al-Manar satellite television station in the Lebanese capital of Beirut on Friday, marking the 14th anniversary of the end of Israel's 33-day war on Lebanon.

He congratulated the Lebanese on the “divine victory” in the July War, which is also known as 2006 Lebanon War, paying tribute to those Lebanese who either lost their lives or sustained injuries during the imposed war. The war resulted in the demolition of thousands of homes and the deaths of over 1,000 Lebanese civilians.

Some 162 Israelis, including 119 soldiers, were also killed during the fighting. As Tel Aviv realized that it could not bomb the resistance movement into submission, it desperately accepted UN Resolution 1701 to end the aggression.

Nasrallah also thanked all who had a role in achieving the victory against the Israeli regime in the war. He also particularly hailed the Syrian people who hosted thousands of displaced Lebanese during the Israeli aggression.

The Hezbollah chief stressed that one of the strategic outcomes of The July War was foiling the new Middle East scheme which was the main goal of the war on the Arab country.

Nasrallah said that the so-called New Middle East scheme started with the occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq by the U.S.-led military coalition and it was meant to continue but was foiled in Lebanon.

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President Warns UAE Not To Let Israel Into Region

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - President Hassan Rouhani lashed out at the United Arab Emirates for the grave mistake of striking a deal with Israel on normalization of ties, warning the UAE about the consequences of allowing the Zionist regime to gain a foothold in the region.

Speaking at a Saturday session of the Coronavirus Fight National Headquarters, Rouhani denounced the decision made by the UAE to align itself with the “enemy of the Islamic world, enemy of the region, and murderer of the Palestinian nation.”

“The UAE has made a very big mistake, and we hope that they (Emirati officials) would reverse their approach and realize that this is the wrong path,” he added.

The Iranian president warned the UAE not to allow Israel to gain a foothold in the region, or it will be treated differently.

He expressed hope that Abu Dhabi would regret making such a grave mistake and taking the treacherous move, and would reverse its decision.

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Tehran Censures IAEA's Silence on Covert Saudi Nuclear Activities

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's permanent ambassador to the United Nations office in Geneva has censured the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) for keeping silent on the covert nuclear activities of Saudi Arabia and Israel's nuclear weapons, warning that such dual attitude would question the agency's claim of impartiality and professional credit.

“There is every reason to be concerned about the danger of nuclear weapons in West Asia. While the Israeli regime, the only possessor of nuclear weapons in our region, persists in its blatant defiance of international law by refusing to become committed to relevant international legal regimes and by further enriching its nuclear arsenal, Saudi Arabia's nuclear program is adding another complexity to the already volatile region,” Esmail Baghaei Hamaneh said in an address to the UN Conference on Disarmament on Friday.

He pointed to the Thursday speech to the conference by the Saudi ambassador to the UN, saying it would be better if he addresses this concern of the international community's instead of bothering to fabricate a thick smokescreen by blaming others for all the wrongdoings, mistakes and atrocities that Riyadh has knowingly been committing with the support and approval of the United States across the region.

Baghaei Hamaneh emphasized that Iran fully recognizes the right of Saudi Arabia, as a member of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.

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South Korea Imports No Iran Crude Oil for July

SEOUL (Dispatches) – South Korea imports no Iran crude oil for July and a year ago, preliminary data from Korea Customs Service showed.

The world's fifth-largest crude buyer imported a total 11.6 million tons of crude last month against 11.5 million tons imported a year ago, the data also showed.

Final data for South Korea's crude oil imports last month will be published by state-run Korea National Oil Corp (KNOC) later the month. The KNOC data is considered the industry standard for South Korea's oil imports.

Meanwhile yesterday some Iranian media outlets claimed that the trade between both counties has almost been zeroed and only few medical items are exported to Iran.



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Vaezi Describes UAE-Israel Agreement a Strategic Mistake

TEHRAN (IP) - Head of Presidential Staff has rejected the agreement to normalize political and diplomatic relations between the United Arab Emirates and the Zionist Regime of Israel as a strategic mistake.

Mahmoud Vaezi described the agreement as a treacherous, divisive, and strategic mistake against the Palestinian cause, the Arabs, and, most importantly, the Muslim world, and warned the UAE of the consequences.

He added that the repetition of the failed and scandalous experience of an agreement with Israel is a disgrace that history will not forget.

Judiciary Chief Calls For Establishing Int'l Islamic Tribunal

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – Judiciary Chief called for a human rights declaration among Islamic countries, saying: “If this declaration is final, it must have an executive guarantee, and human rights violators must be brought to justice.”

Hojjatolislam Seyed Ebrahim Raisi said at the ceremony to commemorate the Islamic Human Rights and Human Dignity Day, “Today, those who have made the lives of many people difficult by economic terrorism must be brought to justice, and this can only happen in a competent international court.”

“One should not think that one cannot bring global arrogance to justice,” Raisi said. “We were able to dominate the West Asian region, and today the power of the Islamic system in the region has made the enemy nervous, and today the power of the United States is weaker than ever.”



“The whole world is witnessing racial discrimination in the United States,” he said. “Discrimination is at the heart of the American system, the discrimination and injustice is not an accident but a system, and the will of the people in America, Europe, and the world is to fight injustice,” Judiciary Chief underscored.

Raisi also referred to the UAE’s move to normalize relations with Israel and noted: “Something happened in the UAE and they established relations with assassins and child killers; It shows the nature of the Arab reactionism. We do not consider the relationship between the people of the Emirates and Israel, this is the relation between the ignorant rulers of the country and Israel.”

The head of the judiciary said, “With the crimes committed by the UAE government in Yemen and the agreement with the Zionist regime, its nature becomes clear to everyone.”

Zarif Decries Israel-UAE Deal to Normalize Ties



TEHRAN (IFP) - Iran has denounced an agreement by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the Israeli regime to normalize relations between the two sides.

In a Friday phone call with Ismail Haniyeh, the head of the political bureau of the Palestinian resistance movement Hamas, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif condemned the deal and reiterated Tehran’s perennial support for the cause of Palestine.

Haniyeh, in turn, expressed his gratitude to Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei as well as the Iranian nation and government for backing the cause of Palestine.

He said “we as Palestine” will move forward with resistance and fighting occupation and will not be swayed by such acts of betrayal. However, he said, Palestinians feel the pain caused by this “backstabbing.”

Earlier in the day, Zarif condemned the “regrettable” deal in a meeting with Ziyad al-Nakhalah, the secretary general of the Islamic Jihad Movement, in Beirut.

“We are confident that this move, which is an act of betrayal, will have no bearing on the resistance of Palestinian people and the movement of the resistance front, and is sure to fuel regional nations and Palestinian people’s hatred of such policies against the cause of Palestine,” he said.

Al-Nakhalah, in turn, appreciated Iran’s constant support for the cause of Palestine, saying the vicious UAE-Israel deal will not affect Palestinian people’s resistance.

Israel and the UAE reached a deal on Thursday that will lead to full normalization of diplomatic relations between the two sides.

U.S. Urged to Learn From Failures

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi wrote in a tweet on Saturday that the U.S. regime should learn a lesson from its failures or it will be more isolated.

“The int’l community, once again & w/ a clear voice, rejected the U.S. reckless & futile attempt to undermine the UNSC credibility,” wrote Mousavi.

Mousavi added that the American regime should learn a lesson from its total failures and “stop shaming itself at UN”, or the country “will get isolated, even more than now.”

The U.S. draft resolution against Iran was rejected by the United Nations Security Council on Friday with two positive, two negatives, and 11 abstentions.

The U.S. and Dominican Republic voted for the draft, China and Russia voted against it, and the remaining permanent and non-permanent members of the international body abstained from voting.

Fight Against Zionist Regime to Continue With Uttermost Zeal

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Majlis Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf in a message reacted to official establishment of political relations between the Zionist regime and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), warning that fighting the Zionist regime will continue with uttermost power and zeal.

The humiliating compromise of the UAE rulers with the criminal Zionist regime is considered as a betrayal

of human values, the Islamic Ummah and the Palestinian cause, Qalibaf wrote in his Twitter account.

We warn these traitors and those who intend to join this project that fighting the Zionist regime will continue with power, he added.

Critics see the deal as the latest attempt by Trump to save his presidential campaign against the Democrat Joe Biden.

Iran to Export Remdesivir

TEHRAN (IP) - Iran’s head of Food and Drug Administration Mohamad-Reza Shanesaz said that Remdesivir will be exported after the country’s needs have been met.

In response to a question on the effectiveness of Remdesivir medicine and its exporting process, he stated although several treatment methods have been tried to cure the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), none have yet been shown to be efficacious.

Remdesivir is one of the medicines which have been used to treat the virus but its effect is not high, Mohamad-Reza Shanesaz pointed out.

Iran’s head of Food and Drug Administration added four pharmaceutical companies have applied for Remdesivir production and two of these have started to produce the medicine.

He noted this medicine will be actively entered the market this week.

Yet its raw materials are not produced in the country but soon will be, he said.

Speaking at the press conference, he said that no definitive medicine has yet been introduced in the world to cure the virus.

All seemed to be effective medicines to treat the disease that has been dispensed in the country such as an anti-inflammatory or anti-viral and the raw materials of many of these medicines are produced in the country or knowledge-based companies have announced their readiness to produce their raw materials, he highlighted.

As for Remdesivir, he stressed that as soon as this drug entered the official list of the country and its import was allowed, it has been distributed to universities and heads of universities and hospitals.

He added that patients should get this medicine only from hospitals, pharmacies, and medical universities.

Iran Reveals Value of Trade Turnover With Thailand

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran exported products worth \$622 million to Thailand in the last Iranian year (March 21, 2019 - March 20, 2020), Director General for Asia and Pacific Office of Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPO) Reza Aghazadeh said.

Aghazadeh noted that Iran imported products worth \$210 million from Thailand in the last Iranian year.

The director general added that the issue of increasing Iran’s exports to Thailand is on the agenda.

He also informed about a meeting held to discuss prospects for deepening cooperation between the two countries.

Representatives of Institute of Standards and Industrial Research of Iran, Organization for Investment Economic and Technical Assistance Of Iran, the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization, Iran Small Industries and Industrial Parks Organization, the Central Bank of Iran, Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicraft of Iran, Iranian Fisheries Organization, the Government Trading Corporation of Iran, Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration, the Iranian Foreign Ministry and other agencies attended the meeting.

“It was decided to hold a meeting of the joint trade committee of Iran and Thailand soon,” he added.

Last Iranian year, Iran exported 133 million tons of non-oil products worth \$41.3 billion and imported 35.3 million tons of products worth \$43.7 billion.

Tehran, Tbilisi Stress Expansion of Bilateral Ties

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iranian Ambassador to Tbilisi Javad Ghavam Shahidi held separate talks with Georgian Minister of Internal Affairs and Defence Minister on the expansion of bilateral cooperation.

During the meeting, the two sides discussed the development of bilateral cooperation between Iran and Georgia.

Ghavam Shahidi stressed the need for security and law enforcement cooperation between the two countries.

Referring to the negotiations held to sign a memorandum of understanding on cooperation in the fight against drugs, he called for speeding up the process of finalizing the cooperation document.

Praising Georgia’s successful efforts in combating the spread of the coronavirus, he expressed hope that cooperation between the two countries in various fields would further develop after the pandemic.

Georgian Minister of Internal Affairs Vakhtang Gomelauri, for his part, appreciated the support of the Islamic Republic of Iran for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Georgia, calling Iran a powerful country with deep-rooted history and culture.

He stressed the development of bilateral relations between two countries.

\$6.3b of Non-Oil Products Exported in Q1

TEHRAN (MNA) – According to the announcement made by the Iranian ministry of industry, the country could manage to export \$6.3 billion of non-oil products in the first 3 months of the present Iranian calendar year (March 21-June 21, 2020).

According to the same announcement, the ministry plans to export \$41 billion of non-oil products by the current year end.

The ministry plans encourage and support exports of steel, copper and aluminum in the current year and expects exports of minerals to constitute for one-fourth of the total non-oil exports of the country in the said time, it added.

The Iranian body is also aimed at increasing extraction of minerals in the present year by 30 percent compared to the year before. Last year, 410 million tons of minerals were extracted in Iran, it said.

Industry ministry also plans to add 1,000 inactive mine to domestic mining cycle which presently includes 1,400 active mines, the same announcement confirmed.

According to earlier reports, holding nearly 68 different types of minerals, Iran is ranked among the world’s top 10 mineral-rich countries, however, the country’s mining sector is still underdeveloped and small mines which can be considered the major drivers of the industry are lagging behind a few big companies which enjoy the government’s full support.

TEDPIX Falls 72,000 Points on Saturday Border Crossing Between Iran, Afghanistan Reopened

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN (MNA) - TEDPIX, the main index of Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), which is Iran’s major stock exchange, lost 72,447 points on Saturday, which is the first day of the Iranian calendar week.

As reported by Tasnim news agency, the index closed at 1.902 million points at the end of the Saturday trades.

TEDPIX has fallen two percent in the past Iranian calendar week.

The index, which had hit the record high of two million points on August 2, closed at 1.975 million points in the previous week.

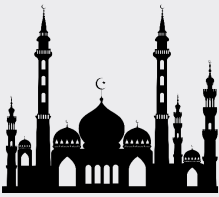
As reported, the indices of Iran Khodro Investment Development Company, National Iranian Copper Industry Company, Ghadir Investment Company, Bank Saderat, Mobarakeh Steel Company, and Bandar Abbas Oil Refining Company were the major contributors to the index’s rise in the past week.

TEDPIX, which had been experiencing an unprecedented trend of rising over the recent months, experienced several days of drop in the past week, and it has started the present week with a sharp decline as well.

TEHRAN - The Milak border crossing between Iran and Afghanistan in Iran’s southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchestan was reopened following the signing of a border agreement between the two neighbors, the spokesman of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) said.

The mentioned border crossing was closed and reopened several times in the past few weeks due to a strike by Afghan truckers and their blockade of the return route of Iranian trucks and the Iranian retaliation. According to Ruhollah Latifi, the signing ceremony was attended by officials from both sides including the Acting Deputy Governor of Sistan-Baluchestan Province for Economic Affairs Madana Zanganeh, and the head of Milak Customs.

Milak border terminal was first reopened earlier this month after a week of closure and over 70 Iranian truckers returned to the country, however, Afghan truck drivers once again closed the crossing in Afghanistan’s Nimruz Province and Iran’s Sistan-Baluchestan Province, only a couple of days after it was reopened. Milak is a village in Jahanabad Rural District, in the central district of Hirmand County, Sistan-Baluchestan Province.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)

■ Evening (Maghreb)

■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)

■ Tomorrow's Sunrise

13:08

20:11

04:54

06:25

88. So We listened to him: and delivered him from distress:
and thus do We deliver those who have faith.
89. And (remember) Zakariya, when he cried to his Lord: "O my Lord! leave me not without
offspring, though thou art the best of inheritors."
Surah 21. The Prophets (88 - 89)

FATF Restrictions Have Lowered Rice Imports

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Secretary of Iran Rice Association Jamil Alizadeh Shayeq says despite prediction on the rise in domestic rice production, restrictions which have been imposed by India and Pakistan have affected rice imports and it had played influential role in the hike in price of rice in Iran.

Speaking to ILNA, Alizadeh Shayeq said pointed to the rise in rainfalls in the past three years, the country has witnessed good precipitation in last winter and this year's spring and it was predicted that rice production would rise this year.

He noted that last year some 2.4m tons of rice was produced in the country and this year its amount will increase.

Asked why the prices soar despite the rise in domestic production, he said despite the rise in production, the production cost has also increased, and because of restrictions imposed by some countries for exports to Iran, one cannot expect the decrease in the rice price.

Alizadeh Shayeq added that Iran mainly imports rice from India and Pakistan and these two countries due to the U.S. sanctions as well as Iran's problem with joining the FATF have restricted their rice exports to Iran.

On the probable price of the domestic rice in the upcoming days, he said the country is currently in the early days of harvest season and supply of rice has not reached its peak but one can buy good rice in the northern provinces for some 25,000 toman per kilo. He further said t in fact, the prices in the consumer provinces like Tehran will increase because of transportation and packing costs.

Alizadeh Shayeq further said the reason behind current skyrocketing price of rice is lack of supervision by the supervisory bodies. Since the time Iran has left the FATF and the sanctions have been intensified, rice exporting countries to Iran, mainly India and Pakistan, have imposed some restrictions and it has three-folded the price of rice in Iran since the beginning of the current year, he added.

In April, the Agriculture Ministry temporarily lifted restrictions on rice cultivation in the country after it had announced plans to gradually limit and ultimately ban the production of this staple crop in all provinces, except the provinces of Gilan and Mazandaran, amid fears of drought.

At that time Mr. Alizadeh Shayeq said, "All provinces that enjoy bountiful water resources due to the recent high levels of precipitation and those with favorable weather conditions and enough raw material [seeds, fertilizer, etc.] can engage in rice cultivation this year. These provinces have also been allowed to dedicate more land to this cultivation."

The official believes that the imposition of restrictions on rice cultivation was "irrational" from the outset.

Iran, Iraq to Increase Trade to \$20b

TEHRAN (ILNA)- The trade exchanges between Iran and Iraq will increase from \$12 billion to \$20 billion," an Iranian official told ILNA.

The head of the Iran-Iraq Chamber of Commerce, Yahya Al-Eshaq, in an interview with ILNA said that Last year, Iran exported \$ 12 billion to Iraq, which will reach \$ 20 billion in four years.


He pointed to the ground paved for the rise of economic activities between two countries and added "Exports to Iraq include steel, foodstuffs, building materials, sanitation, almost all industrial products, home appliances, and technical and engineering services in addition to electricity and gas."

Answering to question about how currency earnings back to Iran, he said "Negotiations have been held between the central banks of the two countries and agreements have been reached, all export money will be returned and there is no need to worry about this."

The Iranian Minister of Industry and Trade said that the volume of Iran's trade with Iraq is now more than \$ 10 billion, stressing the need to increase this figure to \$20 billion over the next two years.

According to reports, this volume of trade is not equally divided between the two countries, and while Iran has exported 7.322 billion dollars worth of goods to Iraq, in the first nine months of this year, the share of Iraqi exports to Iran during this period was only \$36 million.

South Pars Refinery Gas Output up 2%



TEHRAN (MNA) - The supervisor of the second refinery of Iran's giant South Pars gas field has said the refinery's gas production has increased by two percent in the first four months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-July 21) due to the rise in its received feedstock.

According to Hossein Baghban, the increase in the supply of feedstock to the refinery in the mentioned four months has come from the rise in the production capacity of the field's phases 6, 7, and 8 which send their gas to the mentioned refinery for processing, ISNA reported.

Reducing the downtime of process units and improving process conditions are also on the agenda to realize the goals of further increasing the refinery's output in the current Iranian calendar year (ends in March 2021).

He said that timely overhaul operations and the realization of all overhaul programs based on schedule are also among the important activities planned for the current year to sustain production in phases 2 and 3.

South Pars Gas Complex is comprised of 14 gas refineries in Southern Iran that are currently processing the gas extracted from the country's giant South Pars gas field which Iran shares with Qatar in the Persian Gulf.

The mentioned gas field covers an area of 9,700 square kilometers, 3,700 square kilometers of which, called South Pars, are in Iran's territorial waters. The remaining 6,000 square kilometers, called North Dome, are situated in Qatar's territorial waters.

Steel Ingot Production Up 9%

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN- Production of steel ingot in Iran increased nine percent during the first four months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-July 21) compared to the same period of time in the past year, IRIB reported.

As reported, over 9.483 million tons of steel ingot was produced during the mentioned four-month period of this year, rising from 8.683 million tons of the product produced in the first four months of the previous year.

As previously reported, production of steel ingot in Iran increased eight percent during the first quarter of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-June 20) compared to the same period of time in the past year.

Over 5.702 million tons of steel ingot was produced during the first quarter of this year.

Production of steel ingot in Iran is expected to surpass 30 million tons in the current Iranian calendar year (ends on March 20, 2021), Deputy Industry, Mining, and Trade Minister Darioush Esmaili has announced.

Saying that Iran is currently the world's 10th biggest steel producer, the official underscored that the country is planning to rise to 8th place by the Iranian calendar year 1404 (starts in March 2025).

He said the Industry Ministry has it on the agenda to increase the country's steel ingot production to 55 million tons by 2025, for which 160 million tons of iron ore is required annually.

"Given the country's 2.8-billion-ton iron ore reserves, we need new explorations in this field, because when the annual steel ingot production capacity reaches 55 million tons, the current production levels of iron ore can only supply the industry for 12 to 13 years," the official stated.

He further noted that over 90 million tons of iron ore were produced in the country during the previous Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19) of which only seven percent was exported.

Development in Persian Gulf Refinery to Continue

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Manager of projects in Persian Gulf Star Oil Company says the company has developmental projects at the super refinery of Persian Gulf Star and it will complete them in the shortest time with the minimum cost.

Mr. Omid Sanei in an interview delved into details of the projects in the works at Persian Gulf Star Oil Company, adding that the projects will be carried out with reliance on the domestic capabilities and they will be completed in the shortest time with the least cost.

He said implementing the project for boosting capacities of trivalent phases of Persian Gulf Star Refinery in accordance with the Supreme Leader's slogan of surge in production is in line with materialization of the slogan.

He added that this spring the company put on agenda the issue of constructing two reservoirs with the capacity of one million barrels in order to boost the capabilities of the country in combatting the economic sanctions and

showing the power of the Islamic Republic in the region.

Sanei added that increasing the capacity of the processing units of the refinery was the other important measure of the company in the first quarter of the year which will lead to the rise in the feed capacity of the refinery. He said currently the first phase of increasing the capacity to 450,000 barrels per day has been completed successfully which is a successful sign of resistance economy.

He further said the project for increasing the capacity of pipeline for transfer of feed and compressor station, dubbed Call Station, is underway which will increase the capacity of gas condensates transfer to the refinery up to 850,000 barrels per day, adding that the project kicked off early this spring.

Sanei concluded that northern gas station is the other project under construction which is aimed at decreasing the pressure and improve gas supply to the refinery and all projects are carried out by the domestic experts.

Agro Exports Grow by 14%

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iran's export of agricultural products registered a 16 percent hike in the first four months of the current year (from March 21 to July 22) as compared to the same period of last year.

In this period, export of agricultural products of the country showed a 16 and 25 percent growth in terms of value and weight respectively.

According to the statistics of Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPOI), export of foodstuffs also recorded a 11 percent growth in terms of weight as compared to the last year's corresponding period. The production capacities of agricultural sector and development of agricultural processing industries are promising which show diversified capabilities of this sector for yielding more foreign currency, TPOI added.

With the efforts of all those who are active in economic sector [including producers and exporters in this field] and also with the help of executive organizations to provide and equip export infrastructures in customs especially border areas of our country, it is hoped that quantitative predefined objectives would be achieved.

IPWWC Shines at 2nd Niroo and Media Festival

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – Isfahan Province Water and Wastewater Company (IPWWC) shone in the 2nd Niroo (power) and Media Festival and ranked second in the motion graphics category.

According to the public relations of the company, the festival was held with the focal slogan of "Adaptation with Climate Change" and it was aimed at developing the engagement of the media and energy ministry in line with correcting the consumption pattern.

Seyed Akbar Bani Taba hailed cooperation of the media persons with IPWWC in culturalizing the consumption management, adding that major part of public trust to the company is the result of authentic and timely dissemination of information and it shows that the media has acted properly regarding its social responsibilities towards the issue of water.

He expressed hope the festival would continue in the future, adding that out of 557 entries in the festival, 40 top entries ranked first to third in two stages and IPWWC finished second in the motion graphics category.

The first edition of the festival was held in March 2019.

Prominent Thai Democracy Activist Arrested

BANGKOK (AFP) - Thai police on Friday arrested a prominent democracy activist following his participation in protests calling for government reforms, a new constitution and an overhaul of a law shielding the powerful monarchy.

Thailand has seen near-daily demonstrations in recent weeks by student-led groups angry at the government of former military chief Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha.

The arrest of Parit Chiwarak, broadcast live on Facebook by a friend, saw police read out several charges against him before he was bundled into a waiting car, shouting: "Long live democracy!"



Germany Declares Most of Spain a Virus Risk Region

BERLIN (Reuters) - Germany declared nearly all of Spain, including the tourist island of Mallorca, a coronavirus risk region following a spike in cases there.

The move deals a blow to hopes for a swift revival of mass tourism after months of lockdown all but wiped out this year's high season in Europe.

The Bild daily had reported earlier that Mallorca had been added to the list of high-risk regions published by the Robert Koch Institute (RKI), Germany's public health agency.

The latest version of the RKI's list on its website said the whole of mainland Spain and the Balearic islands were risk regions.



Palestinians Unanimously Reject UAE-Israel Deal



GAZA CITY (Dispatches) - Palestinians reacted with shock and dismay after U.S. President Donald Trump unveiled an agreement between the United Arab Emirates and Israel to normalize ties.

The deal pledges full normalization of relationships between the two countries in the areas of security, tourism, technology and trade in return for suspending Israel's annexation plans in the West Bank.

Both the Palestinian leadership and public were caught by surprise when the announcement came on Thursday. "We absolutely had no prior knowledge of this agreement," Ahmed Majdalani, the Palestinian Authority's (PA) minister of social affairs, told Al Jazeera. "The timing and speed of reaching this agreement were surprising, especially that it came at a critical moment in the Palestinian struggle."

Former PA minister Munib al-Masri noted Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, who ruled Abu Dhabi for more than 30 years before his death in 2004, had always been a strong supporter of the Palestinians.

"The late Sheikh Zayed was a dear brother to me, I knew how much he was proud of his support for Palestine..."

I never imagined that in my lifetime I would see the day in which the UAE would simply sell the Palestinians out for the sake of normalisation," al-Masri said. "It's very shameful. I can't believe it until now."

Other Palestinian officials said though the news came abruptly, it was not much of a surprise.

"We were not surprised that much because the Emirati army was never on the borders ready to fight Israel," said Mustafa al-Barghouti, leader of the Palestinian National Initiative and member of the PA parliament.

"We've been seeing recent strange moves by the UAE such as sending direct flights to Israel, and there were leaks of secret accords between the two in terms of scientific and economic cooperation. It is clear that these were preliminary steps to absorb yesterday's shock."

The PA and all Palestinian factions, including Hamas and the Islamic Jihad, issued official statements denouncing the UAE-Israel agreement. Palestinian leaders who spoke to Al Jazeera called it a "stab in the back".

"We already knew that there has been normalisation going under the table, but to formalise and legalise it that way at this critical moment is shocking. It's a stab in our back and the back of all Arab nations," said Majida al-Masri, former PA minister of social affairs.

Al-Barghouti emphasised the deal "doesn't introduce any change or progress, it's far from being genuine peace".

"This is an attempt to enforce the 'deal of the century' that aims to liquidate Palestinian national rights, it represents a denial of Palestinian, Arab and Islamic rights," he said.

Turkey Warns Greece, Slams Bully France

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkey has warned Greece of retaliation against any attack on its survey vessel in the eastern Mediterranean and accused France of acting like a bully amid escalating tensions in the energy-rich region.

Speaking to reporters after Friday prayers in Istanbul, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said one of the warships accompanying the exploratory Oruc Reis vessel, the Kemal Reis, had "given the necessary response" to an attack on Thursday.

"If this continues, they will receive their answer in kind," he said, without specifying which nation's ships had allegedly attacked Turkey's. "We can't let even the smallest attack go without an answer."

Turkey and Greece are vehemently at odds over overlapping claims for hydrocarbon resources in the increasingly volatile region. Tensions rose on Monday after Ankara launched exploration operations in a disputed area of the Mediterranean by sending a seismic vessel accompanied by a small navy fleet into the region.



EU Ministers Agree to New Round of Sanctions on Belarus

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - European Union ministers agreed Friday to draw up a list of targets in Belarus for a new round of sanctions in response to strongman Alexander Lukashenko's post-election crackdown.

At a videoconference hosted by Brussels' diplomatic chief Josep Borrell, the foreign ministers also agreed to take up the stand-off between Greece and Turkey at their next face-to-face talks.

As Lukashenko's main opposition challenger called for mass weekend rallies to denounce the long-standing leader's disputed claim of re-election, his western neighbors are stepping up pressure.

"The foreign ministers agreed to impose sanctions on those responsible for the repression and a list of names will be drawn up," one European official said.

Sweden's Foreign Minister Ann Linde said in a tweet that the "EU will now initiate a process of sanctions against those responsible for the violence, arrests and fraud in connection with the election."

Once the list is finalized, each individual or entity on it will have to be approved unanimously by member states, but officials said none of the 27 raised objections to the idea of sanctions.

Ahead of the meeting there had been calls for action from several EU members, especially Belarus' neighbors Poland and Lithuania, which is now hosting exiled opposition candidate Svetlana Tikhonovskaya.

Poland, Latvia and Lithuania say they are ready to act as mediators to try to resolve the post-election crisis, after a poll that Brussels has already said was "neither free nor fair".

Lithuanian President Gitanas Nauseda has spoken to Tikhonovskaya and, according to his spokesman, she is ready to help him implement a plan for "peaceful dialogue" to resolve the crisis.

Lithuania also on Friday offered to treat Belarusians injured during the protests and suggested setting up the EU fund to support "the victims of repression".

North Korea Lifts Virus Lockdown In City, Rejects Foreign Aid

PYONGYANG (Dispatches) - North Korea leader Kim Jong Un lifted a lockdown in a major city near the border with South Korea where thousands have been quarantined for weeks over coronavirus worries.

Kim, during a key governing party meeting on Thursday, insisted North Korea will keep its borders shut and rejected any outside help as the country carries out an aggressive anti-coronavirus campaign and rebuilds thousands of houses, roads and bridges damaged by heavy rain and floods in recent weeks.

Pyongyang's official Korean Central News Agency also said Kim replaced Kim Jae Ryong as prime minister, following an evaluation of the cabinet's economic performance and appointed Kim Tok Hun as his successor.

During Thursday's meeting, Kim said it was clear after three weeks of isolation measures and "scientific verification" that the virus situation in Kaesong was stable and expressed gratitude to residents for cooperating with the lockdown, KCNA reported.

Kim said his country now faces a dual challenge of fending off COVID-19 amid a worsening global pandemic and repairing damage from torrential rain that lashed the country in past weeks.

KCNA said 39,296 hectares (97,100 acres) of crops were ruined nationwide and 16,680 homes and 630 public buildings destroyed or flooded.

It added many roads, bridges and railway sections were damaged and a dam of an unspecified power station gave way. There was no mention of any information related to injuries or deaths.

Kim expressed sympathy with people who were at temporary facilities after losing their houses to floods and called for swift recovery efforts so that none is "homeless" by the time the country celebrates the 75th anniversary of the ruling Workers' Party's founding on October 10.

"The situation, in which the spread of the worldwide malignant virus has become worse, requires us not to allow any outside aid for the flood damage but shut the border tighter and carry out strict anti-epidemic work," KCNA paraphrased Kim as saying.

Cho Hey-sil, spokesperson of Seoul's unification ministry, which handles inter-Korean affairs, said the South remains willing to provide humanitarian assistance to the North.



Bolsonaro's Popularity Surges To High Despite Pandemic

RIO De JANEIRO (AFP) - Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro received the best approval rating of his term Friday, boosted by his popularity among recipients of coronavirus stimulus payments despite the carnage the pandemic has caused in Brazil.

The far-right leader's approval rating surged five points from June, to 37 percent, while his disapproval rating plunged 10 points to 34 percent, the leading polling firm Datafolha reported.

It was the first time since April 2019, four months into his presidency, that Bolsonaro's approval rating outstripped his disapproval rating in the Datafolha poll.

The strong numbers came despite the fact that the new coronavirus has killed more than 105,000 people in Brazil -- the second-highest death toll worldwide, after the United States -- and fueled the loss of 8.9 million jobs last quarter.

Known as the "Tropical Trump," Bolsonaro is a divisive figure, condemned as racist, sexist, homophobic and dictatorial by his critics, but adored as a "Messiah" -- his middle name -- by his base.

His presidency has been marked by a constant string of controversies, most recently his handling of the pandemic.

Even after catching the virus himself last month, putting him in quarantine for three weeks, Bolsonaro, 65, continues to downplay COVID-19.

He regularly rails against economically painful lockdown measures. Instead, he trumpets the unproven drug hydroxychloroquine as a treatment. Other recent polls have also found Bolsonaro has rebounding popularity and a strong chance at re-election in 2022.

Datafolha found he was performing well among poor Brazilians who have been receiving monthly stimulus payments of 600 reais (about \$110) to offset the economic pain of the pandemic.

The former army captain had an approval rating of 42 percent among stimulus payment recipients. In Brazil's poorest region, the northeast, typically a bastion for the left-wing opposition, his disapproval rating fell 17 points from June, to 35 percent. His approval rating there rose six points, to 33 percent. Datafolha carried out the poll on August 11 and 12 via phone interviews with 2,065 respondents.



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Sino-U.S. Tensions to Hurt China, U.S. and the World

BEIJING (Reuters) - China will be able to maintain steady economic growth this year although the tensions between China and the United States will negatively impact the two countries and the world, China's National Bureau of Statistics spokesman Fu Linghui said.

China's investment is steadily recovering on policy support, but employment pressure still exists, Fu said on Friday.



Euro Zone Trade Surplus Surges as Imports Drop

BRUSSELS (Reuters) - The euro zone's trade surplus with the rest of the world ballooned in June to 21.2 billion euros (\$25 billion) as the bloc's drop in imports of goods outpaced the fall of exports amid a global slide in trade due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The bloc also suffered the biggest drop ever recorded in employment in the second quarter, the European Union's statistics agency Eurostat said.

The agency also confirmed the record drop in the bloc's gross domestic product last quarter, which fell by 12.1% compared with the first three months of the year.

Eurostat said on Friday the June trade surplus was wider than that posted a year earlier when the bloc had a positive balance of 19.4 billion euros. The reading also largely beat market expectations of a 12.6 billion euros surplus.

The surplus was more than twice as big as that recorded in May when the bloc had a positive balance of 9.4 billion euros.

The year-on-year improvement was caused by a 12.2% drop of imports, which more than offset the 10% fall in exports, Eurostat estimates showed.

From January to June, the bloc's exports to the rest of the world fell by 12.7% to about 1 trillion euros compared with the same period in 2019. Imports dropped by 12.9% to 929 billion euros. Trade among euro zone countries was down by 13.6% to 869 billion euros.

The 19 countries of the currency bloc also traded much less among themselves. In June they exchanged goods worth 150.6 billion euros, down by 7.3% compared with the same month last year.

The larger EU, which is composed of 27 states, posted a 20.7 billion euros surplus in June, also caused by a bigger drop in imports than exports.

Among its top three trading partners, the EU reduced trade mostly with Britain, which left the EU on Jan. 31.

For January-June, exports to Britain fell by 21.5% from the same period last year, while imports dropped 17.5%, leaving the EU with a smaller trade surplus of 46.7 billion euros compared with 64.5 billion euros in the same period of last year.

Trade with the United States also fell significantly while the drop of exchanges with China was small.

In a separate release, Eurostat said euro zone employment in the period between April and June fell by 2.8% compared with the previous quarter, in the sharpest decline since data began to be collected in 1995.

The agency confirmed the estimates it released on July 31 of a record fall in euro zone GDP in the second quarter, the deepest since the time series started in 1995.

The new release on GDP is based on data from 13 of the 19 euro zone countries, including all the big ones. The earlier release included data from 10 states.

The record fall coincided with coronavirus lockdowns which many euro zone countries began to ease only from May.

Japan Exports to Post Double-Digit Fall Again

TOKYO (Reuters) - Japan's July exports are expected to have recorded a double-digit decline for the fifth straight month as the coronavirus pandemic hit global demand, a Reuters poll showed on Friday.

The poll also showed machinery orders in June rose for a second straight month and core consumer prices probably grew for the first time in four months in July.

But analysts say weak global demand and restrictions on business activities in some major economies due to a resurgence in infections suggest any recovery in the world's third-largest economy will likely only be moderate.

Exports in July were projected to fall 21.0% from a year earlier, less than a 26.2% tumble in June, the poll of 16 economists showed.

Imports, however, were expected to have dropped by a sharper 22.8% from a year earlier after a 14.4% fall the previous month, resulting in a trade deficit of 77.6 billion yen (\$725.84 million), the poll found.

"Global reopening of economic activities probably helped the nation's exports to escape from the worst period," said Yusuke Shimoda, senior economist at Japan Research Institute.

"But the pace of global economic recovery will likely remain modest due to uncertainty over the containment of the coronavirus. Exports likely tumbled year-on-year."

The poll also showed machinery orders, a leading indicator of capital expenditure, rose 2.0% in June from the previous month, after a 1.7% gain in May.

Analysts said the reopening of businesses after a nationwide shutdown supported core machinery orders, but worsening corporate profits and uncertainty over the outlook would probably limit the pace of recovery.

The government is due to publish trade data and machinery orders at 8:50 a.m. on Wednesday (2350 GMT Tuesday).

The core consumer price index (CPI), which includes oil products but excludes volatile fresh food prices, likely rose 0.1% in July from a year earlier, helped by a pick-up in oil prices and some recovery in consumer demand, the poll showed.



China Will Promote Yuan's Internationalization

BEIJING (Reuters) - China will make it easier for foreign investors to use the yuan to invest in Chinese bonds and stocks as it

pursues the currency's internationalization, the central bank said on Friday, amid rising tensions with the United States.

"In the future, we will continue to steadily promote the yuan internationalization to serve the real economy, based on market principles," the People's Bank of China said in its 2020 yuan internationalization report.

Fears in China of a deepening financial war with the United States have fuelled calls to bolster the yuan's global clout as Beijing looks to decrease reliance on the greenback.

China will make it easier for foreign investors to use the yuan to invest in Chinese bonds and stocks and will promote the development of offshore yuan markets, it said.

The central bank expects the yuan to play a bigger role in pricing and settling commodities trade, including crude oil and iron ore, it said.

Cross-border yuan settlements reached 19.67 trillion yuan (2.16 trillion pounds) in 2019, up 24.1% from a year earlier, the central bank said.

Last year's cross-border yuan settlements accounted for 38.1% of the overall cross-border settlements, it added.

Cross-border yuan settlements in foreign trade grew 16% last year, accounting for 13.4% of the total cross-border trade settlements, the central bank said.

The central bank will step up monitoring of cross-border capital flows and use its counter-cyclical policies to ward off potential risks from cross-border capital flows, it said.

EU Highly Concerned by U.S. Stance on Nord Stream Pipeline

FRANKFURT (Reuters) - A delegation of EU member states has raised concerns with the U.S. State Department that sanctions in response to the construction of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline under the Baltic Sea are a breach of international law, a report said on Friday.

A European delegation representing 24 member states out of 27 communicated a diplomatic position to the U.S. State Department on Aug. 12 in a video call, German daily Die Welt reported in its online edition.

A European Commission spokeswoman confirmed there had been an informal outreach, or demarche in diplomatic language, which the EU member states were invited to join on a voluntary basis.

Speaking at a Brussels briefing, the spokeswoman Nabila Massrali reiterated that the Commission, the EU executive, was "deeply concerned" by a U.S. decision to broaden the scope of sanctions.

In an emailed statement, the U.S. embassy in Berlin said it preferred not to use sanctions and favored cooperation with Europe, but Russia's dominance of Europe's gas markets gave it no choice. "The United States must act to address the threat to our national security and foreign policy interests," it said.

Die Welt cited the diplomatic note as saying the EU shared foreign and security policy goals with the United States and was open to dialogue. It also said the companies involved in Nord Stream were pursuing legitimate business activities.

"The EU considers the extraterritorial use of sanctions as a breach of international law," it said.

The EU demarche follows tighter U.S. sanctions on the pipeline, which has long caused diplomatic divisions.

Within Europe, Germany stands to benefit from relatively affordable supply deals, while the United States faces increased competition when trying to sell liquefied natural gas to Europe.

Nord Stream 2, which adds to an existing Nord Stream 1, is designed and led by Russia's Gazprom and due to operate from early 2021, carrying gas directly to Germany from Russia.

Five western partners - Uniper, OMV, Wintershall DEA, Royal Dutch Shell and Engie - have committed to sharing 50% of the 9.5 billion-euro (8.6 billion pounds) project.

The Nord Stream 2 consortium, based in Switzerland, has knowledge of the EU's initiative, but would not comment, a spokesman for the group said.

Hong Kong Cuts Full Year Economic Outlook



HONG KONG (Reuters) - Hong Kong cut its economic outlook for the year on Friday, saying a recovery from recession depended on how fast it can get a new wave of coronavirus infections under control.

The Chinese territory's government revised its full year gross domestic product (GDP) forecast to a contraction of 6% to 8% from the earlier estimate of a 4% to 7% contraction.

Its economy shrank 9% in the second quarter, the fourth straight quarter of year-on-year decline for the Asian financial hub. The contraction was in line with advance estimates released by the government and was just a shade better than the 9.1% fall in the preceding quarter.

"Hong Kong's short-term economic outlook is still highly uncertain," government economist Andrew Au said in a statement. "The recent surge of COVID-19 infections and the resultant tightening of social distancing measures, and austere labor market conditions will weigh heavily on private consumption in the coming weeks," Au said, adding any recovery will depend on how fast local infections can be brought under control.

The overall economic situation had stabilized somewhat during the quarter, especially in May and June when the coronavirus was largely under control. But a resurgence in the number of cases recently is likely to produce more damage.

"If the current wave of local infections can be contained within a short time and barring any further sharp deterioration in the external environment, economic performance for 2020 as a whole can hopefully fall within the upper half of the range forecast," Au added.

Hong Kong reported 48 additional coronavirus cases on Friday, bringing total infections to more than 4,300 people.

On a quarterly basis, the economy contracted a seasonally adjusted 0.1% for the April-June period, after a revised 5.5% drop in the first quarter.

The resurgence of infections is weighing on consumer and tourism-related sectors. The city's jobless rate has surged to the highest in more than 15 years. Visitor arrivals dropped by 99.7% in June. Retail sales and restaurant receipts are also expected to shrink further.

U.S. Retail Sales Miss Expectations in July

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - U.S. retail sales in July increased less than expected as consumers cut back on purchases of motor vehicles and could slow further in the months ahead amid spiraling new COVID-19 infections and a reduction in unemployment benefit checks.

The report from the Commerce Department on Friday, however, did not change expectations that consumer spending will rebound this quarter after a record collapse in the second quarter. Retail sales rose 1.2% last month after advancing 8.4% in June. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast retail sales would rise 1.9% in July.

Retail sales have been rebounding as businesses resumed operations after being shuttered in mid-March in an effort to slow the spread of the respiratory illness. Coronavirus infections continue to spread across the United States, forcing authorities in some of the hot-spots to either shut down businesses again or pause reopenings. The respiratory illness caused by the virus has left consumers wary of visiting places like restaurants and shopping malls, cutting into spending.

The slowdown in retail sales in July was led by a 1.2% decline in receipts at auto dealerships. That followed a 6.1% acceleration in June. Consumers also cut back spending at hobby, musical instrument and book stores as well as at building materials outlets. But they boosted purchases at electronics and appliance stores, which soared 22.9%, likely reflecting strong demand as many Americans work from home.



Receipts at restaurants and bars increased 5.0%, though the pace slowed from the 26.7% notched in June. Online and mail-order retail sales rebounded 0.7%. Furniture store sales were flat. Receipts at clothing stores increased 5.7%.

Excluding automobiles, gasoline, building materials and food services, retail sales increased 1.4% in July after soaring 6.0% in June. These so-called core retail sales correspond most closely with the consumer spending component of the gross domestic product report.

Consumer spending collapsed at a 34.6% annualized pace in the second quarter. That led to GDP plunging at a 32.9% rate last quarter, the deepest decline in output since the government started keeping records in 1947. The dollar was trading lower against a basket of currencies while prices of U.S. Treasuries were higher. Stocks on Wall Street opened lower.

Rouhani Meets With New Iranian Envoys

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iran’s new ambassadors to six countries met with President Hassan Rouhani in Tehran before embarking on their new missions.

The new ambassadors will represent Iran in Azerbaijan, Oman, North Korea, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Namibia and Georgia.

During the meeting, Rouhani wished success for the new envoys and tasked them with introducing Iran’s capabilities and capacities to the other sides in order to attract their private and public sectors’ investment.

He also urged the ambassadors to make every effort to strengthen and deepen Iran’s ties with those countries.



Chinese Firms Hit by New Import Hurdles in India

NEW DELHI (Reuters) - Chinese firms like Xiaomi are facing delays getting approvals from India’s quality control agency for their goods, five industry sources told Reuters, as the business environment deteriorates clash on their Himalayan border.

Greater scrutiny of Chinese imports follows calls for boycotts from Indian nationalist groups linked to Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s ruling party, angered by the killing of 20 Indian soldiers in the border clash in June.

The Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) has in recent weeks delayed approvals for mobile phone components and televisions, jeopardizing the plans of firms such as Xiaomi as well as Oppo, industry sources in India and China said.

BIS Director General Pramod Kumar Tiwari did not respond to requests for comment. China’s commerce ministry and the foreign ministry did not immediately respond.

Xiaomi declined to comment, while Oppo did not respond.

The most serious border tension in decades between the Asian giants has hurt already hurt their economic ties and Indian officials expect the damage to get worse.

“The relationship has gone south dramatically,” said one official, adding India was unlikely to immediately approve several investments proposals from Chinese companies. “We cannot do business as usual.”

India had mandated the screening of investment flows from China in April but the government has been slow in approving any since the clash.

India’s trade ministry did not respond to a request for comment.

A senior Indian official said the government was working on a new standards policy - likely to be announced by the end of August - in a bid to target low-quality products from China and elsewhere.

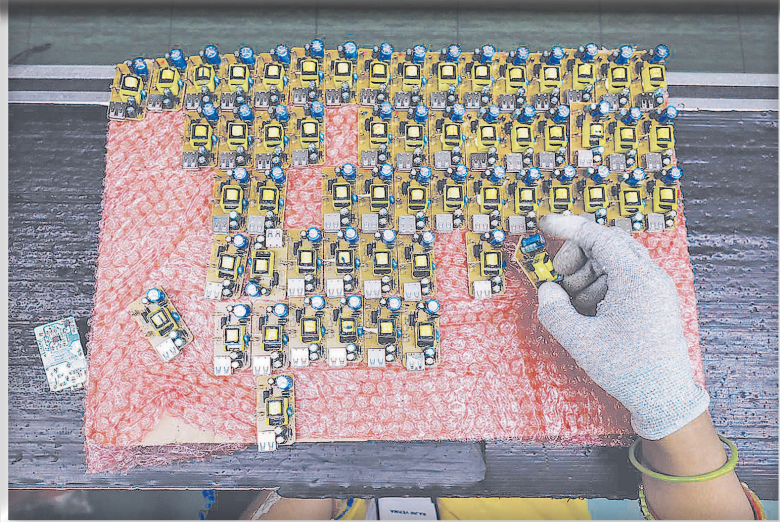
But those deliberations have stalled approvals for even branded Chinese companies’ hoping to step up sales, one Indian industry source said.

“The products are not getting clearance as quality standards are being upgraded because of which many product lines could be affected,” said the official, who declined to be identified.

Chinese smartphone brands, including Oppo and Xiaomi, account for eight of every 10 smartphones sold in India. While the two companies assemble most of their models in India, several components are imported from China.

Modi has in recent weeks called for a “self-reliant India”, urging industry to focus on boosting domestic production.

Under the BIS’s registration scheme, certain electronic goods - whether imported or locally made - need to meet India’s standards. After companies get their products



tested in a certified laboratory, BIS approves the applications.

A source briefed at a smartphone maker in China, which has been affected by delays, said BIS applications were typically processed within 15 days but had now “been left in limbo”.

As of Friday, 643 applications were pending for registration, with 394 pending for more than 20 days, the BIS website said. It did not say how many were from Chinese companies.

The CP-UP Certification Technology Service Co, an agency based in China’s Guangzhou city which helps clients with such clearances, told its customers in an Aug. 4 notice that BIS had stopped processing applications from “non-Indian manufacturers” from July 23 “due to the trade war between China and India”.

It was not immediately clear whether imports from countries other than China were also being held up.

A BIS official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said additional checks were being made in consultation with several ministries before clearing any applications.

South Korea Expects GDP to Return to Growth in Third Quarter

SEOUL (Dispatches) -South Korea’s economy will likely return to growth in the third quarter, after recent economic data pointed to a gradual recovery, but a slump in exports remains a major concern, the country’s finance minister said on Friday.

The economy slipped into a technical recession in the second quarter, when it suffered its worst contraction in more than two decades, as the coronavirus took its toll despite government support measures.

“The government expects a sequential growth in the third quarter,” Hong Nam-ki told a briefing with foreign media outlets. South Korea’s economy fell a seasonally adjusted 3.3 per cent in the June quarter as the coronavirus pandemic battered exports and social distancing curbs paralysed factories.

That came even after the government rolled out some 277 trillion won (US\$233 billion) worth of stimulus packages including three supplementary budgets.

But the finance ministry said Asia’s fourth-largest economy is expected to do well compared to other

major economies, citing a report from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) on South Korea.

The OECD said the country will take the smallest hit to growth of any advanced economy this year, by falling just 0.8 per cent, after it was able to limit the spread of the coronavirus without imposing severe lockdowns. The OECD had previously forecast South Korea’s economy to shrink 1.2 per cent this year.

It comes as the government cut its economic projections for this year in June, forecasting the economy would grow just 0.1 per cent in 2020, which would be the worst performance since the 1998 Asian financial crisis.

“There are still significant risks to our forecast since it is based on a scenario (where) the coronavirus pandemic would cool down in the second half of the year,” Hong said.

Hong also said the ministry is currently not considering another supplementary budget, which would be its fourth for this year.

Tehran Censures...

FROM PAGE 1

“However, despite the fact that Saudi Arabia is a party to the NPT and has a Comprehensive Safeguard Agreement with the IAEA, it has questionably failed to abide by its commitments,” the Iranian diplomat said.

He noted that Saudi Arabia’s lack of transparency and cooperation with the IAEA’s inspectors has caused real concerns about the country’s objective and dimensions of its nuclear program. “We call upon Saudi authorities to honor their obligations under the NPT and the Safeguards Agreement and extend cooperation with the IAEA inspection regime.”

Baghaei Hamaneh also pointed to the responsibility of the IAEA and its Board of Governors to carry out their inspection/verification mandate and submit a report on the status of Saudi Arabia’s nuclear activities and prevent any misuse of old safeguard loopholes and stressed the importance of clarifying the reasons that the agency has preferred to be silent in this regard.

“This, especially in the light of the unjustified haste and prejudices about Iran’s peaceful nuclear program, which is under the IAEA’s most robust verification/inspection

regime, could raise questions over the Agency’s impartiality and unbiasedness.”

“The IAEA is best advised to shield its credibility, impartiality, independence and professionalism against any suspicion to the contrary,” he added.

He also called on Saudi authorities to act like a responsible actor in the region, end the ruthless destruction of Yemen, stop violent extremism and terrorism that has ravaged some Arab countries and let regional states to reinforce collective trust based on deep-rooted bonds of solidarity and good neighborliness to live in peace and harmony.

“Under the NPT’s Article VI...there exists an obligation to pursue in good faith and bring to the conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control. This is an explicit legal obligation with no ambiguity or conditionality,” Baghaei Hamaneh said.

He warned that lack of political will to make progress in nuclear disarmament could not be compensated by an over-emphasis on non-proliferation.

Israel Shivering With...

FROM PAGE 1

“The Israelis now are having existential fears. They fear the entity’s existence and continuation,” the Hezbollah chief said, stressing that the military and psychological defeat the Zionists received 14 years ago still exists.

He also said that Israel “acknowledges” failure in preventing the resistance movement’s strengthening in Lebanon.

“Lebanon is strong with its resistance equation. That’s why they want to get rid of it. Their offer for us to abandon it is still valid till these days,” Nasrallah added, stressing that the doctrine of deterrence keeps growing in Hezbollah’s favor every day.

He also pointed out that after the war on Lebanon failed to defeat Hezbollah, the enemy is “resorting to every other method, and all we are witnessing now in Lebanon is a result of that.”

Elsewhere in his remarks, he touched on the catastrophic explosion in the Lebanese capital of Beirut.

On August 4, a colossal explosion, the biggest ever to hit the Middle East, killed at

least 172 people. Some 6,000 were injured.

Dozens of people are still missing, and at least 300,000 people have been displaced as a result of the huge blast, which leveled the whole port of Beirut and a large section of central capital and turned successive apartment blocks into masses of debris and twisted metal.

Nasrallah noted that Hezbollah does not have any narrative on the Beirut port explosion, saying, “We’re not investigating, the Lebanese state is doing the job.”

However, he put forward two possibilities, at least theoretically, regarding the deadly blast, saying it occurred either out of negligence or sabotage.

“If investigations proved that the explosion occurred out of negligence, those responsible must be held accountable and punished,” the Hezbollah chief said, stressing that if it turned out that Israel was behind the blast, it would pay the price.”

Lebanon’s caretaker justice minister has dismissed calls for an international investigation into the recent deadly explosion in Beirut, saying the country’s judiciary can handle the probe itself.

Libya Sovereign Fund To Ask U.N. for Freedom To Invest Billions



LONDON (Reuters) - Libya’s sovereign wealth fund head plans to ask the United Nations to allow it to invest billions of dollars sitting idle in its accounts, after missing out on some \$4.1 billion (3.1 billion pounds) in potential equity returns during nearly a decade of sanctions.

The Libyan Investment Authority (LIA) was blacklisted in March 2011 because it was then controlled by the family of toppled ruler Muammar Gaddafi. Its assets were valued at \$67 billion in 2012, but LIA plans to update that in October after a review by its financial adviser Deloitte.

Sanctions have had a heavy toll on the LIA, with investment curbs meaning it had missed out on around \$4.1 billion in potential returns if it had invested in line with the market average, chairman Ali Mahmoud Hassan Mohamed told Reuters. The LIA also wanted to avoid negative interest rate charges, which had cost it around \$23 million since 2011, he said.

“We have billions of cash in our accounts not invested,” Mohamed said in an interview this week. “It would be much better to take advantage of the market situation and invest at this moment.”

Libya had previously asked the U.N. Security Council to approve a sanctions exemption for the LIA in 2016, but this request was turned down as the U.N. wanted to see a stable government in place before doing so.

Although the LIA is not pushing for a full rollback, it is aiming to apply to the U.N. Sanctions Committee for adjustments to enable it to invest, via a custodian, some of the \$12.7 billion frozen cash held by its investment managers.

This includes some of the proceeds from 796 bond holdings, with a value of \$4.8 billion, that have matured since 2011. Any investments the LIA tried to make at present were hampered by a lengthy process that required it to gain approval from the sanctions committee as well as within Libya.

“It is time consuming and investment decisions are time sensitive,” Mohamed said.

Market volatility during the coronavirus crisis has hit the LIA, cutting the value of its stock holdings by about 5% and prompting a potential debt restructuring for some of its hundreds of subsidiaries.

Towering Solo Win For Formolo

PARIS (AFP) - Italy's Davide Formolo completed a courageous solo break over two Alpine summits to win stage three of the Criterium du Dauphine.

Overnight leader Primož Roglič of Jumbo Visma was second, extending his lead over French climber Thibaut Pinot and Ineos general Egan Bernal with a late burst at the very end of the 157 km run between Corenc and Saint-Martin-de-Belleville.

LICENCE HOLDER: SOKHAN GOSTAR INSTITUTE

Switchboard:

(+98) (21) 44253448

Public Relations Tel:

(+98)(21) 44253450

Editorial Board: 44253449

Public Relations Fax:

(+98)(21) 44253395

Advertising Department:

Tel/Fax:(+98) (21) 44253335-9/44253234

Website:

http://www.irannewsdaily.com

E-Mail Address:

info@irannewsdaily.com

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FA Cup Replays Scrapped for Next Season

LONDON (AFP) - FA Cup replays will be scrapped for the 2020-21 season in a bid to ease the strain on clubs during the coronavirus pandemic, the Football Association announced.

With a shortened season starting a month later than usual in September there is more pressure on an already hectic calendar. The FA has taken the decision that all ties in the FA Cup will be decided on the day rather than allowing for the usual replay. "In order to assist in easing pressure on the football schedule, there will be no replays for the 2020-21 season," the FA said in a statement.

Brutal Bayern Humiliate Barcelona To Reach Semis

LISBON (AFP) - A merciless Bayern Munich inflicted a humiliating, record defeat on Barcelona on Friday, recording a scarcely believable 8-2 victory in their Champions League quarter-final in Lisbon to leave Lionel Messi forlorn and surely hastening in the end of an era in Catalonia.

Thomas Mueller scored twice either side of goals from Ivan Perisic and Serge Gnabry in a stunning opening 31 minutes at an empty Estadio da Luz, with a David Alaba own-goal having briefly brought Barcelona back level.

Luis Suarez pulled it back to 4-2 at one point in the second half, but Barcelona then caved in, with Joshua Kimmich getting Bayern's fifth before three more goals in the final stages, one for the prolific Robert Lewandowski and two for substitute Philippe Coutinho.

That was the really humiliating part for the beaten side, with Coutinho on loan in Bavaria from Barcelona, who spent 160 million euros on signing the Brazilian in 2018 but never got the best out of him.

It is Barcelona's worst European defeat and the worst of Messi's career.

This was Bayern's 19th consecutive victory in all competitions, and a 28th game unbeaten for Hansi Flick's side.

But the story of this game is Barcelona's remarkable capitulation and the question is what happens to them now.

Messi was 27 when they last won the Champions League in 2015. He is 33 now and this game may make up his mind that he needs to finally leave the Camp Nou if he is to win it again.

Barca have just about been here before: They were torn apart by Bayern in the 2013 semi-finals, losing 7-0 on aggregate, but this was eight goals in 90 minutes.

And with an ageing team featuring six players aged 31 or older, this has to be the end of an era.



Bayern went ahead in the fourth minute as Mueller controlled a ball in from the left by Perisic and played a one-two with Lewandowski to scuff a shot low past compatriot Marc-Andre ter Stegen.

They did leave themselves open at the back and parity was restored when Alaba, in attempting to stop Jordi Alba's cross, sliced the ball over Manuel Neuer and into his own net.

For a very brief spell Barca were even on top, as Neuer saved from Suarez and a Messi cross came back off the far upright.

But Bayern, suffocating their opponents with their pressing, went back in front midway through the first half. Gnabry won back possession on the edge of the final third before feeding Perisic, who fired past Ter Stegen and into the far corner.

That was the first of three goals in a 10-minute spell.

Leon Goretzka's deft touch over the top took out Clement Lenglet and Gnabry drilled home to make it 3-1. Then Mueller stole in front of Lenglet to turn in Kimmich's delivery from the right for 4-1.

Suarez briefly gave Barca something to cling to as he controlled Alba's assist, bodyswerved away from Jerome Boateng and fired home.

Yet there would be no comeback, as Kimmich converted Bayern's fifth following a remarkable assist by Alphonso Davies, and then Lewandowski headed in Coutinho's cross to make it six.

As Barcelona collapsed, Coutinho made it seven in the 85th minute at the end of a move started when Messi was robbed of possession and then had time to score another in the 88th minute.

Arsenal Sign Willian on Free Transfer



LONDON (Dispatches) - Arsenal completed the signing of Willian on a three-year deal on Friday after the Brazilian winger's contract at Chelsea expired.

The 32-year-old won two Premier League titles, an FA Cup, a League Cup and the Europa League during seven years with the Blues, but moves across London on a free transfer with Chelsea unwilling to offer the multi-year contract he desired.

"I believe he's a player that can really make a difference for us," said Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta.

"He has the experience of everything in the football world but to still have the ambition to come here and contribute to bring the club where it belongs. I have been really impressed with all the talks I have had with him and how much he wanted to come."

Willian sat out the FA Cup final when Arsenal beat Chelsea 2-1 earlier this month due to injury, but said the impact made by Arteta in his first season in management encouraged him to join the Gunners.

"I think that with Arteta, Arsenal have a great opportunity to fight again for titles in the Premier League and in Europe so I'm very happy because of that," said Willian.

Dan Martin

Tour de France Doubt

PARIS (Dispatches) - Ireland's Dan Martin pulled out of the Criterium du Dauphine on Friday after the Israel Start-Up nation team leader fell and fractured a bone in his lower back.

The accident on Thursday has left the 33-year-old general classification contender in a race against time to be fit for the Tour de France's delayed start in just two weeks time.

"I'm optimistic I can still race the Tour de France," said Martin, who has a sacral fracture, which is the bone between the back and the tailbone. "It's a shame as I felt I was in great shape but I'm a fast healer and I have reason to remain optimistic," added the double Tour de France stage winner and candidate for the top 10.

"I don't have a scratch on me really, but I landed full force on the bottom of my back. Unfortunately we have a small fracture down there in my sacrum."

Martin's loss for the Tour de France would be a major blow for the ambitious Israel Start-Up Nation team, who have signed Chris Froome for next season. The five-day race through the Alps was hit by a freak hailstorm on Thursday that battered part of the peloton with giant-sized hailstones.

Slovenian former ski-jumper Primož Roglič leads the race, which tackles one of French cycling's seminal challenges on Friday in the form of the Col de la Madelaine with its lunar landscape upper reaches.

Bottas Tops Hamilton

BARCELONA (Dispatches) - Valtteri Bottas set the pace ahead of his team-mate and championship leader Lewis Hamilton as Mercedes resumed normal service by topping the times in the opening Spanish Grand Prix practice.

The Finn clocked a best lap in one minute and 16.785 seconds to outpace the six-time champion by 0.039sec with last Sunday's race victor Max Verstappen third for Red Bull, nine-tenths adrift of the fastest time. The Dutchman had beaten both Mercedes men to claim the ninth win of his career in the 70th Anniversary Grand Prix in sweltering conditions at Silverstone.

Matuidi joins Beckham's Inter Miami



MILAN (AFP) - France's World Cup winner Blaise Matuidi will join David Beckham's Major League Soccer club Inter Miami, the American club announced.

Matuidi, 33, has left Italian champions Juventus by mutual consent after three years, for the club co-owned by Beckham, his former Paris Saint-Germain teammate.

"I made my decision a few weeks ago to join Inter Milan, rise to my friend David Beckham's challenge and win new trophies there. My family and I can't wait," Matuidi wrote on Twitter. Matuidi joined the Turin giants from Paris Saint-Germain in 2017 and had one year left on his contract.

"I couldn't be happier to welcome my friend Blaise to Inter Miami. He is an exciting and gifted player and a great person," said Beckham.

"To have a World Cup winner of Blaise's quality in our new team is such a proud moment - for us as owners and for our fans."

"For me personally, to have a former teammate joining our club is very special and I can't wait to welcome him and his beautiful family to South Florida."

The move comes less than a year before the European football championships, postponed this summer because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Matuidi played in the 2018 World Cup final when France beat Croatia 4-2.

"Blaise is one of the most successful midfielders of his generation and we're thrilled to have him at Inter Miami," added Paul McDonough, Inter Miami's Sporting Director.

Italian Open Brought Forward



ROME (Reuters) - Next month's Italian Open in Rome will be held a week earlier than scheduled following the cancellation of the Madrid Open due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the governing body of men's tennis (ATP) said.

The ATP announced several updates to the remainder of the 2020 calendar badly affected by the novel coronavirus outbreak, with no place for the NextGen ATP finals, the flagship event for the top players aged 21 and under, in its provisional schedule.

The Italian Open, a key preparation tournament for the French Open, will now begin on Sept. 14 and have a Monday final.

It will be followed by the Hamburg European Open in the week prior to Roland Garros, which starts on Sept. 27.

"Tennis is starting to find its way back and, while we must first and foremost look after the health and safety of everyone involved, we are hopeful we will be able to retain these playing opportunities and produce a strong finish to the season," ATP Chairman Andrea Gaudenzi said in a statement here.

"I would like to commend the tournaments for their continued commitment, flexibility and resourcefulness in finding solutions to operate under these challenging circumstances."

Among other changes, the St Petersburg Open will be elevated to ATP 500 status for its 2020 edition. "The revised calendar also provides confirmation that the NextGen ATP Finals in Milan will not take place in 2020 due to the impact of COVID-19," the ATP said.

Djokovic Says Will Play at U.S. Open



BELGRADE (Reuters) - World number one Novak Djokovic will compete at the Aug 31-Sept 13 U.S. Open and the Western & Southern Open curtain-raiser, the winner of 17 Grand Slam titles said in a statement.

His decision will come as good news for the U.S. Open organisers after several high-profile players, including former winners Rafael Nadal and Stan Wawrinka, pulled out over issues related to the novel coronavirus pandemic.

But it is also a U-turn from Djokovic after his June statements that competing at the 2020 U.S. Open would be "impossible" due to "extreme" COVID-19 protocols for the tournament at Flushing Meadows.

"I am happy to confirm that I will participate at the Western & Southern Open and U.S. Open this year," the 33-year old Serb said.

"It was not an easy decision to make with all the obstacles and challenges on so many sides, but the prospect of competing again makes me really excited."

"I am aware that this time around it will be very different with all the protocols and safety measures that are put in place to protect players and the people of New York."

Djokovic and three other players contracted the coronavirus at the Serb's Adria Tour event in June, with the first leg being held at his tennis centre in Belgrade and the second in Croatia's coastal city Zadar. Bulgarian Grigor Dimitrov tested positive ahead of the Zadar leg final, which was scrapped as a result, with Djokovic, his compatriot Viktor Troicki and Croatian Borna Coric also testing positive shortly afterwards.