

The European Union (EU) Said in A Statement That the Next Meeting Of the Joint Commission of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) Will Be Held in Vienna on September 1

IRAN NEWS

Iranian Minister of Defense Left Here for Moscow Yesterday at the Head of a High-Ranking Defense And Military Delegation to Hold Bilateral Talks With Russian Officials in Relevant Field

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Rouhani Hails Medical Community's Efforts To Contain COVID-19

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The Iranian president has, in a message, congratulated the medical community on National Doctor's Day.

In his Saturday message, President Hassan Rouhani specifically expressed gratitude to medical personnel for their relentless efforts to combat the coronavirus pandemic.

"Indubitably, Doctor's Day this year is different from that of previous years to the Iranian society, and rituals to appreciate the services rendered by doctors have a different vibe this year," he said.

"This year, Doctor's Day is an opportunity to express our gratitude to the heroes who have wholeheartedly protected the health of dear people of this land," he noted.

"They (medical personnel) put their lives on the line to save the lives of their fellow human beings," the president added.

Rouhani said he "bows" to all contributing to the campaign against COVID-19 in gratitude for all the efforts they have done.

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Iran Warns of Proportional Action Against Reimposition of Sanctions

TEHRAN (IFP) - Iran's ambassador to the United Nations Majid Takht Ravanchi said Tehran's action against Washington's attempts to reinstate the UN sanctions would depend on how seriously the US threats would harm the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action [JCPOA] and the UNSC Resolution 2231.

"Depending on the extent to which the JCPOA and Resolution 2231 are threatened, Tehran's actions will be commensurate with what is happening to JCPOA and Resolution 2231," Takht Ravanchi said in an interview with the Washington Arms Control Association on Friday when asked about Iran's goal in reducing its obligations and whether it will take new steps in future.

The UN ambassador further noted that Iran was discussing the Arak nuclear facility with its partners.

"If Iran fails to develop this part of the nuclear facility, it will return to its original design, which is an indigenous construction," Iran Press quoted Takht Ravanchi as saying.

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No Alien Allowed to Fish in Iran Waters



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Head of Iran's Fisheries Organization yesterday refuted allegations about the Chinese and foreign fishermen's presence in Iran's waters, emphasizing that no foreigner is allowed to fish in Iran's waters.

Speaking at a presser yesterday, Nabiollah Khoon Mirzaei said that the license for fishing is issued for legal and real Iranian persons and it is not issued for any foreign fisherman. He added that there is nothing under the name of the activities of Chinese fisherman in Iran and if someone has a report on Chinese fishermen's activities in Iran, the organization casts doubt because Iran's naval forces will not let any trespass or exploitation of fishing areas happen by the foreign fishing fleets.

He added that it is possible some foreign fishermen are employed by Iranian fishing boats but they are their employees.

Khoon Mirzaei added that all fishing fleets either before or after their arrival into the sea and fishing areas are checked by the protection guard.

On the trawling in the country, he said all fish trawlings are done by Iranian fishers or boats but the organization sets some restrictions in some months of the year for fishing some certain species of fish. He reiterated that trawling has its own regulation and devices, and equipment of fishermen should only exceed the depth of at least 200 meters (roughly 656 feet) or else it will be an offence.

He added that currently 134 trawlers are active for trawling and the amount of fish trawling reaches 165,000 tons.

Khoon Mirzaei noted that fishery production last year was ahead of the schedule, adding that the target set for production was 1.25m tons in the year but the production was 1.28m tons.

The official added that the fishery consumption per capita improved last year from 13 kilograms to 13.3 kilograms and fishery trade balance was positive.

On the murders of two Iranian fishermen by the UAE forces, he said two Iranian fishermen were killed by the Emirati forces, reiterating that he had asked Iran's foreign Ministry to take legal action.

Most UNSC Council Members Oppose U.S. Bid for Iran Sanctions

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - The United States was further isolated on Friday over its bid to reimpose international sanctions on Iran, with 13 countries on the 15-member United Nations Security Council expressing their opposition and arguing that Washington's move is void given it is using a process agreed under a nuclear deal that it quit two years ago.

In the 24 hours since U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said he triggered a 30-day countdown to a return of UN sanctions on Iran - including an arms embargo - long-time allies the United Kingdom, France, Germany and Belgium as well as China, Russia, Vietnam, Niger, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, South Africa, Indonesia, Estonia and Tunisia have already written letters in opposition, Reuters news agency reported.

The U.S. has accused Iran of breaching a 2015 deal with world powers that aimed to stop Tehran from developing nuclear weapons in return for sanctions relief. But US President Donald Trump described it as the "worst deal ever" and quit in 2018. Diplomats said Russia, China and many other countries are unlikely to reimpose the sanctions on Iran. Pompeo again warned Russia and China against that on Friday, threatening U.S. action if they refuse to reimpose the UN measures on Iran.

The Trump administration on Friday dismissed the near universal opposition to its demand and declared that a 30-day countdown for the "snapback" of penalties had begun.

"We don't need anyone's permission," US special envoy for Iran Brian Hook told reporters in a briefing on Friday. "Iran is in violation of its voluntary nuclear commitments. The condition has been met to initiate snapback. And so we have now started to initiate snapback."

He said that "whether people support or oppose what we're doing is not material," adding that "today is day one of the 30-day process."

The U.S. acted on Thursday after the Security Council resoundingly rejected its bid last week to extend an arms embargo on Iran beyond its expiration in October. Only the Dominican Republic joined Washington in voting yes. Iran's Ambassador to the UN Majid Takht Ravanchi immediately rejected the US move, which he said was "doomed to failure".

The Dominican Republic has not yet written to the council to state its position on the sanctions snapback push.

Under the process Washington says it has triggered, it appears all UN sanctions should be reimposed at midnight or 00:00 GMT (8pm New York time) on September 19 - just days before Trump is due to address world leaders at the UN General Assembly, the annual meeting that will be largely virtual because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Iran Sets Condition For India's Presence At Chabahar Port

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Head of Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization Mohammad Rasta says Indians have not totally left Chabahar Port project and they are still keen to invest in the port but Iran has set conditions for continuing the cooperation.

Speaking to ILNA, Rastad said Iran and India are eager to have a long-term cooperation but Iran has set its own conditions. He said some rumors and allegations on China's arrival to Chabahar Port and elimination of Indians from the projects in the port are baseless.

He reacted to claims on report that Iran and India have terminated cooperation at Shahid Beheshti Port of Chabahar and said currently the temporary contract with Indian companies is in underway and in the main and final contract, Indians have undertaken to provide equipment for the port and the first batch of port equipment including mobile cranes is to be installed by the yearend.

He added that in some paragraphs and topics of the main contract, talks are underway and he feels that with the current trend for activating the ten-year main contract for developing Shahid Beheshti Port, it will see no problem and it will be operationalized.

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Malaysia Formulating Strategies to Increase Palm Oil Exports to Iran

KUALA LUMPUR (Dispatches) - The Malaysian Palm Oil Board (MPOB) will formulate strategies to restore palm oil exports to Iran which has shown a decline currently following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chairman Datuk Ahmad Jazlan Yaakub said the COVID-19 pandemic has also significantly impacted the local industry whereby the trade value and palm exports to that country have contracted.

He said the strategies which contain several proposals would be presented to the Plantation Industries and Commodities Minister in an effort to increase the export value to Iran.

"In 2019, Malaysia exported 575,127 tonnes of palm-based products worth RM1.368 billion to Iran, comprising 521,669 tonnes of palm oil, palm kernel oil (26,924 tonnes), oleochemical (11,600 tonnes), and palm-based finished products (14,934 tonnes).

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China Criticizes U.S. Push For Iran Sanctions

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China says the United States' call for the re-imposition of the United Nations sanctions on Iran is 'nothing but a self-serving political manipulation,' stressing once again that Washington has no right to make such a demand after its unilateral withdrawal from the nuclear deal of 2015.

"Like we stressed many times, the US unilateral withdrawal from the JCPOA (the nuclear accord, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action), means renunciation of its rights as a participant of the deal, and it is in no position to demand enacting the snap-back mechanism," Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesman Zhao Lijian said at a regular press conference on Friday.

Pointing to Washington's attitude in withdrawing from international organizations and treaties, harming multilateralism and the authority of the Security Council and undermining international non-proliferation regime, the Chinese official said, "Its move to push for a resolution or send a letter to the Security Council cannot justify its above-mentioned behaviors."

The spokesman emphasized that the parties to the JCPOA and an overwhelming majority of the Security Council believe that the US demand to enact the 'snapback' mechanism has no legal basis, and it has not been invoked.

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Trump's Approval Ratings Nosediving

TEHRAN (IFP) - A senior Iranian official says U.S. President Donald Trump's approval ratings have sharply declined during the last months of his administration's tenure.

Mahmoud Vaezi, the chief of staff of the Presidential Office, said Trump is struggling to get out of this crisis. "Trump is trying to get out of this situation by playing blame games and resorting to threats," he said in a tweet.

"Gone are the days of unilateralism, and the international community won't succumb to US bullying and pressure," he said.

Iran to Respond Any Provocative Action Near Borders

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Deputy Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps for Coordination Rear Admiral Ali Fadavi stated that the power of the Islamic Republic of Iran for the past 41 years has been such that all the arrogant powers of the world attacked the Islamic Revolution but failed to achieve victory.

Speaking on Iran's predicated security measures against the presence of the Zionists in UAE, Ali Fadavi stressed that if the Zionists trespass borders of the Islamic countries that are neighbors of Iran, and the leaders of these countries are deceived by the United States and Israel, they just humiliated themselves.

Fadavi noted that Zionists' resistance is like a glass palace that does not last against the stone of Palestinians, let alone these glass palaces resist the infinite power of the Islamic Revolution.



This new Zionist- American move like all previous ones, will cause their defeat and the victory of the Islamic Revolution, he reiterated.

Fadavi also reiterated that the efforts of the U.S. and its allies against Iran are in vain.

Enemies have done whatever possible against the Islamic Republic of Iran but got no victory, he said.

Iran has gained significant achievements in the defense field including missile production which is unbelievable for global countries, he added.

It is nearly 41 years that enemies are waging war against the Islamic Republic of Iran without achieving any success, he noted.

Afghan Refugees' Presence in Iran to Be Legalized

KERMAN (IRNA) - Afghanistan's ambassador in Iran announced that the presence of his country's refugees in Iran will become legalized.

"A team from Afghanistan has traveled to Iran to work on the identity of refugees, issue ID cards for them and also electronic passports," Abdolghafour Lival said in a meeting with Kerman Province Governor-General on Saturday.

Referring to a recent visit by an Afghanistan high-ranking delegation to Iran, Lival said that a comprehensive strategic document was signed between the two countries which covered such areas as paying more attention to economic, trade and investment issues.

He said the transit of cargo between the two countries is in their final stages of preparation.

The Afghan ambassador, meantime, pointed to the cultural and religious commonalities between the two countries, and said that the two sides are not as informed about their economic capacities as they should "as I just found out about Kerman province's potentials during my visit".

Normalization With Israelis Against Regional Peace, Stability

TEHRAN (MNA) – First Deputy Speaker of Iranian Parliament Seyed Amir Hossein Ghazizadeh Hashemi deplored any attempt to normalize ties with the Israeli regime, saying such a move will not contribute to the peace, stability to the region.

In a meeting with the representative of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Nasser Abu Sharif, in Tehran on Thursday, the Iranian deputy speaker said, "Normalization of ties with the Zionist regime will not bring peace and stability back to the region; on the contrary, it will increase the killing of Muslims by this cancerous tumor [Israeli regime]."

Referring to the covert efforts by the leaders of some Arab countries, Ghazizadeh said, "Some rulers of Islamic countries are in a hurry to normalize relations with the Israeli regime, and their behavior is a betrayal to the Islamic Ummah and the Palestinian cause."

He noted that the approach of the Iranian people,

government and parliament toward the issue of Palestine is not political, but it relates to the "religious teachings and balance"

"God's tradition is to support the oppressed, and the nation, parliament and government of the Islamic Republic of Iran have put such tradition as a guideline to back the Palestinian people."

Nasser Abu Sharif, for his part, also condemned the agreement between the UAE and the Zionist regime, saying that the normalization of relations between the UAE and the Israeli regime is a betrayal of the Palestinian cause and a violation of Palestinian rights.

"Resistance and struggle against the occupation will continue and the Palestinian people will never be affected by treacherous acts."

At the end of the meeting, Abu Sharif expressed gratitude to the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei and the Iranian nation for their special support to the Palestinian people.

Iranian Nation Not Afraid of Threats

TEHRAN (IP) - Iranian Intelligence Minister stated that the Iranian nation is not afraid of threats, adding that believing in martyrdom makes the Iranian nation stand still and firm against the world powers.

Intelligence Minister Mahmoud Alavi stated: "If we succumb to arrogance, there would be nothing left of the Islamic Revolution."

The country's officials delivered speeches regarding the martyrs and their sacrifices on the occasion of Government Week and stressed that the enemies' sanctions would not work against the resistance of the Iranian nation.

"The Third Congress of the Commemoration of the Martyred Ministers and Employees" with the attendance of Intelligence Minister Mahmoud Alavi, Director of Foundation of Martyrs and Veteran's Affairs Saeed Ohadi, Deputy Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps Rear Admiral Ali Fadavi, and the families of the martyrs was held at IRIB International Conference Center on August 22nd.

NIOC to Export First Oil Cargo From Jask Port

TEHRAN (ILNA) - The National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) will be able to export its first oil cargo from Jask terminal by the end of the current Iranian calendar year.

Considering progress in Goreh-Jask oil pipeline project, the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) will be able to export its first oil cargo from Jask terminal by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2021), said the managing director of Petroleum Engineering and Development Company (PEDEC).

According to Touraj Dehqani, the development of the project is going on uninterrupted and the project has reached over 50 percent of physical progress, IRNA reported.

"With the main pumping stations of the project becoming

operational, we will witness the beginning of the oil transfer from Goreh to Jask by the end of the year," Dehqani said.

"Of course, like other parts of the project, Jask export terminal itself has developed and progressed," he added.

The official added if the required storages at the Jask terminal are not addressed by the end of the year, alternative options such as the use of single-point-mooring (SPM) storing the oil will be on the agenda.

The PEDEC's goal is to export the first oil cargo from Jask oil terminal in the last month of the current Iranian calendar year (starting on February 19, 2021).

Goreh-Jask oil pipeline project was inaugurated in late June by President Hassan Rouhani.

The pipeline will transfer one million barrels of heavy and light crude oil per day to Jask oil terminal in the southern province of Hormuzgan to be exported.

Iranians' Distrust of U.S. Hits Its Highest

TEHRAN (MNA) – Referring to the Iranians' unprecedented distrust of the US in the post-revolutionary years, Abbas Moghtadaei said that this has led to Iran's administration to look forward to establishing long term relations with Asians.

Opinion polls conducted in different periods of the country show that today, in Iran there is the highest consensus on non-negotiation with the United States, Deputy chairman of the Parliament National Security and Foreign Policy Committee announced, and added, "According to these surveys, Iranians' national distrust of the United States is at its highest level in the post-revolutionary years."

He went on to say, "Today, all parties, movements, individuals, influential figures, and the public agree that not only the U.S. is not trustworthy, but also they believe that everyone should be suspicious of all the behaviors and promises of the U.S. officials."

Accordingly, the greatest extent of Iranians' distrust has occurred in recent months, and this has led Iran's administration to look forward to establishing long term relations and co-operations with Asian governments, he underlined.

Elsewhere in his remarks, he expressed hope that Iran can strengthen ties among Asian countries, and this will result in reducing the U.S. influence in Asia, specifically in the Persian Gulf region and West Asia (Middle East).

Snapback Mechanism Is a Propaganda Ploy to Save Trump

TEHRAN (IP) - The Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council of Iran emphasized that the trigger mechanism is merely a propaganda show to save U.S. President Donald Trump and has no other use.

Ali Shamkhani, secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, tweeted on Friday: "The United States knows that it is unable to reinstate UN sanctions and arms embargo against Iran."

Shamkhani reminded: "White House warmongers should think of another way to reduce the hatred of the American people for Trump."

Following the rejection of its proposed UN Security Council resolution extending indefinitely the arms embargo on Iran, the United States has put activating the trigger mechanism on its agenda.

Tehran, Moscow Emphasize Promoting Ties

MOSCOW (IRNA) - Iranian Ambassador to Russia Kazem Jalali and Deputy Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation Igor Morgulov underlined developing cooperation in all fields despite Washington's destructive measures.

According to Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Jalali and Morgulov in a phone conversation reviewed cooperation between two countries.

Both sides focused of maintaining relations in fighting coronavirus.

Energy, transportation, industry and advanced technologies are the most important topics on which both countries have cooperation.

They also export agricultural and sea products and food as well.

Armed Forces Ready to Nip Any Threat in Bud

TEHRAN (MNA) – Commander of the Iranian Army Ground Force Brigadier General Kiomars Heidari highlighted the readiness of the Iranian Armed Forces to counter any threat.

"Iranian Armed Forces are ready to neutralize any hostile threat in the shortest time possible," he said on Saturday while speaking on the sidelines of a local event in Fuman, Gilan province. "It does not matter for Iran that the threat will be from the US, the Zionist regime or the Saudi-US coalition," said the commander.

"We have repeatedly announced that we do not seek to threaten and attack any country but we will defend the values of the Revolution and the Islamic Republic Establishment with all might," he added.

In similar remarks, Iranian Defense Minister Brigadier General Amir Hatami also pointed to the readiness of the Iranian forces to counter any sort of aggression.

Iran Refutes Claim UN Sanction Reinstated Upon U.S.' Request

TEHRAN (IFP) - Spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran Saeed Khatibzadeh has dismissed the notion raised by some foreign media that a request from Washington has reinstated the UN sanctions against Tehran, saying the US will never achieve its illegitimate objective.



Asked by reporters on Friday about the latest status of developments relating to the US' illegal measures at the United Nations Security Council and about Iran's actions, Khatibzadeh said, "First of all, I deem it necessary to emphasize that in the course of reporting the news and developments relating to the United States' baseless attempt to reinstate the Security Council resolutions that have been terminated under the Resolution 2231, we see attempts from a series of foreign media to offer an incorrect interpretation."

"Such news approach is seeking to portray that a mere request made by the US has nullified the resolutions and the sanctions have been re-imposed subsequently, and Iran would be sanctioned by the United Nations Security Council," he added.

"Nevertheless, the U.S. has no authority to take such action, and has only submitted a 'request' to the rotating president of the Security Council in a measure in violation of the international law's regulations and norms and of the Resolution 2231. The US' competence to submit such request has been rejected by all JCPOA members, and the US has become so isolated, even among its allies, that it has called the three European states (UK, France and Germany) the allies of Iran's ayatollahs," the spokesman stated.

"All remaining parties to the JCPOA, including the three European states of Germany, the UK and France, as well as Russia and China, have opposed such groundless and illegal request from the United States immediately and strongly, and have also informed the Security Council president about it. The other Security Council members will be adopting similar stances in the coming days as well," Khatibzadeh noted.

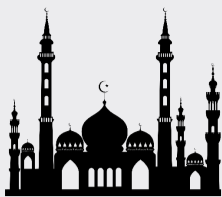
He then pointed to a recent meeting of the UN Security Council in which a US-initiated resolution on the extension of an arms embargo on Iran faced opposition from all member states, except one country, particularly from the UNSC permanent members, including Russia and China.

"Washington will never achieve its illegitimate objective," the spokesman underlined.

The primary and final purpose of the US is to implement the policy of economic terrorism against the Iranian people by resorting to political unilateral tools, to the psychological war and propaganda, and causing disruption to Iran's psychological and economic stability and security, he added.

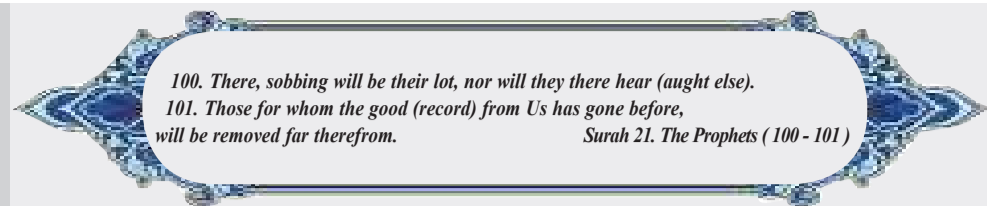
"As Dr. Zarif has emphasized in the last night's message for the Iranian nation on his Instagram page, the diplomacy body, like the past seven years, has done its utmost and has employed all of its political and legal capacities to promote and stabilize the mighty and logical image of Iran in the international arena."

The spokesperson concluded that the Foreign Ministry is trying to once again force the "American law-breakers" to experience isolation in order to counter the US' unilateralism and law-breaking.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:06
■ Evening (Maghreb)	20:02
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:01
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:30



Iran Eyes Joint Investments in Syria

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Head of Iran-Syria Joint Chamber of Commerce Keyvan Kashefi says Iran is not after selling goods to Syria but it is looking for launching joint ventures and joint projects in Syria.

Speaking in an interview, Kashefi said Syria is one of the major destinations for Iran's exports especially in the future as both countries enjoy commonalities which can boost economic ties. He added that launching Iran's Trade Center in Syria in the near future can coordinate the economic cooperation between both states.

He said Syria's economy has huge potentials for bilateral or multilateral cooperation, noting that Syrian economy since its early days has been a production-centered one. Kashefi added that Syria was once one of the biggest producing countries but due to the war condition, the country has distanced from its past and it is now in the reconstruction era and this is a good opportunity for Iran to provide Syria with different services for its reconstruction.

He further said Syria is willing to have economic exchanges with Iran and Iran should take advantage of this opportunity. Kashefi added that industrial goods, equipment for plants, construction materials and especially agro products have good market in Syria and Iran should focus on exports of these goods.

He added that Syria's economy has great potentials and Iran should not ignore this opportunity, adding that the chamber has purchased an office in Damascus to launch Iranian Trade Center and it will be a venue for centralizing Iranian companies.



Kashefi reiterated that the center is not aimed at presenting Iranian products in Syrian markets but it is one step from the pre-planned goals for cooperation in Syria.

He added that Syria has good technical and engineering forces and Iranians can take advantage of them for joint cooperation and investment in several projects like construction of dams, power stations and other infrastructures.

Kashefi added the center is ready to come on stream and the chamber's goal is to increase the current trade volume with Syria to one billion dollars next year.

He once again reiterated that the chamber is not focused on sales of goods in Syria, adding sales of goods is some part of the chamber and center's task but the major goal is to have joint investment in different fields.

Kashefi stated that the center is to employ people who know Syria very well and be acquainted with Syria's laws and regulations in order to offer economic consultations to Iranian traders.

He further said that launching a credit line with Syria is necessary for easing the trade with Syria, noting that to this end, the chamber is in dire need of Iran's Central Bank cooperation.

IME Witnesses Growth In Its Weekly Trade

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - While over 693,030 MT of commodities worth over \$1,238m were traded on the Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) last week, the trading volume and value experienced growth of %12 and %2, respectively.



According to the report from IME International Affairs and PR, on the domestic and export metal and mineral trading floor of IME, 244,689 MT of various products worth close to \$592m were traded.

On this trading floor, 240,804 MT of steel, 2,000 MT of aluminum, 1,040 MT of copper, 250 MT of molybdenum concentrates, 15 MT of precious metal concentrates, 580 MT of zinc ingot as well as 20 kg of gold bullion were traded by customers.

The report declares that on domestic and export oil and petrochemical trading floors of IME, 444,911 MT of different commodities with the total value of \$779m were traded.

On this trading floor, 127,000 MT of VB feed stock, 157,605 MT of bitumen, 72,825 MT of polymer products, 36,303 MT of chemical products, 38,043 MT of lube cut oil, 170 MT of argon, 1,160 MT of insulation, 1,717 MT of base oil as well as 5,130 MT of sulfur were traded.

Furthermore, 3,430 MT of commodities and a commercial real estate were traded on the side market of the IME.

Tehran-Baku Trade Volume Shrinks

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The volume of trade turnover between Azerbaijan and Iran amounted to \$179,275 during the period of January-July 2020, local media reported with reference to the State Customs Committee on August 19.

The volume of trade turnover during the reporting period decreased by 48 percent, compared to the same period last year.

The volume of export operations from Azerbaijan to Iran amounted to \$20,787 during the first seven months of the year, which is by 18 percent less compared to the same period of 2019.

Meanwhile, the volume of imports amounted to \$158,488, which is by 2 times less compared to the same period last year.

Thus, there is a negative balance of \$137,700, showing the decrease in the volume of trade operations between two countries, during the period of January-July 2020.

Earlier, it was reported that the volume of Azerbaijan's trade operations amounted to \$15.3 billion in the period between January and July.

Foreign trade turnover decreased by 30.3 percent in actual prices and by 20.5 percent in real terms, compared to the same period last year. In addition, imports decreased by 42.8 percent, while export by 4.6 percent.

During the reporting period, legal entities and individual entrepreneurs carried out trade operations with partners in 167 countries. Goods were exported to 100 countries and imported from 155 countries.

Iran Exports Fall 39% Following Coronavirus Pandemic

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Head of Iran Export Confederation Mohammad Lahouti has said that the country's non-oil exports have declined about 39 percent due to the restrictions caused by the coronavirus pandemic, Tasnim news agency reported.

According to Lahouti, the government had about \$41 billion of non-oil exports on the agenda for the current Iranian calendar year (started on March 20), and so far the figures for the first five months of the current calendar year (March 20-August 21) indicate that the exports have fallen about 39 percent compared to the previous year.

Referring to the president's remarks on cutting economic dependence on oil, the official said: "The president has announced a reduction of 10 percent in the country's economic dependence on oil, which is unprecedented."

Today, the country's economy is based on non-oil exports, which is of particular importance, he stressed.

"A country, which for years relied solely on the oil, is now facing conditions that have forced it to break its dependence on oil and to move toward a non-oil economy," he added. According to Lahouti, Iran is the only oil-rich country in the world where the budget dependence on oil revenues has fallen to about 10 percent.

This success is due to the fact that in recent years, on one hand, non-oil exports have been seriously promoted, and on the other hand, industrial, agricultural, and mining infrastructures have developed, and finally, investments in the petrochemical industry are now paying off, the official said. "All these factors have led us to increase our non-oil exports from \$7 billion a decade ago to over \$40 billion last year", he added.

People Urged Not to Buy Flight Tickets to Turkey

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Secretary of the Iranian Airlines Association said although Turkey has announced the resumption of flights to Iran from September 4, there is a possibility that the scheduled flights will be canceled.

"People should be cautious and not to buy tickets to Turkey at the moment, because if the flights are canceled, getting money back from a foreign airline may be a hassle," Maghsoud Asadi Samani said.

"So far, several domestic airlines have applied to perform flights to Turkey, and the issuance of licenses to Iran's domestic airlines is subject to Turkey's agreement to resume the flights," the secretary added.

Referring to the flight between Iran and Iraq, he says, "We are not going to have any flights to Iraq during the first decade of Muharram (the first month of the Islamic calendar)."

"This is due the fact that Iraq has announced that it will not accept any foreigners during the mourning ceremony of Imam Hussein," the official added.

He went on to say that as of today, the Iraqi government has not yet allowed flights to Baghdad and Najaf.

CEO of Golgothar Co. Honored for Performance

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The CEO of Golgothar Mining and Industrial Company (GMIC) was honored for the performance of the company during the Applied Symposium on Successful Managers and Leading the Brand.



According to reports, the symposium was held at IRIB's Conference Hall with presence of owners of brands, economic elites, owners of the big, small and medium-sized businesses, senior advisors of brands, organizers of integrated campaign of the brands and economic analyzers. The symposium was aimed to review the ways for boosting the business and sustainable production in the year of surge in production and in the post-Coronavirus era.

During the symposium the CEO of Golgothar Mining and Industrial Company Eng. Jamshid Molla Rahman was honored as a key-player manager during the recession era and was presented with plaque of appreciation.

Governor General of Yazd Visits Sarmad Complex

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Governor General of Yazd Province Dr. Mohammad Ali Talebi yesterday visited Sarmad Iron and Steel Complex in Abarkouh and conferred with managers of the complex and paid a visit to the projects which are in the works by the complex.

According to reports, the CEO of Chadormalu Mining and Industrial Company Eng. Naser Taghizadeh accompanied Dr. Talebi during his touring the complex.

During the visit, Dr. Talebi hailed the prudence and developmental ideas of En. Taghizadeh and announced his support of developmental programs and projects of Chadormalu Company.

He then said in the current condition, the country needs activities of industries more than ever and he was sure that with the long-term vision of managers of this industry, Yazd Province would become one of the important steel poles of the country.

Meanwhile Eng. Taghizadeh, for his part, pointed to the short and long term projects of Chadormalu for boosting economy in the region and far-reaching development in the province and thanked the governor general and official of Yazd for their full and effective support. He then underscored Chadormalu's determination for exploiting the new iron ore resources and creation of industrial units, complementary to the steel industry.

Eng. Taghizadeh added that he expects this bright outlook in the region to be materialized through empathy and support of managers and officials of the province in order that an effective step would be taken in economic pick-up and surge in production in the national steel industry as well as creation of generating jobs.

Chadormalu Company owns 65 percent of shares of Sarmad Iron and Steel Complex which is located at Abarkouh, Yazd Province. The rolling mill of the complex produces some 450,000 tons of different types of rebar annually and its project of steel ingot mill with an annual production capacity of 650,000 tons is underway.



Iran First Private Refinery Launched in East Azerbaijan

TABRIZ (IP) - Iran's first private refinery was built by Hashtroud Arkan Pars Knowledge-based Company in East Azerbaijan Province, northwestern Iran.

This refinery is the only no-filter one (without pollution), which is considered as a great success for the Iranian refinery industry during the sanctions.

Hashtroud Arkan Pars Knowledge-based Company is the first one in West Asia to design and operate refinery units based on the API (American Petroleum Institute) standard. With the installation of the second phase of Hashtroud Refinery equipment, an 800-ton unit will be added to its production and exports to have \$40 million in annual exports.

100 Commercial Wagons Exchanged Daily Between Iran, Turkey

URMIA (IP) - Iran's minister of roads and urban development said that the flow of trade cooperation between Iran and Turkey via rail is good and progressing.

Mohammad Eslami, minister of roads and urban development of Iran, in an interview with Iran Press in Urmia, talked about the level of economic cooperation between Iran and Turkey via railway, noting that the development of rail transport with Turkey is a priority for the Iranian government and now 100 commercial wagons are exchanged between the two countries daily.

Eslami said that Iran's quadripartite agreement with CIS member states (Commonwealth of Independent States) has increased the volume of rail exchanges between Iran and Turkey.

UN Team Gains Access to Mali's Keita

BAMAKO (AFP) - The United Nations said Friday it had gained access to Mali's ousted president while rebel soldiers announced the release of two other leaders held in a dramatic coup this week.

The gesture coincided with mounting international pressure on the junta and preparations for celebratory rallies in the capital Bamako following the latest putsch in the troubled West African country.

"Last night, a team from MINUSMA #HumanRights went to #Kati in the framework of its mandate to protect human rights and was able to gain access to President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita and other detainees," the UN peacekeeping mission said.



German Doctors Have Been Allowed to See Navalny

BERLIN (AFP) - German doctors who flew in on a medical plane to evacuate Russian opposition figure Alexei Navalny were on Friday allowed to see him in a Siberian hospital, Navalny's aide said, calling it "a positive development".

"The German doctors who came on this flight... finally got access to him just several minutes ago," Navalny's chief of staff Leonid Volkov told reporters at a press conference in Berlin.

A German NGO, the Cinema For Peace foundation, chartered a medical plane late Thursday that flew from Germany to the Siberian city of Omsk to airlift Navalny back to Berlin's renowned Charite hospital after he suffered a suspected poisoning.



Libya's Warring Rivals Announce Ceasefire Welcomed by UN



TRIPOLI (AFP) - Libya's warring rival governments announced in separate statements Friday that they would cease all hostilities and organise nationwide elections soon, an understanding swiftly welcomed by the United Nations.

The statements were signed by Fayez al-Sarraj, head of the UN-recognised unity government based in the capital Tripoli, and Aguila Saleh, speaker of the eastern-based parliament backed by military strongman Khalifa Haftar. The two have been at war virtually since the formation of Sarraj's government in December 2015.

The UN's top official to Libya, Stephanie Williams, called for "all parties to rise to this historic occasion and shoulder their full responsibilities before the Libyan people."

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi welcomed the ceasefire declarations.

"I welcome statements by Libya's presidential council and the House of Representatives calling for a ceasefire and halting military operations in all Libyan territory," Sisi said in a tweet.

Sisi, whose government has been a major supporter of the eastern-based administration dominated by Haftar, said the twin announcements were an "important step" on the path to restoring stability.

Libya has been in chaos since a Western-backed uprising toppled and killed longtime dictator Moamer Kadhafi in 2011.

Haftar launched an offensive in April 2019 to seize Tripoli from the Government of National Accord (GNA).

But the move prompted intervention by Turkey and its regional ally Qatar in support of the GNA.

After 14 months of fierce fighting, Turkish-backed pro-GNA forces expelled Haftar's troops from much of western Libya and pushed them eastwards to Sirte, a gateway to Libya's rich oil fields and export terminals.

As well as Egypt, Haftar has had the backing of the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Russia, prompting repeated calls from the United Nations for outside powers to stop meddling.

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas, on a surprise visit to Tripoli on Monday, warned that Libya faces a "deceptive calm" since fighting stalled around Sirte.

The central Mediterranean coastal city -- a symbolic site as the hometown of Kadhafi -- is the gateway to Libya's eastern oil fields and export terminals, and to the key Al-Jufra airbase to the south.

Western powers, fearing that a GNA attack on Sirte would raise the prospect of direct clashes between regional heavyweights Turkey and Egypt, have called for renewed peace efforts.

Egypt, which has threatened direct military intervention, has also sought to join forces with some of the neighbouring country's powerful tribes, to give it a local partner aside from the volatile strongman Haftar.

Challenger Voices Defiance As Belarus Cracks Down

VILNIUS (AFP) - Belarus opposition challenger Svetlana Tikhonovskaya voiced defiance on Friday after President Alexander Lukashenko's government opened a criminal probe into attempts by the opposition to "seize power".

In her first public comments since fleeing to Lithuania, Tikhonovskaya said Belarusians would "never accept the current leadership again" after a crackdown on mass protests following a disputed August 9 election.

"They can never forgive and forget all the violence that our citizens have suffered," she said.

Tikhonovskaya, a political novice who only put forward her candidacy when her blogger husband was arrested ahead of the vote, also told reporters she loved her homeland and planned to return "when I feel safe there".

"It should be clear to the president that there is a need for change. I hope that good sense prevails and the people will be heard and there will be new elections," she said, declining to comment on whether she would be a candidate in any fresh vote.

A nervous-looking Tikhonovskaya also refused to answer questions about her own safety or about what compelled her to leave Belarus in the aftermath of the election.

"As for threats, you know I don't think I would like to discuss this question now," she said in English.

"Every person in our country feels fear and is scared now, but it's our mission to step over all our fears and move further," she added.

Supporters and the Lithuanian government have said she had little choice but to leave after coming under intense pressure from the authorities during a meeting at the Central Election Commission in Minsk.



WHO Chief Hopes Coronavirus Pandemic Will Last Less Than Two Years

GENEVA (Reuters) - The World Health Organization hopes the coronavirus pandemic will be shorter than the 1918 Spanish flu and last less than two years, WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said on Friday, if the world unites and succeeds in finding a vaccine.

The WHO has always been cautious about giving estimates on how quickly the pandemic can be dealt with while there is no proven vaccine.

Tedros said the 1918 Spanish flu "took two years to stop".

"And in our situation now with more technology, and of course with more connectiveness, the virus has a better chance of spreading, it can move fast because we are more connected now," he told a briefing in Geneva.

"But at the same time we have also the technology to stop it and the knowledge to stop it. So we have a disadvantage of globalisation, closeness, connectedness but an advantage of better technology.

"So we hope to finish this pandemic (in) less than two years."

He urged "national unity" and "global solidarity".

"That is really key with utilising the available tools to the maximum and hoping that we can have additional tools like vaccine."

More than 22.81 million people have been reported to be infected by the coronavirus globally since it was first identified in China last year and 793,382 have died, according to a Reuters tally.

U.S. Halts Military Cooperation With Mali

BAMAKO (Reuters) - The United States said on Friday it had suspended cooperation with Mali's military in response to the overthrow of the president, as thousands gathered in the capital to celebrate the junta's takeover.

The ousting of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita on Tuesday has dismayed Mali's international partners, who fear it could further destabilise the former French colony and West Africa's entire Sahel region.

"Let me say categorically there is no further training or support of Malian armed forces full-stop. We have halted everything until such time as we can clarify the situation," the U.S. Sahel envoy J. Peter Pham told journalists.

The United States regularly provides training to soldiers in Mali, including several of the officers who led the coup. It also offers intelligence support to France's Barkhane forces, who are there to fight affiliates of al Qaeda and Islamic State.

Pham said a decision on whether Washington would designate the actions a coup, which could trigger a

cut-off of direct support to the government, had to go through a legal review. A Pentagon spokesperson referred on Friday to the events as an "act of mutiny".

Supporters of the junta filled Independence Square in the capital, Bamako, which has been largely peaceful since Tuesday's turmoil. Many of them sang, danced, tooted vuvuzelas and waved banners thanking the mutineers.

"It's a scene of joy. God delivered us from the hands of evil, we are happy, we are behind our army," said a 59-year-old farmer who gave his name only as Souleymane.

Some protesters also showed their disapproval of different foreign powers. One sign had the words "Barkhane" and "MINUSMA" crossed out, the latter a reference to the U.N. peacekeeping force in Mali.

Meanwhile a couple of Russian flags could be seen waving in the crowd. Russia's ambassador to Mali has met representatives of the junta, Russian state news agency RIA reported.

France said on Thursday that Barkhane's operations would continue despite the coup.



Nearly a Fifth of Enrollees in Pfizer, BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine Study Are Black or Latino

CHICAGO (Reuters) - Nearly a fifth of 11,000 people enrolled so far in a 30,000-volunteer U.S. trial testing a COVID-19 vaccine from Pfizer and German partner BioNTech are Black or Latino, groups among the hardest hit by the coronavirus virus pandemic, a top Pfizer executive said.

"Between Latinx and Black or African American populations, we're running at about 19 percent or so," Dr. Bill Gruber, Pfizer's senior vice president of vaccine clinical research and development, told Reuters in an interview.

"We're trying to push even higher than that."

Black and Latino Americans are infected with COVID-19 at more than twice the rate of white Americans, with Native Americans infected at even higher rates, research has shown. The groups are historically underrepresented in clinical trials.

The companies' vaccine has quickly advanced into late-stage testing, with some participants already getting their second of two doses.

Physicians and scientists have been urging companies testing coronavirus vaccines to include Black, Latino and indigenous Americans in COVID-19 vaccine trials in hopes of building trust among at-risk populations.

"We have a lot of campaigns to reach out to those communities because they are overrepresented in terms of COVID-19 illness, so we are very keen to have those individuals as part of our trial," Gruber said on Thursday. "They have higher attack rates and they are most likely to benefit."

According to a Reuters/Ipsos poll in May, only half of Black Americans said they were somewhat or very interested in taking a COVID-19 vaccine.

Gruber did not disclose the number of Native Americans enrolled in the trial, but said Pfizer plans to draw on ties from its Pnevna 7 pneumococcal vaccine tests in the southwestern United States.

"I'm hopeful we'll be able to make further inroads in that community as well," he said. Pfizer and BioNTech expect to have data sufficient for an emergency use authorization (EUA) or to start a full submission in October, according to Gruber.

The company does not need to finish recruiting the full 30,000 patients planned for the trial in order to have enough data to support a EUA, he said.



Shanon
(adviser)

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J, balcony
marble fl
Fully Furn

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

Parsian

(\$2400)
Elahieh Apt
220sq.m, 3bdrs
S/p, S, J, pkg
balcony, & F.F

Niavaran Apts
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(\$3000) 3bdrs, S/p, S, J, & F.F
(\$3800) 4bdrs, S/p, S, J, & F.F

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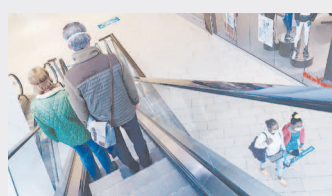
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Euro Zone Consumer Confidence Rises to -14.7 in August

LONDON (Reuters) - Euro zone consumer confidence rose by 0.3 points in August from the July number, figures released on Friday showed.

The European Commission said a flash estimate showed euro zone consumer morale improved to -14.7 this month from -15.0 in July.

Economists polled by Reuters had expected it to stay flat at -15.0. In the European Union as a whole, consumer sentiment rose by 0.1 points to -15.5.



U.S. Business Activity Surges to Early 2019 Levels

NEW YORK (Reuters) - U.S. business activity snapped back to the highest since early 2019 this month as companies in both the manufacturing and services sectors saw a resurgence in new orders even as new COVID-19 cases remain stubbornly high across the country, a purchasing managers' survey showed on Friday.

Data firm IHS Markit said its flash U.S. Composite PMI Index rose to a reading of 54.7 this month - the highest since February 2019 - from 50.3 in July. Its flash - or preliminary - indicator for the manufacturing sector stood at its highest since January 2019 and for the services sector it was the highest since March 2019.

A reading above 50 indicates growth in private sector output. The economy fell into recession in February as the coronavirus began to spread rapidly around the United States, triggering widespread business shutdowns and stay-at-home orders.

"Driving the overall upturn in output was stronger client demand," Markit said in its report. "Total new business rose for the first time since February and at a solid rate. Manufacturing firms registered a steeper expansion in new order inflows than in July, while service providers signaled a renewed increase in sales."

The survey's flash composite new orders index climbed to 54 in August - the highest since March 2019 - from a final reading of 49.7 in July.

Foreign sales increased at the fastest rate since September 2014, it said, as more non-U.S. markets reopened their economies.

The improvement in the PMI data comes even as U.S. coronavirus infections continue to climb, and some authorities in the hard-hit South and West regions this summer have been forced to either shut down businesses again or pause reopenings. As of Aug. 20, more than 5.5 million U.S. cases cumulatively had been recorded since the pandemic began, according to a Reuters tally, up from around 4.6 million at the end of July.

The unexpectedly sharp increases in Markit's indexes continue a pattern of choppy U.S. economic data that paint a picture of a fitful recovery from the COVID-19 recession, with pockets of both strength and weakness dotted across disparate portions of the economy and regions.

On Thursday, for instance, the U.S. Labor Department reported that new claims for unemployment benefits shot back above the 1 million mark last week. Meanwhile, earlier in the week the government reported residential construction had accelerated by the most in nearly four years last month.

Markit's services sector flash PMI increased to 54.8 from a reading of 50 in July. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast a reading of 51 for the services sector, which accounts for roughly two-thirds of the U.S. economy.

Factory activity climbed for a fourth straight month, with the flash manufacturing PMI increasing to 19-month high of 53.6 from a reading of 50.9 in July. Economists had forecast the index for the sector, which accounts for 11% of the economy, advancing to 51.9 in August. A measure of new orders received by factories climbed to a reading of 54.3 from 51.3 in July. Output also rose.

French Business Activity Weaker Than Expected in August

PARIS (Reuters) - French business activity has lost more momentum than expected in August, a survey showed on Friday, as firms worked off backlogs of work built-up during a coronavirus lockdown.

Data compiler IHS Markit said its preliminary purchasing managers index (PMI) fell to 51.7 points from 57.3 in July - far below the average forecast for 57.2 in a Reuters poll of economists.

The reading for the services sector stayed above the 50-point level dividing an expansion from a contraction, but the preliminary PMI reading for manufacturing came in below that level.



The dominant service sector saw its PMI reading for August fall to 51.9 points from 57.3 in July - below a forecast for a reading of 56.3 points. The manufacturing PMI fell to 49.0 points in August - down from 52.4 in July and below a forecast for 53.7 points. French business activity had surged after the euro zone's second-biggest economy emerged in May from one of the strictest lockdowns in Europe as firms responded to pent-up client demand. The August PMI survey indicated that backlogs were no longer growing in the service sector and were growing at a slower pace in manufacturing. Meanwhile, new order flow was stable in services and slowed slightly in manufacturing, the survey showed.

The INSEE statistics agency said at the end of July that the French economy contracted by a post-war record of 13.8% in the second quarter due to the lockdown.

OPEC+ Needs to Offset Large May-July Oversupply

MOSCOW (Reuters) - Some members of the OPEC+ group of oil-producing nations would need to slash output by an extra 2.31 million barrels per day (bpd) for a month to make up for their oversupply between May and July, an internal OPEC+ report seen by Reuters shows.

That oversupply above OPEC+ agreed targets ought to be compensated for in August and September, the report said. OPEC+ sources said if additional cuts were spread over more than one month, the daily reduction would be smaller than 2.31 million barrels. OPEC+ - which includes members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and other producers including Russia - stepped up their joint output cuts to a record 9.7 million bpd in May before tapering them to 7.7 million bpd this month.

In April the impact of the new coronavirus on air and road travel and other areas of the global economy sent benchmark oil prices LCOc1 below \$16 a barrel.

The ongoing spread of the virus is now threatening oil demand recovery forecasts.

The OPEC+ report showed the monthly oversupply totals of May, June and July were added to produce the 2.31 million bpd total, that was not the average daily overproduction for the period.

"Real monthly overproduction over the period was much smaller," one OPEC+ source said.

"In May it was about 1.3 million bpd, in June 0.5 million bpd and July 0.5 million bpd," a second source said.

That adds up to a total of 70 million barrels, or enough to load 70 large Suezmax tankers.

The report shows OPEC+ expects oil demand in 2020 to fall by 9.1 million bpd, 100,000 bpd more than in its previous forecast, before rising by 7 million bpd in 2021. However, it also presents an alternative scenario in which a stronger and more-prolonged second wave of infections hits Europe, the United States, India and China in the second half of the year.

Under this scenario, demand is forecast to fall by 11.2 million bpd in 2020, sending OECD commercial oil inventories in the fourth quarter to 233 million barrels above the latest 5-year average, the report showed.

Stocks would stand at 250 million barrels above the latest 5-year average in 2021. Data shows among OPEC members, Iraq and Nigeria were the least compliant and even the United Arab Emirates, which made additional voluntary cuts in June, overproduced by around 50,000 bpd over the May-July period. Among non-OPEC participants, Russia and Kazakhstan overproduced by a cumulative 280,000 bpd and 190,000 bpd, respectively, over the three months.

Peru Leads Global Economic Crash With 30.2% Quarterly Drop

LIMA (Dispatches) - Peru's economy collapsed at a record pace in the second quarter as the pandemic shuttered businesses and put almost half the country's urban population out of work.

Gross domestic product plunged 30.2% from a year earlier, the deepest slump of any major economy, the country's statistics agency said Thursday. It follows a 3.5% drop in the first quarter, putting the economic officially in recession, and one that the World Bank expects to be among the deepest anywhere this year.

One the region's strictest lockdowns brought much of the economy to a virtual standstill in mid-March. While industries such as mining

and fishing rebounded quickly after the government eased restrictions in May, service and retail sectors are lagging and many of the small companies that make up the backbone of the economy have gone bankrupt.

"It's not so easy for economic activity to return when you've had such a brutal drop," said Miguel Jaramillo, a researcher at Grade, a Lima-based think tank, before the report's release. "Many companies have folded, and they're going to keep folding. It's naive to think we've touched bottom."

Peru's hospitality industry, which has been hardest hit by the pandemic, contracted almost 90% compared with the same quarter of last year, while construction plunged 67%. Retail dropped 45% and mining fell 37%, the report said.

The number of people in active employment plunged by almost 40% from a year ago, and dropped by almost 50% in towns and cities, the agency said last week.

"Activity bottomed in April and slowly recovered in May and June, but remains well below its level prior to the outbreak and the year prior. Recovering external demand and higher copper and gold prices should provide some relief, but policy makers will have to be more effective implementing stimulus measures."

The government approved 128 billion soles (\$35.8 billion) of economic measures, including tax relief and cheap loans, to mitigate the lockdown's impact. Finance Minister Maria Antonieta Alva said this week the measures will prevent the economy slumping more than 20% this year. The World Bank forecasts a 12% drop in Peru's GDP.

Peru has one of the highest virus death and case counts after easing stay-at-home restrictions in much of the country of almost 33 million last month led to a resurgence in infections.

Saudi Aramco Suspends \$10b China Oil Refinery Venture

RIYADH (Dispatches) - Saudi Arabia's state oil company has suspended a deal to build a \$10 billion refining and petrochemicals complex in China, according to people familiar with the matter, as the company slashes spending to cope with low oil prices.

Saudi Arabian Oil Co., or Aramco, decided to stop investing in the facility in China's Northeastern province of Liaoning after negotiations with its Chinese partners, said the people, who asked not to be identified as the matter is private. The uncertain market outlook was behind the decision, they said.

Aramco declined to comment. China North Industries Group Corp., or Norinco, one of the partners, didn't immediately respond to an email seeking comment. No one answered a call to Panjin Sincen, the third partner, outside office hours, or responded to an email.

The oil-price crash and the virus's impact on energy demand have changed the calculations for energy companies' projects around the world. Aramco plans deep cuts to its capital spending as it tries to maintain a \$75 billion dividend amid low crude prices and rising debt. The kingdom -- Aramco's main recipient of those dividends -- is suffering a major squeeze on its public finances.

The joint venture was signed when Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman was in Beijing in February last year -- and at the time was seen as a landmark deal with a key ally. Saudi Arabia wanted to increase market share in Asia and also has encouraged Chinese investment in the kingdom.

The Saudis were set to team up with Norinco and Panjin Sincen to form an entity called Huajin Aramco Petrochemical Co. The kingdom was going to supply as much as 70% of the crude for the 300,000-barrel-a-day refinery.

The Chinese side will press ahead with the project, which also includes an ethylene cracker and a paraxylene unit, according to the people. And the joint venture remains an option for the future, they said.

Refiners have taken a hit as the virus curbed demand globally and margins have been squeezed. That's changed the investment case for the refining business. Saudi Aramco had also been in talks with Indonesia's state energy company Pertamina earlier this year over a refinery expansion project, but negotiations ended without an agreement and Pertamina is looking for another partner.

UK Economy Rebounding for Now



LONDON (Reuters) - Britain's economic recovery from the shock of the COVID-19 pandemic has gathered pace, data showed on Friday, but government borrowing rose past the 2 trillion pound mark and fears of future job losses are mounting.

Retail sales rose above pre-pandemic levels in July, the first full month for many shops reopening after lockdown, and August's Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) data showed the fastest growth in almost seven years.

But Britain's economy still faces a long recovery after shrinking by a record 20% in the second quarter, the largest decline of any big country.

"The UK is still seeing a V-shape bounce in activity. But ... a hot summer can quickly turn to a cold autumn," HSBC economist Liz Martins said, pointing to a softening in euro zone business activity as coronavirus cases begin to rise again.

Retail sales in July were 1.4% above year-ago levels and 3.0% above their level before the pandemic, the Office for National Statistics said.

August's preliminary composite PMI, which covers most businesses outside retail, hit its highest level since October 2013. But employers are increasingly planning to shed jobs and were making staff redundant rather than bringing them back from a government-subsidised furlough scheme that expires in October.

"Scarring from the pandemic and lingering doubts about the sustainability of recovery resulted in a need to cut overheads," said Tim Moore, economics director at IHS Markit, which compiles the PMIs.

The Bank of England forecasts unemployment will reach 7.5% by year-end, almost double its most recent reading. Separately, the Confederation of British Industry said manufacturing orders were "severely depressed", with little improvement in August. Stuttering PMI surveys for the euro zone -- where countries exited lockdown earlier than Britain -- suggested the boost from pent-up demand was already fading.

COVID-19 Kills 126 More Iranians

TEHRAN (IRNA)- Health Ministry spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari said on Saturday that some 126 more Iranians have died from coronavirus disease (COVID-19) over the past 24 hours bringing the total deaths to 20,502.

Sima Sadat Lari said on Friday that, with the 126 new victims, the country's total COVID-19 deaths mounted to 20,502.

Some 2,028 new cases of infection with the COVID-19 were found over the past 24 hours, some 707 of whom have been hospitalized, she added.

She noted that a total of 356,792 Iranians have been confirmed infected with the COVID-19, some 307,702 of whom have recovered and were discharged from hospital.



China Unveils New Strategy for Economic Growth

BEIJING (Dispatches) - As China struggles to restore economic growth, its official phrase-makers have been working overtime to rebrand the government's strategy with a slogan that will sell at home and abroad.

Late last month, China's new economic buzz-words made their first appearance in state media coverage of President Xi Jinping's speech to corporate executives and entrepreneurs in Beijing on July 21.

Despite the pandemic slowdown that has slammed China's export markets, Xi "ruled out the possibility of China closing its doors on other economies," according to the English-language China Daily.

"Instead, he said, China will unleash the full potential of its domestic demand, improve connectivity between the domestic and international markets, and better use resources and the two markets to propel stronger and sustainable development," the paper reported.

Even before the COVID-19 crisis, the government had argued for years that domestic demand and consumer spending should drive economic expansion, taking over the role from export- led growth.

Now with demand facing slow recovery, the message is that the economy needs both domestic demand and foreign trade to succeed.

"Only when both the domestic and global markets function smoothly can the Chinese economy overcome the multiple challenges facing it," China Daily said, giving rise to the new policy label -- "dual circulation."

Behind the vaguely-named title is an even more vaguely- constructed strategy that promises to do whatever is needed to achieve sustainable growth and "opening-up" reforms.

The newly-minted policies may be a prelude to the market reforms expected to figure in China's forthcoming 14th Five- Year Plan for 2021-2025, which may be released in October. Notably absent from the explanations of dual circulation, however, is a commitment to loosen the grip of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) on the economy.

On Aug. 10, Hao Peng, chairman of the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission (SASAC), told China Daily that most SOEs would achieve "sustained and rapid growth" in the second half of the year, although it was unclear how.

Hao cited an upcoming three-year "action plan" for SOEs aimed at making them "more flexible and better structured to generate fresh momentum." But this appears to be part of a long-drawn effort to attract private capital and incorporate it into the state system.

"Xi has made it imperative to make the state sector bigger, stronger and better," said one Chinese official quoted by The Wall Street Journal. "That will never change."

The prosaic "dual circulation" formula seems unlikely to spark global enthusiasm, but it may sum up China's limited options for reaching its economic growth goals.

On trade, China's figures for July topped forecasts as exports jumped 7.2 percent



in dollar terms, buoyed by COVID- 19 mask sales, but imports fell 1.4 percent, signaling continued weakness in demand.

In the first seven months, foreign trade of goods lost 1.7 percent in yuan terms, the official Xinhua news agency reported. With the pandemic dimming China's markets, trade seemed unlikely to drive needed growth.

"China's foreign trade companies will be faced with greater challenges during the second half due to waning external demand and rising anti-globalization sentiment, Xinhua reported in an interview with Commerce Minister Zhong Shan.

Despite a partial rebound, international investment has suffered from similar symptoms. Foreign direct investment (FDI) in actual use rose 15.8 percent from a year earlier in July, but seven-month growth edged up only 0.5 percent, the Ministry of Commerce said.

China's non-financial outbound direct investment (ODI) fell 2.1 percent in the first seven months of the year. The government has hailed the improvement of second- quarter gross domestic product to 3.2 percent from the disastrous drop of negative 6.8 percent in the first three- month period. But the gain came only with continuing signs of weakness as retail sales of consumer goods fell 3.9 percent.

In the first seven months, retail sales of consumer goods were down 9.9 percent year-on-year, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) said.

COVID May Have Pushed 100m Into Extreme Poverty



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The coronavirus pandemic may have driven as many as 100 million people back into extreme poverty, World Bank President David Malpass warned.

The Washington-based development lender previously estimated that 60 million people would fall into extreme poverty because of COVID-19, but the new estimate puts the deterioration at 70 million to 100 million, and he said "that number could go higher" if the pandemic worsens or drags on.

The situation makes it "imperative" that creditors reduce the amount of debt held by poor countries at risk, going beyond the commitment to suspend debt payments, Malpass said in an interview with AFP. Even so, more countries will be obliged to restructure their debt.

"The debt vulnerabilities are high, and the imperative of getting light at the end of the tunnel so that new investors can come in is substantial," Malpass said.

Advanced economies in the Group of 20 already have committed to suspending debt payments from the poorest nations through the end of the year, and there is growing support for extending that moratorium into next year.

But Malpass said that will not be enough, since the economic downturn means those countries, which already are struggling to provide a safety net for their citizens, will not be in a better position to deal with the payments. The amount of debt reduction needed will depend on the situation in each country, he said, but the policy "makes a lot of sense."

"So I think the awareness of this will be gradually, more and more apparent," especially "for the countries with the highest vulnerability to the debt situation."

The World Bank has committed to deploying \$160 billion to 100 countries through June 2021 in an effort to address the immediate emergency, but even so, extreme poverty, defined as earning less than \$1.90 a day, continues to rise. Malpass said the deterioration is due to a combination of the destruction of jobs during the pandemic as well as supply issues that make access to food more difficult.

"All of this contributes to pushing people back into extreme poverty the longer the economic crisis persists." Newly installed World Bank Chief Economist Carmen Reinhart called the economic crisis a "pandemic depression," but Malpass was less concerned with terminology.

Erdogan Announces Discovery of Large Natural Gas Reserve

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has announced the discovery of a large natural gas reserves off the Black Sea coast, days after he promised "good news" that would usher in a "new era" for the energy dependent country.

Erdogan said Friday that the amount of gas discovered is 320 billion cubic meters, adding that he hopes to start extracting and using the gas by 2023.

If confirmed as recoverable resources, the reserves could ease the country's dependence on costly energy imports and could ease the financial market jitters that have seen the country's currency plummet to record lows this summer.

The Turkish drilling ship, Fatih, had been carrying out exploration operations in the Tuna-1 sector in the western Black Sea for the past month. The sector is near where Romania has also found gas reserves.

"We have carried out nine deep-sea drillings in the Mediterranean and Black Sea through our Fatih and Yavuz ships so far. We have had the honor of giving our nation the good news that it has been waiting for."

"There is no stopping and resting until we become a net exporter in energy," he added.

Euronews reported on Wednesday that Turkey was poised to announce the discovery of a new gas field, but a source reported the likely location was the Eastern Mediterranean, where prospective drilling has led to conflict with the EU.

The discovery comes as tensions between NATO allies



Turkey and Greece are running high over oil and gas exploration in disputed waters in the eastern Mediterranean. Greek and Turkish warships have been shadowing each other after Turkey sent a research ship to look for potential undersea oil and gas deposits. The Turkish ship is scheduled to search for energy reserves there until Aug. 23.

Separately, Turkey is also at odd with Cyprus over energy exploration around the island. It has dispatched warship-escorted vessels off Cyprus's coast to drill for gas, insisting that it's acting to protect its interests and those of Turkish Cypriots to the area's natural resources. The Greek Cypriot government of the ethnically split island has slammed Turkey for encroaching in its waters and economic rights.

The discovery of the natural gas reserve would come as a welcome respite for the country which is dependent on Iran, Iraq and Russia for its energy and is grappling with economic woes. Last year, energy imports cost the country \$41 billion.

The Turkish lira has tumbled to record lows this months, fuelled by high inflation, a wide current account deficit and the Turkish government's push for cheap credit to drive an economy that was already fragile before the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

The currency however, recovered some losses following reports of the discovery of gas deposits.

"Our goal is to make Black Sea gas available to our nation in 2023," said Erdogan on Friday. 2023 is the centenary of the founding of the Turkish Republic.

Stakes Rising in Oman for Regional Financial Aid

MUSCAT (Dispatches) - Oman's fiscal deficits and external debt maturities will amount to \$12 billion to \$14 billion - or about 20% of GDP - per year from 2020 through 2022, according to Fitch

Potential assistance for Oman from wealthier neighbours in the Gulf may not be quite the turning point it was for Bahrain two years ago.

Oman's bondholders are hoping it obtains a similar lifeline, and credit assessors from Fitch Ratings to S&P Global Ratings see that as a possibility. The sultanate discussed the option with other Persian Gulf states, people with knowledge of the matter told Bloomberg in June.

But the size of any aid package will likely "be calibrated to facilitate, but not meaningfully replace, debt market funding," Fitch said this week as it downgraded Oman's sovereign rating deeper into junk. The sultanate's dollar-denominated bonds have lost 1.6% this year, the worst performer in the region.

That raises the stakes for Oman, which has lagged behind most peers in implementing fiscal reforms despite dwindling reserves and a budget deficit Fitch estimates could reach 20% of gross domestic product this year.

Investors demand a premium to hold Oman's debt over Bahrain's note of similar maturity - a reversal from 2018 before the \$10 billion rescue lifted the fortunes of the island nation - even though its debt is rated one level higher by Fitch and S&P.

Rouhani...

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President Rouhani also underlined the importance of rendering efficient e-government services to the public especially in health sectors during the pandemic days.

Talking in the meeting of Iran's COVID19 task force, he said rendering better e-government services will reduce number of people commuting to offices thus helping to cut the COVID19 chain.

He also turned to the particular conditions prevailing the mourning ceremonies held nationwide on the occasion of the martyrdom anniversary of the third Shiite Imam Hussian (AS).

The President referred to the prime importance of the ten-day long ceremonies for the Muslim Iranian nation and urged relevant official bodies to work out and check all necessary measures and instruments to enable people to hold the mourning ceremonies in the best health standards.

Iran Warns of...

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Relatively, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo formally demanded on Thursday that crippling international sanctions be reinstated against Iran.

"The process to re-impose sanctions on Iran begins," he said in a tweet. "Today I hand-delivered a letter to @UN Security Council President Dian Triansyah Djani to formally notify the Council of something we all know too well—Iran's failure to meet its commitments under the terrible nuclear deal."

Members of the E3 -France, Germany and the UK- have rejected the attempt to initiate what's known as a snapback. The countries noted that the United States ceased to be a participant in the 2018 Iran nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action or JCPOA.

Iran Sets...

FROM PAGE 1

He reiterated that currently the pullout of Indians from the project is not on the agenda and both sides are eager to activate the ten-year contract.

Rastad emphasized that Iran, Afghanistan and India are full of incentive to keep the port active for transit of goods and Indian operator in the port is after providing appropriate condition for Indian and Afghan exporters.

On the timing and arrival of port equipment to Shahid Beheshti Port, Rastad said that the equipment that Indians have undertaken to provide worth \$85m and all Italian mobile cranes will be taken gradually into the port by the yearend.

He admitted that some items of the main contract have been changed by both sides and Iran has set some conditions especially, provision of port equipment by Indians.

Malaysia...

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"For the period from January to June 2020, exports totalled 74,084 tonnes, down 73.5 percent from the same period in 2019," he said in a statement released after the courtesy visit by Iranian Ambassador to Malaysia Ali Asghar Mohammadi to the MPOB Office today.

Ahmad Jazlan said both parties also stressed on the strategies and mechanism to increase exports to Iran, which would indirectly help the oil palm smallholders and industry players in Malaysia.

Apart from that, with the exemption of export duty announced by Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, the trade value definitely could be further increased from time to time.

The duty exemption is also a good step by the government to help the people directly involved in the oil palm industry in the country.

China...

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"This fully demonstrates that the US unilateral position runs counter to the wide consensus of the international community and its attempt to sabotage the JCPOA will never succeed," Zhao said.

China urges the U.S. to "stop going down the wrong path, otherwise it will only meet further opposition," he said.

The Iranian nuclear issue, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman added, can be solved through "equal-footed dialogue and candid consultations" instead of imposing sanctions, mounting pressure or even making military threats.

Farah to Run at London Marathon in October

LONDON (Reuters) - If you need a pacemaker to help you pursue an Olympic qualifying time in the marathon, they couldn't come much better-qualified than Britain's most celebrated track and field athlete, Mo Farah.

That's the happy scenario for some of Britain's lesser lights who will have the 37-year-old leading them out around the streets of the capital in October's London Marathon. Farah, who has abandoned his decision to focus on the marathon and instead seek yet more gold on the track in Tokyo next year, confirmed his role as 'helper'.

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Shibuno Set to Miss Cut at Women's Open

NEW YORK (Reuters) - Defending champion Hinako Shibuno suffered a nightmare second round at the women's British Open on Friday and looks certain to miss the cut after slipping to 12 over par for her two rounds.

The 21-year-old Japanese player was blown off course in wet and windy conditions at Troon and carded a 78. The projected cut is six over.

Sweden's Dani Holmqvist was sharing the lead on one-under after 13 holes of her second round.

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SPORTS

SUNDAY AUGUST 23, 2020

Sevilla Beat Inter 3-2 to Lift Sixth Europa League Title

COLOGNE (Reuters) - Sevilla clinched a sixth Europa League title with a roller-coaster 3-2 win over Inter Milan after an overhead kick by defender Diego Carlos deflected by the Italian side's top scorer Romelu Lukaku settled a thrilling contest on Friday.

In the first European final ever staged behind closed doors, it was an astonishing anti-climax for Lukaku after he had earlier set the longest scoring run by a player in UEFA Cup/Europa League history by netting in the 11th successive game.

In contrast, it ended as a dream final for Sevilla's Diego Carlos, who could easily have been sent off after he fouled Lukaku to give away the early penalty which the towering Belgian striker converted.

Lukaku also equalled former Brazil striker Ronaldo's club record of 34 goals for Inter in a season in all competitions, but it was scant consolation as gritty Sevilla claimed a record-extending sixth Europa League crown in just 14 years.

As his team mates made up for the lack of noise in the Cologne Stadium — free of fans because of the COVID-19 pandemic — with ecstatic celebrations, tearful Sevilla captain Jesus Navas declared: "This squad deserves it."

"We fought all year, experienced the difficult situation, like everyone, tried to get through day by day. The fans deserve it, those who love football like we do and we have to enjoy it," he added on Sky Sports.

The final got off to a rip-roaring start as Inter nearly fell behind moments before they took the lead when Fernando saw his goal-bound shot blocked by Roberto Gagliardini.

Inter's lightning counter ended with Carlos tripping the irrepressible Lukaku before the striker steered his spot-kick past goalkeeper Yassine Bono.

Dutchman Luuk de Jong, who came off the bench to score Sevilla's winner in a 2-1 semi-final win over Manchester United, then showed his predatory instincts again with a pair of superb headers which turned the tide.



The former Newcastle United striker levelled in the 12th minute after a delightful cross from the right by Navas and then beat Inter keeper Samir Handanovic in the 33rd with a looping header after Ever Banega floated in a free kick.

However, Sevilla's joy was short-lived as they were also undone by a fine set piece three minutes later, with Croatia midfielder Marcelo Brozovic swinging in a free kick for Diego Godin to head home from close range.

A rip-roaring first half ended with Lucas Ocampos shaving the bar with a header as both sides surged forward in relentless end-to-end action.

The pace dropped after the break before Lukaku spurned a gilt-edged chance in the 65th minute, as he could only muster a tame shot at Bono after racing clear of Diego Carlos again from the halfway line.

Lukaku compounded his second half nightmare in the 74th minute as Carlos unleashed a speculative overheaded kick after Inter failed to clear yet another set piece.

The ball seemed to be going wide of Handanovic's left-hand post but Lukaku instinctively stuck his foot out and it ended up in the roof of the net.

It was a joyful end of the season for their coach Julen Lopetegui, who won his first trophy as coach at senior level after a torrid period which saw him sacked by Spain and Real Madrid.

Yet Inter's Handanovic could only rue their failure to win a first trophy since 2011.

Oxlade-Chamberlain to Miss Community Shield

LONDON (Reuters) - Liverpool midfielder Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain is set to miss next week's Community Shield game against FA Cup winners Arsenal after sustaining a knee injury during pre-season training, manager Jurgen Klopp said on Friday.

The 27-year-old was injured in a challenge at the Premier League champions' pre-season training camp in Austria and Liverpool said he has returned to England to begin his rehabilitation.

This year's Community Shield game, the traditional English season-opener between the FA Cup and top-flight league winners, will be played at Wembley Stadium on Aug. 29.

"It looks like it is very similar to what Hendo (Jordan Henderson) had which keeps him out... we don't know for sure exactly how long," Klopp told the club website.

"But for sure this pre-season he will not make a game, Arsenal for sure not and then we will see. The next game is probably two weeks later, but I don't know."

Oxlade-Chamberlain was sidelined for over nine months during Liverpool's 2018-19 campaign after he ruptured the cruciate ligament in his right knee.

Klopp added that captain Henderson and defender Joel Matip have made progress in recovering from a knee injury and a foot problem, respectively, and the German manager said he hopes to have them ready for the first match of the league campaign.

"Both are very positive, both are more or less pain-free now," Klopp said. "In the moment when they give us the green light then they are back in team training."

Liverpool are scheduled to play friendly matches against Austrian champions Salzburg and Bundesliga side VfB Stuttgart in their pre-season camp before they begin their league title defence against newly-promoted Leeds United on Sept. 12.

Messi Contemplates Barca Exit



BARCELONA (Reuters) - Lionel Messi still wishes to leave Barcelona after meeting new coach Ronald Koeman, according to reports in the Spanish media on Friday, as all four sports newspapers dedicated their front covers to the Argentine's uncertain future.

Marca, Spain's biggest selling daily, said the Argentine told Koeman that he was more likely to leave the club than to stay, while AS declared on its cover 'Messi sees himself leaving'. Barcelona-based daily Mundo Deportivo said Messi 'does not see his future clearly', but stressed that the captain has little hope of leaving the club immediately due to his 700-million-euro (\$827.05 million) release clause.

Messi, who joined Barca aged 13, has scored a record 634 goals for the Catalans in 730 matches and is also the club's most decorated player with 33 trophies.

He is 37 games away from matching Xavi Hernandez as the club's all-time appearance maker.

But the 33-year-old is into the final year of his contract at the club and doubts about his future have grown since last week's historic 8-2 thrashing to Bayern Munich to exit the Champions League, which Barca have failed to win since 2015.

Sport, also based in Barcelona, talked of a 'first summit meeting' between the captain and coach, adding that Messi interrupted his holidays in order to meet with Koeman.

Clijsters Pulls Out of Western & Southern Open



LONDON (Reuters) - Kim Clijsters has withdrawn from the Western & Southern Open due to an abdominal injury, the former world number one said on Friday, but she is hopeful of playing in the U.S. Open later this month.

The Western & Southern Open which began this week in New York serves as a warm-up event for players ahead of the Aug. 31-Sept. 13 U.S. Open — where Clijsters, 37, received a wildcard entry.

"It's disappointing to have to withdraw but after discussions with medical and my team,

I need a little more recovery time," Clijsters, who won the event in 2010, said in a statement.

"I'm grateful to be able to stay in the 'bubble' and continue to prepare with my team here at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center."

Clijsters, who made her return to tennis this year after nearly eight years away from the sport, won the U.S. Open in 2005, 2009 and 2010.

The four-times Grand Slam champion's planned comeback in January was pushed back to February because of a knee injury and she played in Dubai and Monterrey before the tour was suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Djokovic Eyes Federer's Record

NEW YORK (Reuters) - Novak Djokovic decided to travel to New York for the U.S. Open amid the COVID-19 pandemic because the 17-times Grand Slam champion did not want to pass up on the opportunity to close in on Roger Federer's record tally of 20.

Federer will not be at Flushing Meadows this year after he took the year off to recover from a knee surgery while defending champion Rafael Nadal joined a number of top seeds in refusing to travel to the U.S. due to COVID-19 concerns.

"I cannot say it's the main reason why I'm here, but it's one of the reasons," Djokovic told The New York Times, adding that he came very close to skipping the tournament as well.

"I have to think about myself and my health and my fitness and whether my team is OK to be here. Once that was checked, then I, of course, also felt responsible as a top player to be here, it's important for our sport to keep going."

"I want to play... That's why I'm here. I'm personally not afraid of being in a risky, dangerous health situation for myself. If I felt that way, I most likely would not be here."

Djokovic came under scrutiny in June when he hosted the ill-fated Adria Tour in Serbia and Croatia, which was scrapped when many players and staff, including himself, tested positive for COVID-19.

The 33-year-old Serbian said he felt the criticism had turned into a "witch hunt".

"I don't think I've done anything bad to be honest," Djokovic said. "I do feel sorry for people that were infected. "Do I feel guilty for anybody that was infected from that point onward in Serbia, Croatia and the region? Of course not. How can you blame one individual for everything?"



Bayern Squad Better Than 2013 Treble Winners

BERLIN (AFP) - Bayern Munich captain and goalkeeper Manuel Neuer says the current squad is better than the 2013 Champions League-winning side, who they are trying to emulate in Sunday's final against Paris Saint-Germain.

Neuer, 34, was in goal at Wembley in 2013 when Bayern completed their first treble by beating Borussia Dortmund 2-1 to add the Champions League to the Bundesliga and German Cup titles.

Only four survivors of the 2013 team -- Neuer, Jerome Boateng, David Alaba and Thomas Muller -- are likely to start Sunday's final, although striker Robert Lewandowski, the Champions League top-scorer with 15 goals, was on the losing Dortmund side.

Neuer says the current Bayern squad has more depth. Brazil playmaker Philippe Coutinho, three French World Cup winners -- Lucas Hernandez, Benjamin Pavard and Corentin Tolisso -- and Germany centre-back Niklas Suele were among the internationals on the bench against Lyon in the semi-final.

"The difference to 2013 is that we have top players across the board, back then, we won with fewer players," said Neuer.

The Germany captain said the players waiting to come on to make an impact make the difference.

"We have a class of players beyond the 18-man squad - it's fantastic what players we have."

Bayern arrive in Sunday's final on a 20-match winning streak in competitive games, which Neuer says is partly down to head coach Hansi Flick, who is poised to lead the German giants to the treble ten months after being hired as interim coach. "What sets him apart is his calm, level-headed approach and his work with the coaching team," added Neuer.

