

**Health Ministry Spokeswoman
Sima Sadat Lari Said on Sunday
That 274 More Iranians Have Died
From the Coronavirus Disease
Over the Past 24 Hours Bringing
The Total Deaths to 64,764**

IRAN NEWS

**A Domestic Airline on Sunday
Launched a Special Flight to Return
Iranians Living in Georgia From
Tbilisi to Tehran in Coordination
With the Iranian Embassy in Georgia
Amid Sharp Rise of COVID-19 Cases**

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No Talks Between Iran, U.S.

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Foreign Ministry spokesman stressed that there would not be any talks between Iran and the U.S., and all imposed sanctions on Iran must be removed.

Attending his weekly press conference and in response to Iran Press question regarding Vienna talks on Wednesday, Saeed Khatibzadeh highlighted: "There won't be any talks between Iran and the U.S. and all sanctions must be removed based on resolution 2231 and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Actions (JCPOA).

Saeed Khatibzadeh also referred to the Vienna talks, adding: "What is happening in Vienna is not a nuclear negotiation, but a technical one to lift sanctions."

Asked on how Iran would verify the lifting of U.S. sanctions, Khatibzadeh said it is not a difficult task if the U.S. sincerely lifts the sanctions and returns to its commitments; if the U.S. does, many can be verified. Iran should receive its oil money, shipping and the return of money of its exported products.

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Supreme Council of Non-oil Exports Approves Facilitating Regulations

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran's Supreme Council of Non-oil Exports Promotion, in a decree, has approved new regulations for facilitating the country's non-oil trade, especially with the neighboring countries, in the current Iranian calendar year (started on March 21).

The mentioned decree which was issued in the 10th meeting of the council is addressed to the related government bodies and organizations to follow in the current year, the portal of Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (TCCIMA) reported.

In the meeting, it was also decided to hold another meeting with the presence of the head of the Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) and the deputy governor of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) to prepare a proposal package for resolving the issues related to the foreign currency obligations of the country's exporters.

The council also agreed to allow the exporters of technical and engineering services to sell the machinery and equipment necessary for their projects in the destination market if the mentioned machinery and equipment are damaged or worn out and cannot be returned to the country.

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Int'l Community, IAEA Urged to Address Nuclear Terrorism Against Iran



TEHRAN (PressTV) - The head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) has slammed the act of sabotage against the country's nuclear site in Natanz earlier in the day, noting that the international community, as well as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), must deal with such "nuclear terrorism" that targets Iran's facilities.

Ali Akbar Salehi's remarks came hours after the AEOI spokesman said on Sunday that an incident took place at the electricity distribution network of Shahid Mostafa Ahmadi Roshan nuclear facility in Natanz, which is a uranium enrichment center located in the city of the same name in Iran's central province of Isfahan.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran, while condemning this despicable act, underlines the need for the international community and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to address this nuclear terrorism and reserves the right to take action against masterminds, perpetrators and conspirators of this [terrorist] act," Salehi said.

He added that the Islamic Republic will seriously pursue the development of its nuclear technology, on the one hand, and make efforts to remove the oppressive U.S. sanctions, on the other hand, so that those who ordered the terrorist act would not reach their goals.

According to the AEOI chief, the action that took place at the Natanz enrichment facility shows the failure of those, who oppose the country's industrial and political advances, in preventing Iran's remarkable progress in its nuclear program and obstructing successful talks aimed at removing the oppressive sanctions.

Behrouz Kamalvandi, the spokesman for the AEOI, announced the incident earlier in the day, saying it did not cause any pollution or human fatalities.

Kamalvandi added that the cause of the incident is under investigation and that further information will be announced later. Israel's public radio quoted unidentified intelligence sources on Sunday as saying that Israel's Mossad spy agency carried out a cyber attack against Iran's Natanz nuclear facility, Reuters reported.

Natanz facility is among the sites being monitored by the IAEA under a 2015 landmark nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), between Iran and a group of world powers.

On July 2, 2020, an explosion was reported in a shed under construction at the Natanz complex, but it caused no casualties and failed to stop enrichment work at the facility.

At the time, Kamalvandi described the incident as "an act of sabotage."

Yemeni Drones, Missiles Hit Aramco Refineries, Military Sites

SANAA (Dispatches) - Yemeni armed forces and allied Popular Committees fighters have launched fresh attacks on targets deep in Saudi Arabia in retaliation for the kingdom's ongoing aggression on their country.

Spokesman for the Yemeni Armed Forces Brigadier General Yahya Saree said that 17 drones and ballistic missiles were used in an operation against Saudi Arabia on Monday.

Aramco refineries in Jubail and Jeddah were hit with 10 drones of Samad-3 type as part of the operation, he said. According to the spokesman, "sensitive military targets" in the Saudi cities of Khamis Mushait and Jizan were hit with five Qasf-2K UAVs as well as two ballistic missiles of Badr 1 type. The operation, which took place on Sunday evening and continued until dawn, hit its targets "successfully", he added.

Saree stressed that the retaliatory attacks will continue as long as the Saudi aggression and blockade persist. Earlier Monday, an international airport in Saudi Arabia's Jeddah was temporarily closed due to a military activity in the vicinity of the city, an aviation news website says, with Yemen warning that the kingdom uses its airports for military purposes.

Simple Flying reported on Monday that flights due to arrive in King Abdulaziz International Airport in Jeddah are diverting to other airports around Saudi Arabia.

The Saudi-led coalition against Yemen claimed on Sunday that it intercepted and destroyed a ballistic missile, and six drones launched by Yemeni troops towards the kingdom.

Yemeni troops on Sunday carried out drone attacks against military aircraft hangars at Jizan airport, also known as King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz airport, in the kingdom's southern Jizan region and King Khalid air base in Asir in retaliation for the Saudi aggression.

Last February, a member of Yemen's Ansaruallah movement said Saudi Arabia uses its airports across the kingdom to launch deadly aerial attacks on Yemen, making them "legitimate targets" of the war-torn country's retaliatory strikes.

"We advise airlines not to use Saudi airports because they are used for military purposes in the aggression and blockade on Yemen," Supreme Political Council member Mohammed al-Bukhaiti said in a tweet on February 10. Saudi Arabia, backed by the U.S. and its other regional allies, launched a devastating war on Yemen in March 2015, with the goal of bringing the government of Yemen's former president, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, back to power and crushing the popular Ansaruallah movement.

Tehran, Moscow To Sign Two Important Documents

MOSCOW (IRNA) - Iran's Ambassador to Moscow said on Monday that Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov is due to pay a visit to Tehran to sign an action plan for economic cooperation with Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif.

Kazem Jalali, Iranian Ambassador to Moscow, said that Russia's Lavrov was set to arrive at Tehran on Tuesday to meet Iranian officials and discuss bilateral, regional and international issues including the JPOCA, Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan and economic issues.

Jalali said that the Lavrov's trip is significant because it's taking place after the Supreme Leader of Revolution Ayatollah Khamenei and Russian President Vladimir Putin recently exchanged messages, which according to him, contained important points on Tehran-Moscow cooperation.

Highlighting the challenges from the US and the West that Russia is faced with on its borders and through U.S. sanctions, the diplomat said that Iran's has been suffering from similar challenges for forty years and now the two countries could share a common perspective on regional and international issues.

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Domestic Production of Industrial Equipment Saves Iran Over \$3.5b in a Year

TEHRAN (MNA) - Relying on domestic production has saved Iran \$3.5 billion during the previous Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20), Iran's Deputy Industry, Mining, and Trade Minister Mehdi Sadeqi Niaraki announced.

Last year the indigenization of the knowledge for the production of \$3.2 billion worth of such equipment in various provinces was on the agenda, which increased to more than \$3.5 billion, IRIB quoted Niaraki as saying on Monday.

He mentioned investment in industrial sectors and the increasing trend of production of important industrial products as measures taken by the Industry, Mining and Trade Ministry in the previous year which was named the year of "Surge in Production" by the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Seyed Ali Khamenei.

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U.S. Not Willing To Remove Trump-Era Sanctions on Iran

TEHRAN (PressTV) - A senior Russian diplomat says the administration of U.S. President Joe Biden is not willing to remove sanctions imposed by his predecessor Donald Trump on Iran.

Russia's Permanent Representative to the International Organizations in Vienna Mikhail Ulyanov made the remarks in an exclusive interview with the Russian radio of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB).

"What is clear is that the Iranian side wants the lifting of all sanctions at once, but the Americans are only ready to lift the sanctions related to the JCPOA," he said, referring to the 2015 nuclear deal formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

Trump abandoned the JCPOA three years after its conclusion and unleashed what his team called a "maximum pressure" campaign with the stated objective of forcing Iran to negotiate "a better agreement."

The Islamic Republic refused to bow down to the pressure and adopted instead a "maximum resistance" policy, which includes economic measures to weather the bans as well as reducing Tehran's compliance with the JCPOA.

Biden has claimed that his administration is willing to rejoin the JCPOA, but conditioned the move to Tehran's full compliance.

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Serbian Foreign Minister to Visit Iran on Apr. 17

TEHRAN (IP)- Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh says the Serbian Foreign Minister will visit Tehran on Saturday, April 17, 2021.

Speaking in his virtual press conference on Monday, Khatibzadeh said the Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov was to arrive in Tehran late Monday night.

Seoul Urged to Unfreeze Iran's Assets As Soon as Possible

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's first vice president says South Korea must take action to unfreeze Iran's foreign exchange assets as soon as possible, noting that freezing Iran's money has badly tarnished the image of South Korean banks among Iranians.

Es'haq Jahangiri made the remarks in a joint press conference with the visiting South Korean Prime Minister Chung Sye-Kyun in Tehran on Sunday.

"The measure taken by South Korean banks to block Iran's foreign exchange assets has marred the image of South Korea among the Iranian people," Iran's VP said, adding, "We want the South Korean government to unblock Iran's assets in the shortest time possible and make up for the problems it has caused in recent years."

"Unfortunately, during the past three years, South Korea has followed suit with US illegal sanctions against Iran, which lack any international legitimacy, as a result of which, relations between the two countries have become stagnant," Jahangiri said.

He added, "The decline in relations between Iran and South Korea took place at the time that there were no international sanctions, including the United Nations' sanctions, against Iran," he added.

The mutual relations have been seriously strained by the South Korean banks' move to freeze some seven billion dollars of Iran's foreign exchanges resulting from the legal sale of its oil and gas condensates to this country, he said.

"The move by the South Korean banks to block Iran's foreign resources took place at a time that the Iranian people are in dire need of them due to the coronavirus pandemic and its economic and health consequences. This measure by Koreans has deprived the Iranian government of major foreign exchange resources it needs to buy medical equipment, medicine and other essential goods for the country," Iran's vice president said.



Jahangiri expressed hope that South Korea would take proper steps to improve its position in Iran, saying that the Iranian government is ready to help Seoul make up for its past mistakes if it takes "effective and tangible" steps in this regard.

For his part, the South Korean prime minister said Tehran and Seoul have agreed to work on ways to expand mutual relations and make decisions to boost cooperation in the fight against the COVID-19.

Chung added that South Korea will increase dispatch of humanitarian aid, including medicines and medical equipment, to Iran via the two countries' working group, expressing hope that it would be useful for the Iranian people.

The two countries would also resume an academic program to exchange medical experts and hold professional training courses, which had previously played a leading role in boosting relations between the two nations, he noted.

The South Korean prime minister noted that the two countries will make efforts to strengthen cooperation at a faster pace in parallel to their endeavor to revive the multilateral nuclear deal signed between Tehran and world powers in 2015, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

Qalibaf Calls for S. Korea's Practical Act Regarding Frozen Assets

TEHRAN (MNA) – Majlis Speaker called on South Korean Prime Minister to provide the Iranian nation with immediate and practical solutions so as to release Iran's frozen money.

Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf met and held talks with South Korean Prime Minister Chung Sye-kyun who arrived in Tehran on Sunday evening.

In this meeting, Qalibaf hailed Korean Prime Minister's visit to Tehran, calling it an appropriate step to improve relations between the two countries.

Referring to the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations of Iran and South Korea, he expressed hope that this trip will become a turning point in the resumption of political, economic, and cultural cooperation between the two countries.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Qalibaf criticized South Korean banks for freezing Iran's assets, saying, "We expect you to provide us with immediate and practical solutions so as to release Iran's money."

Regarding this expectation of the Iranian people has not been met by South Korea, he said and added that even Iranian businessmen, who previously had good relations with Korea, are dissatisfied with this condition.

According to Qalibaf, today, Iranian people's attitude towards South Korea is negative and they don't accept this country's behaviors and approaches since 2018.

In the end, the Iranian Parliament Speaker emphasized Iran's readiness to establish parliamentary cooperation with the Korean Parliament.

South Korean Prime Minister, for his part, expressed hope that his trip will lead to the resumption of good relations with Iran.

"Unfortunately, from 2018 onwards, the relations between the two countries have faced some problems, which we are trying to solve," he said, adding, "With respect to the position of the Islamic Republic of Iran in South Korea's foreign relations, we will do our best to overcome the problems."

Confirming Qalibaf's remarks that the next century is the century of Asia, he said, "Accordingly, I believe that Iran and South Korea, as two Asian countries, should preserve and strengthen their relations."

AEOI Spokesman Injured During Visit to Natanz Facility

TEHRAN (MNA) – The spokesman of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) Behrouz Kamalvandi has been injured in an accident while visiting the Natanz Nuclear Facility.

According to IRIB, hours after an incident took place at the electricity distribution network of Shahid Mostafa Ahmadi Roshan nuclear facility in Natanz on Sunday, Kamalvandi visited the site along with the head of the AEOI Ali-Akbar Salehi



and sustained an injury while doing an inspection.

The spokesman was immediately transferred to a hospital in the nearby city of Kashan.

According to the head of the Kashan medical university, Alireza Moraveji, the incident happened during inspection after Kamalvandi fell from a height of seven meters.

He added that the AEOI spokesman's overall health is satisfactory, but his ankle and head have sustained fractures.

Leaving Vienna Talks Least Reaction to Natanz Incident

TEHRAN(MNA) – Leaving the table of Vienna talks is the least reaction and response to the Zionists' act of sabotage in Iran's Natanz nuclear site, First Deputy Speaker of the Iranian Parliament says.

The Natanz act of sabotage was coordinated and plotted in cooperation of the agents of the Zionist Regime and the United States, asserted Seyed Amir-Hossein Ghazizadeh Hashemi.

This "act of sabotage" must influence Iran's approach toward Vienna talks, he said adding that Iranian top negotiators must also announce that the talks will not resume until the Zionist regime is punished.

He went on to say, "We must take a serious and effective action in response to such moves. The response must be such crushing that the

Zionists regret what they've committed."

According to Ghazizadeh, nuclear achievement has been Iran's upper hand in the negotiations and that's why the Zionist Regime resorted to such moves so as to seize this upper hand and power from the Islamic Republic.

Leaving the Vienna talks table is the least reaction to the Zionists' act of sabotage, he also stressed.

Saying that it is the second time that such incidents happen at Natanz nuclear site, he stressed that it is necessary to investigate the security aspects of the Natanz case and to find the perpetrators immediately.

An incident took place at the electricity distribution network of Shahid Mostafa Ahmadi Roshan nuclear facility in Natanz on Sunday.

Iran Berates Germany for Recognition of MKO Terrorist Group

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Secretary of Iran's High Council for Human Rights on Monday berated the German Government for recognition of MKO terrorist group.



Through a Twitter post, Ali Bagheri-Kani reacted Monday to Germany's approach towards interacting with and officially recognizing terrorist group of Mujahedin-e-Khalq Organization (MKO).

"3-year-old Fatima, burnt alive in 1980s, was one of 1000s victims of Nazi-style massacre by MKO terrorist group in Iran.

"To serve justice, Germany should establish trials as huge as Nuremberg, not granting MKO impunity!," Bagheri-Kani wrote.

"Is terrorist laundering Berlin's #human_rights strategy?"

European politicians, the ones in Germany and France in particular, have closed eyes on the MKO crimes, and have cooperation with the group members and support them.

Recently, some former representatives at German parliament spoke about human rights at the MKO webinar.

Tehran, Sofia to Expand Sports Relations

TEHRAN (IP) - Iranian Sports Minister welcomes expansion of sports interactions in meeting with Bulgarian's ambassador in Tehran.



During the meeting of the Bulgarian Ambassador in Tehran Nikolina Kuneva, the Minister of Sports and Youth of Iran, Massoud Soltanifar expressed hope that the expansion of sports interactions between Iran and Bulgaria could lead to the presence of more athletes in the two countries.

Massoud Soltanifar, said: "Iran and Bulgaria have a very good relationship with a history of 122 years, which in recent years, has expanded."

Zionists Want to Take Revenge on Iranians for Successful Lifting Sanctions

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Monday that the Israeli Zionist regime aims to take revenge on Iran for successful lifting the sanctions.

Speaking during a Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Commission, Zarif tacitly took the Zionist regime responsible for the Sunday sabotage at Natanz enrichment facility in Central Iran, saying Iran will not allow the Zionists to reach their goals and will take revenge for such measures.

During the session, in which Zarif briefed the lawmakers on the last week negotiations in Vienna with other signatories to the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, the foreign minister urged the need to protect the country's nuclear facilities and scientists.

He said that the Zionist officials will receive a response by Iran making further nuclear achievements.

"If they think that we would have had the lower hand in the negotiations, they should know that this desperate act made our stance even stronger in the negotiations," Zarif said.

He said that the negotiating parties should also know that if they used to face enrichment facilities with first generation machines, now Natanz site can be full of advanced centrifuges with several times higher enrichment capability.

Regional Stability to Increase With Withdrawal of U.S. Troops



TEHRAN (MNA) – Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) said that accelerating the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq will strengthen regional stability.

Ali Shamkhani made the remarks in his meeting with visiting Iraq's National Security Advisor Qasim Muhammad Jalal Al-Araji on Monday.

Al-Araji who arrived in Tehran on Monday morning met and held talks with Shamkhani on bilateral, regional and international issues.

Explaining the causes of instability in the region, Shamkhani called the United States the biggest cause of insecurity and organized terrorism, saying, "Accelerating the implementation of the Iraqi parliament's law on the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq will strengthen regional stability."

Stating that the assassination of the resistance commanders, martyrs Qassem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi Muhandis fully revealed and proved the role of the United States in strengthening Takfiri terrorism, he added, "Prosecution and punishment of the perpetrators of this terrorist crime is one of the priorities of the two countries' security cooperation, and we expect more from the Iraqi government in this regard."

Shamkhani also expressed concern over the reactivation of elements affiliated with the ISIL terrorist group in Iraq, saying, "There is credible information that the Americans, by supporting ISIL forces and moving them to different parts of the country, are trying to create insecurity to continue their presence in Iraq."

Referring to some counter-security movements of counter-revolutionary and terrorist elements in the Iraqi Kurdistan region and northern Iraq, Shamkhani stressed the need for more Tehran-Baghdad cooperation to counter these groups.

He also stressed the need to tackle organized crimes, including large arms and drug trafficking networks that target the security of the two countries.

The Iranian official also pointed to the creation of new security structures among the countries of the region with the aim of combating common security threats as a suitable way to establish stability and security in the region and announced Iran's readiness to form such structures.

Praising Iran's strategic and privileged role in creating stability and security in the region and fighting terrorism, Al-Araji, for his part, stressed the need to continue and expand comprehensive cooperation between Iran and Iraq.

He described the measures taken by the order of the Iraqi Prime Minister to deal with terrorist groups in northern Iraq, saying, "Necessary coordination has begun with Kurdish region's officials to implement the decisions taken to deal with terrorist groups in northern Iraq, some of which are US-backed."

Confirming the connection of the ISIL terrorist group with the United States, the Iraqi official said, "The division of terrorist groups into good and bad and the application of double standards in the fight against terrorism will certainly have no result other than strengthening the criminal role of terrorist groups."

Al-Araji highlighted that the Iraqi government is committed to enforcing parliamentary law on the withdrawal of foreign troops.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:04
■ Evening (Maghreb)	19:54
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:04
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:32

34. Offspring, one of the other: And Allah heareth and knoweth all things.
35. Behold! a woman of 'Imran said: "O my Lord! I do dedicate unto Thee what is in my womb for Thy special service: So accept this of me: For Thou hearest and knowest all things."
Surah 3. The Family Of 'Imran, The House Of 'Imran (34-35)

Iran Signs 5-Year Economic Cooperation Document With Iraq

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

BAGHDAD - Minister of Cooperatives, Labor and Social Affairs Mohammad Shariatmadari who is on an official visit to Iraq signed a five-year economic cooperation agreement with Iraq on Sunday.

Shariatmadari made the comment after his meeting with the Iraqi Finance and Labor minister and before departing Baghdad for Karbala in an interview with the IRNA correspondent in Iraq.

He said that signing the economic cooperation document was proposed in my meeting with the Iraqi finance minister and welcomed by him and we hope we will also reach mutual agreement on customs investments, boarder markets, and issues like that during this trip.

He said that the finalizing of the economic cooperation document depends of the Iraqi finance minister's visit to Iran, adding, "The preparations for signing the five-year cooperation document are made and it is now ready for surveys, so that it will be signed and finalized before the end of the 12th government's tenure.

Shariatmadari announced that the IRI Economy Minister Farhad Dezhpasand has invited his Iraqi counterpart to visit Tehran for further consultations and bilateral talks, adding: This document on economic cooperation is besides the Joint Economic Commission that was earlier designed.

Very broad economic issues, especially infrastructure projects and economic transactions are among the subtitles and the economic cooperation document that both sides are very optimistic about its benefits, he added.



The Iranian labor minister meanwhile focusing on the joint free trade zones said that consultations on the issue have been done and the foundation stone for that is preferential tariffs, based on which the Joint Iran-Iraq Shopping Mall will be established that will function as a complimentary economic apparatus with the two countries share free trade zones, and in turn, they will both establish broader markets in other neighboring countries.

Later Shariatmadari in a meeting with his Iraqi counterpart Adel al-Rikabi proposed exchanging skillful labor forces with Iraq.

Iran attaches importance to stability, security, territorial integrity, dignity and independence of Iraq and its regional and international position, Shariatmadari said.

He described cooperation between two countries in fighting ISIS and saving the region from Takfiri terrorists as a successful experience.

He called for implementing the five-year document through a joint committee.

He also called on the joint committee to put on its agenda organizing and solving problems of Iranian labor forces in Iraqi Kurdistan Region.

Meanwhile, Adel al-Rikabi hailed friendly relations between two countries, saying it can be a pattern for other countries. He expressed Iraq's readiness for taking advantage of Iran's experiences in creating job opportunities.

Majlis Strong Determination for Removing Hurdles of Production

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Representative of Jolfa and Marand Constituencies and Head of Free Zones Fraction of Majlis announced the strong determination of Iranian parliament for help to remove hurdles in way of production and to materialize the slogan of the year in free zones.



Masoumeh Pashaei Bahram in a meeting with Majlis Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf submitted a report on the incoming objections to the bill for elimination of tax on value added in the free zones and called for pursuing the demands of economic activists, investors and producers established in those zones.

She pointed to the tax exemption on valued added as one of the tools for attracting investors stipulated in the law of "How to Administer Free Zones", and emphasized commitment of legislators to the previous approved laws and urged them to stop violating rights of native residents and activists of these zones.

Pashaei Bahram noted that these exemptions and establishment of free zones in the deprived border points in several years have caused relative boom and in recent years, due to some efforts, some effective actions have been taken to eliminate deprivation, to boost production and to create sustainable jobs.

She emphasized that it is necessary to protect the production by stopping creation of hurdles which leads to the closedown of businesses.

Majlis Speaker Qalibaf, for his part, emphasized preserving the trust of economic activists and supporting them and urged all bodies in line with materializing the slogan of the year and removing hurdles.

Iran to Sign Trade Agreement With Eurasian Economic Union



TEHRAN (IP) - The head of the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPOI) said that Iran had direct trade relations only with Syria, but would sign a trade agreement with the Eurasian Economic Union in a year.

In an exclusive interview with the Russian edition of Pars Today, Hamid Zadbloom stated that the Eurasian Economic Union was formed after 20 years of negotiations with Armenia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Belarus, and began its activities in 2015.

According to Zadbloom, the Islamic Republic of Iran was also the first country to apply to join the Eurasian Union.

He added: Of course, the Islamic Republic of Iran first needed to sign an interim agreement with the Eurasian Union for 2 years, which was achieved in 2019, and reduced the customs tariff on 892 items for Iranian and Eurasian traders under the agreement.

Zadbloom added that if Iran can establish extensive trade relations with neighboring countries, especially Armenia, Kazakhstan, and Russia, which are members of the Eurasian Union, under these sanctions, Iran would achieve economic development.

"The Eurasian Economic Union, including Russia, Kazakhstan, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, and Belarus, have more than \$850 billion in annual world trade. That's why trade development with these five countries is important for Iran," he noted.

Zadbloom said that on this basis, the establishment of an international exhibition with the participation of 5 Eurasian Union member states in Tehran was on the agenda, and traders of Iran and Eurasian Union member states could exhibit and sell their goods in all areas without restrictions.

Iran Planning to Export Electricity to Oman

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iranian Energy Ministry's Spokesman for Electricity Industry Mostafa Rajabi Mashhadi said the country is pursuing a plan for exporting electricity to the southern Arab neighbor Oman through the sea, ILNA reported.

"For the countries that we share a water border with, studies are underway that need to be completed so that the two countries can reach a conclusion on technical issues, and the plan for the export of electricity to Oman is also at this stage," Rajabi Mashhadi said.

According to the official, the Energy Ministry's priority plan is to have electricity exchange with all the neighboring countries that share land borders with Iran, and this plan is currently in place.

Regarding the southern Arab neighbors, Rajabi Mashhadi said: "Technical talks have been held between consultants and contractors and some solutions have been considered, but no energy exchange contract has been signed yet."

Mentioning the electricity exports to Afghanistan and

Iraq, the official noted that exports to Afghanistan and Iraq are carried out as before.

"There are good capacities in the country for increasing exports to Afghanistan, which has new demands to supply electricity to its industries and increasing exports to Iraq is also a matter of negotiation," he added.

"Currently, we have energy exchanges with both countries within the contractual capacity, and we have not had any specific negotiations to increase exports. Requests have been made by both Iraq and Afghanistan to do so, but have not yet led to a new contract," Rajabi-Mashhadi reminded.

Earlier this month, the head of Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPO)'s Arab and African office announced that Iran is planning to commence exports of gas and electricity to Oman in near future.

Referring to the development of Iran's trade program with neighboring Arab countries, Farzad Piltan said, "We are pursuing the exports of gas and electricity as two Iranian export projects to Oman."

Tehran, Madrid Libraries to Boost Cooperation

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Some Shia reference books were gifted to Spain's Islamic Library at the order of Iran's Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Abbas Salehi.

The books were given to Spain in the meeting between Iran's Cultural Attaché in Spain Mohammad-Mehdi Ahmadi and heads of the Islamic Library of Spain Araceli García Martín and Luisa Mora Villarejo.

Taking into consideration the shortage of books on Shia Islam in the library, Ahmadi promised to provide more books in Spanish and English in order to enrich the archive of library.

Saying that Iranian rich and ancient culture is among the ones that are taught in the Spanish schools, Martin added that she still remembered the reliefs of Persepolis and Iranian architecture.

Villarejo suggested that trimonthly webinars be held by Iranian and Spanish Islamic libraries in order to share knowledge and experience, which was welcomed by the Iranian party.

Tehran, Havana Stress Expansion of Economic Cooperation

TEHRAN (IP) - Reza Nazarahari, director of the American Affairs Department at Iran's Foreign Ministry and Emilio Lozada, Director General for Bilateral Affairs at the Cuban Foreign Ministry, met in Havana to discuss bilateral and multilateral issues.



During the meeting, Nazarahari and Lozada stressed the need to continue the development of high-level talks between the two countries and to strengthen economic, trade and cooperation relations on issues of mutual interest, including the fight against Coronavirus.

During the meeting, Lozada appreciated Iran's support for the fight to lift U.S. sanctions against Cuba, as well as Iran's condemning the inclusion of

Cuba in the list of countries sponsoring terrorism.

The Cuban Foreign Ministry recently rejected a biased U.S. report on human rights and the use of it as a tool to continue its aggressive policy.

"Washington is cowardly using such a sensitive issue to attack governments that defend the sovereignty of their own people while determining their own destiny," said Carlos Fernandez de Cassio, Cuba's Foreign Affairs official.

Iran and Cuba, which are under the toughest U.S. sanctions, are seeking to build the capacity to produce millions of doses of the coronavirus vaccine.

IOIV Inks Four Deals to Support Domestic Companies

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iranian Oil Industry Ventures (IOIV), a newly established semi-governmental entity that is helping startups active in oil industry, has signed four deals with domestic companies in order to support their activities in the current Iranian calendar year (started on March 21).

As Shana reported, the mentioned contracts were signed in IOIV's official opening ceremony on Monday. Two of the said deals were signed for the guaranteed purchase of electrical submersible pumps (ESP) and drill bits with Fanavar Parsian Company and Asmary Field Services Company, respectively. The other two deals were signed as venture capital (VC) deals with Faradid Company and Aban Company for two projects on artificial intelligence in the field of HSE and EO purification.

West Azarbaijan Province Annual Exports Near \$3b

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iran's West Azarbaijan province exported close to 2.3 million tons of commodities worth \$2.997 billion during the last fiscal year (ended March 20).

According to Tohid Azarbod, the supervisor of West Azarbaijan Customs, the figures indicate a 62% and 1% increase in terms of value and tonnage respectively in comparison with a year before. He noted that a total of 4.74 million tons of goods worth close to \$9.9 billion were exported through West Azarbaijan borders during the past Iranian year.

He said the figure also shows an 85% jump in terms of value compared with the previous fiscal year.

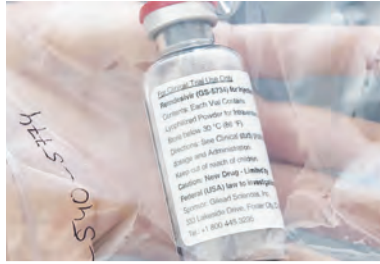
West Azarbaijan borders Turkey, Iraq, and Azerbaijan's Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic.

India Bans Export of Covid-19 Treatment Drug Remdesivir

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India on Sunday banned the export of remdesivir as infections soared to a new daily high and hospitals grappled with increasing demand for the coronavirus treatment drug.

The vast nation has experienced a sharp rise in cases in recent weeks, adding 152,000 new cases on Sunday to take the toll to 13.3 million infections.

The health ministry said the surge in cases has led to a "sudden spike in demand" for the antiviral drug.



India Overtakes Brazil as World's Second Worst-Hit Country by COVID-19

NEW DELHI (Reuters) - India reported a record 168,912 COVID-19 infections overnight, data from the health ministry showed on Monday, overtaking Brazil to become the second-most affected country globally by the coronavirus.

India's overall tally reached 13.53 million, surpassing Brazil's 13.45 million cases, according to data compiled by Reuters. The United States led the global tally with 31.2 million cases.

Deaths in India stood at 904, taking the total to 170,179, data showed.



Lasso Wins Ecuador Presidency In Upset Over Socialist Rival



QUITO (Dispatches) - Ecuadorean banker Guillermo Lasso pulled off a surprise win in Sunday's presidential runoff against socialist economist Andres Arauz, putting the country on track to maintain open market policies rather than return to socialism.

The victory, welcome news for investors unnerved over Arauz's promises of heavy social spending in the face of weak state finances, bucks a trend in Latin America of recent ballot box wins for the left in Argentina, Bolivia and Chile.

But Lasso, who takes office on May 24, still faces a challenging task in restarting a sluggish economy struggling after last year's brutal coronavirus outbreak, which has spiked in recent months as vaccination efforts stalled.

"It's a day on which all Ecuadoreans have decided their future," Lasso said at a rally, where jubilant supporters chanted, "Lasso President!"

He added, "They have used their vote to express the need for change and the desire for better days."

Lasso secured 52.5% of the vote versus 47.5% for Arauz, according to the National Electoral Council, which will not formally declare him the winner until after a review of poll statements marked for follow-up.

Arauz quickly conceded defeat in a speech very different from the combative tone he adopted on the campaign trail.

"This is an electoral setback, but in no way is it a political or moral defeat because our project is for life," said Arauz, who offered Lasso his congratulations.

Lasso's third presidential candidacy seemed an unlikely one in a nation weary of painful economic austerity measures and initially captivated by Arauz's promises of \$1,000 handouts to poor families and a return to socialist largesse.

Lasso, 65, shed his conservative image in the second round by promising progress on issues such as animal and environmental rights and greater efforts to stop discrimination over sexual orientation.

Arauz was unable to separate his persona from that of his mentor, former President Rafael Correa, who won broad support for social welfare programs during his decade-long rule.

But he was also seen as a combative bully, and his reputation was tarnished by bribery charges on which he was found guilty in absentia while in Belgium, where he now lives.

Russia Not Moving Towards War With Ukraine

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - The Kremlin on Sunday said it was not moving towards war with Ukraine as Russia increased its military presence on the border with Ukraine's eastern breakaway territories.

In recent weeks fighting has intensified between Ukraine's army and pro-Russian separatists controlling two regions in the country's east, raising concerns of major escalation in the long-running conflict.

"Of course, nobody is planning to move towards war and in general, nobody accepts the possibility of such a war," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said in a televised interview on Sunday.

President Vladimir Putin's spokesman added that "nobody also accepts the possibility of civil war in Ukraine".

Peskov insisted that Moscow is not involved in the conflict, adding, however, that Russia "will not remain indifferent" to the fate of Russian speakers who live in the conflict-torn region.

"Russia is making every possible effort to help resolve this conflict. And we will continue to explain this tirelessly," Peskov said.

Ukraine has accused Russia of amassing thousands of military personnel on its northern and eastern borders as well as on the annexed Crimean peninsula. The Kremlin has not denied the troop movements but insisted that Moscow does not intend to threaten anyone.

The White House this week said the number of Russian troops at the border with Ukraine was now greater than at any time since 2014, when the conflict erupted after Russia's annexation of Crimea from Ukraine.

Fighting subsided in 2020 as a ceasefire agreement took hold last July, but clashes have picked up again since the start of the year, with each side blaming the other. On Thursday Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky visited the eastern frontline, speaking with soldiers in the trenches.

According to the president, 26 Ukrainian soldiers have been killed since January, compared to 50 in all of 2020. Since 2014, the conflict in Ukraine's east has claimed more than 13,000 lives and displaced many others, while negotiations for a lasting peace deal have stalled.

Nevertheless, "in future, it would be good if there was one single presidency of the European executive," Beune acknowledged. "We need stronger European institutions".

France Says Turkey Deliberately Snubbed EU Commission Chief

PARIS (AFP) - France's Europe Minister Clement Beune said Sunday that Turkey had set a "trap" for European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen by forcing her to sit off to the side on a visit to Ankara, in a photo-op faux pas quickly dubbed 'sofagate'.

The Turkish presidency's failure to place a chair for von der Leyen alongside President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and EU Council chief Charles Michel was "an insult from Turkey," Beune said on RTL television.

"Turkey behaved badly," he added, calling it "a Turkish problem done deliberately towards us... we shouldn't be stirring up guilt among Europeans".

Von der Leyen's being shunted aside prompted recriminations from European capitals to Turkey, but also within Brussels.

For its part, Ankara insists the incident was down to tangled wires between the Council and Commission, separate EU institutions.

Michel's staff claimed they had no access to the meeting room before the Tuesday event, but also highlighted that the Council chief comes before the Commission president under strict international protocol.

"It was a kind of trap... between the one who laid it and the one who walked into it, I'd rather place the blame on the one who laid it," France's Beune said.

Echoing Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi, who called Erdogan a "dictator" in response to the sofa incident, Beune charged that there was "a real problem with lack of respect for democracy and an autocratic drift in Turkey" that should prompt Europeans to be "very firm with the Turks".

Nevertheless, "in future, it would be good if there was one single presidency of the European executive," Beune acknowledged. "We need stronger European institutions".



German Far-Right AfD Bids to Win Back Voters

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Germany's far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) cast itself as the anti-lockdown party at a weekend conference in a bid to win back support before for a September election.

Almost 600 members of the party, which entered the national parliament for the first time after the 2017 election, met in the eastern city of Dresden despite coronavirus restrictions to agree an election manifesto, including a call to leave the European Union.

Dogged by internal divisions over how radical the party should be, it has dipped to around 11% in polls from nearly 13% in the 2017 election when it was the third biggest party and became the official parliamentary opposition.

During the pandemic the AfD has been linked with coronavirus deniers and opposed compulsory vaccinations - which the government has never proposed. Some AfD members have joined anti-lockdown demonstrations.

"The AfD wants to show these orgies of prohibition, this imprisonment, this lockdown madness, that there is no need for this," co-leader Joerg Meuthen told the conference.

Delegates backed a coronavirus resolution with the slogan "Germany. But normal", which includes rejecting wearing masks in day-care centers and schools and ending "disproportionate" lockdown measures.

Germany is struggling to contain a third wave of the pandemic and polls show a majority backs restrictions. Angela Merkel's government is drawing up a law to impose nationwide measures to avoid a confusing patchwork of rules which are not consistently implemented.

AfD delegates also backed a call for Germany to leave the EU and set up a new European community of economies and interests.

Set up in 2013 as an anti-euro party during the euro zone debt crisis, the party has shifted to the right and capitalised on voter anger over Merkel's 2015 open-door migrant policy. It has called for border controls and a ban on minarets.

Its tough line on migration led some conservatives to shift to the right but since entering parliament, the AfD has had little impact on policy. All mainstream parties refuse to cooperate with it.



Catholic Priests, Nuns Kidnapped in Haiti

PORT-AU-PRINCE

(Dispatches) - Seven

Catholic clergy, including

two French citizens,

were kidnapped Sunday

in Haiti, said the spokesman

of the Bishop's Conference

for the island nation,

which has been rocked by

unrest.

Five priests and two nuns

were abducted in the morning

in Croix-des-Bouquets, a

commune northeast of the

capital Port-au-Prince, while

they were "on their way to

the installation of a new

parish priest," Father

Louderg Mazile told AFP.

The kidnapers had demanded

a \$1 million ransom for the

group, which includes one

French priest and one French

nun, he added.

Haitian authorities suspect

an armed gang called "400

Mawozo" -- which is active

in kidnappings -- is behind

the abduction, according to

a police source.

Four of the priests are

Haitian, and one of the two

nuns.

The French embassy in

Haiti did not respond to



AFP's request for comment.

Kidnappings for ransom have surged in recent months in Port-au-Prince and other provinces, reflecting the growing influence of armed gangs in the Caribbean nation. "This is too much. The time has come for these inhuman acts to stop," Bishop Pierre-Andre Dumas of the Haitian commune Miragoane told AFP.

"The Church prays and stands in solidarity with all the victims of this heinous act." In March, the Haitian government declared a month-long state of emergency to restore state authority in gang-controlled areas, including in the capital.

The measure was motivated by the actions of armed gangs who "kidnap people for ransom, openly declaring it, steal and loot public and private property, and openly confront the public security forces," according to the presidential decree.

The rise in gang violence and political instability have recently drawn protesters onto the streets of Port-au-Prince.

A week ago, hundreds of female protesters rallied in the city against the growing power of gangs, which has led to a spike in kidnappings for ransom.

Haiti, the poorest country in the Americas, has also been in a months-long political crisis.

Shanon
(adviser)

Aghdasieh
Mountain view
280sq.m, 4bdrs
Large balcony
marble floor
Fully Furn
(\$2700)

Darrous Villa
900sq.m, 4bdrs
green garden
enough pkgs
Semi Furn
Renovated
(\$3000)

Parsian

Elahieh (\$1500) 180sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, pkg, F.F

Mahmoodeih (\$1600) 140sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, gym, yard, F.F

Jordan Apt (\$2300) 400sq.m, 4bdrs, S/p, pkg, yard, F.F

Pasdaran Apt (\$3000) 300sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, gym, yard, F.F

Farmanieh penthous (\$1200)
surrended by balcony, 2bdrs
outdoor pool, nice yard, F.F

Cell: +989121907875
Shanon_tari@yahoo.com
Tel : 88510081
Fax : 88506474

Niavaran Villa (\$10000)
1800sq.m, 2storey, 10bdrs
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Iraq Has More Than \$60b of Foreign Reserves

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) - Iraq's foreign reserves have risen to more than \$60 billion, driven by the government's economic reforms, Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi said in a statement.

The OPEC member's reserves fell heavily last year after the coronavirus pandemic caused oil prices to crash and the economy went into recession. The government devalued its currency by about 20% against the dollar in December. Iraq's reserves stood at about \$51 billion in October.



IMF, World Bank Begin Push to Swap Debt Relief for Green Projects

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The idea of forgiving debt held by poor countries in exchange for "green" investments gained ground this week during the spring meetings of the IMF and World Bank, with concrete proposals expected in time for a global climate summit this fall.

Low-income countries face a double crisis -- they are under pressure to pay down their debt while also confronting environmental problems. That makes them "highly, highly vulnerable," Kristalina Georgieva, managing director of the International Monetary Fund, said this week, adding that it thus "makes sense" for the world to pursue so-called "green debt swaps."

A World Bank spokeswoman underscored that point.

"The Covid-19 crisis has made it significantly harder for developing countries to tackle the rising risks posed by climate change" and environmental disasters, said the spokeswoman, who declined to be named.

With already tight budgets, these countries have had to use emergency financial assistance to address the severe impact of the pandemic and the resulting economic crisis. "By enlarging the debt burdens of governments -- which were already at record levels on the eve of the crisis -- it has left them with fewer resources to invest in a recovery that will also put the planet on a more sustainable footing," the spokeswoman told AFP.

A technical working group -- bringing together representatives not only of the IMF and World Bank but also of the United Nations and the OECD -- was launched this week to examine "creative options to help countries tackle these simultaneous challenges," the World Bank spokeswoman said.

"This work has only just begun," she said, "but we think a proactive approach is essential: we must look closely at how potential solutions to the challenges of climate and debt can be integrated to address the key development issues of our time."

While there is no timeline yet for announcing concrete measures, all parties involved are clearly pointing toward the COP26 climate summit to be held in November in the Scottish city of Glasgow.

"We are going to work with the World Bank. And by COP26 we will advance that option" of a debt swap, Georgieva said, adding that it will then be up to creditors and debtors to decide whether to take part. For Thierry Deau, the founder and CEO of the Paris-based Meridiam group, which specializes in developing and financing infrastructure projects, if the green debt-swap option is pursued, it will have to be linked to clear "conditionalities" to ensure that debt relief in fact leads to the launching of green projects.

"The primary responsibility there on this debt relief is between the countries that are on both sides," he said. "There's a lot of politeness about this topic, and I think we have to stop that and create real true partnerships."

The IMF and World Bank will also have to consider the plight of several island nations with middle-income economies that receive less economic support but face daunting environmental challenges.

Their heavily tourism-dependent economies have seen revenues dry up as the coronavirus pandemic severely curtails world travel.

At the same time, their low-lying territories are often the victims of extreme weather events, including devastating cyclones or hurricanes.

African Fisheries Need Reforms to Boost Resilience After Covid-19

NAIROBI (Dispatches) - The African fisheries sector could benefit substantially from proper infrastructure and support services, which are generally lacking. The sector currently grapples with fragile value chains and marketing, weak management institutions and serious issues relating to the governance of fisheries resources.

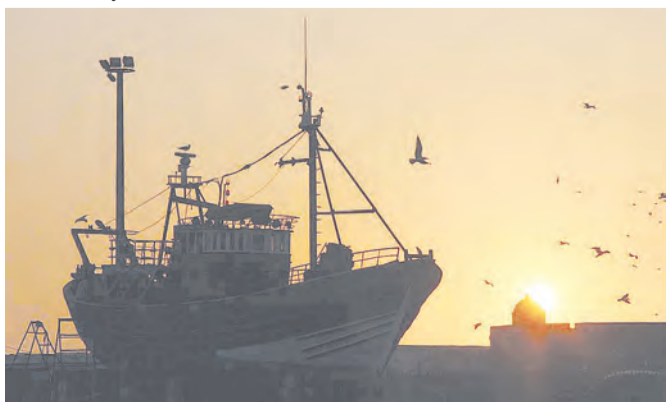
These were the findings of a study that the African Natural Resources Centre conducted from March to May 2020. The center is a non-lending department of the African Development Bank. The study focused on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in four countries -- Morocco, Mauritania, Senegal and Seychelles. The countries' economies depend heavily on marine fisheries. The fisheries sector is also a very large source of economic activity elsewhere in Africa. It provides millions of jobs all over the continent.

The study dwells on appropriate and timely measures that the four countries have taken to avoid severe supply disruptions, save thousands of jobs and maintain governance transparency amid the ongoing global uncertainty and crisis.

Infrastructure shortcomings include landing facilities, storage and processing capacity, social and sanitary equipment, water and power, ice production, and roads to access markets.

Based on the findings, researchers made recommendations to strengthen the resilience of Africa's fisheries sector in the context of a prolonged crisis, and looking ahead to a post-Covid-19 recovery.

The study recommends urgent reforms to make marine fisheries more resilient and enable the sector to contribute sustainably to the wealth of the continent's coastal countries.



Marine fisheries are a crucial contributor to food security and quality of life in Africa. Good nutrition is a key factor to quality of life, and the marine fisheries sector supports the nutrition of more than 300 million people, the majority of whom are children, youth and women. It also provides more than 10 million direct and indirect jobs.

Dominated by artisanal fishing and traditional value chains, the fisheries sector in Africa is mainly informal and is rarely considered in public policies or in assessing the wealth of countries.

Like other sectors, the African fisheries sector has been severely hit by the Covid-19 pandemic. Covid has affected supply markets and regional trade. This has resulted in substantial economic losses for most households that depend on fisheries.

Rising Inflation Complicates Brazil's Covid-19 Crisis

BRASILIA (Dispatches) - After seven months in lockdown, Michele Marques received some unwelcome news when she returned to work: while she was away the prices of almost all the products she uses as a hairdresser had soared.

"A box of gloves rose 200 per cent. Colouring products increased at least 100 per cent," said the 37-year-old from São Paulo, underlining how costs were rising while her revenue had collapsed. "I had to raise the price of my services, too."

It is a dynamic that is playing out across Brazil, adding an extra layer of complexity to the country's coronavirus crisis, which has already claimed the lives of almost 350,000 individuals and pushed hospital services to the brink.

With much of Latin America's largest economy being shuttered, inflation is surging to its highest level in years, fuelling a silent scourge of hunger among poorer citizens that has run in parallel to the Covid-19 pandemic.

"The high price of staple foods -- rice and beans, for example -- has led to the disappearance of these items from the table of millions of Brazilians," said Ana Maria Segall, a researcher at the Brazilian Research Network on Food and Nutritional Sovereignty and Security. In the 12 months to the end of March, the price of rice increased 64 per cent and black beans 51 per cent.

"In Brazil currently food inflation has penalised the very poorest, preventing them from having adequate access to food and in many situations leading to hunger," she said, adding that rising unemployment and the curtailment of social programs were also contributing factors.

Singapore Unemployment Falls for Fourth Month

SINGAPORE (DPA) - Unemployment in Singapore fell for the fourth month in a row in February, dropping to 3 per cent in the latest indication the city-state's economy is picking up after record losses last year.

"Although the unemployment rates

remain elevated and have not yet returned to pre-Covid levels, we are seeing good progress with jobs growth," said Manpower Minister Josephine Teo last week.

Singapore last year reported the most layoffs in over two decades, with over 160,000 people losing their jobs as gross domestic product (GDP) shrank by a record 5.4 per cent.

Much of the damage was done during the second quarter. One year ago, the government imposed a lockdown aimed at slowing the spread of the coronavirus.

Restrictions were eased from June, with unemployment peaking in September.

Migrant workers were hardest-hit by the virus and job losses, particularly in construction, which contracted by 33 per cent last year.

Tourism and related sectors such as aviation shrank by 12 per cent, with most Asia-Pacific countries keeping borders shut since March 2020.

Singapore has set up "travel bubbles" and business travel deals with neighboring countries.

The Tourism Board of Singapore last week also had staged a rare in-person conference where delegates discussed ways of reviving tourism.

Singapore will this week publish first-quarter GDP estimates, with a return to growth expected after exports and manufacturing increases were reported in early 2021.

Labor productivity could also be up, contributing to economic revival.

A survey commissioned by The Straits Times newspaper and published on Wednesday (April 7) suggested Singaporeans are working more and socialising less than before the pandemic.

Eni's Latest Oil Discovery Could Be Big for Angola

ROME (Dispatches) - Italian firm Eni has made a new light oil discovery off the coast of Angola after exploration activities recommenced following a year of pandemic restrictions.



The discovery, made on Tuesday, is in Angola's deepwater Block 15/06. Eni believes the exploration well, drilled at 500 metres in the Cuica exploration prospect, could hold as much as 200 to 250 million barrels of oil and presents the second big oil discovery in the area.

"The well-head location, intentionally placed close to East Hub's subsea network, will allow a fast-track tie-in of the exploration well and relevant production, thus immediately creating value while extending the Armada Olombendo FPSO production plateau. It is expected that production will start within six months after discovery," Eni stated.

Eni, which has been an active part of the country's oil industry since 1980, produces around 120,000 bpd of oil in Angola. The firm has announced an anticipated \$7 billion investment in Angola by 2025 in the areas of research, production, refining and solar energy, with the objective of cutting carbon emissions, job creation and diversifying the economy.

As well as being an OPEC member, Angola is the second largest oil producing country in sub-Saharan Africa, producing an estimated 1.37 million bpd of oil and around 17,904 million cubic feet of natural gas. However, production in the country has been far below its full potential due to low investment in recent years owing to the drop in oil prices.

In January, Angola received IMF approval for a disbursement of over \$480 million under a \$3.7 billion loan agreement due to the ongoing struggle with low oil prices as well as weak exports.

To attract greater investment, the Angolan government has launched a new strategy with the aim of increasing production, hoping to tap into 57 billion barrels in undiscovered oil reserves. The government has also amended its legal and fiscal terms to make it easier for foreign companies to invest in the oil and gas sector, attracting firms with the country's competitive production costs.

Greater investment is expected for 2021, for a country with a substantial oil potential, with 9 billion barrels of proven oil resources. There are also significant opportunities for refined petroleum products as Angola imports 80 percent of its needs in this area at present.

Last month, Angola's National Agency for Oil, Gas and Biofuels (ANPG) released its timeline for the evaluation of its 2020 oil and gas licensing round. ANPG is hoping to expand oil research and evaluation programmes in sedimentary basins, better understand the country's hydrocarbon potential and attract new investors in line with its Hydrocarbon Exploration Strategy 2020-2025.

In early April, Angola announced that it has begun initiatives to develop its marginal fields, creating opportunities in nine blocks with an expected investment of \$67.4 billion over the next five years. The country is also expected to see a return on its renewable energy investment, with solar power production expected from 2022. Major energy firms Eni and Total both have a stake in the country's solar energy sector in the provinces of Namibe and Huíla respectively.

IMF Improves Russia's Economic Growth Outlook for This Year



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has upgraded its forecast for economic growth in Russia for the second time this year, and now expects GDP to gain as much as 3.8% in 2021.

In its April report, the IMF raised its projections for Russia's GDP by 0.8% compared to its January outlook, and by 1.5% compared to its October forecast.

While the outlook for Russia's economic performance in 2021 has been raised for the second time, next year's growth could be slightly slower than previously thought. The IMF expects Russia's GDP to grow at the same pace as this year in 2022, by 3.8%, which is 0.1% lower than it predicted in January.

The upward revision for Russia came as the IMF revealed a more optimistic forecast for the global economy amid vaccine rollouts. The fund now expects it to expand by 6% in 2021.

The fund said that Russia's fiscal policy was countercyclical in 2020. It also revised the figures for the crisis year, when Russia, like most countries, implemented lockdowns to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. According to its latest estimates, the Russian economy shrank 3.1%, not the previously reported 3.6%.

"There will be some degree of consolidation in 2021 in line with economic recovery, and the deficit is likely to come back to the fiscal rule's limit in 2022," the IMF said.

After the new economic outlook was released, IMF Executive Director for Russia Aleksei Mozhin said he expects the Russian economy to outpace its pre-crisis pace of growth in 2021 and 2022. He explained the growth potential by the rather slow development of the Russian economy before the pandemic hit, along with an expected rebound after the recent downturn.

The IMF improved projections for the Russian economy shortly after the World Bank did the same. However, the World Bank is less optimistic, projecting the country's GDP to grow by 3.3% this year and 3.4% next year.

“Eclipse” to Go on Screen At Côté Court Festival

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iranian short film ‘Eclipse’ will be screened at the 30th edition of the Côté Court Festival in France.

Directed by Raha Amirfazli, Alireza Ghasemi, ‘Eclipse’ has been a joint product of Iran and France.

The synopsis of ‘Eclipse’ reads, “Saaghi and her two friends have come to the largest park in Tehran to take

pictures of the one-in-a-century total eclipse announced later in the afternoon. Mischievous and rebellious, they steal a camera stand, lie to their parents and discuss boys as well as an upcoming party. Their wanderings lead them to a remote part of the park. As the sun disappears, Saaghi sees something that should have stayed hidden.”



Vaccine Inequity Threatens Mideast's Economic Recovery

DUBAI (Dispatches) - Middle East economies are recovering from the coronavirus pandemic faster than anticipated, largely due to the acceleration of mass inoculation campaigns and an increase in oil prices. But the International Monetary Fund warned Sunday that an uneven vaccine distribution would derail the region's rebound, as the prospects of rich and poor countries diverge.

In its latest report, the IMF again revised upward its 2020 economic outlook for the Mideast and North Africa, now outlining just a 3.4% contraction last year, with growth for the region's oil exporters buoyed by a boom for commodities and rise in oil price, which hit \$67 a barrel in March. Even with an expected dip to \$57 a barrel by the end of 2021, the surge from last year's all-time lows is boosting the oil-rich nations of the Persian Gulf, such as the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, which also have moved swiftly toward widespread vaccination.

But elsewhere in the region, from Yemen and Sudan to Libya and Lebanon, where inflation soars, instability prevails and wars have left lasting scars, the damaging effects of the pandemic will drag on and cause economic harm, the IMF said — possibly for years to come.

“We are a year into the crisis and recovery is back, but it is a divergent recovery,” Jihad Azour, director of the Middle East and Central Asia department at the IMF, told The Associated Press. “We are at turning point. ... Vaccination policy is economic policy.”

The IMF expects economic growth to reach 4% for the Middle East this year. But that rosy outlook papers over the region's deep economic divides.

For oil-rich economies, yawning deficits are expected to halve this year as revenues climb, more arms get jabbed and lockdown measures recede, said Azour. Thanks to strong government management of the virus' successive waves and the jolt in oil prices, Saudi Arabia's economy will expand 2.9% — compared to last year's contraction of 4.1%. Higher oil prices come as the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and its allies keep a lid on production and it seems unlikely that the U.S. will quickly lift sanctions on Iran's critical oil sector.

The IMF expects the UAE's economy to grow this year by 3.2%, with Dubai's World Expo, now rescheduled for October 2021, key to the nation's recovery. Dubai hopes the massive event will draw 25 million visitors and a series of deals, heralding a bright post-pandemic future.

The UAE has launched among the world's fastest inoculation campaigns, with over 90 doses administered per 100 residents as of this week. Still, the collapse of hospitality, tourism and retail presents challenges for glitzy Dubai, where a cascade of layoffs hit foreign workers and slashed the emirate's population by 8.4%, according to ratings agency S&P Global.

The outlook is bleaker for fragile and developing economies, many with lagging vaccination campaigns, few resources for fiscal stimulus and revenues drawn heavily from sectors like tourism that have been slowest to recover from the pandemic.

Whereas rich countries plan to vaccinate most of their population in a few months, swaths of the region — from Afghanistan and Gaza to Iraq and Iran — likely won't inoculate a significant portion of their populations until mid-2022, the IMF said.

Even that estimate may be optimistic. The region's lowest-income countries could end up waiting until 2023 at the earliest for mass vaccination, according to the report. Meanwhile, many countries' beleaguered health systems are straining under resurgent waves of infections, prompting authorities to impose new restrictions and inflict more economic pain.

The IMF expects a sluggish 2021 recovery for Egypt and Pakistan, oil importers reliant



on tourism that saw an exodus of foreign investors last year. The fund revised down its growth estimate for Jordan, where the youth unemployment rate has skyrocketed to 55%. Sudan remains mired in debt and threatened by instability, but its economy could grow for the first time in years as it gains new access to international financial networks.

Lebanon, in the midst of its worst financial crisis ever, remains the only Mideast economy at risk of further contraction. The country has defaulted on its foreign debt and failed to implement economic reforms, let alone form a government. A giant explosion at the Beirut port last year wreaked havoc on the capital. Discussions with the IMF led nowhere after the Cabinet quit.

Azour declined to even offer a specific economic forecast for Lebanon this year, citing “all the uncertainties.”

In Iran, the IMF found reason to praise economic growth after years of decline, noting that the government's resistance to virus-induced lockdowns that would have devastated its sanctions-hit economy had saved it from the worst of the pandemic's fallout. The country's economy is expected to grow 2.5% in 2021, Azour said, building on slight gains last year.

But Iran's recovery remains far off as its vaccinations lag, inflation eliminates people's savings and economic policies overlook the most vulnerable. The IMF continues to consider Iran's \$5 billion assistance request, which would be its first loan since 1962. Meanwhile, American sanctions remain in force as torturous discussions begin over a return to Tehran's tattered 2015 nuclear deal with world powers.

“A removal of the recently implemented sanctions will of course allow the Iranian economy to export more, trade more, and this will have a positive impact,” said Azour, while urging the government to tame inflation and better incorporate the private sector.

Despite the worsening inequality, the pandemic has shown the fortunes of the Mideast's richest and poorest countries to be increasingly intertwined. Surging infections and foundering inoculation anywhere in the region could spread new variants that threaten overall economic and public health, the IMF reported.

“Therefore, any regional co-operation would be welcome going forward,” said Azour.

No Talks Between...

FROM PAGE 1

Khatibzadeh commented on the news published by Kyodo News on how Iran and the United States would return to JCPOA, noting: “Whenever there are negotiations at this level, the media publishes different reports for different purposes. This report is in this direction. Without going into details, Iran is seeking to lift the sanctions in one step and verify the lifting of the sanctions. We will use all mechanisms to achieve this goal within the framework of Iran's national interests.”

Regarding the French ambassador's recent remarks, Khatibzadeh said: “If it were not for the strategic patience of this nation and the wise behavior of the Islamic Republic of Iran, there would have been nothing left of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) as a multilateral agreement due to clear violations of U.S. and European obligations.”

He also assured on Mon. that Iran will take revenge on the Zionist regime for the Natanz incident.

He blamed the Tel Aviv regime as the main culprit of the Natanz incident and named it a crime against humanity.

“The Zionists want to take revenge on the Iranian people,” Saeed Khatibzadeh said in a video conference.

Addressing Natanz incident, the spokesperson explained: “It is too early to comment on the amount of damage we have seen in Natanz, and the teams are still investigating.”

“But I promise that the damaged facilities in Natanz are of the first-generation centrifuges, which are very basic compared to what the Islamic Republic has now. They will be replaced by modern ones.”

“What happened in Natanz cannot make Iran's advanced indigenous nuclear industry retreat nor can it be effective in removing the oppressive sanctions against the Iranian people.” Regarding the amount of damage, he said: “Basically, the Natanz incident happened due to a failure in the electrical system. The amount of damage must be determined according to the testing of all centrifuges; But for every centrifuge that fails, there is a more advanced one to replace it.”

Answering a question about the Russian Foreign Minister's visit to Tehran, he said: “During Sergei Lavrov's visit to Tehran, he will hold numerous meetings with Iranian officials.”

“According to the held talks, the 10-year comprehensive cooperation agreement between Iran and Russia, which has been recently expired, will be extended,” he added. Regarding the strategies and steps taken by the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to increase trade activities with Iraqi Kurdistan, he said: “Iran-Iraq relations are a multi-layered, popular and strategic relationship, and therefore very good consultations between the two sides are underway on all sectors.”

Answering a question about Iraqi officials' excuses for paying Iran's debts, he said: “We talked in detail about Iraq's debts during the Iraqi Foreign Minister's visit to Iran. The governor of Iran Central Bank visited Iraq. A number of actions have been taken and a number of actions are underway. There are definitely obstacles, but some progress has been made.”

Tehran, Moscow...

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He suggested that Iran, Russia and China could play a pivotal role in creating a sanctions-resistant block to gather countries sanctioned by the US and Europe together.

Jalali said that Iran and Russia share lots of common viewpoints on many issues, including on Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen as well as Iran's stance on the JCPOA. Iran and Russia have a key role in the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), according to the diplomat who underlined that it is in the interest of both countries to take serious action to finalize the corridor. Jalali said that Iran and Russia have a cooperation treaty in place which is extended every five years, but the two sides are willing to update treaty and agreed that Iran produces a draft for this purpose.

The diplomat was referring to the Treaty on the basis for mutual relations and the principles of cooperation between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Russian Federation which was signed on March 12, 2001. He stated that the draft would be handed over to Russia after it is reviewed by relevant agencies in Iran and it would be signed by Presidents of Iran and Russia to become effective.

Supreme Council of...

FROM PAGE 1

It was also decided to provide bank facilities to the owners of traditional wooden ships active in the Persian Gulf in order for them to be able to buy new small-scale commercial vessels.

To expand non-oil exports during the sanctions and the coronavirus pandemic, Iranian government has defined some new strategies and has been pursuing them vigorously.

The major strategy is to focus on the neighboring countries and the trade partners in the region, and it is, in fact, one of the top priorities of the government for defying the U.S. sanctions.

Chinese Vaccines' Effectiveness Low



BEIJING (Dispatches) - In a rare admission of the weakness of Chinese coronavirus vaccines, the country's top disease control official says their effectiveness is low and the government is considering mixing them to give them a boost.

Chinese vaccines “don't have very high protection rates”, said the director of the China Centers for Disease Control, Gao Fu, at a conference on Saturday in the southwestern city of Chengdu. Beijing has distributed hundreds of millions of doses in other countries.

“It's now under formal consideration whether we should use different vaccines from different technical lines for the immunization process,” Gao said.

The effectiveness rate of a coronavirus vaccine from Sinovac, a Chinese developer, at preventing symptomatic infections has been found to be as low as 50.4 percent by researchers in Brazil. By comparison, the vaccine made by Pfizer-BioNTech has been found to be 97-percent effective. Beijing has yet to approve any foreign vaccines for use in China, where the coronavirus emerged in late 2019.

Gao gave no details of possible changes in strategy but mentioned mRNA, a previously experimental technique used by some Western vaccine developers while China's drug-makers used traditional technology. “Everyone should consider the benefits mRNA vaccines can bring for humanity,” Gao said. “We must follow it carefully and not ignore it just because we already have several types of vaccines already.”

Gao previously raised questions about the safety of mRNA vaccines. He was quoted by the official Xinhua news agency as saying in December he could not rule out negative side effects because they were being used for the first time on healthy people.

India Needs to Grow at Much Faster Pace to Make Up for Contraction During COVID-19

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India, which is projected to grow at an impressive rate of 12.5 per cent this year, needs to grow at a much faster pace to make up for the unprecedented contraction of eight per cent that it clocked during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, according to a senior IMF official.

The International Monetary Fund Deputy Chief Economist, Petya Koeva Brooks, in an interview to PTI on Friday also made a strong case for an additional economic stimulus to address the impact of the pandemic on the country's economy. “When it comes to India there was a major collapse of output last fiscal year and the number as you mentioned is eight.”

“So, we are very glad to see the strong rebound this year with projected growth of 12.5 for fiscal year 21-22 and we are seeing also high frequency indicators including PMI (Purchasing Managers' Index), and trade and more mobility indicators which give us a sense that there is continued recovery in the first quarter of this year,” she said.

That said, there are some recent emergencies of the new variants in the localised lockdowns that are seen as one of the threats to this recovery, Brooks noted. On the recovery itself, when it comes to level in terms of the level of output, we are expecting that level to return to the pre-crisis one from 2019 to this fiscal year. That is what we have in our projections. “However, if you look at a concept of scarring, which just compares what the level of output would have been hadn't there not been a crisis in 2024, which is the measure which we are using. Then at and compare where our current growth trajectory is for India that gap is much larger, Brooks said. The gap, she said, which is eight per cent of GDP is significantly larger than what it is for the world as a whole.

Domestic Production of...

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“The country's industrial sector was able to grow significantly in a situation where the outbreak of the coronavirus had created unfavorable conditions for the country's productive sector; fortunately, we have witnessed a good leap in the production of products needed by people to fight this disease,” the official stressed.

Touching upon some of the major industrial growth indicators in the previous year, Sadeghi Niaraki noted that industrial investment reached more than 1.8 quadrillion rials (about \$42.8 billion) in the first 11 months of the previous year (March 20, 2020-February 18, 2021), registering a growth of 225 percent.

The upward trend continued to the end of the year, he emphasized.

The official also pointed to a 23-percent increase in job creation in various industrial sectors, saying that direct employment was provided for 121,000 people during the previous year. Niaraki also informed about the increase in production of 20 important industrial products and added: “We hope that this trend will be maintained in the current year which named the year of “Production: Support and the Elimination of Obstacles.”

U.S. Not Willing...

FROM PAGE 1

Tehran says Washington is the side which abandoned the JCPOA and thus, it has to take the first step to unconditionally remove all its sanctions on Iran in a verifiable manner, given its long record of not playing by the rules.

On Friday, envoys from Iran and the P4+1 group of countries — Britain, France, Russia, and China plus Germany — wrapped up the first round of the talks in Vienna aimed at revitalizing the troubled nuclear deal.

A U.S. delegation had also traveled to Vienna, but it did not have Iran's permission to attend the discussions.

During the negotiations, two expert-level working groups discussed the sanctions Washington might remove as well as the nuclear curbs Tehran might observe, and reported their conclusions to the JCPOA Joint Commission. The participants agreed to hold the next round of the talks on Wednesday.

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Monfils Limp out of Monte Carlo Masters

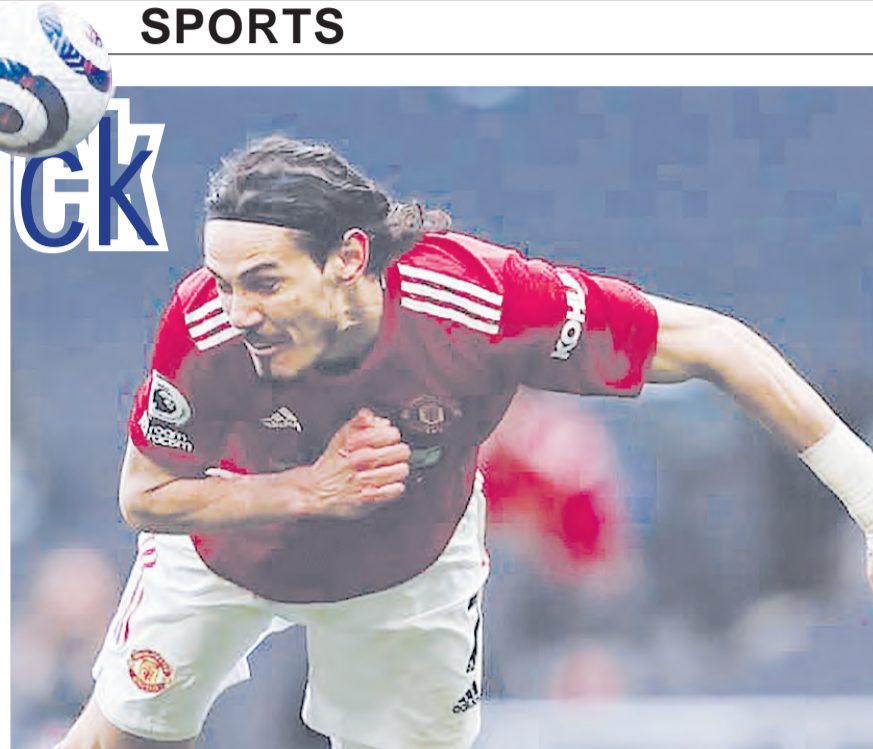
MONACO (Dispatches) - French stalwart Gael Monfils pulled out of the Monte Carlo Masters on Sunday with a calf injury. "I have been feeling some pain at the bottom of my calf for the last ten days and it got worse yesterday (Saturday) during my last practice," the 34-year-old announced on twitter. The world number 13 was last seen on court at the Australian Open in a "nightmare" first round loss to Finland's Emil Ruusuvuori. The runner-up in Monte Carlo to Rafael Nadal in 2016 was scheduled to face Pablo Andujar in the first round.

Matsuyama Chases Historic Masters Triumph

AUGUSTA (Dispatches) - Hideki Matsuyama, trying to become the first Japanese man to win a major golf title, held a four-stroke lead as Sunday's dramatic final round of the 85th Masters began. Matsuyama stood on 11-under 205 after 54 holes at Augusta National, seizing command with a Masters career-low seven-under par 65 on Saturday, the only bogey-free round of the event.

Man Utd Hit Back To Sink Spurs

LONDON (Dispatches) - Manchester United staged a superb fightback to shatter Tottenham's top-four bid with a 3-1 win, while West Ham climbed to fourth place in the Premier League as the revitalized Jesse Lingard inspired a 3-2 victory against Leicester on Sunday. Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's side trailed to Son Heung-min's first half strike, but United scored three times after the break through Fred, Edinson Cavani and Mason Greenwood. Second-placed United's fourth successive league win avenged their embarrassing 6-1 home defeat against Tottenham in October. The visitors were denied a first-half opener when Cavani's strike was controversially ruled out by referee Chris Kavanagh, who consulted the pitchside monitor to decide Scott McTominay's flailing arm had made the slightest contact with Son's face in the build-up. Son put Tottenham ahead in the 40th minute as the South Korean slotted home from close range after Harry Kane and Lucas Moura carved open the United defence. But United deservedly equalised in the 57th minute when Paul Pogba played in Cavani, whose shot was saved by Hugo Lloris, with Brazilian midfielder Fred on hand to slam in his first league goal since 2018. In the 79th minute, Cavani netted for the first time in seven games as the Uruguay striker dived to meet Greenwood's cross with a superb header.



Greenwood lashed in the third in stoppage time and United are now 11 points behind leaders Manchester City with a game in hand. "Top reaction. We played some great stuff in the second half. We felt the injustice (of the disallowed goal) and we showed good character to come back. We can't let those decisions ruin this good season for us," Solskjaer said. The defeat was a huge blow to troubled Tottenham's top four ambitions. They sit in seventh place, six points behind West Ham, and speculation will mount about close-season departures for boss Jose Mourinho and star striker Kane.

"It's a compliment to me in the way we start matches, the way we are organised. Then what happens during matches to lose points from winning positions is one of the situations I am not comfortable with talking to the media anymore," Mourinho said as Tottenham have now lost 18 points from winning positions this season. "You look to the table and you see the distance to the top four. You know it's difficult but it's mathematically possible."

At the London Stadium, Lingard struck twice in the first half to maintain his remarkable form since joining West Ham on loan from Manchester United in January. The 28-year-old has been reborn with West Ham, scoring eight times in nine appearances and earning a recall to the England team.

Jarrold Bowen scored West Ham's third after half-time as David Moyes' side moved one point ahead of fifth-placed Chelsea and two in front of sixth-placed Liverpool with seven games left for all three teams.

Kelechi Iheanacho struck twice in the final 20 minutes for Leicester, but having looked certain to earn a top four place, the Foxes are now only one point above West Ham. Newcastle took a big step towards securing their survival with a vital 2-1 win against Burnley.

Steve Bruce's side came from behind at Turf Moor to end their seven-game winless run thanks to goals from Jacob Murphy and Allan Saint-Maximin after Matej Vydra put Burnley ahead.

The Magpies are six points clear of the relegation zone and hold a game in hand on third-bottom Fulham.

Sonego Ends Italian Drought in Cagliari ATP Tournament

ROME (Dispatches) - Italy's Lorenzo Sonego rallied past defending champion Laslo Djere of Serbia to win the second ATP title of his career in Cagliari. Sonego, the third seed, won 2-6, 7-6 (7/5), 6-4 in just over three hours to become the first Italian to lift a trophy at home since Filippo Volandri in Palermo in October 2006. The 25-year-old, who reached the fourth round in Roland Garros last year, added to his title in Antalya, Turkey in 2019, having lost his previous final appearance in Vienna last October. Sonego completed a double on the Mediterranean island having partnered Andrea Vavassori to doubles victory on Saturday. Djere, ranked 57, had been hoping to claim his third title in as many finals after Rio de Janeiro in 2019 and Cagliari last year.

Jazz First To 40 wins

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Donovan Mitchell scored 42 points and the Utah Jazz became the first team in the NBA to reach the 40-win mark with a 128-112 victory over the Sacramento Kings in Salt Lake City. Mike Conley added 26 points and Joe Ingles contributed 20 off the bench, with both players sinking five 3-pointers, to help the Jazz overcome a double-digit deficit en route to a rout of the Kings. It was Utah's 24th straight win at home and the team's 11th win in 13 games. Mitchell became the first Jazz player since Hall of Famer Karl Malone to score 35 points in three consecutive games. De'Aaron Fox scored 30 and Richaun Holmes poured in 25 points for Sacramento, but the Kings couldn't hold on to an early 11-point lead. Stephen Curry poured in a game-high 38 points to move within 18 of Wilt Chamberlain's career franchise record, lifting Golden State Warriors to a 125-109 victory over visiting Houston Rockets.

Vazquez Ruled out of Liverpool Trip



Vazquez had to come off before half-time in the 2-1 win over Barcelona but not before

MADRID (Dispatches) - Real Madrid will face Liverpool at Anfield next week without right back Lucas Vazquez who set up the opener in Saturday's Clasico win before limping off with a knee injury.

he had crossed to Karim Benzema to score the first goal. Real announced the player was suffering from a left knee ligament sprain with the Spanish media suggesting he could be out for the rest of the season.

The first match he will miss is Wednesday's Champions League quarter-final second leg with Real travelling to Anfield with a 3-1 first leg lead. His absence adds to Zinedine Zidane's injury concerns with Sergio Ramos, Raphael Varrane and Dani Carvajal all sidelined for the game.

Inter Streak Towards Serie A Title

MILAN (Dispatches) - Matteo Darmian scored the only goal as Serie A leaders Inter Milan held off lowly Cagliari 1-0 to stretch their winning streak to 11 games as they close in on a first league title in over a decade.

Champions Juventus consolidated third place with a 3-1 win over Genoa as Napoli moved fourth and back into the Champions League spots with a 2-0 win at Sampdoria.

Inter are 11 points clear of second-placed AC Milan who won 3-1 at Parma on Saturday, as a first title since 2010 beckons for Antonio Conte's side with eight game left to play.

Moroccan Achraf Hakimi came off the bench and minutes later set up Italy defender Darmian to grab the winner in the San Siro to inflict a fourth consecutive defeat on Cagliari.

"AC Milan won yesterday so it was important for us to get a result," Conte said. "It's not easy to be under constant pressure but we're getting used to it."

"We just need to continue pedalling to the max as we approach our goal." Inter had been pegged back against 18th-placed Cagliari whose goalkeeper Guglielmo Vicario, replacing Covid-19 hit Alessio Cragno, kept his team in the game.

Vicario denied Christian Eriksen in both halves, while Inter loanee Radja Nainggolan also missed a chance to open the scoring for the visitors against his parent club.

Romelu Lukaku set up Alexis Sanchez who thought he had broken the deadlock after quarter of an hour, but the goal was ruled out for offside.

Stefan de Vrij rattled the crossbar before Conte made a double substitution bringing on Hakimi for Ashley Young after 69 minutes, with Lautaro Martinez replacing Sanchez.



Rizwan Steers Pakistan To Their Highest-Winning T20 Run Chase

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Mohammad Rizwan took inspiration from teammate Fakhar Zaman and steered Pakistan to their highest winning run chase as they beat South Africa by four wickets in the first Twenty20 international at the Wanderers Stadium in Johannesburg on Saturday.

Rizwan made an unbeaten 74 as Pakistan chased down a target of 189 with one ball to spare. Their previous highest T20 chase was 188 against Australia in Harare in 2018.

Rizwan said the pitch was tricky at the start of the chase but he and captain Babar Azam got the side off to a quick start before Babar was out with the total on 41 in the fifth over.

He was then joined by Fakhar, who scored an astonishing 193 not out in the second one-day international on the same ground six days earlier. Fakhar made 27 off 19 balls before he was caught on the boundary off left-arm spinner Tabraiz Shamsi, who took two for 29.

But Rizwan said he modelled his innings on the way Fakhar played in the one-day game. "Fakhar's innings was on my mind today, the way he played on this surface," said Rizwan.

"I was taking my time knowing I could score later on." With a succession of power hitters in the side, Rizwan said he got a message from his team's dug-out that he must keep batting until the end.

Rizwan, who scored only 42 runs in three innings in Pakistan's 2-1 one-day series win, was back in the form which earned him man of the series awards in both Test and T20 series against South Africa in Pakistan earlier in the year.

He hit nine fours and two sixes. The match swung in the last four overs of the two innings.

