

Health Minister Said on Friday That Some 500,000 Doses of Corona Vaccines Have Been Administered In Iran and the Number of Vaccination Will Reach 1.3 Million Until the End of Next Thursday

IRAN NEWS

Health Ministry Spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari Said on Friday 328 More Iranians Lost Their Lives Due To COVID-19 Over the Past 24 Hours Bringing the Death Toll to 66,002

VOL. XXVII, No. 7202 TEHRAN Price 40,000 Rials

www.irannewsdaily.com

SATURDAY APRIL 17, 2021 - FARVARDIN 28, 1400

2 DOMESTIC

Regional Cooperation Key To Countering Israel, Ensuring Security



> SEE PAGE 2

3 DOMESTIC

President Inaugurates Major Petchem Projects



> SEE PAGE 3

4 INTERNATIONAL

U.S. Expels Russian Diplomats, Imposes New Sanctions



> SEE PAGE 4

8 SPORTS

Man City, Liverpool Reach Semis of Champions League



> SEE PAGE 8

EU's New Sanctions Meant To Undermine JCPOA Talks

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's deputy foreign minister for political affairs says the Iranian delegation took the European countries to task during Thursday talks on the 2015 Iran nuclear deal for imposing so-called right-related bans and ignoring a recent terrorist attack on an Iranian nuclear site, saying the new sanctions are meant to undermine talks on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and the deal altogether.

"The Europeans not only ignored this important act of sabotage, but also they were busy imposing new sanctions on Iran and that was totally unacceptable," Abbas Araqchi said in an exclusive interview with Press TV correspondent in Vienna on Thursday.

"We told them that even your human rights sanctions that you imposed two days ago, we consider them as JCPOA-related sanctions, because right in the middle of negotiations you decided to impose sanctions and that is certainly [meant] to undermine the current negotiations and to undermine the JCPOA altogether," Araqchi added.

Pointing to the new sanctions, the chief Iranian negotiator said this is a significant non-performance by the European Union.

See Page 7

Iran Produces First Batch Of 60% Enriched Uranium

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Majlis Speaker Mohammad-Baqer Qalibaf says Iran's nuclear scientists have managed to produce the country's first batch of 60-percent enriched uranium.

"I am proud to announce that at 00:40 last night ... young and pious Iranian scientists were able to obtain a 60% enriched uranium product," Qalibaf wrote in a Persian tweet on Friday.

"We congratulate the brave people of the Islamic Iran on this success; the will of the Iranian people is miraculous and will thwart any conspiracy."

The announcement came days after Iran informed the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) of a plan to start 60-percent uranium enrichment, following an act of sabotage against the Natanz nuclear facility, which Iran called "nuclear terrorism".

Iran Increases Missile Range According to Threat Types

TEHRAN (MNA) - A military advisor to the Leader of the Islamic Republic General Hossein Dehghan warned the enemies against any hostile moves, adding that Iran would increase the range of its missiles in response to the types of threats.

Brigadier General Hossein Dehghan, former Iranian defense minister, who currently serves as a military advisor to the Leader of the Islamic Republic, made the remarks in a recent interview with Yemeni al-Masirah TV. "Any hostile move will be met with a tough and practical response at due time and place so that [the enemy] will no longer repeat its move. Iran is fully prepared to face any threat or aggression, and our forces are monitoring all hostile movements," Gen. Dehghan warned the enemies.

The former Iranian defense minister ruled out any possibility of negotiations on Iran's missiles, saying "Iran's missile power is a red line and cannot be negotiated. That is it."

"Increasing the range of Iranian missiles is related to threats, and we increase the range of our missiles according to the types of threats we face," the military advisor to the Leader of the Islamic Republic further added. He went on to say that Iran sees no restrictions on developing its weapons apart from weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), which it does not seek to acquire.

He continued to touch upon the recent act of sabotage at Iran's Natanz nuclear site, which the Israeli regime was blamed for by Iran, saying that "It does not matter who claims responsibility for or denies the attack on Natanz. What matters is that the attack took place within the framework of the Hebrew-Arab-American triangle and that the United States cannot deny responsibility for it."

See Page 7

Leader Says Protracted Talks Harmful to the Country



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has warned against protracted talks aimed at reviving the 2015 nuclear deal, reiterating that Iran will only return to its commitments under the accord once it has verified that all U.S. sanctions have been removed.

Ayatollah Khamenei said that he has directed Iranian diplomats to proceed with the negotiations, but cautioned them the talks should not drag on.

"The talks shouldn't become talks of attrition," the Leader said. "They shouldn't be in a way that parties drag on and prolong the talks. This is harmful to the country."

"The fact that the Americans talk about engaging in direct and indirect negotiations [with Iran] is not because they want to negotiate to accept the truth, rather they want to negotiate to impose their wrongful argument" on Iran, the Leader noted.

Ayatollah Khamenei stressed that the Islamic Republic's position on the issue, that the United States -- as the party that has repeatedly reneged on its obligations in the past-- must first remove the sanctions, is privately shared by some Europeans involved in the talks.

"However, when it comes to decision-making, they bow to the Americans and do not act independently," the Leader said.

"Most of the proposals by the Americans are arrogant and contemptuous. They are not worth looking at," Ayatollah Khamenei noted.

Following the U.S. withdrawal from the JCPOA in May 2018, Iran waited patiently for an entire year for the European parties to the deal to shield Iranian business interests in the face of US sanctions.

However, as the Europeans failed to hold up their contractual obligations to Iran under the threat of US reprisal, Tehran began a series of countermeasures by scaling back its own commitments under Articles 26 and 36 of the JCPOA covering Tehran's legal rights.

The Vienna talks already have been thrown into disarray by an attack on Iran's Natanz nuclear enrichment site, which Tehran says was carried out by the Israeli regime.

Elsewhere in his statements, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution stated, "The Quran itself does not step aside in any way when it comes to political-social challenges. And it does not refrain from confronting the Taghut (domineering, evil powers), the arrogant, the wasteful and the oppressors. It has always stood up to them."

Imam Khamenei also added, "The Quran's guidance is not particular to a limited area in humanity's life. Quranic guidance covers all areas of human life. It is not the case that the Quran guides people in one area but leaves them alone in another essential area. No, the Quran deals with all aspects and corners of humanity's life."

In another part of his statements, His Eminence considered praising the work done by all the medical groups in the country to be important, especially during the Corona pandemic, "It is truly necessary for people to praise and thank the medical personnel working in the country."

The Leader of the Islamic Revolution added, "The next point is about the people's charity work. Well, the month of Ramadan is the month of good deeds. This has always been the case. Even in normal times in the month of Ramadan, generous people and believers offer their food and help to the needy. However, during the Corona pandemic, this issue becomes increasingly important. It is necessary for the people's movement of offering pious help and providing relief to increase even more in the month of Ramadan."

Iran, Pakistan to Sign Free Trade Agreement

PESHAWAR (Dispatches) - Iranian Consul General in Peshawar Hamid Reza Ghomi said that efforts were initiated to sign a free trade agreement between Iran and Pakistan.

Addressing businessmen at Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry, he said that Iran wanted to boost bilateral trade and economic relations with Pakistan to strengthen regional economy.

The Iranian diplomat said that despite Covid-19 pandemic, the Iranian consulate facilitated the Pakistani businessmen and issued visas to them within a short span of time.

He lauded the efforts made by Pakistani ambassador in Iran, saying he played vital role in increasing trade volume between the two countries. He added that Iranian ambassador in Pakistan would soon visit Peshawar to hold a meeting with the businessmen to know their problems.

The envoy asked the Peshawar-based businessmen to cement trade relations with Mashhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry to take benefits from each other's experience and boost trade activities between the countries.

The meeting was also attended by SCCI senior vice president Engineer Manzoor Elahi, Iranian Second Consul Seyed Ebrahim Dehnadi and other officials of Iranian Consulate in Peshawar.

Earlier, the businessmen led by Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry president Sherbaz Bilour discussed a number of issues for improvement of the bilateral trade volume with the envoy.

See Page 7

ViewPoint U.S. to Benefit Talks of Attrition

The Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei on his Wednesday remarks said officials have decided to continue talks with P4+1 countries on the JCPOA but warned against protraction of talks and once again reiterated that Iran would only return to its commitments under the accord once it has verified that all U.S. sanctions have been removed.

Political analysts believe that the U.S. would benefit the protracted talks and it can make Iran accept more of its conditions at the negotiating table. One of the political analysts warned Iranian negotiating team of avoiding protraction of talks because it will be against Iran's interests. He listed four reasons that the Americans are trying to protract talks in order to dictate their conditions in the JCPOA regarding other issues like regional and missile programs.

One of the reasons for protraction of talks is that the Americans think that to return to the JCPOA, they have to give concessions and have to fulfill some of their JCPOA obligations which had not been even fulfilled during the Barack Obama Administration and Trump Administration also left them. Currently no determination is seen in the Biden Administration to fulfill some of the obligations accepted during the 2015 agreement and talks of attribution will help them to delay fulfilling their obligations and they can get more concessions from Iran by protracting the talks.

The other reason that the Americans like the talks are protracted is to get some concessions on defense, missile and regional issues and its solution is in protracting the talks. The Supreme Leader in his remarks reiterated that they want to dictate some of their conditions on Iran.

The analyst noted the Iranian negotiating team under pressure from some officials in the country rush to conclude the talks as soon as possible and the protracted talks would make them tired and they may give concessions as the U.S. wants. So protracted talks are against Iran's interests.

The analysts also believe that U.S. President Joe Biden does not have enough power to lift all sanctions due to opposition in the Democrat-dominated Congress because some of the Democrat Congressmen also Senators are against lifting the imposes sanctions and Biden is not ready to mess with them and he will benefit the protraction of talks.

See Page 7

IMF Corrects Estimate About Iran Forex Reserves

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has corrected its wrong estimate about the amount of Iran's foreign exchange reserves in an official note sent to the Central Bank of Iran (CBI), says a CBI statement.

The statement released on Thursday by CBI's public relations office said that the IMF had sent an official email to the bank announcing that Iran's gross international reserves had amounted to \$115 billion in 2020, thereby correcting a previous estimate of only \$4 billion.

The statement said that the IMF had admitted in the email that it had misjudged the situation around Iran's foreign currency reserves by calculating the sheer amount of resources that are accessible to the country.

It said the email had come after the CBI launched an official protest to the IMF about the estimate.

CBI governor Abdolnasser Hemmati said earlier this week that the IMF had used flawed data and incorrect methodology to calculate the amount of Iran's foreign reserves.

Hemmati had even suggested that the calculation could represent IMF's biased approach toward Iran as the organization has refused to grant the country a loan it needs to tackle the coronavirus pandemic under alleged pressure from the US.

See Page 7

Iran Buys 60m Doses Sputnik V COVID-19 Vaccine

MOSCOW (IRNA) - Iranian Ambassador in Moscow Kazem Jalali said on Thursday that Iran bought 60 million doses of the Sputnik V COVID-19 vaccine from Russia.

The doses are sufficient for vaccination of 30 million people, Jalali told IRNA, adding that the agreement was finalized and signed through negotiations between Iranian Embassy in Moscow and the Russian Direct

Investment Fund (RDIF), with support of Iran's Ministry of Health.

He said that the purchased doses are to be sent to Iran from May to November. Regarding the current agreement for purchasing two million doses of the vaccine, he said that 520 thousand doses have so far been sent to Iran and the Russia party agreed to send remainders as soon as possible.

Regional Cooperation Key To Countering Israel, Ensuring Security

TEHRAN (PressTV) - President Hassan Rouhani has warned against Israel's acts of terrorism in the region, including nuclear terror sabotage, urging regional countries to strengthen cooperation to confront the regime and ensure peace and security in the Middle East.

"Cooperation among regional countries is essential to ensure security, peace and stability. We believe it is dangerous to let the usurping Zionist regime gain a foothold in the region, and it is necessary for it (Israel) to be seriously dealt with," Rouhani said in a phone call with his Turkish counterpart, Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

On Sunday, Iran reported an act of sabotage that led to a power failure at the Natanz uranium enrichment site. Officials, however, said the incident had not led to any casualties, damage or complications.

Iran has blamed the act of nuclear terrorism at Natanz on Israel, which has a history of carrying out sabotage acts against Tehran's nuclear work and assassinating the country's nuclear scientists.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Rouhani stressed the importance of improving Iran's cooperation with Turkey on regional and international issues, including the settlement of the Syrian crisis through the Astana talks.

"Cooperation between Iran and Turkey, as two important and influential countries in the



region, can be effective in resolving regional problems and crises," the Iranian president said.

Pointing to cordial Tehran-Ankara relations, he noted that the expansion of cooperation in various political, economic and trade sectors can help both sides play a "better" role in the region.

Rouhani also expressed hope that the upcoming 28th meeting of the Iran-Turkey joint economic committee would further enhance joint efforts in the fields of energy, transportation and trade and commodity exchanges between the two countries.

He said the two neighbors need to work together and share experience and capabilities in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Turkish president, for his part, said his country is firmly determined to deepen friendly relations with Iran and hailed bilateral cooperation even during the coronavirus outbreak. Erdogan added that the planned meeting of the joint economic committee is a clear example of the two countries' resolve to strengthen cooperation, especially in the economic and trade fields.

Iran to Seriously Refrain from Negotiations for Sake of Negotiations

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's foreign minister has ruled out talks over the 2015 nuclear agreement for the sake of talks, saying the timing and duration of the negotiations are determined only by national interests.

In a post written in Persian on his Instagram page, Mohammad Javad Zarif thanked Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei for supporting the Iranian negotiators, who are in Vienna to discuss the issues surrounding the deal, also called the JCPOA, saying the Leader's recent remarks "once again, as in previous difficult times, revived hopes and made [our] steps stronger."

"The Leader's advice to refrain from 'attritional negotiations' has always been a beacon for us," Zarif said.

"We considered 'negotiations for the sake of negotiations' a failed experience and we negotiated only to achieve national goals," he added.

Tehran has also rejected repeated calls by the Biden administration to hold direct talks with Washington over the JCPOA, arguing that the US is no longer a party to the deal and that it first needs to return to its commitments by removing the sanctions before it can attend multilateral JCPOA meetings with Iran.

"As we did not accept talks leading to a photo op in the past four years, today we will seriously refuse to engage in negotiations for the sake of negotiations as well," Zarif said.

He said the Rouhani administration sees negotiations as a powerful and legitimate tool to resolve problems, rather than a tribune for making speeches or a stage for taking photos.

The foreign minister also hoped for a brighter future for Iranians, filled with joy and satisfaction and far away from the misfortunes of sanctions and the coronavirus.

New Centrifuges to Replace Old Ones in Natanz by Early May

TEHRAN (IRNA) - A member of the National Security and Foreign Policy Commission of Majlis said on Wednesday that the new centrifuges will replace the old ones in Natanz nuclear site by early May.

Sara Fallahi said that contrary to the claims of the Zionist media, the damages to the site have not been severe and reconstruction will finish soon.

Fallahi said that only the power system was damaged and it is quite natural that when the power system is damaged, the installed centrifuges are damaged a little as well.

She added that most of the installed centrifuges were IR1 and now the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOD) is trying to replace them IR6 centrifuges.

Saying that enrichment has not stopped in Natanz, she added that 60% enrichment started on Tuesday and all the present experts are working with high spirit.

She noted that if it becomes certain that the Zionist regime is responsible for the sabotage, they will receive a serious response.

The enemies of Iran should understand that Iran is sensitive to its security and no regime or group can harm it, she said.

She also noted that right after the incident and the meetings Americans had with the Israelis, it became clear that heart of U.S. strategy in the region is the security of the Zionist regime, which has been repeatedly stressed by Washington.

Iranian Diplomat, UN Envoy Discuss Latest Syria Developments

TEHRAN (IFP) - Ali-Asghar Khaji, a senior advisor to the Iranian foreign minister for special political affairs, had a conversation with UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen.

During the talks, the two sides discussed political solutions to settle the Syria crisis as well as the need for the Syrian Constitutional Committee to move forward with its negotiations.

The Iranian official touched upon recent talks on Syria held in Tehran with the visiting Russian delegation.

He added the Syrian presidential election will be held based on the current Constitution, and highlighted the Constitution should be respected.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran supports Pedersen's efforts to sustain talks on the constitution and holding an upcoming meeting of that committee," said Khaji.

Pedersen, in turn, lauded Iran's backing in that regard, saying he was in talks with Syrian sides to make arrangements for holding the sixth meeting of the committee.

The UN envoy said he would move forward with his consultations with key players, especially Iran.

Army, IRGC Guarantors of Security, Peace of Iranian Nation

TEHRAN (IP) - In a message congratulating on the occasion of "The Army Day of the Islamic Republic of Iran", the Chief of General Staff called the army and the IRGC the guarantors of the country's lasting security and the unparalleled peace of the Iranian nation.

On the eve of the April 18, 1979 "Army Day of the Islamic Republic of Iran", Major General Mohammad Bagheri, Chief of General Staff of the Armed Forces, sent a congratulatory message to Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi, Chief Commander of the Army, he considered the honors of the army in various fields as a valuable and path-breaking treasure for the generations eager to serve and be responsible in this organization and emphasized that the dear army supported the nation and national interests and worked to meet the needs of the country.

Bagheri said: "We will respond decisively to any threat and evil acts of the enemies."

Biden Only Committed to Trump's Maximum Pressure

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has criticized the administration of U.S. President Joe Biden for casting doubt on Tehran's seriousness in pursuing diplomacy while it has itself persisted with the failed "maximum pressure" campaign initiated by former president, Donald Trump.

In a tweet on Thursday, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said Iran's "seriousness of purpose" in pursuing diplomacy was tested in the three years since Trump withdrew from the 2015 landmark nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

"Iran—by remaining in the deal—passed with flying colors," Zarif wrote, adding, "The Biden administration, however, has only shown a commitment to Trump's maximum pressure."

Iran's "seriousness of purpose" in pursuing diplomacy was tested in the three years since Trump withdrew from the nuclear accord. Iran—by remaining in the deal—passed with flying colors.

Zarif's remarks came after U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken called Iran's move to begin enriching uranium at 60 percent purity "provocative," saying it raised questions about "Iran's seriousness" over the ongoing negotiations to revive the JCPOA in Vienna.

"We take very seriously its provocative announcement of an intent to begin enriching uranium at 60 percent," Blinken said at a news conference at the NATO headquarters in Brussels on Wednesday.

"I have to tell you the step calls into question Iran's seriousness with regard the nuclear talks, just as it underscores the imperative of returning to mutual compliance with the JCPOA," he added.

Blinken's remarks come irrespective of the fact that it was the US that left the JCPOA in 2018 in defiance of international criticism and although the deal was endorsed by the UN Security Council in the form of a resolution.

Tehran, Bratislava Discuss Promotion of Mutual Cooperation

TEHRAN (IFP) - Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Seyyed Abbas Araqchi has held talks with Slovakian Deputy Foreign Minister Ingrid Brocková.

In the virtual meeting held on Tuesday, the two sides discussed the latest regional and international developments as well as the enhancement of relations between the two countries in different political, economic, cultural and academic areas.

Araqchi, who joined the video conference call from Vienna, elaborated on Tehran's stance on the 2015 nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

He made it clear that Iran stands ready to revive the JCPOA once the other side returns to its commitments under the deal and Iran verifies the other side's compliance with its obligations.

The two sides expressed content with the expansion of Tehran-Bratislava relations over the past years, and said they support further promotion of mutual ties.

They underscored the importance of utilizing untapped potential for the expansion of relations, including through holding meetings of the two countries' joint economic commission and attending bilateral as well as international events in different areas.

Moreover, the Iranian official aired his grievances over the European Union's recent decision to put the names of several Iranian officials and bodies on its sanctions list.

"In reaction to this move, Iran will suspend its comprehensive negotiations with the EU and its cooperation on [fighting] terrorism and narcotics as well as refugees," he said.

Tehran Severely Criticizes Europe For Violating Iranians' Rights



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Secretary of Iran's High Council for Human Rights Ali Bagheri Kani criticized Europe for irresponsibility towards human rights and gave bitter examples of violation of Iranians' rights in Europe.

Bagheri Kani demanded Europe to cooperate with Iran's especial rapporteur for investigating the conditions of the Iranian prisoners in Europe.

In his letter to Secretary-General of the Council of the European Union Jeppe Tranholm-Mikkelsen, Bagheri Kani counted some of the European anti-human measures against Iranian citizens, including German companies' cutting ties with Iran's Armita Teb Novin in the field of blood transfusion, avoiding services to Iranian citizens in Swedish and Spanish airports, and Danes' lack of cooperation with an Iranian company in the field of medical equipment.

Calling these moves clear examples of crime against humanity, he urged Tranholm-Mikkelsen to make stop the European countries from violating Iranian people's rights.

He also named Mehdi Kiasati (in the Netherlands), Mousa Bashtani (in Poland), Sajjad Shahidian (in the UK), Behzad Purghannad (in Germany), Davoud Zadehloloi (in Denmark), Jaladdin Ruhollahnejad (in France), Mohammad Boroujerdi (in Denmark), Hamid Nouri (in Sweden), and Behnam Bahrami Talaghanaki (in Switzerland) who had faced bitter experiences such as cremation, illegal detention with force, baseless detention, disappearance, and other similar inhumane actions.

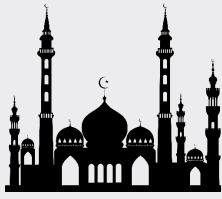
Condemning the passivity of the Council of the European Union about regeneration of medieval rules and regulations by the European governments and deprivation of Iranian citizens from education, he stressed the necessity of Europe's cooperation with Iran's especial rapporteur for investigating the conditions of the Iranian prisoners in Europe for guaranteeing restoration of the rights of Iranian nationals imprisoned in Europe.

In another part of his letter, he referred to sufferings of 31 Iranian children because of the sanctions, including Nazgol Nouri, Nima Heravi, Nazanin-Fatemeh Hemmati, Yegane Heydari, Masoumeh Inanlu, Khadijeh Rahmani, and Sahar Shamsi. These children had EB or MS.

He urged Europe to take the first step towards discovering the truth about violation of the right to life of these innocent children and oblige itself to cooperate with Iran's High Council for Human Rights' special representative about the negative effects of the sanctions.

Condemning the Council of the European Union for indifference against the approach of some of European countries towards spread of terrorism, especially Sweden, he criticized Europe's silence against state terrorism of the U.S., an example of which is assassination of anti-terror commander General Qasem Soleimani.

The letter was delivered to the Portuguese ambassador in Tehran. Portugal is the rotational head of the Council of the European Union.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:04
■ Evening (Maghreb)	19:58
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:59
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:28

40. He said: "O my lord! How shall I have a son seeing I am very old and my wife is barren?"
 "Thus" was the answer "doth Allah accomplish what He willeth."
 41. He said: "O my Lord! Give me a Sign."
 "Thy Sign," was the answer, "Shall be that thou shalt speak to no man for three days but with signals.
 Then celebrate the praises of thy Lord again and again, and glorify Him in the evening and in the morning."
 Surah 3. The Family Of 'Imran, The House Of 'Imran (40-41)

President Inaugurates Major Petrochem Projects

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - President Hassan Rouhani on Thursday ordered the official startup of 3 major petrochemical projects via videoconference.

During a virtual ceremony held on Thursday, President Rouhani inaugurated the ethane extraction unit of Parsian Sepehr Refinery and two important projects for production of catalysts for the petrochemical industry.

The ethane extraction project of Parsian Sepehr Refinery is one of the 17 petrochemical projects that were put on agenda of the industry last year but was delayed because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite intensification of the COVID-19 pandemic, which was an obstacle in the way of projects, until the end of last calendar year, projects such as Miandoab, Kaveh, Lorestan Petrochemical catalyst production plant, Kimia Pars Middle East, Bushehr, Lordegan, potassium sulfate plant of Urmia, Hegmataneh, the second phase of Ilam Petrochemical plant, Bidboland Persian Gulf Gas Refinery and Kangan Petro-refinery were among the plans that came online throughout the year.

The ethane extraction project of Parsian Sepehr Refinery is one of the remaining projects from last year which came on stream on Thursday, April 15.

The plant is fed by Parsian Refinery, and Tose'e Energy Tadbir Company has invested \$1 billion in the project which is expected to generate \$1,000 million annually.

The project has been developed with 3.3 million tons per year of annual production capacity and generated 5,300 jobs during its installation and nearly 1,000 during its operation.

The two catalyst projects that also came online are among the knowledge-based projects of the petrochemical industry.



The two catalytic projects include the catalysts needed for production of polypropylene and heavy polyethylene (CX).

In catalytic projects, what is important is the development of Iranian technical knowhow, because for the first time in the country that production of such catalysts has been made possible and it is a matter of pride that the technical savvy of catalyst production is being developed by the Petrochemical Research and Technology Company (PRTC), and this will make Iran needless of importing these two types of catalysts.

Iranian petrochemical industry consumed about \$270 million of catalysts per year.

There are 40 types of catalysts used in the industry of which 19 have so far been localized in Iran and 9 others will be introduced by the end of the current calendar year, which began on March 20, 2022.

The remaining 12 types of catalysts are being studied and will hopefully be added to the list of Iranian catalysts in the coming years.

Moreover, Sabalan methanol, Masjed Soleiman urea and Exir Halal projects are in the final stages of construction and will be added to the petrochemical complexes of the country in the coming weeks.

Mass Production of Iranin Covid19 Vaccines to Come in Late August

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Razi Vaccine and Serum Research Institute, a coronavirus vaccine producer in Iran, said Thursday that mass production of its Cov Pars COVID-19 vaccine would come in late August.

Although the real timing of production of the vaccine depends on the results of the third phase of its clinical test, the vaccine is expected to come out in late August, said Mohammad Hassan Fallah, Razi's Research and Technology Deputy.

The first phase of clinical test for Cov Pars is currently running and the second and third phases will be done in May and July, Fallah said, adding that the vaccine would be mass produced if the two phases were hopefully successful.

Razi Institute COV-Pars coronavirus vaccine is the first injected-inhaled recombinant corona protein vaccine unveiled February.

The institute started working on a COVID-19 vaccine in early 2020.

South Pars Refinery Processes Over 17 bcm of Gas

TEHRAN (Shana) -- The director of the third refinery of the South Pars Gas Complex (SPGC) said the plant supplied over 17 billion cubic meters of sweet gas last calendar year which ended on March 20.

According to the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC), Mohammad Shafi Moazeni, emphasizing that the South Pars Gas Complex is the largest gas producer in the country, said last year, more than 20 million barrels of gas condensate was also produced in phases 4 and 5 of SPGC.

He also noted the production of ethane and propane in the refinery, and added: "In the same period, more than 770,000 tons of ethane and 600,000 tons of propane were produced in this refinery."



Petchem Output Up By 21.5 mt in 1399



TEHRAN (Shana) - Oil Minister Bijan Zangeneh said the country had enhanced its petrochemical production capacity BY 21.5 million tons per year during the calendar year of 1399 which ended on March 20.

Addressing a virtual ceremony to launch a number of petrochemical projects on Thursday, he said: "We had committed ourselves to bolster the industry's output by 25 mt/y during the year of which 21.5 mt/y has so far been realized thanks to the diligence and round-the-clock efforts of those involved in the projects."

He said the second leap of petrochemical industry is taking its last steps firmly and the third leap is taking place with power and its plans are being implemented.

"According to the plan, by adding three super projects to the plans of the third leap, the value of petrochemical products will increase from \$34 billion by [the calendar year of] 1404 (2025) to \$40 billion by 1406 (2027)," Mr. Zangeneh went on to add.

The Oil Minister emphasized that the feedstock of all petrochemical super-projects has been determined and their investors have been designated and their work will begin under Rouhani administration, adding: "With the help of God Almighty, we have not only completed the second leap projects and completed most of them, but we have laid a solid foundation for the next administration."

NIOC Raises All May Asia-Bound Crude OSPs

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - State-owned National Iranian Oil Company has raised the May official selling prices for all its Asia-bound crude grades by 35-50 cents/b from April, according to a notice on the company website seen by S&P Global Platts April 14.

NIOC raised the May Iranian Light and Forozan OSP differentials by 35 cents/b each from April to a premium of \$1.60/b and 70 cents/b, respectively, to the average of Oman/Dubai assessments in May, while it increased the price of Iran Heavy by 40 cents/b to a premium of 65 cents/b.

The May OSP differential for Sorosh crude was raised by 50 cents/b from April to a discount of \$2.85/b to Oman/Dubai assessments.

Iran Stresses Achieving \$20-Billion Trade With Iraq

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - A senior Iranian parliamentary official called for the enhancement of bilateral trades between Iran and Iraq.

The Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of Iran's Parliament, Abbas Golroo, met with Iraqi Ambassador to Tehran Nasir Abdul Mohsen Abdullah.

During the meeting, Golroo emphasized the need to strengthen trade relations between Iran and Iraq, saying, "Economic ties between the two countries are good, but it is necessary to increase the trade figures to more than \$20 billion."

He further pointed to the religious commonalities and special historical relations between the two countries as the reason for the long-standing bond between the two neighbors.



"Deep cultural, religious and social ties are the foundation of the amicable relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Iraq."

He also reiterated Iran's support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of neighboring Iraq.

"The situation in the region is very sensitive at the present time and the need to pay attention to the security of bilateral relations and consensus in managing regional issues is a significant element for both sides."

The Iraqi ambassador, for his part, called for boosting relations between the two countries, especially parliamentary interactions, and said the parliaments of the two countries can increase the level of cooperation and expand the role of their friendship groups in order to propel the development plans that are of mutual interest.

Iranian Researchers Produce Nano-Based Thermal Coating

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iranian researchers from a knowledge-based firm have successfully produced Nano-based thermal insulation and protective coatings products for the first time in Iran.

According to the Persian-language website of the Iran Nanotechnology Innovation Council, Nano-based thermal insulation coating with excellent adhesion on metal surfaces prevents energy and heat losses, and due to its very low heat transfer coefficient, has high effectiveness in thermal insulation of surfaces.

The nano-based thermal insulating coating works not only to reduce temperatures but also provides energy savings, thermal insulation and personnel protection all in an easy spray-on application.

Now in Iran, a knowledge-based company has been able to localize the technology of producing this type of thermal insulation coating and has produced products of this type for the first time.

According to the report, currently available in the Iranian domestic markets there are traditional insulation types such as fiberglass, mineral wool, and polyethylene foams that have a completely different composition base and there is no product similar to this knowledge-based company's product in the domestic market. Meanwhile, this product is also new in the world and is still being developed.

Western Powers Try to Portray Bad Image of Iran-China Cooperation

BEIJING (IRNA) - Certain Western powers, who try to maintain their dominance in the world, attempt to "paint a bad image of China to frighten the people of other countries" especially the Iranian people, whose government has signed a 25-year strategic agreement with the new big power, Iran's envoy to Beijing says.

In an interview with Global Times, Mohammad Keshavarzadeh noted that the Western colonial powers, who dominate global media, publish false information through social networks and mass media "in order to prevent friendly cooperation between Iran and China."

Keshavarzadeh noted, "When economic cooperation brings prosperity, well-being, and improves the livelihood of the local people, this poisonous and unrealistic propaganda of the West loses its effectiveness."

He also referred to the fact that the Islamic Republic is not the only country in the world, which is suffering from U.S. sanctions, adding that independent states such as China and Iran "are determined to preserve their sovereignty and follow their own destinies to

cooperate in order to improve people's lives."

Asked about Western powers' criticism on the situation of human rights in China and other countries, the U.S. has been busy initiating wars in about 80 countries, taking more than 800,000 lives and displacing tens of millions of people in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria among other countries.

The envoy further pointed to China's model of governance as a successful one in alleviating poverty, achieving economic growth and maintaining sustainable development that has "challenged the stereotype of Western democracy, which the West sought to prescribe liberal democracy as the only system of successful governance and forcefully imposed it on other countries."

"The Islamic Republic of Iran also has its own model of governance, and in spite of different kinds of conspiracy, terrorist acts, war, sanctions, and maximum pressure, can still play as an independent regional power, and has brought development and prosperity for the Iranian people during the last 40 years," he argued.

Iran Imports 400,000 Doses of Chinese Sinopharm

TEHRAN (IP) - Iran's customs deputy announced the import of 400,000 doses of Chinese Sinopharm vaccine to Iran.

Mehrdad Jamal-Arvanaghi stated that 400,000 doses of the Sinopharm vaccine donated by the Chinese Red Cross arrived at Imam Khomeini Airport on Thursday.

So far, Iran has purchased and imported vaccines from China, India, and Russia for the vaccination of the people. Iran has also received vaccines from the COVAX global vaccine initiative.

In addition, Iranian scientists have successfully developed and tested several COVID-19 vaccines in recent months.

Armenia to Appoint a Trade Attaché to Iran

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Armenia will appoint a Trade Attaché to Iran. The Armenian government adopted a relevant decision on Thursday.

The establishment of an Armenian trade attaché in Iran will allow to more effectively represent the economic interests of the Republic of Armenia in various spheres related to economic cooperation, to facilitate the implementation of trade and economic cooperation by Armenian-Iranian economic entities, as well as to support the activation of business initiatives between the two countries.

The creation of a post of trade attaché will enable him to receive more operative information on the economic situation in Iran, the legislation regulating the sphere of foreign economic activity, as well as to provide similar information about Armenia to the interested bodies of Iran.

One of the main responsibilities of the trade attaché is to participate in business forums organized on the ground, to present the business environment in Armenia, to provide relevant information to Iranian entrepreneurs interested in investing in Armenia, to companies, etc.

According to the RA Statistical Committee, Armenia's trade turnover with Iran in 2020 amounted to \$ 400.2 million. Exports from Armenia to Iran amounted to \$ 84.8 million, and imports from Iran to Armenia amounted to \$315.4 million.

The issues of establishing a joint ventures or branches of Iranian companies in Armenia are currently being discussed by both sides. In these processes, it is important to eliminate transport barriers and take joint steps to facilitate financial transfers.

Taiwan Transport Minister Resigns Over Train Crash

TAIPEI (AFP) - Taiwan's government on Thursday said it had accepted the resignation of its transport minister following a train crash earlier this month that killed 49 people, the island's deadliest in decades.

The 2 April crash was caused by a railway maintenance truck that slid down an embankment and onto the track moments before a high-speed train passed by.

The accident, which left more than 200 injured, plunged Taiwan into mourning.



India Battered by Huge Second Covid Wave

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India's huge coronavirus second wave accelerated Thursday with a record number of infections reported, as a top Japanese politician warned Covid-19 could still derail the already delayed Olympics.

While nations like Britain have celebrated the beginning of normality and extended vaccine rollouts, some South Asian countries are grappling with fresh -- and more terrifying -- virus waves.



U.S. Expels Russian Diplomats, Imposes New Sanctions



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The Biden administration on Thursday announced the expulsion of 10 Russian diplomats and sanctions against nearly three dozen people and companies as it moved to hold the Kremlin accountable for interference in last year's presidential election and the hacking of federal agencies.

The actions, foreshadowed for weeks by the administration, represent the first retaliatory measures announced against the Kremlin for the hack, familiarly known as the SolarWinds breach. In that intrusion, Russian hackers are believed to have infected widely used software with malicious code, enabling them to access the networks of at least nine agencies in what US officials believe was an intelligence-gathering operation aimed at mining government secrets.

Besides that hack, U.S. officials last month alleged that Russian President Vladimir Putin authorized influence operations to help Donald Trump in his unsuccessful bid for reelection as president, though there's no evidence Russia or anyone else changed votes or manipulated the outcome. The measures announced Thursday include sanctions on six Russian companies that support the country's cyber activities, in addition to sanctions on 32 individuals and entities accused of attempting to interfere in last year's presidential election, including by spreading disinformation.

The 10 diplomats being expelled include representatives of Russian intelligence services, the White House said. The White House also said Biden was using diplomatic, military and intelligence channels to respond to reports that Russia encouraged the Taliban to attack US and allied troops in Afghanistan based on the "best assessments" of the intelligence community.

Reports of alleged "bounties" surfaced last year, with the Trump administration coming under fire for not raising the issue directly with Russia. The White House did not publicly confirm the reports. "The safety and well-being of U.S. military personnel, and that of our allies and partners, is an absolute priority of the United States," the White House said Thursday.

It was not immediately clear what, if any, other actions might be planned against Russia. Officials had previously said they expected to take actions both seen and unseen. The sanctions, presumably intended to send a clear retributive message to Russia and to deter similar acts in the future, are certain to exacerbate an already tense relationship between the US and Russia.

President Joe Biden told Putin this week in their second call to "de-escalate tensions" following a Russian military buildup on Ukraine's border, and said the US would "act firmly in defense of its national interests" regarding Russian intrusions and election interference.

In a television interview last month, Biden replied "I do" when asked if he thought Putin was a "killer." He said the days of the U.S. "rolling over" to Putin were done. Putin later recalled his ambassador to the U.S. and pointed at the U.S. history of slavery and slaughtering Native Americans and the atomic bombing of Japan in World War II.

French Nationals Urged to Leave Pakistan After Anti-French Protests

PARIS (Dispatches) - The French embassy in Pakistan on Thursday advised all French nationals and companies to temporarily leave the country, after violent anti-France protests paralysed large parts of the country this week.

"Due to the serious threats to French interests in Pakistan, French nationals and French companies are advised to temporarily leave the country," the embassy said in an email to French citizens.

"The departures will be carried out by existing commercial airlines."

The move came a day after the Pakistani interior ministry said it would outlaw the Tehrik-i-Labaik Pakistan (TLP), a hardline Islamist group responsible for recent anti-French protests across the country.

The TLP has been demanding that the Pakistani government expel the French ambassador and endorse a boycott of French products due to Charlie Hebdo's republishing of the Prophet Mohamed cartoons last year.

Anti-French sentiment has been simmering for months in Pakistan since the government of President Emmanuel Macron expressed support for Charlie Hebdo's right to republish the cartoons, deemed blasphemous by many Muslims. Clashes erupted on Tuesday between TLP supporters and police officers after the group's leader, Saad Rizvi, was detained



Deadly Car Bomb Rocks Iraq's Sadr City

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) - At least four people have been killed and 17 others wounded in a car bomb attack in the Sadr City neighborhood of the Iraqi capital Baghdad, police and medical sources said on Thursday.

The car was parked at a busy second-hand equipment market in the mainly Shia district, police said.

An Iraqi military statement said the blast killed one civilian, wounded 12 others and set several vehicles on fire.

Black smoke was rising from the market place and ambulances rushed to save the wounded, Reuters news agency reported, citing witnesses. Police cordoned off the site of the blast shortly afterwards.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attack. It was the second major deadly bombing to hit Baghdad this year after twin suicide attacks claimed by Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, or ISIS) fighters killed at least 32 people in a crowded market in January.

Large bomb attacks, once an almost daily occurrence in the Iraqi capital, have halted in recent years since ISIL was defeated in 2017, part of an overall improvement in security that has brought normal life back to Baghdad.

The January blast was the most deadly in three years.

Thursday's attack comes during an election year, a time when tension between rival Iraqi political groups has often caused violence in the past.

The populist cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, after whom Sadr city is named and who commands a following of millions of Iraqis, counts among his enemies both ISIL and rival Shia parties with militias backed by Iran.

On Wednesday, separate violence linked to regional rivalries saw an explosives-laden drone target US forces at Iraq's Erbil airport in northern Iraq and a separate rocket attack kill a Turkish soldier at a military base nearby.

Ukraine Slams Russia's "Open" Threats, Vows Firm Response

KIEV (AFP) - Ukraine on Thursday accused Russia of flagrantly threatening it with destruction and warned Moscow that any escalation of fighting would be met with a firm military response.

Tensions have risen once again in the long-simmering conflict in eastern Ukraine, where government forces have battled pro-Russian separatists since 2014.

Kiev and its Western allies this week have sounded the alarm over a huge build-up of Russian military personnel along Ukraine's northern and eastern borders, as well as on the Crimean peninsula annexed by Moscow in 2014.

During a press conference Thursday, Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said rhetoric in Moscow had reached a fever pitch with pundits and officials issuing "dehumanising" statements aimed at intimidating Kiev.

"They are openly threatening Ukraine with war and the destruction of Ukrainian statehood," Kuleba told

reporters at a press conference with counterparts from former Soviet countries Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

"The red line of Ukraine is the state border. If Russia crosses the red line, then it will have to suffer," Kuleba added.

The visit to Ukraine from senior diplomats from the Baltic states is the latest show of support for Kiev from European countries and the United States, which has promised "unwavering" backing.

Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis reiterated that support Thursday telling reporters "Ukraine will never be on its own."

"We stand with you, we stand in solidarity," he said. The display of solidarity follows US President Joe Biden and German Chancellor Angela Merkel agreeing on Thursday to call on Russia to reduce its troops on the border with Ukraine.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was also expected to travel to Paris on Friday to discuss the rising tensions with his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron.



Myanmar Military Shoots at Protesting Medical Workers

YANGON (Dispatches) - Myanmar's military

opened fire on protesting healthcare workers on Thursday, killing at least one bystander as the demonstrators fled for safety to a nearby mosque.

The country has been in uproar since the military seized power from civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi on February 1, triggering a massive uprising that the junta has sought to quell using lethal force.

But the movement remains undeterred, and protesters have continued taking to the streets this week -- refusing to celebrate the Myanmar New Year holiday of Thingyan.

On Thursday in Myanmar's second largest city of Mandalay, a demonstration by medical workers turned violent when soldiers opened fire on them, sending them running to the mosque.

"They were shooting everywhere... they were targeting the Sule mosque compound because people in there were hiding protesters," said an eyewitness.

A 30-year-old man who lived in the compound was shot dead, and at least two others were injured, said a doctor who treated the wounded.

"The man who died was shot from the back and it penetrated through his chest," he told AFP.

A medic who participated in the protest said he saw the arrest of six nurses and doctors during the crackdown.

"We lost contact with some medical team members as well," he told AFP. Myanmar's healthcare workers have been at the forefront of a nationwide civil disobedience movement, refusing to return to work under a military regime -- which has left the country's hospitals unstaffed during a pandemic.

Civil servants from other sectors have followed suit, bringing the operation of the country's banks, schools, railway operations, and businesses to a halt.

The junta has tried to force people back to work, and on Thursday, state-run media reported that at least 20 doctors participating in the movement will be charged for attempting to "deteriorate peace and stability".

So far more than 700 civilians have been killed in anti-coup unrest, according to a local monitoring group, and more than 3,000 have been detained.



Shanon
(adviser)

Parsian

Elahieh Apt
New (\$1900)
200sq.m, 3bdrs
S/pool, Sauna
J, balcony
marble fl
Fully Furn

Darrous Villa
(\$3500)
1000sq.m
5bdrs, S/p
S, J, balcony
green yard
Fully Furn

Darrous Apt
200sq.m, 3bdrs
balcony, pkg
(\$1500) F.F

Mahmoodieh (\$2000)
220sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p
S, J, balcony, & F.F

Tajrish bldg
3000sq.m, 5floors
20 Apt each 3bdrs
very nice roof with
Fantastic view, & pool
2storey pkg lots

Kamranieh Apt (\$1800)
200sq.m, 3bdrs, pkg, & F.F

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

Vanak Office (\$30 per sq.m)
300sq.m, 4bdrs, pkg lots

ADVERTISING

44253401

Don't Waste Your Time

Visit our website to choose your desired rental Properties

www.DeltaHOME.ir

The Most Specialized Website for Foreigners

HOME

Real Estate
Member of DELTA Real Estate Group
(021) 88888865

IRAN NEWS

PUBLISHER OF NEWSPAPERS

ADVERTISING

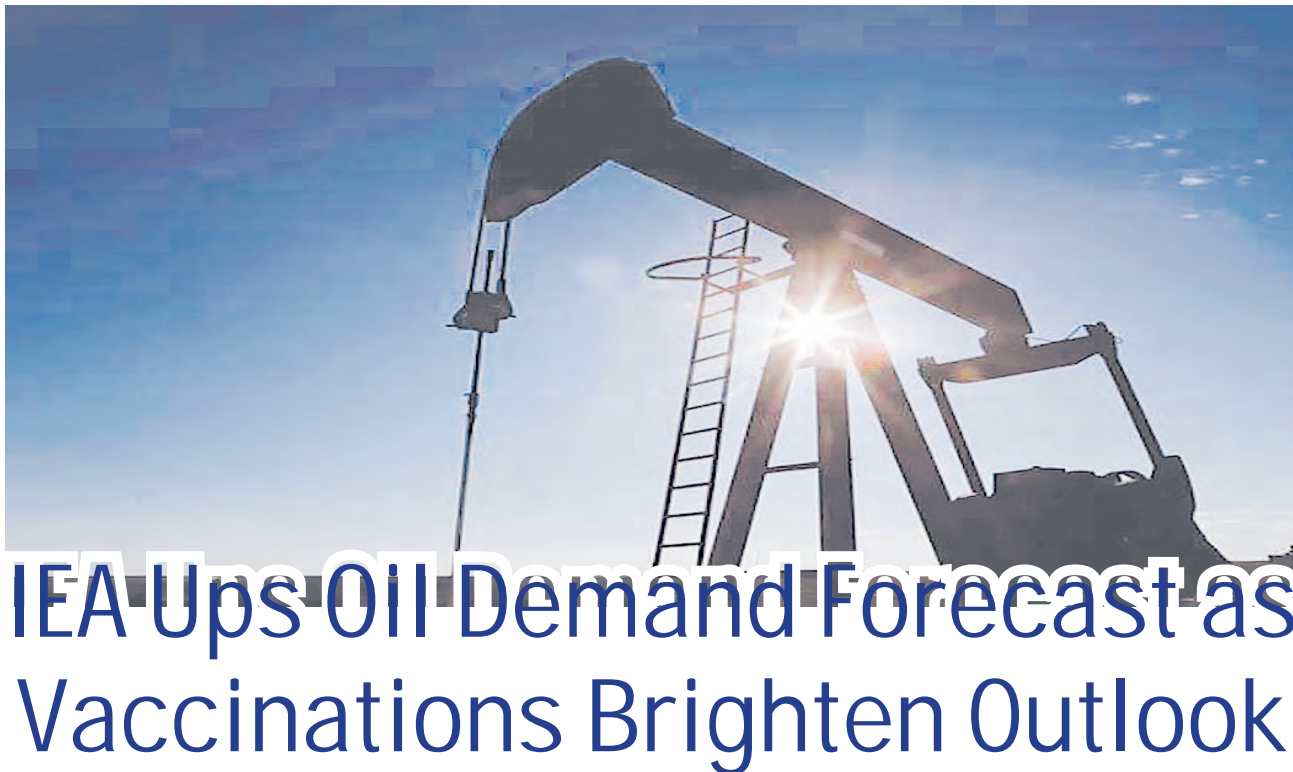
TEL: 44253448-50
FAX: 44253234
ADIRANNEWS@GMAIL.COM

Ford Details New Production Cuts Due

DETROIT (Reuters) - Ford Motor Co outlined another series of plant shutdowns due to the global semiconductor chip shortage, with five facilities in the United States and one in Turkey affected. The No. 2 U.S. automaker did not outline how many vehicles would be lost in the latest actions, and reiterated it intends to provide an update on the financial impact of the chip shortage with its quarterly earnings on April 28, suggesting the hit

could be bigger than initially forecast.

Ford said in March it expected the semiconductor shortage to cost between \$1 billion and \$2.5 billion. While the company has prioritized chips for its highest-profit vehicles, it has been forced at times to idle production of its top-selling F-150 full-size pickup, and it has parked some of those trucks for final assembly later when enough chips are in hand.



IEA Ups Oil Demand Forecast as Vaccinations Brighten Outlook

LONDON (Reuters) - Vaccine rollouts are brightening the outlook for global oil demand, the International Energy Agency (IEA) said, though rising cases in some major oil-consuming countries show a recovery may be fragile.

"Fundamentals look decidedly stronger," the IEA said in its monthly report.

"The massive overhang in global oil inventories that built up during last year's COVID-19 demand shock is being worked off, vaccine campaigns are gathering pace and the global economy appears to be on a better footing."

Citing rising cases in Europe, Brazil and the United States, the Paris-based watchdog said it remained concerned about new waves of the virus derailing progress. Still, the IEA predicted global oil demand and supply were set to re-balance in the second half of the year and that producers may then need to pump 2 million barrels per day more to meet the expected demand.

OPEC and allies like Russia, a grouping known as OPEC+, would likely prove capable of tailoring its output to demand whether the virus is tamed or not, the IEA added.

"The bloc's monthly calibration of supply may give it the flexibility to meet incremental demand by ramping up swiftly or adjusting output lower should the demand recovery fail to keep pace." The IEA said commercial oil stored in OECD countries fell for a seventh consecutive month in February, signalling a rise in demand and increased imports in the near future.

Less developed countries faced a steeper climb out of the demand crater created by COVID-19, the IEA warned, as the differences between countries with prompt access to the vaccine and those without become more pronounced. "Some emerging countries with lower access are in a more difficult situation, with likely new COVID waves slowing economic activity and mobility," the IEA said.

S. Korea Keeps Rates Steady as COVID-19 Cases Rise

SEOUL (Reuters) - South Korea's central bank kept interest rates at record lows on Thursday and said it was too early to discuss a change in the direction of monetary policy, even as it sounded more upbeat on growth and expected inflation to accelerate.

Bank of Korea (BOK) kept the seven-day repurchase rate unchanged at 0.5%, as widely forecast in a Reuters poll, amid concerns that rising coronavirus cases could derail the economic recovery.

The central bank has kept rates at that level since May 2020, after it cut them by 75 basis points last year to help the economy cope with the fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic.

While the BOK said robust exports and an uptick in consumption will continue to power the economy, it said uncertainties remained and it would continue to monitor the coronavirus outbreak.

"Looking at how the global economy and domestic activities fared in the first quarter... growth of mid-3% is very possible (in 2021)," Bank of Korea Governor Lee Ju-yeol said at a news conference.

He expects the economy to expand between 3% and 4% this year, compared with a previous forecast for 3% growth in 2021. "But it's a concern that the resurgence of the coronavirus has hardly subsided, and that the inoculation rate remains at a 2% range."

South Korea has reported around 700 new coronavirus cases per day this week, a level not seen since January.

Analysts expect surging home prices and faster inflation to push policymakers to start raising interest rates in 2022, but not sooner, due to uncertainty over the recent spike in coronavirus cases.

South Korea's consumer price inflation hit a 14-month high of 1.5% in March and the BOK said on Thursday inflation will run around 2% before declining. Policymakers are also keeping an eye on rising property prices amid concerns they could swell an already hefty household debt pile.

"(The BOK) could turn on the blinker by the end of the fourth quarter and possibly raise interest rates in the first quarter of next year," said Ahn Jae-kyun, fixed income analyst at Korea Investment & Securities.



Europeans Want Digital Euro to Be Private, Safe and Cheap

FRANKFURT (Reuters) -Euro zone citizens expect the European Central Bank's proposed digital euro to be private, safe and cheap, a survey showed on Wednesday, as the ECB warned that any launch was still several years away.

The ECB is studying an electronic form of cash to complement banknotes and coins in a bid to stem competition from cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin, Tether and Facebook's proposed Diem.

An ECB consultation showed that privacy, a key feature of cash that some fear will get lost when switching to an electronic means of payment, was the number one priority for both private individuals and professionals.

"For the participants in the public consultation, the most important features of a digital euro are privacy, security and broad usability," ECB board member Fabio Panetta told members of the European Parliament.

The ECB will decide in the coming months whether to launch a two-year analysis of the digital euro project.

Panetta said this would then be followed by "several years" of implementation before a final decision is made on whether or not to launch a digital currency. This could take five years in total, Panetta added.

The consultation was open to anyone and has no statistical value. The ECB did not ask if participants wanted a digital euro at all.

A digital euro would give holders a direct claim on the ECB, making it safer than an account held at a commercial bank or a digital wallet.

This has raised some concerns, particularly by Germany's Bundesbank, that people at times of crisis would convert their savings into digital euros, exacerbating bank runs or even upending the financial sector's business model altogether.

The ECB consultation showed that half of respondents were in favor of introducing a cap on how many digital euros every citizen can own or a tiered remuneration whereby balances above a certain threshold are penalized.

Two thirds of respondents said the electronic cash should be offered by private-sector intermediaries and integrated in the existing payment system and a quarter also wanted it offered as a "smart card" or phone app so that it can be spent offline.

Other central banks around the world are also working on similar projects, with China already running pilot programs.

Singapore Economy Grows 0.2% in Q1

SINGAPORE (Dispatches) - Singapore's economy grew by 0.2 per cent year-on-year in the first quarter of 2021, a turnaround after three quarters of contraction, as the country continued its recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

On a quarter-on-quarter seasonally adjusted basis, Singapore's gross domestic

product (GDP) expanded by 2 per cent between January and March, extending the 3.8 per cent growth in the previous quarter, advance estimates by the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI) on Wednesday (Apr 14) showed.

Economists polled by Reuters had expected a decline of 0.2 per cent.

Singapore's economy has been battered by the COVID-19 pandemic. After the first case was reported in Singapore on Jan 23 last year, Singapore posted 0 per cent growth in GDP in the first quarter, followed by contractions in the following three quarters.

Last year, the economy shrunk by 5.4 per cent, Singapore's first annual contraction since 2001 and its worst recession since independence.

"The expansion is a strong signal that our economy is slowly but surely recovering from the unprecedented impact of COVID-19 last year," said Minister for Trade and Industry Chan Chun Sing in a Facebook post after the data was released.

"While we are cautiously optimistic, many downside risks remain which we will have to pay close attention to," he added.

Singapore's economy rose on the back of strong manufacturing activity.

The sector grew 7.5 per cent year-on-year, supported by output expansions in the electronics, precision engineering, chemicals and biomedical manufacturing clusters.

The construction sector continued to contract, albeit at a slower rate, as activity in the private and public sectors picked up.

The sector shrank by 20.2 per cent in the first quarter, compared with the 27.4 per cent decline in the fourth quarter of 2020.

Among the services sectors, the wholesale and retail trade as well as transportation and storage trade sectors shrank by 4.1 per cent in the first quarter.

UK-EU Trade Recovered in February After Historic Drop In January

LONDON (Dispatches) - Data on trade between the UK and European Union painted a mixed picture for the health of imports and exports, with month-on-month figures between January 2021 and February showing trade was up by 20%.

That's according to data released by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) on Tuesday morning.

Trade was, however, still lower than it was in previous years, with a drop of 12% in February this year versus last year for EU trade and a drop of 1% over the same period for global trade.

Imports and exports had been hampered by administrative confusion following the end of the Brexit transition period in January this year. Many firms had stockpiled to mitigate tailbacks and delays.

Businesses have complained of huge disruption as a result of Brexit. Manufacturers union Make UK in April said three quarters of its members had experienced delays exporting since the turn of the year, while the Institute of Directors said that 1 in 5 of its members had given up on trying to export to the EU.

In addition to the changes facing the UK after the transition period ended, England joined the rest of the UK in another national lockdown to stop the spread of the coronavirus at the beginning of January 2021, which continued through February.

Despite these factors, exports of goods to the EU, excluding non-monetary gold and other precious metals, partially rebounded in February 2021, increasing by £3.7bn (\$5.1bn) (46.6%) after a record fall of £5.7bn (negative 42.0%) in January.

The government said that increases in exports to the EU in February 2021 were driven by machinery and transport equipment, and chemicals, particularly cars and medicinal and pharmaceutical products.

Imports of goods from the EU, excluding non-monetary gold and other precious metals, showed a weaker increase of £1.2bn (7.3%) in February 2021 after a record fall of £6.7bn (negative 29.7%) in January.

Agricultural and food exports to the EU were still hard hit, when comparing with 2020 levels, with meat sinking 52%, eggs and dairy down 39%, fish and shellfish down 54% and sugar down 49%.

The total trade deficit, excluding non-monetary gold and other precious metals, narrowed by £2.1bn to £6.3bn in the three months to February 2021; imports decreased by £5.7 billion (negative 3.8%), while exports decreased by £3.6bn (negative 2.5%).

Trade in services imports and exports have consistently remained at a lower level since Q2 2020 as services accounts such as travel and transport trade continue to be affected by coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions.

Last month, data from the Food and Drink Federation showed that exports of fish and meat from the UK to the EU had seen a dramatic dip in January compared with the previous year, compounding the chaos following the end of the Brexit transition period.

Germany's Economic Institutes Cut GDP 2021 Growth Forecast to 3.7%



BERLIN (Dispatches) - Germany's economic institutes will cut their joint 2021 growth forecast for Europe's largest economy to 3.7% from 4.7% previously due to a longer than expected COVID-19 lockdown, two people familiar with the decision told Reuters on Wednesday.

The institutes, which are expected to release their joint growth forecast on Thursday, will lift their GDP growth estimate for 2022 to 3.9% from 2.7% previously as private consumption is expected to boost overall output, the sources added.

The institutes' estimates form the basis for the government's own growth forecast which the economy ministry will present later this month.

In January, the government said it expected gross domestic product to grow by 3% this year, following a drop of 4.9% in the previous year caused by the coronavirus.

The figures are the latest sign that the economy will need longer than initially thought to reach its pre-crisis level.

Export-oriented manufacturers are currently benefiting from higher demand from China and the United States, whereas the domestically focussed services sector is suffering under extended curbs to contain a third wave of COVID-19 infections.

No Restrictions on Foreign Currency for Iraqi Traders

TEHRAN (IP) - There is no restriction on the entry of foreign currency by Iraqi traders to buy Iranian goods on the border of Shalamcheh in Khuzestan Province (southern Iran).

In the meeting of the Khorramshahr Economic Committee in the Chamber of Commerce of this city on Thursday, it was stated: There are no restrictions on the entry of foreign currency by Iraqi traders to buy Iranian goods at the border of Shalamcheh.

Previously, there was a restriction on the entry of foreign currency by Iraqi traders, according to which Iraqi traders could bring only \$ 10,000 a day to buy Iranian goods at the Shalamcheh border.



IMF Urges Eurozone to Boost Spending to Fuel Economic Recovery

LONDON (IFP) - Eurozone countries should increase government spending by an extra 3 per cent of gross domestic product over the next year to mitigate the economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic, the IMF said on Wednesday.

The 19-country bloc is forecast to recover more slowly than its main trading partners, the IMF has warned, held back by vaccination rollout delays, extended coronavirus lockdowns and a smaller fiscal stimulus than the U.S. is implementing.

Advanced European economies are expected to cut their extra fiscal support from 7.5 per cent of GDP in 2020 to about 6.5 per cent this year, the IMF said.

A further increase in public spending would boost the bloc's growth by 2 per cent and reduce the permanent loss of jobs, investment and output due to the crisis, according to the fund.

"The faster the recovery, the less scarring people and businesses will suffer from unemployment, lost human capital and lower investment and research and development," the IMF said in its latest European regional economic outlook.

In particular, European governments should spend more on "additional transfers targeted at households in need, hiring subsidies to reintegrate the unemployed faster, temporary investment tax credits to bring forward investment and equity support schemes for viable firms in need of capital", the fund recommended.

The IMF recently trimmed its growth forecast for the eurozone this year to 4.5 per cent and estimates that it faces a long-term output loss relative to the pre-Covid-19 trend of about 1.5 per cent of GDP by 2025.

"As monetary policy — close to the effective lower bound in several economies — becomes less effective in boosting output, fiscal policy needs to play an increasingly larger role," the IMF said. "Fiscal measures to stimulate investment and to facilitate job creation and reallocation would speed up the recovery."

Christine Lagarde, president of the European Central Bank and former head of the IMF, compared the eurozone economy to a patient coming out of intensive care but still leaning on two crutches. "You don't want to remove either crutch, the fiscal or the monetary, until the patient can actually walk fine, and to do that means support well into the recovery," she said on Wednesday.

The \$1.9tn fiscal programme launched by the US government is expected to provide a 0.3 percentage-point boost to eurozone GDP and a 0.15 percentage-point lift to inflation by 2023, Lagarde added.

Several European countries are ramping up their spending plans. The German



government last month approved a €60bn supplementary budget and the Dutch cabinet is discussing extra expenditure.

Mario Draghi, Italy's prime minister and Lagarde's predecessor at the ECB, is preparing a new package of stimulus measures worth up to €40bn — about 2.5 per cent of GDP — which could push Italy's budget deficit this year above 10 per cent of GDP. That would be the first time the country's deficit has hit double digits since the early 1990s.

Since taking office two months ago Draghi has argued that his country and others in Europe must provide significant support to their economies to reduce the impact of pandemic lockdowns. Draghi is expected to present his plan to Italy's two parliamentary chambers for approval in the final week of April.

EU governments are this month due to submit plans to Brussels for how they plan to spend their share of the bloc's €750bn NextGenerationEU recovery fund. However, the money is not due to start being distributed before June, while several governments are yet to approve the plan and it faces a legal challenge in Germany.

Luis de Guindos, vice-president of the ECB, told MEPs on Wednesday: "If we want a timely recovery in Europe, we have to avoid any cliff effects from the premature scaling back of these [stimulus] policies. It is therefore of the utmost importance that the NextGenerationEU plan becomes operational without delay."

President Rejects Concerns About Iran's 60% Enrichment Level

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - President Hassan Rouhani has rejected the "concerns" of the Europeans and the United States about Iran's recent decision to start enriching uranium to 60-percent purity, saying the two sides have a false perception of Tehran's latest remedial step away from the 2015 nuclear deal.

Speaking on Thursday, Rouhani rejected claims that Iran's new enrichment level could be a step towards weapons-grade uranium and stressed the importance of the diplomatic efforts underway in Vienna aimed at reviving the 2015 nuclear deal between Tehran and major world powers.

"It does not matter to us when the enemy will return to reason and show humility before the law, but we are sure that for the United States and the countries that are participants in the JCPOA, there is no way other than to fully return to [UN Security Council] Resolution 2231 and the JCPOA. If they do so, we will immediately return to all our own commitments under the JCPOA after verification," he said, referring to the nuclear agreement by the acronym of its official name, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

"Therefore, the concerns raised by the US and Europe ... and the perception that the 60% enrichment means moving towards 90%, is not true; It is wrong to think that we are paving the way for the production of atomic bombs," he added. The Iranian chief executive said we could have enriched uranium to 60-percent before, too.

"Today, we would do 90% enrichment as well if we chose to. However, we are determined to keep our promise. We are not looking for a nuclear bomb," he said, in reference to a fatwa (religious decree) by Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei that bans the production, possession and stockpiling of nuclear weapons and other WMDs.

The remarks came two days after Iran announced that it had informed the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) of a plan to start the 60-percent enrichment, under which 1,000 advanced centrifuge machines will be installed at Natanz nuclear site.

The decision followed a suspected Israeli act of sabotage at the facility, which is among the sites being monitored by the IAEA under the JCPOA.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, whose country caused a crisis for the JCPOA by pulling out of the deal and re-imposing anti-Iran sanctions, called Tehran's announcement "provocative," claiming that it raised questions about the seriousness of Tehran over the Vienna talks.

"We take very seriously its provocative announcement of an intent to begin enriching uranium at 60 percent," he said in Brussels on Wednesday. "I have to tell you the step calls into question Iran's seriousness with regard to the nuclear talks, just as it underscores the imperative of returning to mutual compliance with the JCPOA." Similarly, Britain, France and Germany claimed in a statement that Iran's decision to enrich at 60% and activate advanced centrifuges was at odds with the Vienna talks.

"Iran's announcements are particularly regrettable given they come at a time when all JCPOA participants and the United States have started substantive discussions, with the objective of finding a rapid diplomatic solution to revitalize and restore the JCPOA," the three countries said.

"Iran's dangerous recent communication is contrary to the constructive spirit and good faith of these discussions," they alleged.

Supporting Iranian Prisoners' System Unveiled

TEHRAN (IP) - A system for supporting the social and economic needs of prisoners' families unveiled on Wednesday in the presence of Iran's judiciary spokesman.

A system for supporting the social and economic needs of prisoners' families unveiled on Wednesday in the presence of Iran's judiciary spokesman. The system aims at supporting prisoners' families and recognizing their needs and housing condition. The system provides an updated statistic of prisoners' families and aims at a fair distribution of facilities among them.

Right now there are 92000 prisoners' families that 80,000 of them (about 90%) need support. Head of Iran's prisons organization, Mohammad Haj Mohammadi in this ceremony said: "Helping prisoners' families was among our priorities."

"According to law and religious training, supporting those in need is essential while the head of the family is in prison," Haj Mohammadi added. The head of Iran's prisons organization also emphasized creating job opportunities for prisoners, noting that prisoners' employment has reached 54%, and the aim is to reach 80% this year.

During the ceremony, Iran's judiciary spokesman Gholamhossein Esmaeli talked to the head of the prisons in Iran's provinces through videoconference due to the coronavirus restrictions, emphasizing supporting the prisoners' families.

Serbia Determined to Expand Ties With Iran

BELGRADE (IRNA) - Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabić said on Thursday in a meeting with Iran's Ambassador to Belgrade that his country was determined to expand and improve ties with Tehran, in economic areas in particular.

Iran's Ambassador to Serbia Rashid Hassan-pour met with Serbian Prime Minister to discuss expanding bilateral ties. In the meeting, Ms. Brnabić mentioned problems in expanding ties with Iran and called for joint efforts to resolve them.

She hailed Iran's principled and stabilizing stance to support sovereignty and territorial integrity of countries, including Serbia, and congratulated Iranian scientists for manufacturing COVID-19 vaccines despite U.S. sanctions.

Iran's Ambassador cited the common views of Iran and Serbia on international issues and said, "Belgrade and Tehran have no reason to not cooperate and the Islamic Republic of Iran is ready to work with Serbia in different dimensions and levels without restriction."

Iran Increases Missile...

FROM PAGE 1

Gen. Dehghan also pointed to recent attacks against Iranian ships, saying that the enemies sought "to create an atmosphere of tension and war, and if there is a reaction from the other side, that would be a natural reaction."

The military advisor to the Leader also said that Iran will continue its military advisory role in Syria at the request of the Syrian government.

He also touched upon the recent announcement of 60% uranium enrichment by Tehran, saying that "Iran's action to increase the enrichment to 60% is not a threat to the regional countries, and on the contrary, we do not consider these countries a threat to us. The presence of foreign powers in the region is the cause of all the problems and tensions." He also asserted that "Our defense capability is in the interest of the region and will not be against Islamic countries."

The former Iranian defense minister went on to say that "Saudi Arabia is not our enemy, but if it makes mischievous movements within the framework of the Arab-Western-Zionist coalition, then our perception of them will change." The senior military advisor to Iran's Leader also pointed to the Yemeni crisis, saying that "The oppressed people of Yemen are under blockade and face starvation and are subject to brutal attacks." He concluded by saying that "All humanity must react to this catastrophe."

Iran Increases Missile...

FROM PAGE 1

Both the sides agreed to further strengthen bilateral trade between the two countries by signing a free trade agreement (FTA), installation of an effective banking channel, establishment of markets at border region, elimination of illegal trade, exchange of business delegation and organising joint trade exhibitions.

It was also agreed that a webinar between SCCI and Mashhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry would be organized after Eidul Fitr to exchange views. Sherbaz Bilour invited the Iranian businessmen to invest in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in hydel power generation, marble, mining, match, furniture, honey, gems and other sectors.

He said that promotion of regional trade was need of the hour. "There's huge potential to further boost trade between Pakistan and Iran, which currently stands at \$359 million," said Mr Bilour.

He called upon Islamabad and Tehran to take serious initiatives to remove hurdles to bilateral trade.

He said that Iran should take benefits from China-Pakistan Economic Corridor projects. He said that youth could play pivotal role in bolstering mutual relationships between the two brotherly Islamic countries.

U.S. to Benefit...

FROM PAGE 1

Of course, some part of Zionist lobbying is active in the Congress, and by the way, Saudis and the Emiratis are also active to influence the Congressmen on not backing the removal of sanctions and therefore prolongation of the talks will be good for them, either.



The other reason that Americans like the talks to be protracted is the upcoming Iran presidential election as some part of the Democrats in the Biden Administration like to influence Iran presidential election and it is not a complicate issue. It is nature because we also had our choice in the U.S. presidential elections and we wanted someone to take power who exerts less pressure on our country. So the Democrats want someone to take power in Iran to give more concessions to them. In order to influence the election, they need propagation and for this reason and to this end, they may partially unfreeze some of Iran's assets, and even for it, they need the talks to go on. There is even no consensus in the Biden Administration on unblocking Iran's assets in the Biden Administration.

To counter this theory of the Americans, Iran should not give them enough time to protract the talks and it should continue its nuclear activities with pace because although some inside the country do not understand the significance of nuclear activities, the opposite side knows it well and the Majlis approval on the nuclear policy should be carried out and it should not be delayed under different pretexts and it should give the Americans to plan other plots and the talks should end as soon as it is realized it is just waste of time and energy.

EU's New Sanctions Meant...

FROM PAGE 1

Iran and the remaining parties to the JCPOA, including the UK, France, Russia and China plus Germany, are in Vienna to discuss the details of efforts to restore the deal after the United States left the accord in 2018, and following almost three years of repeated attacks by the former US administration to destroy the deal.

Iran argues that the U.S. needs to first come back to honoring the JCPOA since it was Washington that initially created the current crisis by its withdrawal and subsequent illegal sanctions on Iran.

The negotiations, first of their kind since U.S. President Joe Biden assumed office, began early this month. They have been described as "constructive" and "businesslike" by the sides, but they have not led to any concrete agreement so far. During the interview, Araqchi said the participants had "very tough exchanges of views" at the Thursday session of the JCPOA Joint Commission, but they all agreed to move forward.

"Although we still have differences, we share this common interest that we have to move forward, and we have to expedite this process in order to come to a conclusion as soon as possible," he noted.

If there is good faith on the U.S. side, Araqchi continued, the way is quite clear. "They have to lift all sanctions and we need the list of sanctions and this should be our job in this round of discussion," he said, asserting that without a list, "I don't think we can make any progress." According to Araqchi, Tehran is also prepared to make a similar list on the nuclear measures that it should take. "With this understanding, the joint commission decided to mandate the two working groups on the nuclear and sanctions-lifting [parts] to re-start the job this afternoon and try to make a concrete, specified list of measures to be taken by Iran and the US," he said. The deputy foreign minister further underlined the need for the US to prepare a list of sanctions, because without it "nothing will happen."

"I cannot say that I am optimistic, but I think we are on a good track, although we had the negative impacts of last days' developments and we have to somehow manage that," he remarked. Elsewhere in the interview, Araqchi said the list of sanctions should also include third parties who have been sanctioned because of their cooperation with Iran. "Before we see the list, we cannot judge whether it is as complete as we want or not," he added.

IMF...

FROM PAGE 1

The IMF had explained in the footnotes of its recent Regional Economic Outlook report that the data about the amount of Iran's gross international reserves had been amended so that they could represent the assets that are readily available to the country following the imposition of US sanctions in 2018.

Iran holds tens of billions worth of blocked reserves in banks in other countries where financial authorities say they are unable to process the funds within the US dollar system over fears they might face penalties by Washington.

CBI's Thursday announcement said the bank would continue to press the IMF to fix other issues it has raised about the Regional Economic Outlook and its data on Iran.

Rome Fully Confirmed To Kick-Off Euro 2020

ROME (Dispatches) - Euro 2020 will kick-off as scheduled on June 11 in Rome after European football's governing body UEFA on Wednesday "fully confirmed" the Italian capital after receiving guarantees that fans would be present in the Stadio Olimpico.

Rome was one of four of the 12 host cities in the pan-European tournament threatened with having its matches removed because it could not give assurances that spectators would be allowed into grounds given the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

LICENCE HOLDER: SOKHAN GOSTAR INSTITUTE

Switchboard:
(+98) (21) 44253448

Public Relations Tel:
(+98)(21) 44253450

Editorial Board: 44253449

Public Relations Fax:
(+98)(21) 44253395

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

Website:
http://www.irannewsdaily.com

E-Mail Address:
info@irannewsdaily.com

ISSN 1024-6053

P.O. Box: 15875-8551

Address: No 13, Pajouhesh St., Golestan II St, Golestan St.Marzdaran Blvd., Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Printed by: Honar Sarzmin Sabz

Distributed by:
Cities of Iran Cultural and Artistic Institute

Managing Director: Fereydoon Taherpour Asl

Kudela Gets 10 Match Ban for Racism

NYON (Dispatches) - UEFA banned Slavia Prague defender Ondrej Kudela for 10 European matches for club and country for racially abusing Rangers' Glen Kamara in a Europa League match.

Finnish international Kamara has been suspended for three matches in UEFA club competitions for an "assault" on Kudela that reportedly took place in the tunnel after the match at Ibrox on March 18.

Man City, Liverpool Reach Semis of Champions League

LONDON (Dispatches) - Manchester City scored twice in the second half through Riyad Mahrez and Phil Foden to beat Borussia Dortmund 2-1 on Wednesday and reach the Champions League semi-finals for the first time in six years.

Foden, who scored the winner in their 2-1 first-leg victory, fired in off the post in the 76th minute after Mahrez had converted a 55th-minute penalty to secure a 4-2 aggregate triumph and send City into the last four for the second time.

"It means a lot, this club this team deserves it," City midfielder Ilkay Gundogan said. "We are grateful for being in a great competition, reaching the semi-final for the first time with this team."

"This Borussia team has a lot of quality," he said. "On a good day they can beat everyone. It's about staying in the game, attitude, personality, especially in that stage of the competition."

Dortmund had gone ahead when striker Erling Haaland chased down a deep cross, the ball falling to Jude Bellingham and the teenager curling his shot into the top corner in the 15th minute for his first Champions League goal.

Premier League leaders City, eliminated in the quarter-finals of the competition in the previous three years, will face Paris St Germain in the semi-finals after the French champions knocked out holders Bayern Munich on Tuesday.

City manager Pep Guardiola reached his eighth Champions League semi-final as a coach, equalling Jose Mourinho, and his first with the English club.

The Spaniard had made seven changes from Saturday's team that lost to Leeds United but it was Dortmund who looked fresher and went ahead through a fine strike by English teenager Bellingham who scored his first Bundesliga goal at the weekend.

City, faced with a fourth consecutive quarter-final exit, upped the tempo and Kevin De Bruyne rattled the post with a 25th-minute shot.



Mohamed Salah and Georginio Wijnaldum were guilty of wasting glorious opportunities to get Klopp's men back into the tie as they failed to replicate a remarkable recovery from 3-0 down to beat Barcelona 4-3 on aggregate at the semi-final stage two years ago.

"We didn't lose the tie tonight. We lost it definitely in Madrid but even if we drew there 0-0, we would probably still be playing because we didn't score," said Klopp, whose side now face a battle just to qualify for next season's Champions League via a top-four finish in the Premier League.

"It's a little bit ourselves this year. We had games here in the Premier League where we just don't finish the situation often enough."

"We know how often Mo Salah finished these chances with closed eyes and in this moment (he did) not."

Madrid were far from their best, but did not need to be to set up a semi-final clash with Chelsea as Los Blancos extended their unbeaten run in all competitions to 14 games.

"We knew we had to suffer tonight, but in the end we got what we wanted, which was to go through," said Zidane.

"We knew they'd start fast and they were really good in the opening 15 minutes, but that's normal. In the quarter-finals of the Champions League you have to dig in and we did that and got through."

Djokovic Knocked Out of Monte Carlo by Evans



MONTE CARLO (Dispatches) - World number one Novak Djokovic crashed out of the Monte Carlo Masters in the last 16 on Thursday following a shock 6-4, 7-5 defeat by Britain's Dan Evans.

Djokovic, the Monte Carlo champion in 2013 and 2015, was broken five times by the 33rd-ranked Evans and suffered his first loss of the year, having won the Australian Open for the ninth time in February.

Evans, who dumped out this month's Miami Open winner Hubert Hurkacz in the previous round, will play 11th seed David Goffin for a place in the semi-finals.

Goffin beat U.S. Open runner-up Alexander Zverev 6-4, 7-6 (9/7) earlier in the day.

An out-of-sorts Djokovic produced an uncharacteristic 45 unforced errors against Evans, who hadn't won a tour-level match on clay since April 2017 before this week.

"To be honest this has been one of the worst matches from my side I can recall in the last few years," said Djokovic.

"I felt awful on the court overall. Nothing worked. Just one of those days."

"It was just an awful performance. I can't take any positives away from this match. It definitely leaves a bitter feeling exiting the court this way."

Mercedes Admit Red Bull Edge

IMOLA (Dispatches) - Lewis Hamilton and his Mercedes team expect Max Verstappen and Red Bull to bounce back and give them a torrid test of speed at this weekend's Emilia Romagna Grand Prix, the second round of this year's world championship.

Three weeks on from the season-opening Bahrain Grand Prix, where Hamilton dug deep into his reserves to conjure up his record 96th Formula One victory ahead of the Dutchman, the seven-time champion knows it will be a challenge to repeat his 2020 win at the old Autodromo Enzo e Dino Ferrari.

Mercedes team boss Toto Wolff was delighted to see Hamilton triumph in the opener, but said he is under no illusion that Mercedes have proved they can match the obvious speed of this season's Red Bull car.

"We may have won the first round, but we are under no illusions that this is going to be an easy season," he said.

"Our car still lacks speed on a single lap and Red Bull have the edge at the moment." In Bahrain, Verstappen secured pole by three-tenths, but Hamilton made the most of strategy and race-craft to win, with the aid of a costly error by the Dutchman, by just seven-tenths of a second.

Hamilton's Bahrain victory showcased not only his speed, but his experience and supreme race-management, qualities that he will need again this season as he seeks to fend off the challenge for his crown from Verstappen.

Hamilton rode his luck to win the 2020 Emilia Romagna race at Imola with some aplomb - and the help of a timely Safety Car intervention -- last November as he roared towards the drivers' title.

His win was the third triumph in a run of five as he took advantage of Mercedes' superiority and team-mate Valtteri Bottas's ill fortune to take command of the title race on the narrow and bumpy old track, back in use for the first time since 2006.

Hamilton made it plain last year that he loved the "old school" nature of the circuit set in the rolling vineyards of Emilia Romagna and Wolff shared his feelings.

"It's where we won secured our seventh constructors championship that weekend," he said.

Flick Mulls Future After Bayern Munich Exit Champions League



BERLIN (Dispatches) - Hansi Flick has admitted he is mulling over his future as Bayern Munich coach after the holders were knocked out of the Champions League by Paris Saint-Germain at the quarter-finals stage.

Bayern's 1-0 return-leg win in Paris on Tuesday was not enough to overturn last week's 3-2 first-leg defeat in Munich as PSG moved into the semi-finals on away goals at the Germans' expense.

"Everyone understands that I am thinking about my future," Flick told Sky after Eric Maxim Choupo-Moting's goal against his former club proved insufficient at the Parc des Princes on Tuesday.

Flick has been under noticeable strain in recent weeks with tensions running high between him and Bayern sports director Hasan Salihamidzic.

The 56-year-old Flick has also been tipped to become Germany's next head coach when Joachim Loew steps down after the Euro 2020 finals this summer.

For now, Flick, whose Bayern contract runs until 2023, says he "first wants to process the elimination" and "assess the situation. I also have my own ideas."

Ultimately, a PSG side boasting the talent of Neymar and Kylian Mbappe was too good for a depleted Bayern team missing injured top scorer Robert Lewandowski.

Under Flick, Bayern won all six titles available in the last 12 months, defeating PSG in last season's Champions League final in Lisbon.

However, elimination from both the Champions League and German Cup means only the Bundesliga is still in play with leaders Bayern five points clear and on course to win the German league for the ninth straight year.

Flick hinted he is unhappy with the situation at Bayern: "My family, no matter what I would do, would always support me... what matters to them is that I enjoy my job".

Clear the air talks are planned in Munich between Flick and Bayern board member Oliver Kahn.

Sixers Win Battle for Top Spot in the East

LOS ANGELES (AFP) - Joel Embiid finished with 39 points as the Philadelphia 76ers won the battle for first place in the Eastern Conference, holding on to beat the short-handed Brooklyn Nets 123-117.

Philadelphia, who are seeking their first NBA championship since 1983, are looking to earn the top seed and home court advantage in the postseason and Wednesday's win gives them the upper hand, at least for now, over the second-place Nets.

The 76ers improved to 38-17 on the season, just one game ahead of Brooklyn at 37-18.

Embiid also shot 13-of-29 from the floor and pulled down 13 rebounds as the 76ers saw their 22-point lead slashed to just three in the fourth.

Tobias Harris added 26 points and Ben Simmons finished with 17 points, nine assists and three steals for the Sixers, who won their third straight. Shake Milton had 15 points.

The depleted Nets played without offensive star James Harden, who is recovering from a strained hamstring, and Kevin Durant who sits out when the team has games on back-to-back nights.

Durant had eight turnovers in his last game, a one-sided 126-101 loss to the Los Angeles Lakers.

Kyrie Irving led the Nets with 37 points and nine assists while Landry Shamet added 17 points and Jeff Green had 15. Bruce Brown scored 14, and DeAndre Jordan finished with 12 points and 14 rebounds. Irving was a late addition to the lineup after he took time off for "personal reasons."

The Nets have been playing with all or a portion of their "Big Three" out for most of the season but they are hoping that everyone gets healthy for the postseason.



Virus Could Force Olympics Cancellation

TOKYO (Dispatches) - A top member of Japan's ruling party has warned the Tokyo Olympics could be cancelled if they are "no longer possible" as virus cases spike in the country, media reported Thursday.

"We need to cancel without hesitation if it's no longer possible," Jiji Press agency quoted Toshihiro Nikai as saying.

"If infections spread because of the Olympics, I don't know what the Olympics is for," added Nikai, who is the Liberal Democratic Party's secretary general and second most powerful figure.

The comments were reportedly made during the recording of a television programme.

"It's important for Japan to foster excitement with support from the public, and it's an opportunity," the Mainichi newspaper quoted Nikai as saying. "We definitely want to make it a success," he added, according to the daily, while warning "there are many issues to solve."

The remarks come 99 days before the pandemic-postponed Games open on July 23, and with rising concern in Japan about a spike in virus cases.

Record numbers of infections have been reported in Osaka in recent days, and the government has been forced to authorise new restrictions just weeks after lifting a virus state of emergency.

The surge has already forced the Olympic torch relay off public roads in Osaka, and a city in western Japan also announced Wednesday that it would cancel the public event.

Olympic organizers insist the Games can be held safely and have released virus rulebooks to allay public fears.

