

Iran's Intelligence Ministry Said That Three Iranians Who Had Been Taken Hostages For Five Years by Somalian Pirates Have Been Released

IRAN NEWS

Health Ministry Spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari Said on Friday That Some 112 More Iranians Have Died From COVID-19 Over the Past 24 Hours

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2 DOMESTIC

S. Korea Must Be Accountable for Halting Drug Imports to Iran



> SEE PAGE 2

3 DOMESTIC

Minister Calls for Producing Maximum Oil Despite Sanctions



> SEE PAGE 3

4 INTERNATIONAL

Trump Reaffirms Plan To Withdraw All U.S. Troops From Iraq



> SEE PAGE 4

8 SPORTS

Raptors Rally Over Nets, Jazz and Celtics Win



> SEE PAGE 8

Iran Summons Emirati Envoy to Condemn UAE Killing of Its Fishermen

TEHRAN (IFP) - The chargé d'affaires of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has been summoned to the Iranian Foreign Ministry over the UAE coast guard's move to shoot at a number of Iranian fishing boats and the seizure of one of them in the Persian Gulf on August 17, 2020.

"Right after the incident in which two fishermen were also killed, relevant Iranian officials put on their agenda an immediate investigation into the tragic event," the Foreign Ministry said in a Thursday statement.

"After the situation on the ground was carefully examined, the UAE diplomat was summoned to the ministry in the early hours of the following days by the director of the International Legal Affairs Department of the ministry," it added. At the ministry, the Iranian official has condemned the UAE vessels' harassment of the Iranian fishing boats, saying the responsibility for this illegal and out-of-norm move rests with the UAE government.

He has stressed that those arrested as well as the fishing boats seized must be released, and bodies of those killed must be handed over to Iran. The Iranian official has also demanded compensation for the damage inflicted and called on the UAE to take the necessary measures to prevent such events from happening again in the future.

The UAE charge d'affaires, for his part, has expressed regret over the incident, and underlined that he will inform Abu Dhabi of the developments accordingly.

See Page 7

IAEA Chief to Visit Tehran

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency Rafael Grossi is planning to visit Iran for the first time.

Diplomatic sources say IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi hopes to visit Tehran as early as next week to hold talks with senior Iranian officials, NHK reported.

He is expected to ask for Iran's cooperation over the IAEA's inspections of two facilities, the report added.

The IAEA plans to release its updated report on Iran's nuclear program in early September, ahead of a board of governors meeting in the middle of the month. The Iranian issue is expected to be the main focus in the meeting.

Grossi's planned visit to Iran follows a visit by his senior staff in charge of inspections in mid-August.

Grossi is also expected to talk with Iranian officials about a nuclear facility in Natanz in central Iran, where a fire broke out last month. Recently, Iran is said to have moved advanced centrifuges, the equipment used to produce enriched uranium, underground.

Tehran Shows Off 'Soleimani' Ballistic Missile With Range of 1,400km



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Defence Ministry has unveiled a surface-to-surface ballistic missile, named after the late IRGC commander Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, with a range of 1,400 kilometres.

In a televised speech on Thursday, Defence Minister Brigadier General Amir Hatami said the country has also unveiled a new homegrown cruise missile.

"The surface-to-surface missile, called martyr Qassem Soleimani, has a range of 1,400 km and the cruise missile, called martyr Abu Mahdi, has a range of over 1,000 km," Hatami said.

Pictures of the new missiles, which were unveiled on the National Day of Defence Industry, were shown on state TV.

"The country's achievements in the defense industry over the past four decades are not comparable to any other period," said Hatami, describing the accomplishments as a "basis for military self-reliance and a must for [maintaining] the country's independence."

Commenting on the new achievement's features, Iran's Deputy Defense Minister Brigadier General Qassem Taqizadeh said the speed of the Martyr Qassem Soleimani missiles makes their interception impossible.

He added that the cruise missiles are capable of flying at a low altitude and getting around the enemy's missile systems. The new ballistic missile is an upgraded version of the pinpoint-accuracy missile Fateh-110, according to Tasnim.

General Soleimani, the commander of IRGC Quds Force, and Iraqi military commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis were assassinated in January in a US drone strike on their convoy in Baghdad airport.

Earlier, the Iranian president had noted that "missiles and particularly cruise missiles are very important for us ... the fact that we have increased the range from 300 to 1,000 in less than two years is a great achievement."

The new missiles were unveiled as the United States is pushing in vain to extend a UN-imposed arms embargo against Iran, which is due to expire in October under Tehran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers.

Addressing the unveiling ceremony, President Hassan Rouhani reiterated that the Islamic Republic pursues a defence and deterrence strategy which poses no threat to any country in the region, especially Iran's neighbors.

President Rouhani noted that Iran has never pursued a strategy of aggression.

"In the defence sector, whatever the Islamic Republic of Iran produces, and whatever research work it does, and whatever effort it makes and whatever preparations it makes, are all based on a deterrence and defence strategy," said the president in a ceremony where several new achievements in the country's defence sector were unveiled.

"We don't intend to occupy any place. We don't want to harm any nation. Our neighbours should rest assured that our defence power is in their interest," he said.

"We will use our defence power to serve our friends' interests. We won't use it against them. Never ever in history, especially after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, has Iran initiated a war. We have always only defended ourselves," he said.

The president also expressed gratitude to local defence experts for increasing the range of domestically developed marine cruise missiles from 300 to more than 1000 kilometres.

He said weapons produced in the country should have enough precision, destruction power and maneuverability.

He also said Iran's skies should be as safe as it can be. "We should have a radar which, given the technologies used in stealth aircraft, does not miss any target."

The president appreciated efforts by domestic experts which, as he said, have led Iran to reach self-sufficiency in numerous weapons and defence systems.

E3 Not to Support U.S. Action on Trigger Mechanism

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - The Three European member states of the UN Security Council have issued a statement saying that they do not support US action to use the snapback mechanism against Iran.

According to the statement, the United States wrote a letter to the United Nations Security Council on 20 August requesting that the snapback mechanism be activated, according to which one of the JCPOA participants can demand the reinstatement of multilateral sanctions that were lifted in 2015 under Resolution 2231.

France, Germany, and the United Kingdom (the E3) noted in this statement: "The US ceased to be a participant to the JCPOA following its withdrawal from the deal on 8 May 2018. Our position regarding the effectiveness of the US notification pursuant to resolution 2231 has consequently been very clearly expressed to the Presidency and all UNSC members. We cannot, therefore, support this action which is incompatible with our current efforts to support the JCPOA."

See Page 7

ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

U.S. Is Not At All A Friend of Iraq

We learned that on Tuesday and before Iraqi Prime Minister Seyed Mustafa Al Kadhimi's visit to Washington, Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein was in Washington to prepare the climate for Al-Kadhimi's visit which was aimed at renewal of political and economic relations with the U.S., and to avoid any misunderstanding, Hussein underlined that his country's relation with Iran is based on common interests like cultural, political and economic interests.

Hussein who was in Washington for holding the second round of talks between Iraq and the U.S., in a joint press conference with his American counterpart Mike Pompeo said, "Iraq sees the United States of America as his strong and will continue to protect that alliance."

The news website "Baghdad Today" in its report says Hussein has considered Iraq's foreign policy based on national interests and he has said, "Iraq's relation with Iran is based on the common interests like cultural, political and economic interests."

After this presser, Pompeo on Wednesday met Iraqi Prime Minister Al-Kadhimi. After this meeting, Pompeo in his twitter account wrote, "Had a productive meeting with Prime Minister @MAKadhimi today to reaffirm our partnership and discuss the U.S.-Iraq Strategic Dialogue. The U.S. will continue to work with Iraq on ways to address their economic challenges in light of COVID-19 and decline in oil prices."

In this visit, a high-ranking political and economic delegation, comprised of ministers of foreign affairs, oil, electricity defense, migration, accompanying the Iraqi Prime Minister. These meetings were being held while Iraqi media published different analyses on the meetings.

Decision on revival of ties between the U.S. and Iraq happens while at the top of all issues and Iraq's priorities is talks on legal case of ending foreign forces' presence especially American troops in Iraq.

Meanwhile Iraqi newspaper Al Sabaah in an article two days before al-Khadhimi's visit to Washington quoted an Iraqi official as saying, "One of the main topics of the strategic talks between Iraq and the U.S. is Iraq's request for the U.S. government's military support from Baghdad in war with Daesh forces and undertaking for protecting the active foreign installations in the country." Meanwhile due to the outbreak of Coronavirus and its danger and fragility of the current condition in Iraq, the country was eager to take advantage of the U.S. health support in the future.

See Page 7

Iran Planning to Launch 5 New Satellites By March 2021

TEHRAN (IFP) - Minister of communication and information technology has unveiled plans for the launch of five new homegrown satellites by the end of the current Iranian year.

In a radio interview on Wednesday, Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi said his ministry will be carrying out 10 projects in the final year of the incumbent administration's term, mainly in the space sector and development of the National Information Network.

The Ministry of Communication and Information Technology is going to launch five satellites in cooperation with the Defence Ministry by the end of the year (March 2021), he noted.

The minister said a satellite launch initially slated for June has been postponed in order to coordinate the plans and make sure that the satellite will function properly.

He further highlighted the country's great progress in the development of artificial intelligence solutions, saying Iran is going to unveil a homegrown supercomputer which is among the world's top 500 computers.

See Page 7

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UAE Trespassing Red Lines of Regional Security

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Senior Advisor of the Iranian Parliament Speaker Hossein Amir Abdollahian said on Thursday that the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is violating red lines of security in the region.

In reaction to the UAE act of establishing ties with the Zionist regime, the official wrote on his Twitter account that Abu Dhabi is unwisely violating red lines of regional security. Apart from the Zionist regime, the UAE must take accountability for the severe consequences of the regional situations from now on.

S. Korea Must Be Accountable for Halting Drug Imports to Iran

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

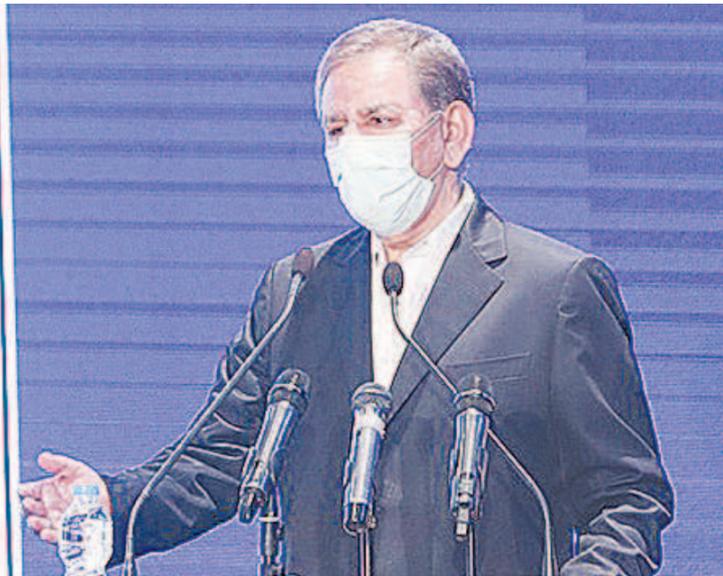
TEHRAN - First Vice President Es'high Jahangiri said on Thursday that South Korea must be held accountable for its negative response to drug imports to Iran.

In a ceremony held on the occasion of Iran's National Doctors Day, Jahangiri criticized South Korea's act of blocking Iran's frozen assets and said South Korea must be accountable to the history for blocking Iran's assets and halting imports of medicine and vaccine to the country.

"It is a surprise that the South Korean officials are not ready to return above \$7 billion of Iran's frozen assets to be used for imports of vaccine from their own country," he underlined.

"They must be accountable to the history for the damages the Iranian nation is incurring," he said, "They must respond because we do not want anything more than supplying the major requirements and demands of our country."

He also praised the medical community's role in the country's affairs, saying that the medical staff did a great job during the coronavirus outbreak and their exceptional work will be recorded in the history of Iran. Jahangiri noted that the medical community has always been prominent and respected by the people, adding that the physicians are most trusted by people.



Pointing to the sacrifices made by the medical staff, he said: "To treat the coronavirus patients, when all the sick relatives left him, the medical community and the nurses stood to the point that sometimes they even lost their lives."

"We have lost 164 doctors, nurses, and members of the medical staff due to the coronavirus," he added.

Jahangiri also said that all countries that blocked Iranian money in their accounts in this situation must be held accountable.

Jahangiri's remarks came during a ceremony held on Thursday in Tehran to pay tribute to health defenders on the occasion of National Physician's day, where he and Iran's Minister of Health and Medical Education Saeed Namaki were present as the keynote speakers of the event.

U.S. Act in UNSC Is Null, Void

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Abbas Araghchi in a message described U.S.' anti-Iran act in the United Nations Security Council as null and void.

"U.S. notification is incapable of having legal effect. It is null and void," Araghchi wrote in his Twitter account.

"None of the remaining JCPOA participants considers the notification as effective. We trust the SC will not permit the U.S. to abuse Res 2231 to achieve its stated objective of destroying that very resolution," he added.

Earlier, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif in a letter to the chairman of the UN Security Council protested the U.S.' illegal attempts to snapback sanctions on Iran, reiterating that the U.S. has no right to reapply provisions of terminated resolutions.

He called on the UN Security Council and international community to dismiss the U.S. action.

"The term 'snapback' is never employed in either the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) or UN Security Council Resolution 2231. Rather, the US has intentionally used the term to connote rapidity and automaticity. The wording in UNSCR 2231 is actually 'reapplication of the provisions of terminated resolutions', which requires an elaborate time-consuming process—intended to preserve the JCPOA, and not to destroy it," the letter reads.

Stronger Multilateralism Key To Rebuilding Damages Inflicted by Coronavirus



TEHRAN (IP) - Majlis Speaker said Strengthening multilateralism and responsible commitment is the international community's need to rebuild the damages inflicted by the Coronavirus.

Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, on the first day of the Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament, which is held via video conference on August 19 and 20, said: "the Islamic Republic of Iran, like other countries, is fighting the coronavirus, but fortunately, due to its efficient and strong health system and despite the cruel and inhumane U.S. sanctions, it has had great success in this regard."

Qalibaf stated that the Inter-Parliamentary Union must have serious plans and actions for the reconstruction of the post-Corona world from now on.

He added: "In order to make plans, effective support of national parliaments in allocating budgets and other supportive measures beyond strengthening the goals of governments is essential, and the plan must include NGOs, the media, the private sector, and the vulnerable people of societies."

Iran's Parliament Speaker said: "World parliaments must build a new path by leveraging the rigorous management experience of the Coronavirus era through new financial mechanisms; especially against countries facing illegal unilateral sanctions."

The Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament, which is held every 5 years in cooperation with the United Nations and the Inter-Parliamentary Union, is being held this year via video conference hosted by Austria.

Topics covered by the 130-nation are generally related to the United Nations, with issues related to sustainable development, climate change, the corona epidemic, migrant problems, women's empowerment, and increasing youth participation in policy-making; which the results ultimately contribute to the better functioning of the United Nations.

U.S. Bid to Reinstate Iran Sanctions to Discredit UNSC

TEHRAN (IFP) - Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif says the UN Security Council must counter the United States' "unlawful" bid to reinstate the UN's anti-Iran sanctions.

Speaking to Antonio Guterres, the Secretary General of the United Nations, in a Thursday phone call, Zarif pointed to the United States' bid to activate the so-called snapback mechanism, and highlighted the responsibility of the UN Security Council and the Secretary General in this regard.

"All parties to the JCPOA, the Security Council member states and international jurists all share the view that the US is no longer a party to the JCPOA, and Washington's move has no basis as per the Security Council Resolution 2231 and the JCPOA," Zarif noted.



He warned that the U.S.' move will have dangerous consequences for the international law, and will result in nothing but damaging international mechanisms and discrediting the Security Council.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran expects the Secretary General and the Security Council member states to fulfil their legal duties and counter the US administration's rogue behaviour," he noted.

Guterres, in turn, vowed to carefully consider the points made by the Iranian top diplomat.

The UN chief further presented a report on the latest efforts made by the UN to end the Yemen war, and called on the Islamic Republic of Iran to help settle certain environmental problems in Hodaydah port.

The Iranian foreign minister, in response, expressed Iran's preparedness to use its good offices in this regard.

New Missiles Symbol of Defense, Invasion Deterrence Doctrine

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) in a statement on Thursday called the unveiling of the missiles of "Martyr Haj Qasem Soleimani" and "Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis" as a symbol of Iran's determination to follow up its defense doctrine of deterrence and perseverance in the path of the two martyred commanders of the Islamic Resistance.

The IRGC issued the statement on the occasion of Defense Industry Day which falls on August 21.

Part of the statement read that the strategic position of the defense industries in country's national authority and its power of deterrence which gains specific importance in face of probable threats, makes it imperative to speed up the trend of capacity building and improving defense and invasion might of the country especially at this time of sanctions.

The statement also emphasized the fundamental impact of Iran's defense industries in working out domestic models which make their uttermost demonstration in the resistance trends outside Iran's borders and said they function as the most important factors in defeating proxy wars which led to collapse of the Takfiri terrorism and evil alliances proving Iran's will and authority.

It described the unveiling of these missiles as a symbol of national determination in line with the country's defense and invasive doctrine, further noted that it shows the proportionate capacity to the need for a successful "reciprocal strike" to encounter any invasion of the enemies.

90% of Iran Army Needs, Locally Met

TEHRAN (IP) - "We are mature in the defense industry," said Defense Minister Brigadier General Hatami, adding "Iran provides more than 770 defense items, counting for up to 90% of the needs of the armed forces."

Defense Minister Amir Hatami on Thursday and at the unveiling ceremony of the national achievements of Iran's Ministry of Defense said: "The country's defense developments in the last four decades are not comparable to any similar period."

He added: "In the last seven years, and especially in the last 2-3 years, Iran has achieved remarkable achievements in the defense sector, in particular, in the recent three years among which it can be referred to as the unveiling of 'Kosar' fighter Jets."

Hatami said: "Yasin advanced training jet was designed and built with a new and indigenous platform. With the production of Yasin, A90, and Fajr 3 training aircraft, which are in the operational testing phase, the complete cycle of training aircraft will take place."

As Iranian Defense Minister Brigadier General Amir Hatami said addressing the event, Martyr Soleimani ballistic missile

with a range of 1,400 kilometers and Martyr Abu-Mahdi cruise missile with a range of 1,000 kilometers.

Hatami said, "Iranian defense industry, which is considered as the fundamentals of military self-reliance and is one of the main requirements of the country's authority, is now a mature one with 770 various product groups that can supply the demand of the Iranian Armed Forces in wars. " As he described, in the missile sector, deterrence power is a significant factor today.

Tehran Extends Coronavirus Restrictions for Another Week

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Head of the headquarters for the management of operations against coronavirus in Tehran Alireza Zali announced that coronavirus-related restrictions will be extended for another week in Tehran.

Zali said only 1/3 of employees will be present in their jobs next week and the rest can work from home.

He said that 515 new coronavirus-infected cases were hospitalized over the past 24 hours.

He added eight percent of the walk-ins needed hospitalizations and that 480 people received outpatient services.

Zali said that the condition of the infection in Tehran has still no tangible change and that Tehran is a red zone in this aspect.

Great Strides Taken in Iran's Nuclear Industry

TEHRAN (MNA) - AEOI, in a tweet on Thursday, said with or without the activation of the trigger mechanism against Iran, the body has taken major steps in empowering its nuclear industry and providing 90,000 SWU.

In its tweet, Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) said, «With or without activation of the trigger mechanism, AEIOI has taken long strides in providing 190,000 SWU.»

«The authority of the nuclear industry is preserved,» it added.

The tweet came after the Wednesday announcement made by U.S. President Donald Trump reiterating that the State Department will soon attempt to trigger a "snap back" of UN sanctions on Iran, as the top American diplomat threatened consequences for Moscow and Beijing if they try to block the effort.

Chinese Model of Fighting Coronavirus "Best" for Iran

BEIJING (IRNA) - Iran's ambassador to Beijing said on Thursday that China is a typical example of a successful country in curbing the coronavirus and that Iran can take up Chinese methods as the best ones to bring the potentially fatal disease under control.

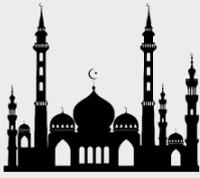
On the sidelines of a video conference about Chinese experiences in this regard, in which representatives of 158 countries participated, Mohammad-Reza Keshavarzadeh said China has been able to curb the disease.

He said that despite the fact that Beijing has been clean of the virus, every person wears a mask in the public, to stop the reemergence of the disease.

Referring to the fact that the conference was chaired by Doctor Zhong Nanshan, a household name in China, he said the famous doctor was the first to recognize and control SARS and had an important role in curbing COVID-19 as well.

He said China has sent more than 50 shipments of medical and medicinal aid to Iran to fight the virus, adding that most of the contributions have come from people.

Keshavarzadeh said when asked about immunization period after recovering from the virus, Doctor Zhong said 3-4 months, and maybe 6 months.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:07
■ Evening (Maghreb)	20:03
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:00
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:30

98. Verily ye, (unbelievers), and the (false) gods that ye worship besides Allah, are (but) fuel for Hell! to it will ye (surely) come!
99. If these had been gods, they would not have got there!
but each one will abide therein.

Surah 21. The Prophets (98 - 99)

Minister Calls for Producing Maximum Oil Despite Sanctions

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Oil Minister Bijan Zangeneh said the end of the oil age would be caused by the introduction of new technologies rather than the end of oil reserves.

Speaking in a televised interview on Wednesday evening, he underlined the role of technological advances in replacing new and renewable energies in the world, saying: "Personally, I think we should do our best to produce maximum oil; The development of technology is increasing day by day and we may reach a point where oil can no longer compete with new energies."

He said oil revenues must be deposited in the national development fund of Iran (NDFI) so that the resources could be used for developing projects such as petrochemical plants, petro-refineries and other industries.

"If we do not produce oil today, maybe one day we will need to get international permission to sell oil (in terms of the environment)," he said. "We must also produce the maximum amount of natural gas, because endorsement of alternative energies by the society is not going to take a hundred years."

The oil minister touched on the productivity and development of joint oil and gas fields, and said: "Our most important joint oil fields in terms of volume and importance of reserves are located in the west of Karoun River. Our daily production capacity in these fields in 2013 was about 70,000 barrels, which has now reached about 400,000 barrels; that means an increase of about 6 times in seven years."

Zangeneh, stating that during this period only about 150 wells have been drilled in South Azadegan field, continued: "The daily oil production capacity of Azar joint field will soon reach 60,000 barrels and we will officially announce it; the contract for the development of Azar and West Paydar fields has also been signed; the contract for Forouzan and Resalat fields has also been signed in recent days in the form of engineering, procurement and construction (EPC)."

Zangeneh further referred to South Pars as the world's largest gas reserve, saying



Iran's production capacity from the gas field was 280 million cubic meters back in 2013 which has now seen a 2.5-fold jump having reached 700 mcm/d.

He also said that during this period, 26 offshore platforms, 228 wells, 2,160 km of sea pipelines and 30 refining trains had been commissioned in the massive field.

Regarding Phase 11 development plan, he noted the withdrawal of Total and CNPC International from the project, adding Petropars, the Iranian partner of a consortium to develop the phase, is scheduled to drill the first well in the phase by fall.

"We hope that gas be transferred to onshore facilities within a year," he said, adding the contract to develop Farzad gas field would also be signed this calendar year to March 20, 2021.

In response to a question about the possibility of fluid migration in joint fields, he did not rule out this possibility, and said: "In some joint fields, the area of the field on the opposite side is much larger than ours. At the same time, it should be noted that despite the sanctions, in which no one is willing to work with us, great work has been done in various sectors of the oil industry and good capacities have been created."

Asked about the future of the oil market due to the coronavirus pandemic and the global economic downturn, Zangeneh said: "The situation in the oil market has not recovered yet, but with the action taken by OPEC (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries), which I think was an important step, Brent crude is now above \$45 a barrel, which is not a price in jeopardy."

To the question that it is said that the United States wants to prevent export of Iran's oil products to Venezuela, and has already seized a shipment, and whether Iran would still continue this cooperation under these circumstances, he stated: "Our cargo was not confiscated. The shipment belonged to Venezuela, we had sold it free on board (FOB)."

Zangeneh added: "The United States wanted to declare a success with this news and say that they have hit Iran, as if they needed it very much. After all, this is a war and both sides are working against each

Iran-Turkey Trade Shrinks 73%

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – According to the official data released by Turkey, the trade volume between Iran and Turkey stood at around one billion dollars in the first half of 2020 which shows considerable 73 percent decline comparing to the same period in 2019.



According to data, the volume of Iran's exports to Turkey has slumped by 85 percent while the country's imports from Turkey have also witnessed 45 percent decline in the same period.

Tehran Chamber of Commerce in a report has reviewed the goods trade with Turkey in the first half of 2020. According to the report, the bilateral trade of Iran and Turkey has declined by 73 percent in the first half of the year.

The reason behind such a considerable decline in the value of Iran's exported goods to Turkey is due to 99 percent decline in Iran's non-oil goods. Over 76 percent decline of Iran's 85 percent decline in its exports to Turkey was because of fall in exports of these goods.

Plastic and the related items topped Iran's exports to Turkey while machineries and mechanical devices were major imports of Iran.

According to Turkey's official statistics, the trade volume of Iran and Turkey was some \$3.9b in the first half of 2019 and Turkey's exports to Iran were some \$1.2b in the same period, and in return, Iran's exports to Turkey hit \$2.7b.

Turkey's exports in the first half of 2020 have declined to \$652m which indicates 44.6 percent fall while Iran's exports were valued at around \$417m in the same period.

Iran May Buy Russian Vaccine for COVID-19 If Approved by WHO



TEHRAN (IFP) - President's Chief of Staff Mahmoud Vaezi has unveiled plans for the purchase of any coronavirus vaccine approved by the World Health Organization, saying the new vaccine developed by Russia could be an option.

Speaking to reporters, Vaezi said Iran will definitely purchase the coronavirus vaccine that is certified by the WHO.

On the possibility of buying the Russian vaccine, he said the Iranian Health Ministry is still evaluating the numerous vaccines produced in the world for coronavirus treatment.

While 28 vaccines have passed animal tests so far, Iran would be purchasing the vaccine that is approved by the WHO, although the country itself is developing the COVID-19 vaccine, Vaezi added.

"We need to assess the Russian vaccine to see if we'd purchase that vaccine or the other ones," the president's chief of staff noted.

Last week, Iran's health minister said a number of vaccines for the novel coronavirus being developed inside the country have successfully passed the human tests and are ready for clinical trial.

On August 11, Russian President Vladimir Putin said his country has become the first country to approve a vaccine offering "sustainable immunity" against the coronavirus. Russian Ambassador to Tehran Levan Jagarian has also expressed his country's readiness to supply Iran with the new vaccine.

EU Commits Over 8m Euros to Support The UN Response to COVID-19 in Iran

TEHRAN (UNIC) - A 8 million euro contribution from the European Commission's Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) is allocated to the UN and its partner Relief International in Iran to support the management and control of the COVID-19 pandemic, and to mitigate its impact on the most vulnerable communities with a focus on most at-risk children, adolescents and young people. The ECHO fund is allocated to UNDP, UNFPA, UNAIDS, UNICEF, and Relief International to support their COVID-19 operations in Iran with UNICEF as convening agency for this Joint Programme.

UNICEF Iran will spend the ECHO fund to procure COVID-19 lifesaving health and diagnosis equipment for the relevant government entities and enhance WASH and Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) standards among schools specially in less developed provinces to ensure their readiness for the reopening. The fund will also be used to mitigate the adverse COVID-19 mental health and psychosocial effects through production of stigma-free information and communication material as well as exclusive psychosocial counseling tailored to the needs of the at-risk community including children and adolescents.

UNDP Iran will use the ECHO funds to procure lifesaving personal protective equipment for specific government entities to support and strengthen the health system's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The funding will be used to meet the ongoing protection and treatment needs of vulnerable groups especially people living with and affected by HIV as well as vulnerable men and women at risk.

UNFPA will spend the ECHO fund to procure medical equipment to support healthcare and social workers continue delivering uninterrupted services to pregnant women and elderly, and prevent and control the transmission of COVID-19. The fund will also be used to ensure that service providers and target populations have adequate knowledge and skills to protect themselves from the pandemic.

UNAIDS Iran will use the ECHO fund to procure health items and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) such as disposable latex-powder-free gloves, alcohol-based liquid hand sanitizer and face masks for the health and social service providers in AIDS Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), NGOs, Positive Clubs to ensure uninterrupted service delivery and prevent transmission of COVID-19.

Karoun Petrochem Plant Fosters Diversity of Product Portfolio

TEHRAN (Shana) -- Karoun Petrochemical Plant's product portfolio was further diversified with the unveiling of the KLM100B (L) grade of isocyanate chain.

The KLM100B (L) grade of isocyanate chain was unveiled on Wednesday, by Alireza Sedighzadeh, CEO of Karoun Petrochemical Company, at the Persian Gulf Petrochemical Industries Company (PGPIC).

This item is produced for the first time in the Middle East in order to meet the needs of producers

in the mid- and downstream industries to complete polyurethane production value chain.

Karoun Petrochemical Complex has an annual production capacity of 5,400 tons of this item. With production of this item, Iran will no longer need to import it. Last year, the country imported nearly 5,000 tons of the item.

Karoun is among the world's 3 only countries to supply MDI, TDI at the same time. 8 million tons of isocyanates are produced annually in the world.

Iran, Turkmenistan Exchange Experience in Fighting Infectious Diseases

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Turkmenistan and Iran exchanged experience in the fight against infectious diseases, as well as ways to prevent them, Turkmenistan's State News Agency reported.

The talks were held during a videoconference between representatives of the Ministry of Health of Turkmenistan with a group of representatives of the Iranian Health Ministry, headed by Director General of the International Cooperation Department of the ministry Mohsen Asadi Lari.

It was noted that the health care sector in Turkmenistan has improved thanks to the international documents on the fight against infectious and non-communicable diseases.

In this regard, the importance of the initiative of President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov to create a council of medical scientists to provide conditions for regular exchange of views between medical scientists, experts and other specialists was emphasized. At another meeting held on May 12, 2020, the two countries discussed issues related to ensuring security at the checkpoints of the Turkmen-Iranian border due to the epidemiological situation in the world.

As reported, the sides also discussed cooperation in the field of transportation, healthcare and construction of joint facilities within implementation of agreements reached between President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, and President of Iran Hassan Rouhani. Earlier, new automobile bridge opened to connect namesake cities of Sarakhs on the two sides of Turkmen-Iranian border.

Iraq Willing to Establish Joint Investment With Iran

ABADAN (IRNA) - Iranian economic attaché in Basra said that Iraq is eager to maintain joint investment with Iran in agricultural, technical and engineering fields.

Abdol Amir Rabihavi said that working in extraterrestrial farming in Iraq is considered as a suitable opportunity for exporting agricultural products to Persian Gulf Littoral States.

He also referred to Iraq's eagerness for establishing joint investment in producing hen and egg sectors, saying many Iranian companies have invested in Iraq and have no problem.

Rabihavi called for changing Iran's exports strategy in order to attend Iraqi market and to compete with exporters to Iraq.

Tehran, Baghdad Stress Reinforcing Cultural Ties

BAGHDAD (IRNA) - Iranian envoy to Baghdad Iraj Masjedi and Iraqi Culture Minister Hassan Nazim in a meeting underlined reinforcing cultural relations between the two countries.

Both sides referred to background of cultural and historical relations between two countries. Masjedi said that major parts of Iranian tourism capacities is used to host Iraqi pilgrims and those who visit Iran for medical and educational purposes.

He noted that increase in popular commutes indicates good relations between two neighbors.

Pointing to readiness for signing MoU between two countries in cultural field, he said Iran is ready to cooperate with Iraq in reconstructing historical and ancient sites in Iraq, holding cultural and handicrafts exhibition and maintaining cooperation in cinema field and producing joint series.

Meanwhile, Nazim expressed happiness over cultural cooperation between Iran and Iraq, saying Baghdad is ready for developing cultural ties with Tehran.

Putin Critic Navalny Fights for Life

MOSCOW (Reuters) - Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny was fighting for his life in a Siberian hospital on Thursday after drinking tea that his allies believe was laced with poison.

If confirmed, it would be the latest in a long series of poisonings and suspected poisonings of people who have fallen out with the Kremlin, which denies settling scores with its foes by murdering them.

Navalny, a fierce critic of President Vladimir Putin and his lieutenants, began feeling ill on a plane to Moscow on Thursday morning after drinking tea at an airport cafe in the Siberian city of Tomsk. His condition became so serious that the plane made an emergency landing at the city of Omsk, en route to Moscow, where he was carried off on a stretcher.



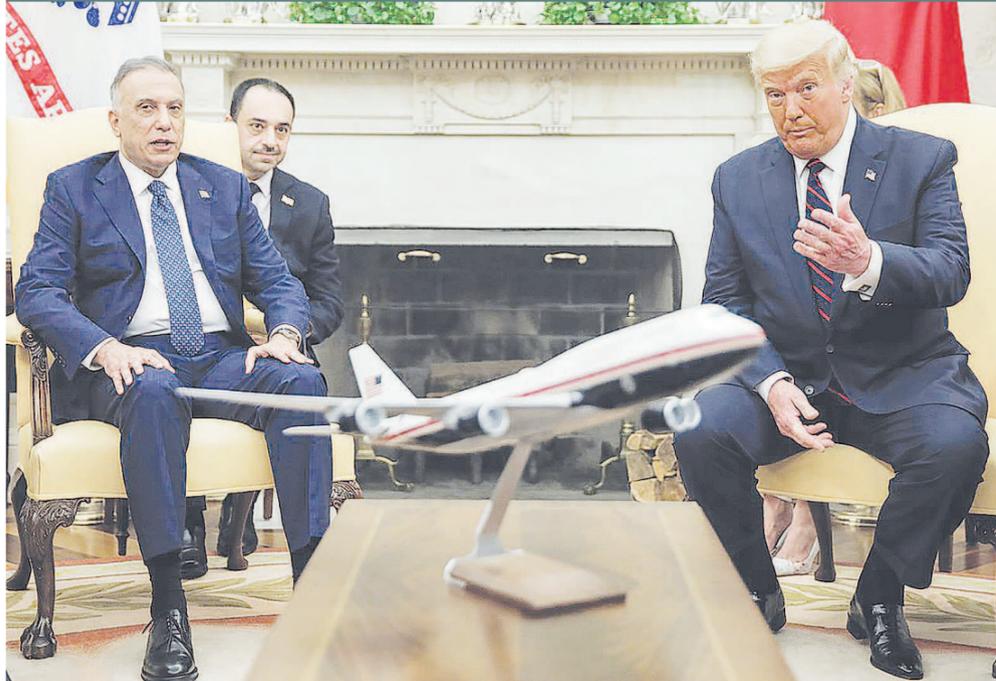
Architect of Trump's 2016 Win Charged With Fraud

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Steve Bannon, an architect of Donald Trump's 2016 election victory, has been charged with defrauding Trump supporters in a campaign to help build the president's signature wall along the U.S.-Mexico border, prosecutors said on Thursday.

As a top adviser to Trump's presidential campaign who later served as White House chief strategist, Bannon helped articulate the right-wing populism and fierce opposition to immigration that have been hallmarks of Trump's 3-1/2 years in office. Trump fired Bannon from his White House post in August 2017.



Trump Reaffirms Plan to Withdraw All U.S. Troops From Iraq



WASHINGTON (AP) - President Donald Trump on Thursday reaffirmed his plan to withdraw all U.S. troops from Iraq as quickly as possible as he met with the prime minister of Iraq to discuss ways to rein in pro-Iran militias in the country and counter residual threats from Islamic State sleeper cells.

"We look forward to the day when we don't have to be there," Trump said during an Oval Office meeting with Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi.

"We were there and now we're getting out. We'll be leaving shortly and the relationship is very good. We're making very big oil deals. Our oil companies are making massive deals. ... We're going to be leaving and hopefully we're going to be leaving a country that can defend itself."

Asked about a timetable for a full withdrawal, the president turned to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who replied: "As soon as we can complete the mission. The president has made very clear he wants to get our forces down to the lowest level as quickly as we possibly can. That's the mission he's given us and we're working with the Iraqis to achieve that."

There are more than 5,000 American troops in Iraq now. Last month, the top U.S. general for the Middle East said he believed the U.S. will keep a smaller but enduring presence in the country. Marine Gen. Frank McKenzie, the commander of U.S. Central Command, said he believes the Iraqis welcome the U.S. and coalition troops, especially in the ongoing fight to keep IS fighters from taking hold of the country again.

McKenzie has not said how many U.S. troops might stay. But he said Iraqi conventional forces now operate on their own. U.S. and coalition forces continue to conduct training and counterterrorism operations, including with Iraqi commandos. Any final decisions, he said, would be coordinated with the Iraqi government.

Al-Kadhimi has often had to walk a tightrope due to the U.S.-Iran rivalry. Asked if he was bringing any messages from Tehran following a recent visit there, al-Kadhimi told The Associated Press before he left for Washington: "We do not play the role of postman in Iraq."

The U.S. recognizes the cultural and religious ties that exist between Iran and Iraq, but the administration wants to decrease Iran's destabilizing influence in Iraq, often exercised by pro-Iranian militias.

Al-Kadhimi's administration inherited a myriad of crises. State coffers in the crude oil-dependent country were slashed following a severe drop in prices, adding to the woes of an economy already struggling with the aftershocks of the global coronavirus pandemic. The U.S. wants to make sure the Baghdad central government's limited resources also find their way to the Kurdish autonomous region in northern Iraq.

Belarus Launches Criminal Case Against New Opposition Body

MINSK (Reuters) - Belarus launched a criminal case on Thursday against a new opposition body, accusing it of an illegal attempt to seize power, a day after President Alexander Lukashenko threatened to sweep the streets of protesters who reject his re-election. Belarus is facing its biggest political crisis since the breakup of the Soviet Union, with tens of thousands of demonstrators rejecting Lukashenko's victory in an Aug. 9 vote his opponents say was rigged. Opponents of Lukashenko, who has been in power for 26 years, unveiled the Coordination Council on Tuesday with the stated aim of negotiating a transfer of power.

Its dozens of members include a Nobel Prize-winning author and the ousted head of Minsk's main drama theatre, as well

as exiled presidential candidate Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, whose followers say she won the election.

The general prosecutor's office described the body as designed to seize power, and the act of setting it up a threat to national security, Russia's RIA news agency reported. No individuals were named as suspects in the case.

The council said one of its members, Maksim Znak, had been summoned to appear at the Investigative Committee on Friday over the criminal case. It issued a statement saying its efforts were lawful. "The accusation is completely baseless and without foundation. Our goal is to resolve the crisis without conflict. We are not calling for the seizure of power," council member Syarhei Dyleuski, leader of a committee of striking workers at the Minsk Tractor Factory, told Reuters.



Hong Kong Slams U.S. Decision to End Tax, Extradition Deals

HONG KONG (AFP) - Hong Kong on Thursday accused America of using the city as a pawn in ties with China as it slammed a U.S. decision to withdraw from three accords on extradition and taxation.

The United States formally notified the Asian financial hub on Wednesday that it had withdrawn from bilateral deals covering the surrender of fugitives, transfer of prisoners and tax exemptions on income from shipping.

Washington's move came in response to the imposition by China of a national security law in Hong Kong that critics say is an attack on freedoms in the semi-autonomous Chinese city.

"These steps underscore our deep concern regarding Beijing's decision to impose the national security law, which has crushed the freedoms of the people of Hong Kong," the US Department of State said.

But a Hong Kong government spokesperson on Thursday said abandoning the deals created further "troubles in the China-US relationship, using Hong Kong as a pawn", and "should be condemned by the international community". He said the decision reflects a "disrespect for bilateralism and multilateralism" under the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump.

The U.S. announcement followed an earlier decision by Trump to revoke the preferential trade status afforded Hong Kong under American law, as Beijing clamps down on the territory after huge and often violent pro-democracy protests last year.

Hong Kong authorities said the three agreements terminated on Wednesday were negotiated "in good faith to benefit the peoples and businesses of both sides".

The spokesperson added that ending the tax exemptions would increase the operating costs of shipping companies. "It will hamper the development of the shipping sector between Hong Kong and the U.S., and is in nobody's interest," he said.

Sri Lanka's President to Scrap Reforms Limiting Powers

COLOMBO (Dispatches) - Sri Lanka's president has said he will use the overwhelming mandate received by his governing coalition in recent parliamentary elections to remove a constitutional amendment curtailing presidential powers and limiting the president to two terms.

During a policy speech at the opening of the new parliament on Thursday, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa said his government will abolish the 19th Amendment as a matter of priority and then work on a new constitution.

The amendment was added by his predecessor Maithripala Sirisena to reform the country's political system by reducing the ability of presidents to amass extensive powers.

The move will strengthen Rajapaksa's grip on power because the country will return to its previous



constitutional status, in which the president could head ministries, appoint and dismiss ministers, appoint officials for the police, judiciary and public service and dissolve parliament any time after one year.

"Our constitution has been changed 19 times from 1978, creating a lot of uncertainties and confusion," he told the parliament.

"Because the people have given us the mandate that we requested from them for a constitutional change, we will as a matter of priority be repealing the 19th Amendment as we promised the people," he said.

"After that, we will get together and bring in a new constitution that is requested by and needed for the country." Rajapaksa said he had faced many restrictions because of the 19th Amendment since being elected president last November.

U.S. Sanctions Syrian Leader's Henchman, Media Advisor

WASHINGTON (AFP) - The United States announced fresh sanctions on Thursday against several senior political, military and financial figures in the Syrian regime as part of the Caesar Act, which punishes any company that works with President Bashar al-Assad.

The sanctions target first and foremost Yasser Ibrahim, described as the Syrian leader's "henchman" in a statement issued by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. Pompeo said Ibrahim was being targeted "for his efforts to prevent or obstruct a political solution to the Syrian conflict" that began in 2011.

"Using his networks across the Middle East and beyond, Ibrahim has cut corrupt deals that enrich Assad, while Syrians are dying from a lack of food and medicine," the U.S. chief diplomat said.

The sanctions freeze any assets the targeted individuals may have in the United States, block them from accessing the U.S. financial system, and bar them from entering US territory. Assad has been under U.S. sanctions since he began to crush an uprising in 2011. The sanctions also target Luna al-Shibl, the Syrian leader's media advisor, and Mohamad Amar Saati, a senior official of the ruling Baath Party who allegedly "led an organization that facilitated the entry of university students into Assad-backed militias."

Biden Promises to End Darkness of Trump Era

WILMINGTON (Reuters) - Joe Biden accepted the Democratic Party nomination for the White House on Thursday, vowing to heal a United States battered by a deadly pandemic and divided by four years of Donald Trump's presidency.

"The current president has cloaked America in darkness for much too long. Too much anger. Too much fear. Too much division," Biden said. "Here and now, I give you my word: if you entrust me with the presidency, I'll draw on the best of us, not the worst."

Biden's speech - the capstone of nearly five decades in politics - was delivered inside a largely empty arena in his hometown of Wilmington, Delaware, at the conclusion of a Democratic convention held virtually because of a coronavirus pandemic that has killed more than 170,000 Americans.

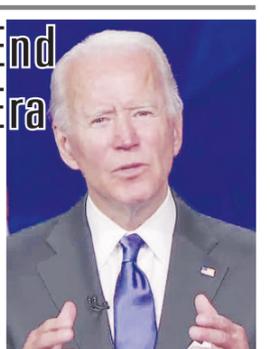
Describing the current moment as one of the most difficult times the country has ever faced, Biden offered himself as a uniter who would work "just as hard" for those who do not support him - drawing a stark contrast with the Republican Trump, who has kept the focus on his base of voters.

"While I'll be a Democratic candidate, I'll be an American president," said Biden, who faces Trump in the Nov. 3 election. "This is not a partisan moment. This must be an American moment. It's a moment that calls for hope, and light, and love."

Democrats used the convention to highlight the broad coalition working to oust Trump, showcasing liberals and moderates, elder statesmen and rising stars - and even some high-profile Republicans, who urged their fellow conservatives to place patriotism above party.

While the party laid out plenty of areas in which Biden would pursue dramatically different policies than Trump, including immigration, climate change and gun safety, much of Thursday was devoted to themes such as faith and integrity.

The program also emphasized Biden's personal experience with tragedy - his first wife's and infant daughter's deaths in a car accident, and the death of his son Beau from cancer - to underscore his ability to empathize with suffering Americans. Trump, whose instincts are more combative than comforting, has been accused of failing to offer solace at a time of crisis.



Lufthansa Reaches Deal With Pilots to Cut Costs

BERLIN (Reuters) - Lufthansa said it had reached an agreement with pilots on Wednesday over a package of short-term measures to cut costs as the German airline battles to reduce losses due to the coronavirus pandemic. In return for job guarantees until at least March 31, 2021, pilots union Vereinigung Cockpit (VC) has agreed to reduced top-up payments to short-time working benefits as well as cuts to pension benefits through to the end of 2020, Lufthansa said. Lufthansa added it would only be able to avoid redundancies beyond March if it reached a long-term agreement for pilots, including a corresponding cut in working hours and salaries. Lufthansa employs around 5,000 pilots.



Euro Zone Economic Outlook Steady But Job Recovery at High Risk

BENGALURU (Reuters) - A full bounceback from the euro zone's deepest recession on record will take two years or more, according to a Reuters poll of economists who also said there is a high risk the job recovery underway reverses by the end of 2020.

Europe was badly hit earlier this year by the coronavirus pandemic, which has now infected more than 22 million people globally. But stringent lockdowns and contact tracing helped get the numbers down and allowed swift re-openings.

Along with trillions of euros' worth of European Central Bank stimulus and a 750 billion euro (€677.83 billion) European Union recovery fund that kicks in next year, sentiment has improved, and the economy is bouncing back along with the euro.

The consensus from the Aug 14-19 Reuters poll points to 8.1% growth this quarter compared with the previous one, easily the fastest on record, following a historic 12.1% contraction in Q2. That is unchanged from the July poll median.

In May, around the time lockdowns were lifted in most euro zone countries, the Q3 forecast was for 7.2% growth.

Quarterly growth will then slow sharply to 3.0% in Q4, slightly better than the 2.8% predicted last month and still a historically robust rate.

However, more than 70% of economists, or 25 of 35 who replied to an additional question, said it would take two or more years for euro zone GDP to reach pre-COVID-19 levels. Ten respondents said within two years and none said within a year.

"Despite the recent recovery in economic indicators, the better-than-expected performance of labour markets and the recent agreement on the Recovery Fund, we still see various downside risks to the economic recovery," said Elwin de Groot, head of macro strategy at Rabobank.

"Although there have been encouraging reports with regard to a potential (COVID-19) vaccine by early 2021, as long there isn't any effective one, containment measures will have to be kept in place regardless. A second series of partial lockdowns could have some serious economic effects."

Around three-quarters of common contributors to this month's and last month's poll either lowered their GDP forecasts for the remainder of the year or kept them unchanged.

Asked to predict their worst-case scenario, the median response was 4.0% this quarter, much better than the 2.0% forecast in last month's poll. But the worst-case view points to a 2.0% contraction in Q4, the most pessimistic yet for that period.

On an annual basis, the economy was expected to shrink 8.2% this year and then grow 5.5% next, or -10.3% this year and no growth in 2021 on a worst-case basis. Much will depend on how the job market performs from now on.

Thanks to wide-reaching government furlough programmes that have helped businesses retain workers, euro zone unemployment has risen only slightly to 7.8% in July from 7.2% in February.

But about 85% of economists in the poll, 28 of 33 who responded to an additional question, said the risk the job recovery reverses by year-end was high, including four who said very high. "Euro zone unemployment almost looks like a Cinderella story. With barely any increase in unemployment, it is currently the belle of the global labour market ball, at least compared to many other developed economies," said Carsten Brzeski, chief economist, eurozone and global head of macro at ING.

"When the clock strikes midnight, however, and short-term work schemes come to an end, the fairy tale is unlikely to continue. We expect a second wave of job losses towards the end of the year and going into 2021."

The jobless rate is expected to rise to 8.9% in 2020 and 9.3% in 2021, according to a July Reuters poll. Inflation was not expected to touch the ECB's target of below, but close to 2% through to 2022, according to the latest August survey. The ECB's key interest rates are expected to stay on hold through the forecast horizon.

Taiwan to Further Free Up Economy

TAIPEI (Reuters) - Taiwan will further liberalise its economy and offer more financing products, aiming to become an Asian financial and asset management hub, President Tsai Ing-wen said on Wednesday, pitching the island at a time of turmoil in next-door Hong Kong.

Export-dependent Taiwan, which already has a very open economy, is trying to diversify away from its traditional reliance on trade with China, its largest trading partner but also a political rival, with Beijing claiming democratic Taiwan as its own territory.

Instability in Chinese-ruled Hong Kong, especially after Beijing enacted a new national security law there, has called into question how long the city can remain Asia's dominant financial centre.

While Taiwan is unlikely to supplant Hong Kong immediately, the government does hope to seize the opportunity to attract professionals and capital from the city.

Speaking to the Third Wednesday Club, a business group made up of 78 of Taiwan's most important companies including Foxconn, the world's largest contract electronics manufacturer, Tsai made no direct mention of Hong Kong.

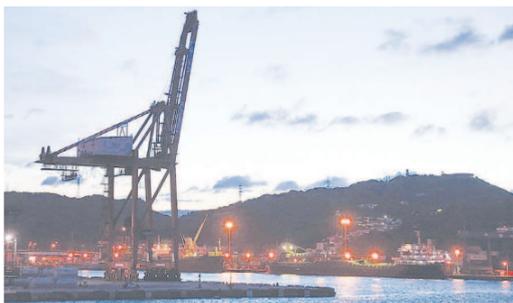
However, she noted the growing interest in Taiwan from foreign companies.

"More and more internationally renowned companies, and even more international-level capital, talent and technology, are bullish about Taiwan, are coming to Taiwan and increasing their investment in Taiwan," she said.

"The government will continue to adopt even more open measures, open up diverse financial products, expand the scope of our wealth management business, and let Taiwan become an Asian corporate financing centre and high-level asset management centre."

She gave no details.

Tsai also said the government would strive to sign more bilateral trade deals, including a long-mooted one with the United States, and reiterated her desire for Taiwan to join the 11-member Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, or CPTPP.



Britain's Economy Won't Reach Pre-Pandemic Size For at Least Two Years

LONDON (Reuters) - Britain's economy will not fully recover from its current historic downturn for at least two years, a Reuters poll of economists found, but there is only a slim chance the Bank of England will use negative interest rates to boost the upswing.

Britain has suffered the highest death toll from the novel coronavirus in Europe, leading to criticism of the government's response to the pandemic.

Last quarter, when a lockdown to quell the spread of the virus was at its tightest, the economy shrank a record 20.4%. But as many restrictions have been lifted, it was expected to expand 15.1% this quarter, the Aug. 14-19 poll showed. "The severity of the slump was chiefly a by-product of the very long lockdown in the UK, necessitated by the government's laissez-faire attitude in the early days of the pandemic, which meant the virus spread more widely than in other countries," said Samuel Tombs at Pantheon Macroeconomics.

Earlier this month the BoE said the economy would not recover to its pre-pandemic size until the end of 2021, but 20 of 23 economists who responded to an extra question said it would be at least two years before that happened. Only three said within two years.

After contracting 9.7% this year - more than most of its peers and more than the 9.1% forecast last month - the economy will expand 6.2% in 2021, the poll of nearly 70 economists predicted. In a worst case scenario, it will contract 14.2% this year. "Unlike BoE chief economist Andy Haldane, who thinks it is now time to see the economic glass as 'half-full', recent data outturns have made us more pessimistic about the lasting economic impact," said Elizabeth Martins at HSBC.

To support the economy the government has ramped up spending to record amounts, the centrepiece of which was to pay 80% of wage bills if staff were put on leave rather than let go.

But that scheme is due to finish at the end of October, and all respondents to an extra question said the risk that the job market will worsen significantly before this year draws to a close was high or very high. "Evidence of job losses is already mounting and the planned phasing out of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme in the autumn will make things worse," said Peter Dixon at Commerzbank.

The economic slump has pushed firms to slash thousands of jobs. While the unemployment rate unexpectedly held at 3.9% in June it was seen peaking at 8.0% in the fourth quarter, the poll found.

For its part, the Bank of England has chopped borrowing costs to 0.10% and restarted asset purchases.

BoE Governor Andrew Bailey has said that negative interest rates, used by the European Central Bank and the Bank of Japan, were part of the Bank's toolbox but that it did not have any plans to use them for now.

Bank Rate was expected to remain at 0.10% until 2023 at least, forecasts showed, and when asked about the chance of negative interest rates, economists gave just a 22.5% median probability. Only two economists polled had sub-zero rates as their base case scenario somewhere in the forecast horizon.

China, U.S. Agree to Hold Trade Talks

BEIJING (Reuters) - China and the United States have agreed to hold trade talks "in the coming days" to evaluate the progress of their Phase 1 trade deal six months after it took effect in February, the Chinese commerce ministry said on Thursday.

Ministry spokesman Gao Feng made the comments at a weekly briefing held online, but did not elaborate. They followed Tuesday's remarks by White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows that no new high-level trade talks were scheduled, though both sides were in touch about implementing the Phase 1 deal.

The deal, reached on Jan. 15, and seen as a major breakthrough after a two-year long trade dispute between the world's two largest economies, set ambitious targets for China to sharply boost purchases of U.S. farm and manufactured goods.

But ties quickly soured in the aftermath of the coronavirus pandemic and China's imposition of a new national security law in Hong Kong.

Both sides traded threats and sanctions on individuals and businesses, such as Chinese video platform TikTok. Official data also suggests China's imports of U.S. farm and manufactured goods, energy and services are well behind the pace needed to meet a first-year target increase of \$77 billion over 2017 purchases.

China's purchases have increased as its economy recovers from this year's coronavirus lockdown, however. On Tuesday, U.S. President Donald Trump told reporters he had postponed an Aug. 15 review of the trade pact, in frustration over Beijing's handling of the virus pandemic.

OPEC+ Presses for Compliance With Oil Cuts

DUBAI (Reuters) - OPEC and its allies pressed oil nations pumping above output targets to cut more in August-September amid fears oil demand recovery was slow while saying it could reach pre-pandemic levels by the year-end.

The group, known as OPEC+, met on Wednesday to review compliance and left oil cuts levels unchanged. Cuts would deepen this month and next because of compensation by Iraq, Nigeria, Angola and Kazakhstan for overproduction in May-July.

"Based on the average projections of various institutions, including OPEC, EIA and the IEA, it is estimated that the world will reach about 97% of pre-pandemic oil demand during the fourth quarter - which is a big recovery from the huge falls in April and May," said Saudi Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman.

OPEC+ has previously eased output cuts levels to 7.7 million barrels per day (bpd) from August versus a record high 9.7 million bpd - or 10 percent of global supply - between May and July 2020 - to balance supply with collapsing demand.

OPEC alone traditionally produced well over 30 million bpd of oil over the past decades but after this year's cuts its output stood at 20-22 million bpd. The virtual meeting on Wednesday only discussed compliance by countries such as Iraq, Nigeria, Angola and Kazakhstan.

The countries within OPEC+ overproduced in May-July and would compensate those volumes in August-September, OPEC+ said in a statement without disclosing exact figures.

"It is very important to maintain full conformity," said Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak, who had tested positive for coronavirus and joined the virtual meeting from home.

"We should endeavour to put this temporary compensation regime behind us, by clearing all the past over-production by end of September," said Prince Abdulaziz. The next OPEC+ ministerial panel is scheduled for Sept. 17.

Brent crude LCOc1 is trading near a 5-month high above \$45 a barrel and has more than doubled since hitting a 21-year low below \$16 in April, helped by the OPEC+ deal.

Many OPEC members need high oil revenues to balance their budgets but also want to avoid allowing oil prices to run well above \$50 per barrel as it would encourage a resurgence in U.S. shale production.

WTO Goods Trade Index Hits Record Low



ZURICH (Reuters) - The World Trade Organization said on Wednesday its goods trade barometer hit a record low, suggesting global merchandise trade registered a historic fall in the second quarter of 2020 as the coronavirus pandemic raged.

"Additional indicators point to partial upticks in world trade and output in the third quarter, but the strength of any such recovery remains highly uncertain: an L-shaped, rather than V-shaped, trajectory cannot be ruled out," the WTO said here on its website.

The barometer reading of 84.5 was down 18.6 points down from the year-ago period. In normal times, it anticipates changes in the trajectory of trade by a few months, but volatility triggered by the pandemic has reduced its predictive value.

"This reading - the lowest on record in data going back to 2007, and on par with the nadir of the 2008-09 financial crisis - is broadly consistent with WTO statistics issued in June, which estimated an 18.5% decline in merchandise trade in the second quarter of 2020 as compared to the same period last year," the WTO said.

The exact extent of the fall will become clear only when official trade data for April to June become available.

The WTO had forecast in April that global trade in goods would fall between 13% and 32% in 2020 before rebounding by 21-24% in 2021, but in June said rapid responses by governments meant its pessimistic scenario for this year was unlikely.

"The WTO's June statistics implied a 14% drop in global merchandise trade volume between the first and second quarters of this year. This estimate, together with the new Goods Trade Barometer reading, suggest that world trade in 2020 is evolving in line with the less pessimistic of the two scenarios outlined in the WTO's April forecast," it said.

U.S. Sanctions 2 UAE-Based Companies for Aiding Iranian Airline

DUBAI (Dispatches) - The U.S. government has imposed new sanctions against two companies based in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) for providing material support to Iran's biggest airline.

The U.S. Treasury Department said Wednesday the two companies, Parthia Cargo and Delta Parts Supply FZC, have provided parts and logistic support to Iranian airline Mahan Air, which is blacklisted under U.S. sanctions.

The Treasury Department also imposed sanctions on UAE-based Iranian national Amin Mahdavi for owning or controlling Parthia Cargo.



Brazil, India and South Africa Face Toughest Recovery Among G-20 Nations

LONDON (Dispatches) - Brazil, India and South Africa face the harshest road to recovery of all the G-20 (Group of 20) major economies, according to a new study.

The three nations have the second, third and fifth largest Covid-19 caseloads in the world respectively, but Verisk Maplecroft's Recovery Capacity Index also identified underlying governance issues and weaker institutions as impediments to long-term emergence from the crisis.

The index measures more than a dozen factors which either underpin or undermine a recovery from a crisis. The Western European and East Asian G-20 nations, which suffered the worst initial hit from the pandemic now have the foundations in place to recover and scored on average 40% higher across the index than their emerging market counterparts.

Brazil, India and South Africa, which cumulatively represent more than 10% of global GDP (gross domestic product) and 20% of the world's population, are projected to see their economies contract by an average of 7% in 2020, according to the IMF.

Institutional weaknesses, notably higher levels of corruption, were identified as the key factors separating poorer G-20 members from their more affluent counterparts.

"South Africa, India and Brazil each score as 'high' risk for corruption in our dataset, with Russia, Mexico and Indonesia falling into or near the 'extreme' risk category," Verisk Maplecroft Principal Financial Sector Risk Analyst David Wille said in the report.

"Corrupt, ineffective and unstable governments will be limited in their ability to direct funding to where it is most needed, failing to revive the economy even after the immediate crisis is dealt with." Population sensitivity also reduces a country's ability to handle shocks, and Brazil, India and South Africa were among the bottom performers, combining higher levels of poverty with lower "human capital."

Connectivity was highlighted as an important pillar for recovery, with India scoring as "high" risk. The measure tracks physical distance between populations and the digital infrastructure which drives a resumption of commercial activity. South Africa, China, Mexico and Brazil all scored as "medium" risk on this criterion.

Other man-made or natural challenges faced by particular nations alongside the pandemic and economic considerations were also accounted for. In the case of Brazil, India and South Africa, Verisk analysts said disruption from civil unrest represents the largest compounding risk factor.

In general, more affluent members of the G-20 bloc have been able to implement strict lockdown measures and effective testing and tracing regimes, combined with higher levels of fiscal flexibility to support citizens as economies fell stagnant.

"The clear outlier is the United States, which has had the least effective pandemic response of any developed market due to its inconsistent and politicized state-level reopening," Wille said in the report.



"An elevated coronavirus caseload will prolong the U.S. economic downturn, but its high fiscal firepower and underlying resilience will enable the economy to bounce back once outbreaks subside or a vaccine becomes widely available."

By contrast, both India and South Africa implemented strict lockdowns early, but lacked the fiscal and budgetary capacity to support their populations through prolonged periods of inactivity. Brazil resisted enacting social-distancing measures while President Jair Bolsonaro dismissed the severity of the virus and promoted unproven cures, only to end up contracting it himself as the country experienced the second-largest outbreak in the world, surpassing 3.4 million cases.

Unsuccessful state level lockdowns in Brazil and the ensuing backlash mean Verisk analysts expect governors to keep their economies open through the brunt of the crisis, exacerbating the human and economic tolls in the long run.

These factors also contribute to Brazil receiving the highest risk rating of the three countries for civil unrest over the next six months in Verisk's datasets, combined with popular outrage over government corruption allegations. South Africa and India also score around the "extreme" risk rating for civil unrest potential.

"These compounding factors will exacerbate pre-existing socioeconomic issues, rising unemployment and unsatisfactory government responses to the pandemic," said Wille.

"This creates higher levels of uncertainty for investors, and large-scale civil unrest has the potential to derail even the strongest of economic recoveries."

India's Economic Recovery Hurt by Coronavirus's Rural Spread

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India is staring at a protracted slowdown as coronavirus cases reach its countryside, with signs that a recovery in the rural economy hailed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi may be weaker than originally thought, government officials and analysts say.

The world's fifth-largest economy is due to report quarterly gross domestic product (GDP) figures on August 31 and, according to a Reuters poll, it is likely to have contracted by 20 percent in the April-June period. It is forecast to shrink by 5.1 percent in the year to March 2021, the weakest performance since 1979.

Nearly half of India's 1.38 billion population rely on agriculture to survive, with the sector accounting for 15 percent of its economic output.

Modi has been citing higher fertiliser demand and the sowing of monsoon crops, both key signs of rural activity, to show there are "green shoots" in the economy.

But four government officials said the uptick in activity may not be as large as first believed given a spike in virus cases in rural areas that were initially isolated from the pandemic.

"The economic situation has in fact worsened since April and May, and we are likely moving towards a longer economic slowdown than earlier expected," a finance ministry official said.

The official pointed to sluggish consumer demand and a slowdown in rural lending as causes for concern. "The situation on the economy front is very serious and the government's hands are tied on the fiscal front," a government adviser with direct knowledge of India's budget plans said.

Both declined to be named as they were not authorised to speak to media. A ministry spokesman declined to comment to the Reuters news agency.

A slump in monthly demand for fuel, electricity, steel, consumer durables and cars between April and June further highlights the dire state of the economy.

India has the world's third-highest number of coronavirus infections at more than 2.7 million, and new cases are increasingly emerging outside major cities, dashing hopes that the rural economy will be a buffer against shrinking exports and manufacturing.

"While a recovery in rural activity provides a glimmer of hope, it is at best a mitigating factor," said Rahul Bajoria, a Barclays economist. Bajoria expects India's GDP to have contracted by 22.2 percent in the April-June quarter.

Farmers planted nearly 14 percent more land between June 1 and July 31 than last year, given good monsoon rains, while fertiliser production rose 4.2 percent in June.

"Even as the momentum coming from the agriculture sector owing to a normal monsoon and robust sowing is a positive, we believe this may not sustain due to surplus-labour concerns, along with an increasing proportion of active COVID-19 cases," said Upasna Bhardwaj, economist at Kotak Mahindra Bank.

Saving Lives Has Never Been More Harrowing

TEHRAN (UNIC) - Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Dr. Natalia Kanem in her message on World Humanitarian Day, 29 August 2020, called for zero attacks on humanitarian workers, civilians, and civilian infrastructure including schools, hospitals and health clinics.



The full text of her message reads:

Last year saw attacks against aid workers surpass all previous records, with hundreds of humanitarian workers assaulted, injured, kidnapped or killed.

This year, threats to health-care personnel are escalating amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Not only do health workers face exposure to the deadly coronavirus, but they are also enduring a rising tide of violence, with attacks driven by fear and misinformation.

Despite this surge in violence and disease, these real-life humanitarian heroes are undeterred. People across the world are rising to the challenge of humanitarian work in their communities and around the world.

On World Humanitarian Day, UNFPA commemorates those injured or killed in the course of their duties, and we pay tribute to those who continue to provide life-saving support and protection to people most in need.

We honor doctors, nurses and midwives who risk their own lives to assist pregnant women during delivery. We honor counsellors and caseworkers providing support to survivors of gender-based violence, which has worsened under COVID-19. We honour the women and youth leaders who stand strong for human rights and dignity as humanitarian front-line responders. And we recognize the extraordinary debt owed to all health

workers who continue to serve amid a pandemic that has claimed nearly 750,000 lives.

At UNFPA, we also recognize the heightened risks faced by women humanitarians and health workers. Women make up around 70 per cent of the health and social services workforce, where they are more likely to grapple with unsafe working conditions and unequal access to

safety equipment and support. We know that standing strong for sexual and reproductive health and rights and gender equality also poses serious risks, and that threats, assaults and killings are increasing for women human rights activists.

We are inspired by the UNFPA staff and partners who are overcoming unprecedented hurdles to provide assistance to people affected by humanitarian crises in more than 60 countries, including those who have found themselves in dire need as the result of COVID-19. As we work with governments and partners to get to zero unmet need for family planning, zero preventable maternal death, and zero gender-based violence and harmful practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation, we also call for zero attacks on humanitarian workers, civilians, and civilian infrastructure including schools, hospitals and health clinics.

We live in a world where heroes don't wear capes, but many do wear masks and (face) shields. They protect the lives of those who give life. They heed distant cries for help and support women and girls in need. They are superhuman in their perseverance and compassion, and in their hope that, together, we can achieve a better world for all.

S. Korea to Share Economic Progress With Global Community

SEOUL (Dispatches) - South Korea will share its 20-year economic development history of overcoming the middle-income trap, government officials said Thursday.

According to the Ministry of Economy and Finance, the World Bank Korea office and state-run Korea Development Institute will publish a collaborative research paper titled "Korea: Connecting Innovation and Technology to Development" early next year. The move came as the World Bank Group has requested the Korean government to share its history of overcoming the middle income trap - a situation where some rapidly growing economies reach the middle-income level, but fail to surpass that income range and achieve high-income country status.

The Finance Ministry has decided to finance the joint study by two agencies and the booklet will cover the economic growth of Asia's fourth-largest economy since the Asian financial crisis in 1997, explaining the country's breakthrough technology, the state-led economic reform programs, export-oriented industrialization and overseas investment.

Iran Planning to...

FROM PAGE 1

The Iranian supercomputer, due to be unveiled in February 2021, is used for data processing to yield results in artificial intelligence systems, the minister explained.

Azari Jahromi also noted that the country's largest infrastructural data centre of the National Information Network, to be used for messengers and browsers, will be unveiled next week. The minister finally said a project to launch the fifth-generation technology standard for cellular networks has begun as two locations in capital Tehran have received the 5G coverage.

U.S. Is Not At All...

FROM PAGE 1

Iraq today is totally different from Iraq in Saddam Hussein's era. High-ranking officials of Iraq cannot both have the law for expulsion of the American troops in their pockets and at the same time give their hearts to the U.S. Disclosure of this double-standard approach undoubtedly vexes Iraqi people.



The pleasant color of Iraq's independence which is covered with blood of Martyr Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis demands transparency in Iraq's foreign policy although maneuver of the media backing the U.S. influence in Iraq have made the climate dusty as they are trying to distract the public opinion to the insignificant and marginal issues by publishing rumors and news aimed at instigating the infiltrated groups who are like jokers. But such actions cannot stop Iraqi people from not showing interest to the process and contents of the talks as they do not want to once again will not hand over the fate of Iraq to the groups and currents which are against the national interests of Iraqi people.

Iraqi government even with prevarication to the Americans will lose the color of transparency and soon it may soon be accused of hypocrisy and charges and make its political life fragile. Experience has shown that the U.S. has not been a good friend for any country in the region especially in Iraq. Still clips of the savage behaviors of the U.S. troops with Iraqi people go viral. Without getting a lesson from this disgraceful background of the Americans' behaviors with Iraqis, Iraq's foreign policy will face confusion.

Iran Summons Emirati...

FROM PAGE 1

In less than 24 hours, another meeting was also held between the UAE diplomat and the Iranian official to follow up on the outcome of the previous talks, according to the Iranian Foreign Ministry.

"Following these developments in Tehran and thanks to efforts by the Iranian embassy in the UAE, the Abu Dhabi government sent an official note yesterday expressing deep sorrow over the incident and expressed its readiness to make up for all the damage inflicted," the statement added. "Also, through the coordination of both countries' border guards, the seized fishing boat and its crew were released. The legal procedure for delivering the bodies of those killed is underway."

Moreover, the statement said, on the same day (August 17, 2020) a UAE vessel was intercepted and its crew arrested by Iranian border guard boats for illegally entering Iranian waters. Legal procedure is underway to look into the situation of the vessel. "The Foreign Ministry deems it necessary to once again announce to all countries in the Persian Gulf that the Islamic Republic of Iran brooks no encroachment upon its interests and no harassment of its nationals in the Persian Gulf, and will adopt all necessary measures to support its vessels and nationals," it added.

E3 Not to Support U.S....

FROM PAGE 1

"The E3 are committed to preserving the processes and institutions which constitute the foundation of multilateralism. We remain guided by the objective of upholding the authority and integrity of the United Nations Security Council. We call on all UNSC members to refrain from any action that would only deepen divisions in the Security Council or that would have serious adverse consequences on its work," the statement added.

"As we have already underlined, including in our 19 June statement, we have serious concerns regarding the implications for regional security of the scheduled expiry of the UN conventional arms embargo, particularly given Iran's destabilizing activities, which continue unabated. The E3 are determined to bring adequate answers to these challenges and will continue to work with all UNSC members and stakeholders to seek a path forward that preserves space for further diplomacy. Our efforts will be guided by the need to uphold the authority and integrity of the UN Security Council and to advance regional security and stability," the statement noted while did not mention Iran's full adherence to its commitments in JCPOA and European failure to comply with their obligations vis-a-vis Iran.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo arrived in New York on Thursday evening to meet with Indonesian Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations Triansyah Djani, who also chairs the Security Council, to discuss the Trump administration's request to reinstate Security Council sanctions against Iran.

During the meeting, which was accompanied by the resigned U.S. representative regarding Iran affairs Brian Hook, Pompeo presented a letter signed by Kelly Craft, the U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, claiming that Iran had not fulfilled its obligations and also has violated the arms ban.

Man Utd, Man City Exempt From First Weekend of Premier League

LONDON (Reuters) - Manchester United and Manchester City will not be required to compete in the opening weekend of the 2020-21 Premier League campaign following their European commitments this past season, the Times newspaper has said.

Man City's season came to an end on Aug. 15 with a 3-1 defeat by Olympique Lyonnais in the Champions League quarter-finals, while Man United's season concluded following their Europa League semi-final loss to Sevilla a day later.

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Two Players in Quarantine At U.S. Open Bubble

NEW YORK (Reuters) - Argentina's Guido Pella and Hugo Dellien of Bolivia are in risk of missing the U.S. Open, which begins on Aug. 31, after they were put in quarantine for 14 days due to their fitness trainer testing positive for COVID-19.

The United States Tennis Association said on Tuesday that a non-player has tested positive for the virus within the controlled environment that will host the Western & Southern Open and the U.S. Open in New York.

Raptors Rally Over Nets, Jazz and Celtics Win



MIAMI (Dispatches) - Toronto reserve Norman Powell scored 12 of his 24 points in the fourth quarter as the defending champion Raptors rallied to beat Brooklyn 104-99 in their NBA playoff series.

The Raptors took a commanding 2-0 lead in the best-of-seven Eastern Conference first-round clash, being played in the league's quarantine bubble in Orlando, Florida.

The Boston Celtics also seized a 2-0 lead in their Eastern Conference clash with Philadelphia, shrugging off the absence of injured Gordon Hayward to thrash the 76ers 128-101.

The Raptors, who had converted 22 three-pointers in a game-one blowout of the Nets, connected on just 25.7 percent of their three-point attempts -- and 43.7 percent of shots overall -- under heavy defensive pressure from a Nets team eager to even the series.

But turnovers proved crucial, with eight Toronto giveaways leading to six Nets points while 17 Brooklyn turnovers resulted in 23 points for the Raptors.

Brooklyn, trailing by three with 15 seconds remaining, had a chance to force overtime but an ill-timed pass on their final possession led to a final, decisive turnover -- forced by Toronto's Kyle Lowry -- that sealed the win for the Raptors.

"We've been here before," said Toronto's Fred VanVleet, who delivered a double-double of 24 points and 10 assists. "You've just got to stick with it, weather the storm."

Trailing 80-74 through three quarters, the Raptors opened the fourth on a 17-5 scoring run, taking their first lead since the second period on OG Anunoby's dunk with nine minutes to play.

Powell extended the lead to eight points with a driving dunk, and the Raptors held on.

"It's just about focusing on what we've got to do, staying present, staying within yourself, and staying confident in your abilities and taking what the game has given you," Powell said.

Lowry finished with 21 points and nine rebounds and Pascal Siakam added 19 points for the Raptors, who will try to take a 3-0 lead on Friday.

The Nets' hopes of battling back could be hindered by the departure from Orlando of Joe Harris, who scored 14 points with 15 rebounds before leaving the campus for what the team called a "personal matter."

Quarantine rules mean Harris will miss at least games three and four of the series.

Jayson Tatum was the star for Boston, scoring 33 points in a dominant victory over the 76ers. Kemba Walker added 22 points and Jaylen Brown added 20 for a Celtics team that announced after their game one win that Hayward would be sidelined for several weeks with a sprained ankle.

Joel Embiid led the 76ers with 34 points and 10 rebounds.

In Western Conference action Donovan Mitchell scored 30 points and handed out eight assists for the Utah Jazz, who cruised to a 124-105 victory over the Denver Nuggets that knotted their series at one game apiece.

It was a sweet reversal for Mitchell, who scored 57 points in a game-one overtime loss to the Nuggets. The Jazz seized control in the second quarter, using a 2-9 scoring run to open a 61-48 halftime lead.

French center Rudy Gobert punctuated the half with a put-back dunk, and there were five minutes left to play in the fourth when Denver coach Mike Malone started looking toward Friday's game three, pulling starters Nikola Jokic and Jamal Murray.

Mitchell connected on 10 of 14 shots, including six of seven from three-point range.

Jordan Clarkson added 26 points off the bench as the Jazz withstood 28-point performances from Jokic and Michael Porter.

After the bitter overtime defeat in game one, Mitchell wasn't getting ahead of himself.

Elsewhere, Luka Doncic had 28 points, eight rebounds and seven assists as the Dallas Mavericks posted a 127-114 win over the Los Angeles Clippers to level their opening round series at 1-1.

FIFA's Ethics Committee Clears Infantino After Investigation



ZURICH (Reuters) - FIFA's independent ethics committee has cleared the organization's president Gianni Infantino of any alleged breach of its code, world soccer's governing body said.

Swiss authorities last month decided to open criminal proceedings against Infantino to look into meetings between the FIFA chief and Swiss Attorney General Michael Lauber.

Lauber and Infantino have denied any wrongdoing with the FIFA chief saying he met the Attorney General as part of his duties as president of the governing body.

The ethics committee said it had received a complaint on June 21 and had received documentation from various Swiss authorities and administrative courts.

"All of this material has been duly scrutinized by the chairperson of the investigatory chamber in the context of the preliminary investigation," the committee said in a statement.

"Based on the information available to date, no aspect of the conduct analysed constitutes a violation of the FIFA regulations," it added.

The committee said some parts of the complaints did not "even fall within the provisions of the FIFA code of ethics, or justify the adoption of any kind of measure, including that of a provisional suspension".

UEFA Considers Super Cup Trial for Fans To Return to Stadiums

LONDON (Reuters) - UEFA has proposed using September's Super Cup match in Budapest as a trial for allowing fans back into stadiums in reduced numbers, European soccer's governing body said on Wednesday.

Champions League and Europa League games are currently being held in neutral locations behind closed doors in a bid to help stem the spread of the novel coronavirus.

UEFA hosted on Wednesday a teleconference with all 55 general secretaries of its member associations to discuss the potential return of supporters to stadiums.

UEFA said it would be too early to allow fans to attend next month's Nations League internationals but cleared the way for trial games to study the impact of spectators on current medical protocols.

"Participants underlined the need for strict hygiene and sanitary measures to be in place to guarantee the health of all those present at a game before allowing fans to return," UEFA said in a statement.

The Super Cup match, to be played on Sept. 24, is the Champions League winners against the Europa League champions.

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Barcelona Appoint Koeman as New Coach



BARCELONA (Reuters) - Barcelona have appointed Ronald Koeman as their next coach, the club said in a statement on Wednesday, as the Catalans look to rebuild after their 8-2 thrashing by Bayern Munich in the Champions League last week.

Koeman, who has left his role as manager of the Netherlands, has signed a two-year-deal with Barcelona, who sacked Quique Setien on Monday after he presided over the club's worst defeat ever in European competition and a first trophy-less season for the club since the 2007-08 campaign.

Koeman, who will be officially presented at the Camp Nou stadium later on Wednesday, is dearly loved at Barca for his role in Johan Cruyff's hugely successful side known as the 'Dream Team' and for scoring the goal that delivered the club's first ever European Cup in 1992.

The defender later became the club's assistant coach before embarking on a career as a head coach, managing Dutch sides Ajax Amsterdam, PSV Eindhoven and Feyenoord plus Premier League sides Southampton and Everton and La Liga's Valencia.

"Barcelona and Ronald Koeman have come to an agreement for him to be the team's coach until 30 June 2022," said Barca's statement.

"A club legend and Barca's hero at Wembley who gave fans their first European Cup, Koeman is coming back to the Camp Nou. But this time he will be in the dugout to lead the team."

Koeman has frequently been linked with the Barcelona job in the past, in spite of a somewhat patchy club record which included disappointing stints at Valencia and Everton.

But he worked wonders with the Dutch national team, leading them to 2019 UEFA Nations League final as well as earning qualification to the postponed European Championships after they had failed to reach Euro 2016 and the 2018 World Cup.

"Over the past two and a half years, I have done everything I can to achieve success with the team," Koeman told the website of the Netherlands' soccer association, the KNVB.

"I look back with pride on what we have achieved together in that period. The Dutch national team has a bright future, I am convinced of that. Everyone knows that Barcelona is my dream club. It feels very special to me to be able to become a coach there."

Bryan Brothers Not on U.S. Open Entry List

NEW YORK (Reuters) - Bob and Mike Bryan, the most successful doubles pair in the history of tennis, were not on the entry list for the U.S. Open released on Wednesday, raising the prospect that the 42-year-old twins may have chosen to end their professional careers.

The Californian pair, famous for their trademark chest-bump celebration, had previously announced they would bid farewell after this year's tournament at Flushing Meadows, scene of their Grand Slam debut in 1995. In an interview last month after a World Tennis Tour event at the Greenbrier in West Virginia, they said they had not yet decided whether they were finished competing.

"We love this life. We had a great run if this is over," Bob Bryan said.

"We're gonna sit down and if we decide to come back and play in 2021, then you'll probably see us play the U.S. Open just to keep it going."

"If we decide to shut it down in 2021, this might be it. So who knows."

Playing almost exclusively with each other throughout their 25-year careers, the Bryans captured a professional era record 119 titles, including 16 Grand Slam wins, 39 ATP Masters 1000s and the ATP Finals title four times.

The Bryans also won Olympic gold at London 2012 and were part of the U.S. Davis Cup-winning team in 2007, the accomplishments they have said they are the most proud of.

Mike claimed two more Grand Slam titles with Jack Sock in 2018 after Bob was sidelined with a hip injury.



Gnabry Double Sends Bayern Into Champions League Final

LISBON (Reuters) - Bayern Munich powered into the Champions League final, where they will face Paris St Germain, as two goals from Serge Gnabry led them to an emphatic 3-0 win over Olympique Lyonnais on Wednesday.

Bayern will bid for their sixth European Cup triumph when they come up against Neymar and Kylian Mbappe on Sunday and after convincingly beating Chelsea, Barcelona and now Lyon, Hansi Flick's side will surely start as favourites. The Germans are unbeaten in 2020, winning 24 of 25 matches in all competitions and they have won every Champions League game this season.

No team has ever won the Champions League with a 100 percent record but while Bayern will fancy their chances, PSG's powerful attack should make for an entertaining contest.

"Paris are a good team. For now we celebrate a little bit but afterwards we focus on the next game," said Bayern's Canadian left back Alphonso Davies. "It's going to be a good game, there's going to be goals in it. This is what you dream of as a footballer - playing against the best in Europe. And we're able to do that, I'm excited," he added.

PSG will take hope from the early chances that Lyon created - Memphis Depay found space behind the Bayern defence but, forced wide, he could only shoot into the side-netting.

Lyon, who upset Juventus and Manchester City in the previous rounds, had warmed up on the field before the game with rarely-seen intensity and it showed as they took the game to Bayern and they went close again in the 17th minute.



China Eyes World Cup Bid

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China rapidly tore down the famous Workers' Stadium in Beijing this week as part of grand plans to revamp its football infrastructure ahead of an expected World Cup bid.

The imposing arena in the heart of the Chinese capital will be almost completely rebuilt and is scheduled for completion in December 2022.

Groups of people gathered to watch as the stadium, a landmark for decades, was levelled within just a few days, with the goalposts poignantly left standing even as the stands crashed down all around.

The Workers' Stadium was built in 1959 as one of 10 major construction projects to mark the 10th anniversary of communist China.

Fondly known as "Gongti" - an abbreviation of its name in Chinese - the cavernous but crumbling arena was home to Chinese Super League club Beijing Guoan and hosted football matches for the 2008 Olympics.