

Iran's Health Ministry Said on Monday That Some 398 Iranians Died From the Coronavirus Disease Over the Past 24 Hours Bringing the Total Deaths to 67,130

IRAN NEWS

Iran's Envoy to the UAE Mohammad Hosseini Said on His Twitter Account That His Country And the United Arab Emirates Are Seriously Concerned About the Transit of Illicit Drugs

VOL. XXVII, No. 7205 TEHRAN Price 40,000 Rials

www.irannewsdaily.com

TUESDAY APRIL 20, 2021 - FARVARDIN 31, 1400

2

DOMESTIC

Leader Offers Condolences on Demise of Brig. Gen. Hejazi



> SEE PAGE 2

3

DOMESTIC

Italian Companies Keen To Return to Iran Market



> SEE PAGE 3

4

INTERNATIONAL

Clashes in Pakistan After TLP Takes Several Police Hostage



> SEE PAGE 4

8

SPORTS

Verstappen Wins Chaotic Imola Classic



> SEE PAGE 8

Tehran Welcomes Dialogue With Riyadh

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzade said on Monday that Tehran welcomed dialog with Saudi Arabia, as it sees dialog in the interest of both countries and regional peace.

Speaking in a press conference, Khatibzadeh confirmed the reports that Iran and Saudi Arabia have started talks with the mediation of Iraq, saying that there have been contradictory quotations.

However, he added that Iran has welcomed dialog with Saudi Arabia and sees it in the interest of both nations and regional peace and stability.

On the document of cooperation between Iran and Russia, Khatibzadeh said that there are two documents being finalized in parallel, but the one which is referred to as the cooperation document expired on March, but it has been designed to be extended automatically.

The spokesman said that the ongoing talks in Vienna between Iran and 4+1 were technical ones aimed at removing U.S. sanctions and returning of the U.S. to its commitments under UNSCR 2231.

See Page 7

Iranian Official Slams U.S. Police Brutality, Justice System

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The secretary of the Iranian Judiciary's High Council for Human Rights has denounced police brutality in the U.S., primarily targeting African Americans, asking whether justice has been served with regard to any of the high-profile killings.

"The U.S. police didn't kill American citizens in just 18 days of 2020," Ali Baqeri-Kani wrote in a tweet on Monday. "George Floyd was only one of 1127 victims of police brutality." "How many murderers of these victims have been tried and convicted in a fair court?" he asked rhetorically.

Baqeri-Kani said it is no surprise that even the court of trial for the murderer of George Floyd could not prevent the murder of Daunte Wright and others. The tweet came more than a week after Wright, a 20-year-old father of one, was shot and killed by a single bullet fired by a white police officer in the city suburb of Brooklyn Center.

The killing, which triggered a wave of protests in Minneapolis, is at least the third high-profile death of a Black man during a police encounter in the city over the past five years.

The murder occurred almost a year after Floyd, a 46-year-old Black man, died when Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin placed his knee on his neck as he pleaded, "I can't breathe." Floyd's murder sparked worldwide condemnation when footage of the moments leading to his death circulated around the world.

Iran to Vaccinate Citizens Next Month With Local Products



TEHRAN (IP) - Health Minister says that despite all restrictions, Iran managed to produce all necessities to fight COVID-19 locally and more importantly, 6 entirely local COVID vaccine platforms, four platforms for contract manufacturing and joint production, while local products will be used in mass vaccination in the coming month.

Saeed Namaki added that the world has been fighting COVID-19 for more than 15 months, which during this period, about 135 million people got infected, of which about three million died.

"COVID-19 pandemic swept the world severely, providing many lessons learned nationally, regionally, and globally, which demonstrated the unpreparedness of the global community to deal with a pandemic," highlighted the minister.

"Leadership, solidarity, inter-sectoral collaboration, evidence-based interventions, and coordination between countries are the tools needed to manage the COVID-19 pandemic," Namaki underlined.

"Unfair distribution of COVID vaccines showed the ugly part of our unfair world, where almost 80 percent of injected vaccines are in 10 developed countries while 18 low and middle-income countries are still with zero vaccines, so we must overcome this unfairness with transparency, cooperation, and solidarity," pointed the minister.

COVID-19 pandemic is a global challenge with a global solution, so national solutions can only help temporarily, he stressed.

"Injustice in this pandemic should be stopped through strengthening the leadership of World Health Organization (WHO), more investment in rapid response teams, data sharing, transparency, and accuracy of data in an agreed format to overcome legal barriers to defeat the pandemics," Namaki concluded.

A high-level meeting of the Ascension Forum entitled "Strengthening Cooperation between European and the Persian Gulf Countries to combat the coronavirus" with Australia, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, Iran, Italy, Turkey, Palestine, South Africa, the World Health Organization, Yemen and Syria's health officials' attendance via videoconferencing was held at the Health Ministry on 19th Apr 2021.

Holding such a meeting was to discuss the latest achievements, experiences, challenges, financial problems, the economic impact of the COVID-19 and the vaccination process, and the obstacles the world faces.

Objecting to COVAX for its unfair COVID-19 vaccine distribution, Iran's Health Minister stated that 1 million Iranians would be vaccinated next week.

Explaining the vaccination program, Namaki, said that one million doses of coronavirus vaccine would begin on Monday across the country to medical staff, medical students, hospital crew, and those who are in contact with infected patients.

Highlighting that the international organizations should be responsible for the unfair vaccine distribution around the world, the Health Minister added that despite being oppressed by sanctions, Iran has been able to manage its needs such as anti-coronavirus materials, medical equipment, and vaccine development.

Namaki stated that Iran had taken effectively promising steps to develop a coronavirus vaccine since the first day it (vaccine) was discussed in the world and was aware that the COVID-19 vaccine is not only a health and preventive product but a political means.

Iran Aims to Boost Foreign Trade by 21% In Current Year

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization Hamid Zadboom has said that the country plans for a 21-percent increase in foreign trade in the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2021, to March 20, 2022).

Zadboom said on Monday that there are two scenarios for the current year, including an optimistic outlook with a successful negotiation on the 2015 nuclear deal and the lifting of sanctions, which will pave the ground for new avenues for foreign trade, as well as a pessimistic foresight that will be the continuation of last year's economic situation with the persistence of coronavirus pandemic and the extension of the pressure of sanctions, which will affect foreign trade negatively.

He noted that based on various studies, COVID-19 and vaccination will have draconian effects on economic growth.

Pointing to the impact of the U.S. sanctions on Iran's trade exchanges, he underlined that the production line in the Islamic country needs the import of certain raw materials to help flourish export of produced materials; thus, the sanctions are the main bump in the way of trade activities.

See Page 7

Islamabad Stresses Cooperation With Tehran For Peace in Afghanistan

ISLAMABAD (IP) - On the eve of his visit to the Islamic Republic of Iran, Pakistan's Foreign Minister stressed Iran's prominent and undeniable role in the Afghan peace process, saying: "Pakistan is determined to cooperate with Iran."

The upcoming visit to Iran is very important to discuss developments in Afghanistan, Mahmood Hussain Qureshi told a news conference at the Pakistani Consulate in Dubai on the sidelines of a visit to the UAE on Sunday.

He called the Islamic Republic of Iran the brother country of Pakistan and an important player in the region, adding: "We are aware of Tehran's position on Afghanistan and are determined to cooperate with Tehran in this regard."

Referring to the four official visits of Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif to Pakistan since the beginning of Imran Khan's government, Qureshi said: "Iran, as a neighbor of Afghanistan, is eager to play a role in helping to resolve the crisis in this country."

See Page 7

Vienna Talks Enter Drafting Stage

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Russia's envoy in Vienna said on Monday that the JCPOA revival talks entered the drafting stage.

"Summing up the results of 2 weeks of deliberations on #JCPOA restoration we can note with satisfaction that the negotiations entered the drafting stage," Mikhail Ulyanov, Permanent Representative of Russia to the International Organizations in Vienna, wrote on his Twitter account.

"Practical solutions are still far away, but we have moved from general words to agreeing on specific steps towards the goal," he added.

The latest round of talks between Iran and other participants to the JCPOA to revive the deal started on Thursday in Vienna at the expert level.

The talks are aimed at preparing a framework for the US to rejoin the JCPOA and for Iran to return to full compliance with the restrictions in the deal.

Iran has taken several measures to reduce its compliance with the JCPOA-related commitments due to the U.S. withdrawal from the deal followed by the resumption of sanctions against Iran. Tehran has said that the measures were taken in accordance with the JCPOA provisions and are reversible in case other participants do their share of obligations.

Ukraine Trying to Politicize Plane Crash Through Unacceptable Allegations

TEHRAN (PressTV) - A high-ranking Iranian security official tells Press TV that allegations made by Ukrainian officials about accidental shooting down of a passenger plane over Iran's sky are unconstructive, as they are trying to politicize the case.

Keyvan Khosravi, the spokesman for Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), made the remarks in a Monday interview with Press TV, saying that the plane's black boxes were one of the main sources of information used to compile the final report of an investigation over accidental shooting down of the Ukrainian plane by Iranian air defense forces in January 2020.

Asked about recent remarks by an informed Iranian official, who said Ukraine is trying to attribute the incident to problems with the Russian Tor-M1 missile system, Khosravi declined to answer that question, but said, "Unfortunately, Ukrainian officials are trying to ascribe false allegations to Iranian officials in order to politicize this case, and their recent allegations in this regard are by no means constructive and acceptable."

The official mentioned Iran's all-out cooperation with Ukraine to clarify various aspects of this incident, saying, "Since the inception of this bitter incident, we have accepted all demands put forth by Ukrainian government, which at times went beyond what was necessary under usual circumstances, so that, there would remain no dark corner in the efforts made to shed light on the truth in this incident."

"Sending the plane's black boxes to France to decode their contents is the most important reason that proves Iran's transparency and honesty in its effort to bring to light all details about this incident," Khosravi said.

See Page 7



Advertisement Department
021-44253335-39

www.irannewsdaily.com
info@irannewsdaily.com

@irannewsdaily @irannewsdaily

Intelligence Forces Seize Weapons Consignment

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iranian intelligence forces seized a consignment of weapons at Khuzestan province borders.

Commander of the regional base in the southwest of the country, Brigadier General Ahmad Khadem made the announcement on Monday, saying that during an intelligence operation on Sunday evening by the intelligence forces, 21 AK-47 and 7,000 pistol bullets were seized in the borders of Khuzestan province.

Earlier, on April 5, the Khuzestan police commander announced the destruction of an arms and ammunition smuggling gang by the Khorramshahr Intelligence and Public Security Police.

Strengthening Bilateral Ties on Agenda of Pakistan FM's Iran Visit

ISLAMABAD (IRNA) - Ambassador of Pakistan to Iran says that strengthening of bilateral relations, especially taking coordinated steps to develop border trade, are main goals of Pakistani Foreign Minister's visit to Tehran.

Rahim Hayat Qureshi addressing a webinar in Pakistan said we are expecting Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi in Tehran very soon adding that bilateral issues would top on the agenda during his meetings with Iranian officials.

The webinar titled "Pakistan: The next geo-economics hub of Asia?" was organized by COLABS in collaboration with one of Pakistan's leading newspapers, the Daily Times.

In addition to Pakistani ambassador to Iran, the webinar was attended by some international affairs experts, journalists and Pakistan's ambassador to Italy.

Rahim Hayat Qureshi, as the main speaker of the program, pointed to the geographical and strategic commonalities of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan in the region.

"Despite sanctions Iranian economy has developed to a large extent and they are developing internally which is commendable," he said.

The ambassador added we have great complementary with Iran we need to seriously take advantage of our geographical location which places us next to energy rich country.

Referring to the upcoming visit of Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi to Tehran, which is said to begin tomorrow, the Pakistani ambassador said strengthening bilateral relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran, examining the situation of common borders and finding useful solutions to improve living standards on both sides of the border are the main goals of Mr. Qureshi's trip to Tehran.

"Foreign minister will be going to Istanbul for Afghan peace process conference so we would have nice conversations with our Iranian brothers on Afghanistan too," Qureshi said at the webinar.

Qureshi in his views said Pakistan can take lot of benefits from 25-year strategic cooperation plan between the Islamic Republic of Iran and China. For example Iran



can export its gas to China through Pakistan.

He added Iran is of course very old civilization and we know it has historic routes in the region adding that China Pakistan Economic Corridor is nothing it is just reinvigoration of old trading routes.

The ambassador added we have great complementarities with Iran and we need to seriously take advantage of our geographical location which places us next to energy rich country. "For example we are importing LNG from Qatar and whenever the situation is right we can complete the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline very quickly," he said.

He said we have two, three fertilizer plants which are now in a poor situation because of the lack of gas so these are the things which we can immediately resolve from Iran in terms of IP gas pipeline. So there is a huge potential.

Rahim Hayat Qureshi went on to say we have issues with sanctions like we have problems in banking, look we have surplus rice of about US \$ 500 million but we have not been able to export that rice to Iran due to banking sanctions and this is giving us a loss of US \$ 500 million every year for the last 10-15 years.

"We border with Iran and our exports have surplus possibility of reaching US \$ 1 billion per year with Iran," the envoy pointed out.

Referring to the Tehran-Istanbul-Islamabad goods train also called the ECO train the ambassador said a rate has been fixed at 8 cents par tone kilometer which is pretty feasible.

"We have the 11 days of travelling time from Islamabad to Istanbul and by sea it is 21 days so already see some savings over there," noted the ambassador.

He said the problem is not too much on Iranian and Turkish sides it is on our side. He added that condition of track is not good and needs an investment of US \$ 800 for the upgradation.

Qureshi added that upgrading of the track would open new avenues of cooperation between Iran and Pakistan.

Speaker Urges Boosting Industrial, Trade, Agricultural Ties With Serbia

TEHRAN - In a meeting with the Serbian foreign minister, the speaker of the Iranian parliament stressed deepening industrial, trade, and agricultural cooperation between the two countries.

During the meeting with Serbian Foreign Minister Nikola Selaković in Tehran on Sunday, Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf stated that stronger ties between Iran and Serbia could lead to stronger comprehensive cooperation.

He noted that the volume of economic relations between Iran and Serbia was

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK



not commensurate with the existing capacities and level of political relations.

The Serbian foreign minister also stated that the Serbian people had great respect for Iran's successful efforts to maintain independence and freedom.

Nikola Selaković further appreciated Iran's full support for the preservation of Serbia's territorial integrity and sovereignty.

He also expressed readiness to use the opportunity to enhance parliamentary relations with Iran further.

Drone Power of Iran Army "Winning Card" of Armed Forces

TEHRAN (MNA) – Today, the drone capability of the Iran Army is the power and winning card of the Armed Forces which be used on the battlefield if needed, said Army Chief Commander Major General Mousavi.

He made the remarks on the occasion of April 18, i.e. Army National Day in Iran, on the sidelines of military parades of the Iran Army, saying, "What you witnessed today, was a small part of the capabilities of the Army which was displayed in full compliance with health protocols."

"With this parade, we want to convey the message to the Iranian nation that, during the past 43 years, we have stood against the enemies of this soil and the ideals of the Islamic Republic", he added. He went on to say, "The most important point is that the Army has achieved such drone power in the years of maximum pressure and sanctions."

JCPOA Framework Clear, Parties Fulfill Their Obligations

TEHRAN (IP) - The head of the Foreign Relations Committee of the National Security and Foreign Policy Commission of the Parliament says the JCPOA is crystal clear, and the parties must fulfill their obligations.

Abass Golroo stated that the US had withdrawn from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and European signatories did not fulfill their obligations, so the new round of talks had been set up in Vienna.

He noted that the 'Strategic Action Plan to Lift Sanctions' law approved by the parliament defined the government's roadmap to interact with European countries and the committed parties to JCPOA.

Highlighting that the parliament is not against negotiations, he added: "The negotiations must have conditions and

actually meet citizens and parliament's satisfaction, and this had two key aspects: As the Leader of the Islamic Revolution has stressed all sanctions (1600 imposed sanctions) should be lifted."

"What Iran's parliament stresses is that sanctions, whether relevant or irrelevant to JCPOA or those imposed during Trump's administration or earlier, must be lifted all at once," the MP underlined.

"The second; Verification must not be just on paper; it should be practical," Golroo added.

"Negotiation should not be attritional, because attritional negotiations cause serious damage to the other party's intentions, debilitate the trust in between, and also cause serious damage to the country's economy," he highlighted.

Zarif Calls for Speeding up of Tariffs Deal With Indonesia

TEHRAN (PressTV)

- Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has stressed the need to speed up the finalization of a preferential tariffs agreement with Indonesia, expressing Tehran's readiness to continue negotiations in this regard.



Zarif made the remarks during a meeting with his Indonesian counterpart Retno Marsudi in Jakarta on Monday.

The Iranian foreign minister expressed satisfaction with the increase in trade volume between the two countries.

The minister referred to decades-old friendly ties between the two countries, and hailed Indonesia's principled stance at the UN Security Council on the 2015 nuclear deal, also known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

The U.S. unilaterally left the deal three years ago and launched its "maximum pressure" campaign against the Islamic Republic.

For her part, Marsudi lauded growth in bilateral ties, including economic cooperation, and expressed hope that the joint trade commission between the two countries and their negotiations would facilitate trade relations.

The two ministers also discussed other issues during the meeting, including ways to support international law and the latest developments in the Afghan peace process.

Zarif headed to Jakarta on Sunday as part of efforts aimed at strengthening bilateral ties.

Withdrawal of Foreign Forces Essential for Regional Security

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iran Army Chief Commander Major General Mousavi points to the need for the withdrawal of foreign forces from the West Asian region.

The commander made the remarks in a letter to Military attachés of other countries on the occasion of Iran's National Army Day.

"In a period that we witness cooperation of America with terrorist groups, withdrawal of foreigners from the region and continuation and boosting of cooperation among committed countries, especially in West Asia, are essential and will guarantee regional and global peace and security," reads the message. The Army of the Islamic Republic of Iran is ready to cooperate with armies of all committed countries for ensuring the security of West Asia and establish peace across the world, he said.

Enjoying experiences of eight years of the imposed war, the Army has reached a significant point in its defensive power and is able to safeguard the security of any region through cooperation with armies of other countries, he said, adding, realities of regional and global developments point to the necessity of increased relations between committed countries for countering US and Israeli regimes' hostile actions.

America and the Israeli regime are the main culprits of tensions in West Asia, he said, adding, "The Islamic Republic of Iran has no choice but to take steps in the path of enhancing its defensive might."

America's opposition to Iran's defensive programs comes as it is exporting huge amounts of arms to the region and making threats against Iran, noted Mousavi.

Majlis to Ban Entry of U.S., UK Reporters Supporting Sanctions Against Country

TEHRAN (PressTV) - A member of the Iranian Parliament's presiding board says it has received a motion by lawmakers to ban the entry of American and British journalists and media outlets known for supporting sanctions against Iran.

Seyed Naser Mousavi-Largani announced the news during an open session of parliament on Sunday.

Mousavi-Largani did not provide any further details.

The United States, under former US President Donald Trump, imposed several rounds of illegal sanctions on Iran, primarily targeting the Iranian nation. Trump unilaterally pulled out of the Iran nuclear deal in 2018.

Iranian officials have called the sanctions "economic terrorism" for disrupting the people's livelihood and "medical terrorism" for hindering people's access to certain medicines and healthcare services, particularly during the spread of the deadly coronavirus disease.

In a letter on Wednesday, the Iranian Judiciary's High Council for Human Rights (HCHR) highlighted the case of 31 Iranian children who succumbed to epidermolysis bullosa (EB) and mucopolysaccharidosis (MPS) diseases as a result of the sanctions.

Leader Offers Condolences on Demise of Brig. Gen. Hejazi

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The Leader of the Islamic Revolution issued a message of condolence on the demise of the deputy chief of the IRGC Quds Force Brigadier General Seyed Mohammad Hejazi on Monday.

The following is the full text of the message of the Leader:

In the Name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful

I would like to express my sincere condolences on the demise of Brigadier General Seyyed Mohammad Hejazi to his spouse, children, family members, and to his friends and colleagues. Having a heart full of true faith, motivation, and determination, General Hejazi lived his life in the true path of defending Islam and the Islamic Revolution.

He was one the most influential figures in the IRGC, who has been successful in performing all his great responsibilities.

The loss of such a person is truly a source of regret and sorrow.

I ask God, to bestow His mercy, forgiveness, and satisfaction upon him and grant forbearance and patience to his family. Hejazi passed away after years of suffering from the effects of chemical weapons used during the Iraqi war of the 1980s on Iran, IRGC spokesman Ramazan Sharif says.

"This honorable martyr had been exposed to chemical agents during the Sacred Defense and had been suffering from the effects. He also contracted the coronavirus a few months ago, from which he recovered," Sharif said Monday.

"A medical commission that formed yesterday at Baqiyatallah Hospital identified the cause of the martyrdom as the chemical effects," he added.

In a statement on Sunday evening, the IRGC said that Gen. Hejazi had achieved the high degree of martyrdom and "joined the ranks of martyrs after years of tireless and sincere efforts in various fields to protect the Islamic Revolution and serve the establishment and the Islamic homeland".

Gen. Hejazi, 65, was a veteran of the Iraqi war under former dictator Saddam Hussein on Iran, which lasted eight years. After the war, he served as the commander of Iran's Basij volunteer force for ten years and as the deputy commander of the IRGC for a year.

He was named the deputy commander of the IRGC Quds Force after the former prominent commander of the force, Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, was assassinated in a US airstrike in Baghdad in January 2020. He replaced Brigadier General Esmail Qa'ani, who was named the new commander of the force.

Gen. Hejazi's passing also prompted huge outpourings of condolences from top Iranian authorities and commanders, including Judiciary Chief Ebrahim Raeisi, Parliament Speaker Mohammad-Baqer Qalibaf, Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Baqeri, and Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif.

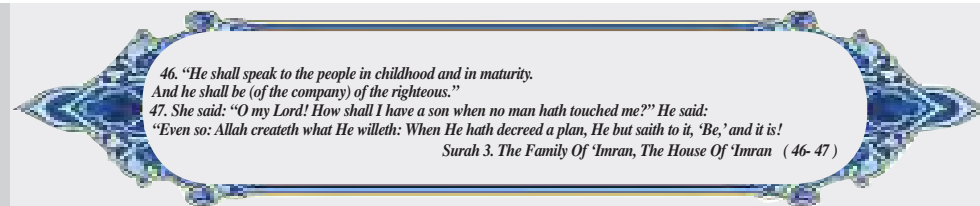
Raeisi praised Hejazi as a "sincere and faithful commander" who put great efforts to help the Islamic Resistance Front. "In addition to playing a role in the victory of the Revolution, commanding during the Sacred Defense (Iran-Iraq war) era and organizing the Basij force, General Hejazi was a 'shining star of the Axis of Resistance,'" Qalibaf wrote in his message.





PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:03
■ Evening (Maghreb)	20:01
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:54
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:24



Italian Companies Keen To Return to Iran Market

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Chairman of Iran-Italy Joint Chamber of Commerce says that Italian companies are still eager to engage in trade with Iran and are preparing to return to the Islamic Republic and the chamber with its more than 5,000 members has recommended then to get prepared for the return.

Speaking to ILNA, Ahmad Pourfallahian said, "Many Italian companies are preparing to re-enter Iran after the sanctions are lifted and in this regard, we have advised the 5000 members we have in the Iran-Italy Chamber of commerce to be prepared as well."

In the previous period, unfortunately, we were not prepared and could not benefit from the opportunity created by the arrival of various business groups from Europe, especially Italy and Germany, the official regretted.

"After the lifting of the previous sanctions, we saw the largest presence of Italian businessmen in Iran. Even the first high-ranking political figure to come to Iran was the Italian Foreign Minister, and the Italian Prime Minister also visited Iran; this shows how much Italy is interested in collaborating with Iran,"

"For many years, Italy was our first trading partner and the only European country with which our trade balance was positive," he added. He added that Iran's sales to Italy have been more because Italy used to buy oil only from Iran and its refineries and petrochemical industry was adjusted to Iran's oil.

Pourfallahian noted that some 9 years ago, Iran's trade volume with Italy was around \$7b per year but it is currently limited to under one billion dollars due to the



sanctions but it has not completely been cut and most of small and medium size companies have retained their trade with Iran.

Mentioning the potential impact of the lifting of sanctions on trade between the two countries, the official said: "It is expected that immediately after the lifting of sanctions, Italian companies and entrepreneurs will flock to the Iranian market."

In response to a question about the number of Italian companies ready to enter the Islamic Republic, he said: "We do not have specific statistics on the number of Italian companies that have announced their readiness to pursue their activities in Iran, but all Italian and Iranian members of the joint chamber in Rome, which are more than 105 companies, are ready to resume their activities in Iran."

Regarding Iran's blocked resources in Italy, Pourfallah said: "According to the latest official data, we do not have a large amount of money blocked in Italy and the figure is lower than Iran's frozen assets in many other countries."

"We have never had a problem with Italy on this issue like other countries," he stressed.

He also called for resolving the FATF bill in the country, saying that if Iran does not join the FATF and Palermo agreement, even removal of sanctions will not help Iran's trade.

Iran Has No Plans for Massive Meat Imports From Serbia



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Minister of Agriculture Kazem Khavazi says Iran has no plans for massive imports of meat from Serbia and priority of the country is the domestic producers.

On the sidelines of meeting with Serbian Foreign Minister, Khavazi said that Iran can take advantage of Serbia's high experience in producing the agricultural seeds and their agro experiences.

Earlier in his meeting with the Serbian Foreign Minister Nikola Selaković, Khavazi stressed the need to expand trade and agricultural relations between the two countries.

"Iran has very good relations with Eastern European countries in the field of agriculture and is eager to develop its relations with Serbia in this regard," said Khavazi.

"There are very good fields in seed production in Iran and very good cooperation can be formed between Iran and Serbia regarding seed exchanges," he added, saying, "In the field of pesticide production, as well as chemical fertilizer, the technology of which is available in Serbia, Iran is fully prepared to produce the active ingredient of pesticide production from oil and provide it to Serbia."

He went on to say, "We can meet Serbia's need for in the field of veterinary medicines and vaccines through Razi Vaccine and Serum Research Institute."

"Serbia can be one of Iran's export destinations in the field of aquaculture, including shrimp and caviar," Khavazi added. The Iranian minister noted that Iran is eager to establish win-win relations in the field of agriculture with Serbia.

Emphasizing the need to expand agricultural trade relations between Iran and Serbia, Nikola Selaković, for his part, said, "Political cooperation between the two countries is at a very high level, and this cooperation should be used to develop trade relations, especially in the field of agriculture."

Stating that the Serbian Foreign Ministry is also responsible for economic diplomacy, he added, "We are seriously pursuing the expansion of trade relations between the two countries at the State Department."

Turkey's Export of Ready-Made Clothes to Iran Grows

IRAN NEW ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Value of ready-made clothes exported from Turkey to Iran grew by 34.7 percent in the first quarter of 2021, compared to the same period of 2020, having exceeded \$4.4 million, the Turkish Trade Ministry announced.

According to the ministry, in March 2021 Turkey exported ready-made clothes worth \$870,000 to Iran, which is 2.7 times more than in March of last year.

Turkey's exports of ready-made clothing to foreign countries increased by 11.6 percent from January through March 2021, compared to the same period of 2020, surpassing \$4.7 billion.

In March 2021, Turkey exported ready-to-wear for \$1.67 billion, which is 38.7 percent more compared to March 2020, the ministry said.

Over the past 12 months (from March 2020 to March 2021), Turkey's exports of clothes amounted to \$17.6 billion.

Majlis Committee Reforms Plan of Car Offering at IME

TEHRAN (MNA)- A member of the parliament's Industries and Mines Committee said that the plan of offering cars at Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) has been investigated and reformed in a meeting of this committee on Sunday.

Rouhollah Izadkhah said, "In today's meeting, the committee approved that in a situation where the car market is facing imbalances and the demand for different types of cars is more than the supply, car manufacturers should offer the types of cars determined and priced by the Competition Council through the IME."

In recent months, the price of cars in the free market has become significantly different from the factory price.

While this gap has led to a massive influx of people and professional dealers to buy cars from the factory, it did not benefit the automotive industry and those active in this sector, as the automakers sold their products at prices set by the Competition Council.

As a result, the car industry suffered losses and the profit of price gaps went to the pockets of dealers.

To tackle the problem, the offering of cars in the commodity exchange has been a top issue under discussion in recent months, and different views have been expressed by officials and related organizations.

However, after contradictory comments, the plan to organize the automotive industry, the most important axis of which is the offering of cars in the stock market, was approved in a meeting of the Industries Committee of the parliament.

Iran Named Among Top 10 Steel Producers in World

TEHRAN (MNA) – Islamic Republic of Iran was introduced among top 10 steel producers in the world.

According to the World Steel Association (WSA), the Islamic Republic of Iran produced 2.3 million tons of steel in Feb. 2021, showing an 11.5 percent hike as compared to a year earlier.

In addition, Iran produced five million tons of steel in the first two months of 2021, registering a 10.8 percent hike as compared to the last year's corresponding period.

With the production of 83 million tons of steel, China is ranked first, followed by India and Japan each with 9.1 and 7.5 million tons of steel output

respectively, WSA added.

Coronavirus pandemic has created serious problems for all industrial and production units across the world but Iran's steel production growth has remained 'positive'.

According to the report, 150.2 million tons of steel was produced in the world in Feb. 2021, recording a 4.1 percent hike as compared to same period of last year.

In the meantime, steel production in European Union' countries hit 11.9 million tons in Feb. 2021, showing a 7.1 percent decline as compared to the last year's corresponding period.

Iran Among Top 5 Manufacturers of Steam Turbine Rotors

TEHRAN (IP) - The CEO of Iran Power Plant Repairs Company said: "Iran is among the top five manufacturers of these steam rotors with the construction of steam turbine rotors."

Abdollah Pishahang, noting that this 82.5 MW turbine rotor was built by the specialists of Iran Power Plant Repair Company, adding: "The purchase of the turbine cost about three million euros, but with the ability of Iranian experts with less than 1.2 million euros, this rotor was built in the country."

He announced the company's full readiness to carry out similar projects for other power plants in the country and said: "This rotor can withstand steam temperatures above 500 degrees Celsius." The CEO of Iran Power Plant Repair Company said: "The previous manufacturer of this rotor was General Electric Company of America. Despite the lack of access to construction plans, the team of Iranian engineers was able to build the inside of the turbine rotor by reverse engineering."

He pointed out: "With the construction of this steam turbine rotor, Iran is now among the top five steam rotors' manufacturers."

MSC Striving to Pump Hope Into the Society

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The CEO of Mobarakeh Steel Company (MSC) announced production of the widest steel slab by the company, saying that in the early days



of the New Year which has been named by the Supreme Leader as the Year of Production, Supports and Removing Hurdles, the company could remove one of the hurdles in way of some industries by producing steel slab with the width of 2,000 and thickness of 250 millimeters.

Mr. Hamid Reza Azimian announced this achievement of the company regarding the production of the widest steel slab in the company, reiterating all of the staff in the company has been united in boosting the production, setting records and above all producing new products and giving good news to the public, artisans and all shareholders of the company.

He added that MSC could produce for the first time the steel slab with the width of 300 millimeters by its casting machine no.5 by the end of last year, and today and in the early days of the New Year and in line with implementing the recommendations of the Supreme Leader it could remove the hurdles in way of some industries by producing the widest steel slab.

Azimian noted that for the first time in the country, MSC could produce the steel slab with the width of 2,000 to 2,025 millimeters with the thickness of 250 millimeters.

The new product can be used in the oil, gas and ship-building industries and it is also an export product and it can actually earn the country huge amount of forex and save the flight of forex due to the needs of those industries for providing this type of steel slab from other countries.

He hailed the managers, staff and experts of the company for their efforts and called them the leaders of the national industry.

He reiterated that MSC does everything to pump hope into the society through increasing production or producing new products.

ESCO Taking Required Measures on Fighting COVID-19

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

ISFAHAN – The CEO of Esfahan Steel Company (ESCO) says the company is taking all required measures for combatting the coronavirus (COVID-19) and it feels responsible for combatting the disease.

Speaking in webinar of the national information campaign on confronting the coronavirus, the CEO of company Mr. Mansour Ebrahimzadeh delved into details of the massive measures the company has taken for fighting the virus and allocating Shahid Motahhari Hospital of Isfahan for serving the COVID-19 infected patients, and said the company has taken all practical measures for observing the sanitary protocols for overcoming the virus and during the holidays, and when the staff are off duty they should be protected.

He reiterated that the company feels responsible for overcoming the virus in order to, God willing, get past this hard time.

Meanwhile Deputy Health Minister Iraj Harirchim, for his part, said that usually 80 percent of public health either physically or mentally is related to the social factors influencing the health which happen out of the field of health and medical sector. He added that issues like national per capita, fair distribution of incomes, occupation and proper housing or negative issues like addiction, divorce and unemployment are more important than one may only think medical sector can resolve all health problems of the country.

Then the head of public relations of the ministry Mr. Kianush Jahanpoor said 70 companies and industrial and commercial brands have cooperated in holding the conference and expressed his gratitude.



Kidnapped French Girl Rescued in Switzerland

NANCY (Dispatches) - An eight-year-old girl was rescued in Switzerland on Sunday, five days after being kidnapped from her grandmother's French home in a "military" style operation with the alleged involvement of her mother.

After a massive search, investigators found the girl, Mia, and her mother Lola Montemaggi in a squat inside an abandoned factory in the Swiss municipality of Sainte-Croix, French prosecutors said.

The 28-year-old mother was arrested along with five others accused of helping her.



Nearly 100 Hurt in Egypt Train Accident

CAIRO (Dispatches) - A train accident north of Cairo on Sunday left 97 people injured, Egypt's health ministry said, in the latest rail calamity to hit the North African country.

The ministry said "97 citizens were injured in a train accident in Toukh", a small farming town in the fertile Nile Delta about 40 kilometres (25 miles) outside the capital.

No deaths were reported.

A security source told AFP eight carriages came off the rails as the train headed north towards the city of Mansoura.



Clashes in Pakistan After TLP Takes Several Police Hostage



ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Police in Pakistan said a right-wing group has taken six security personnel hostage at its headquarters in Lahore on Sunday after a week of violent clashes following the arrest of the group's leader.

Pakistan's government banned Tehreek-e-Labbaik (TLP) Pakistan earlier this week after supporters took to the streets to protest against the arrest of their leader, Muslim scholar Saad Rizvi.

"Today in the early morning, miscreants attacked Nawankot Police Station where [paramilitary] Rangers and police officers were trapped inside the police station and [Deputy Superintendent] Nawankot [was] kidnapped," read a statement from the provincial police in Punjab, of which Lahore is the capital.

The statement said the attackers were armed with petrol bombs and had stolen a tanker truck carrying 50,000 litres of petrol. A senior police officer and two paramilitary staff were among the six being held by supporters of TLP, Lahore police spokesman Arif Rana told Reuters news agency.

Police said they have launched a security operation against the group in response to the attack. Pakistani news channels have been barred from providing coverage of the group since it was banned, and on Sunday mobile and internet services were down in the area where clashes were taking place.

Addressing the media in the capital, Islamabad, Interior Minister Sheikh Rasheed said the situation in Lahore was "tense", with an operation centring on the Yateem Khana intersection, about a kilometre (0.6 miles) from a TLP regional headquarters building.

Supporters of the TLP have been sharing videos on social media of what they said were clashes on Sunday with police, and hashtags supporting the group were trending in Pakistan on Sunday.

The videos, which Reuters could not independently verify, showed thousands of protesters clashing with police in riot gear, as clouds of tear gas hung in the air and the crackle of gunfire could be heard.

TLP spokesman Shafiq Amini told Reuters four supporters had been killed on Sunday and several others were wounded in the violence.

At least four people have been killed, hundreds injured and thousands arrested in the days since Rizvi's arrest.

The TLP leader had called on the government to honor what he said was a commitment it made in February to his party to expel the French envoy over the publication in France of depictions of Islam's prophet. The government said that it only committed to discussing the matter in Parliament.

Prime Minister Imran Khan on Saturday said the group had been banned because it "challenged the writ of the state".

"Our government only took action against TLP under our anti-terrorist law when they challenged the writ of the state and used street violence and attacking the public and law enforcers," he posted on Twitter.

Terror Threat Has Moved From Afghanistan

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Sunday defended the US decision to withdraw from Afghanistan, saying the terror threat had moved elsewhere and that Washington needed to refocus resources on challenges such as China and the pandemic.

President Joe Biden announced last week that the United States would withdraw all forces from the country before this year's 20th anniversary of the September 11 attacks.

The unconditional withdrawal -- four months later than a deadline agreed with the Taliban last year -- comes despite a deadlock in peace talks between the insurgents and the Afghan government.

CIA head William Burns and U.S. generals including the former armed forces chief David Petraeus have argued that the move could plunge the country deeper into violence and leave America more vulnerable to terrorist threats.

"The terrorism threat has moved to other places. And we have other very important items on our agenda, including the relationship with China, including dealing with everything from climate change to Covid," Blinken told ABC's "This Week."

"And that's where we have to focus our energy and resources."

Blinken met Afghan President Ashraf Ghani as well as senior U.S. officials in Kabul last week and briefed them on Biden's announcement Wednesday that he was ending "the forever war," which began in response to the 2001 September 11 attacks.

Blinken told ABC the United States had "achieved the objectives that we set out to achieve."

"Al-Qaeda has been significantly degraded. Its capacity to conduct an attack against the United States now from Afghanistan is not there," he said.

The Pentagon has around 2,500 troops in Afghanistan from a high of over 100,000. Thousands more serve as part of a 9,600-strong NATO force, which will withdraw at the same time.

The delay in withdrawal -- even by just over four months -- has angered the Taliban, who have threatened to resume hostilities against US forces.

Blinken said, however, that Washington would be able to see any move by the Taliban "in real time" and take action.



Syria to Hold Presidential Vote on May 26

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) - Syria will hold a presidential election on May 26 likely to keep in power President Bashar al-Assad, in a country devastated by a decade of war.

The vote will be the second since the conflict erupted in March 2011, with no political solution in sight to end a war that has killed at least 388,000 people and displaced half the population. The election, announced on Sunday by speaker of parliament Hamouda Sabbagh, also comes as Syria is mired in a deep economic crisis.

Assad, who took power following the death of his father Hafez in 2000, has not yet officially announced that he will stand for re-election.

The now 55-year-old won a previous poll three years into the war, in 2014, with 88 percent of the vote.

Since government forces have clawed back swathes of territory from rebel and jihadist forces with military help from regime allies Russia and Iran and Tehran's proxy Lebanese militia, Hezbollah. But large parts of Syria still escape government control and polling will not take place in those areas.

They include the northwestern province of Idlib, a major rebel bastion controlled by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham which is led by members of Syria's former Al-Qaeda affiliate.

The Idlib region, including nearby districts where other rebel groups are also present, is home to 2.9 million people, of whom two thirds have fled their homes in other regions ravaged by violence.

Also unable to vote will be Syrians living in border regions controlled by Turkish troops and proxy militias, and others who live in areas of the Kurdish-majority north where regime forces are not present.

Voting will only be allowed for Syrians living in government-controlled areas or those living abroad but registered with their country's embassies, according to Sabbagh. Presidential hopefuls can submit their candidacies during a 10-day period starting Monday, Sabbagh said.

They must have lived continuously in Syria for at least 10 years, meaning that opposition figures in exile are barred from standing.

Protests, Anger as Prague Digests Sat With Moscow

PRAGUE (Dispatches) - Protesters smeared the Russian embassy wall with blood-like ketchup and politicians on Sunday vowed consequences after the Czech government alleged Russian secret services had orchestrated a fatal explosion in 2014.

Citing an intelligence report, Prague said Saturday evening it would expel 18 Russian diplomats believed to be spies, a step Russia has threatened to respond to with retaliatory measures.

Prime Minister Andrej Babis said Russia's military secret service GRU was behind two blasts at ammunition warehouses in the east of the EU member country in 2014, including one that claimed two lives.

Police then said they were looking for two Russians using passports also held by suspects in the poisoning of former Russian double agent Sergei Skripal in Britain in 2018.

"Killing the citizens of the Czech Republic on its territory by another country, that's almost an act of war," protester Tomas Peszynski told AFP at a rally outside the Russian embassy in Prague on Sunday afternoon.

Around 100 protesters sported banners saying "We're not Russia's backyard" and chanted "Shame" while waving EU and NATO flags.

The night before, police detained seven people who had smeared the embassy wall with ketchup symbolising blood.

Czech politicians joined the outcry, with government ministers saying Russian companies should not take part in the planned construction of a new nuclear unit worth billions of euros for security reasons.

"I can't imagine (Russian energy giant) Rosatom getting as far as the security assessment," Industry Minister Karel Havlicek said.

The two Russians allegedly behind the explosion were identified as Alexander Mishkin and Anatoly Chepigov based on video footage from the site and photos published after the Skripal attack, Czech media said.

Foreign and Interior Minister Jan Hamacek said the second explosion should probably have occurred elsewhere as the men targeted an arms supply to Bulgaria.

Babis said the government would discuss the intelligence report at a meeting on Monday and make it public.

Moscow slammed the expulsion of the diplomats, calling it "a provocation" and threatening retaliation.

In contrast, EU and NATO partners stood by Czech officials, with British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab saying Britain "stands in full support of our Czech allies".

"I resolutely condemn the subversive activities targeting the security of... our closest neighbour and ally," Slovak Foreign Minister Ivan Korcok said in a tweet.



Greece Says Resolving Differences With Turkey May Be Hard

ATHENS (Dispatches) - Greece cannot ignore its differences with Turkey over territorial disputes in the Mediterranean and other issues but while a solution is difficult, it is not impossible, its foreign minister told a newspaper on Sunday.

The two countries are NATO allies but at odds over many issues, including competing claims over the extent of their continental shelves in the Mediterranean, air space, energy resources and ethnically split Cyprus.

"It is not possible to hide under the rug issues where we have different views and approaches," Nikos Dendias told Kathimerini newspaper in an interview.

On Thursday, Dendias and his Turkish counterpart Mevlut Cavusoglu clashed openly at a joint news conference in Ankara that began with hopes of improved relations but quickly descended into acrimonious accusations from both sides.

It was the first visit by a Greek foreign minister to Turkey since 2015 in an effort to find common ground for a positive agenda of discussions with Ankara.

Dendias told the paper that while the climate during the talks was good, there was no convergence on many issues.

"The issue we face with Turkey is that there is no common denominator regarding the framework of resolving our differences," Dendias told the paper.

He said Greece's view is that demarcating its exclusive economic zone and continental shelf with Turkey in the Aegean Sea and the eastern Mediterranean must be based on international law.

"I don't see a toughening of Turkey's stance on the issues concerning the Aegean and the east Mediterranean. But I do see fixed positions that are beyond international law, which makes resolution prospects difficult but not impossible," he said.

Dendias said he has invited Cavusoglu to Athens to continue talks and this could help to prepare the ground for a meeting of Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis with Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan.





Pasdaran Apt (\$2200)
330sq.m, 4bdrs
indoor & outdoor pool
green yard
Large balcony
Fully Furn

Shanon (adviser)

Farmanieh Villa (\$5000)
1000sq.m, 5bdrs
in & outdoor pool
Sauna, balcony
nice green yard
enough pkg lots
Furn or Semi Furn

Parsian

Elahieh (\$1500) 1800sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, S, J, pkg, marble fl, & F.F
Niavaran (\$1800) 200sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, S, J, pkg, marble fl, & F.F

New , Nice, Neat & Bright Apt

Farmanieh (\$2800) 400sq.m, 4bdrs, S/p, S, J, balcony, & F.F
Zaferanieh (\$2500) 350sq.m, 4bdrs, S/p, S, J, balcony, & F.F

2bdrs Apts
Jordan (\$800) pkg, F.F
Velenjak (\$1400) pkg, F.F

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

Vanak (Apt-Villa) (\$2000)
400sq.m, 3bdrs, green yard
outdoor pool, pkg lot, & F.F



IRAN NEWS 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

Bitcoin Slumps 14% as Pullback From Record Gathers Pace

LONDON (Dispatches) - Bitcoin, the world's biggest cryptocurrency, fell as much as 14% to \$51,541 on Sunday, reversing most of the big gains it made over the past week.

Bitcoin was last trading down 10% at \$53,991 as of 1320 GMT, a whopping \$12,000 below record highs set on Wednesday. Smaller rival Ether, the coin linked to the ethereum blockchain network, dropped 10% to \$2,101.

Data website CoinMarketCap cited a blackout in China's Xinjiang region, which reportedly powers a lot of bitcoin mining, for the selloff.



Italy Risks Missing Recovery Plan Deadline Due to EU Concerns

ROME (Reuters) - Italy risks missing an April 30 deadline for submitting a final version of its Recovery Plan to the European Commission because Brussels is not satisfied with several aspects of the drafts presented so far, two sources close to the matter said.

A spokesman for Prime Minister Mario Draghi firmly denied that the deadline would be missed. "The plan will be presented on April 30," he said. An Economy Ministry spokesman said "our aim remains to present it on April 30".

A delay would be a blow to Draghi, who took office two months ago tasked with fine-tuning the plan prepared by the previous government.

All 27 European Union countries have been working on their national plans which spell out how each government wants to spend its share of the EU's 750-billion-euro (\$900 billion) Recovery Fund joint borrowing scheme. Italy is eligible for more than 200 billion euros in grants and cheap loans from the Fund, the biggest slice of any EU country. The money will be disbursed gradually over six years.

"The Commission is unhappy with the Recovery Plan as it stands," said one of the sources, who asked not to be named due to the sensitivity of the matter.

The source said Draghi would probably present the plan around mid-May, but a longer period may be required to overcome the Commission's objections. Among Brussels' main concerns are a lack of detail over how the plan will be managed once it gets EU approval and the substance of some of the reforms outlined, including of the justice system, the source said. Another source also said Brussels wanted changes to the plan, which would require time, and said mid-May now seemed a "realistic" period for its presentation. Italy has not previously suggested it might be late, and Draghi told reporters on April 8 that "on April 30 we will deliver our plan".

A Commission spokeswoman said it had no comment to make on the Italian plan in particular, but the Commission understood that drawing up the Recovery Plans was a challenging task for all member states while they are also focused on tackling the COVID-19 pandemic. While the plans should be presented by April 30 as a rule, some countries "may need a few more weeks," she said, and "quality should be the first priority". She added that the Commission was currently in "intensive dialogue" with all countries on the preparation of their plans.

Commission Vice President Valdis Dombrovskis said on Friday that some EU countries would miss the April 30 target date, without saying which ones.

Draghi's main mission on taking office, along with the COVID-19 vaccination campaign, was to present a solid Recovery Plan to ensure the flow of the EU funds to finally unleash growth for the chronically sluggish economy.

The national plans are blueprints for spending grants and loans that each EU country will get from the unprecedented joint borrowing by the Commission to rebuild economies greener and more digital after the COVID-19 pandemic. In his comments on Friday, Dombrovskis said the delay in the submission of some plans would not push back the scheme as a whole, details of which still require ratification by some countries' parliaments. Provided any delays in the presentation of the plans are not too long, and the ratification is completed in all member states by June, the Commission can make first disbursements in July, Dombrovskis said.

Violence, Insecurity Threaten Afghan Economy

KABUL (Dispatches) - Growing insecurity, political instability, and a lack of confidence in Afghanistan's future has driven hundreds of businessmen out of the country, leading to almost \$1.5 billion in losses last year for the already fragile economy, the deputy head of Afghanistan's Chamber of Commerce and Investment (ACCI) told Arab News on Sunday.

"In 2020 alone, unfortunately, based on our estimates, 1,500 small-scale traders, investors and businessmen left the country because of infighting among government leaders, rising insecurity and corruption," Khan Jan Alokozai said.

"Our unofficial estimates indicate that there was capital flight of at least \$1.5 billion that was sent or taken overseas for investment last year," he added.

Alokozai traced the investors' exit to late 2014, when Afghanistan saw a drastic drawdown of US-led troops, resulting in infighting between President Ashraf Ghani and the then chief executive Dr. Abdullah Abdullah following allegedly fraudulent elections where both claimed victory. The power struggle between the two leaders was further exacerbated during the 2019 polls that allowed the Taliban to gain ground, even as regional commanders and self-proclaimed ethnic leaders "pushed for their type of future government."

It also follows a deadlock in the intra-Afghan peace talks between Ghani's government and Taliban representatives. The talks began in September last year and have failed to make any progress in the peace process.

Fearing a repeat of events due to internal divisions within the government — which led to the fall of the Moscow-backed communist regime in the 1990s, following the departure of the former Soviet Union's troops — Alokozai said that a majority of investors had opted to settle in Turkey instead, with "60 percent of the private sector shutting down their activities in Afghanistan in recent years." He added: "These traders have bitter experiences from the fall of Dr. Najib (communist-era president), which happened as a result of an internal war, and they want to leave now."

"About 60 percent of the private sector has ended activities in recent years. Factories have closed, and only those involved in businesses such as food and fuel items operate. We had some \$15 billion in our annual circulation, but it has dropped to \$6 or \$7 billion now," he added.

The losses have trickled down to the tertiary level as well, since most Afghan investors and traders "spend 25 percent of their income on bodyguards and armored vehicles, apart from the losses they incur due to daily violence across the country and the payment of bribes," Alokozai said.



Sri Lanka Secures \$1.5b Chinese Loan

COLOMBO (Dispatches) - Sri Lanka and China have signed a \$1.5 billion currency swap deal, the island nation's central bank said Tuesday, as it struggles with a major foreign exchange crisis and debt repayments.

Colombo had been negotiating for months to secure credit from China — its largest single source of imports — as the island's foreign reserves plummeted amid the pandemic.

Chinese influence in the South Asian nation has been growing in recent years, through loans and projects under its vast Belt and Road infrastructure initiative, raising concerns among regional powers and Western nations.

The Central Bank of Sri Lanka said the three-year swap arrangement for 10 billion yuan with the People's Bank of China was "with a view to promoting bilateral trade and direct investment for economic development of the two countries." Officials said talks were also under way to secure another \$700 million from the China Development Bank.

Sri Lanka's economy was already reeling from the deadly 2019 Easter bombings, with the coronavirus epidemic and lockdowns further weighing on growth.

The economy contracted by a record 3.9 percent last year.

Foreign reserves fell to \$4.5 billion in February from \$8.0 billion a year ago, despite Sri Lanka banning the import of luxury goods and vehicles as well as some food commodities. Under former president Mahinda Rajapaksa between 2005 and 2015, Colombo borrowed billions from China, accumulating a mountain of debt for expensive infrastructure projects. Rajapaksa returned to power as prime minister in 2019, after his brother Gotabaya Rajapaksa was elected president.

Sri Lanka was forced to hand over its strategic Hambantota port on a 99-year lease to a Chinese company in 2017 after Colombo said it was unable to service the \$1.4 billion debt from Beijing used to build it.

Power Companies Urge Biden to Implement Policies to Cut Emissions 80% by 2030

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - A group of U.S. electricity companies wrote to President Joe Biden this week saying it will work with his administration and Congress to design a broad set of policies to reach a near-term goal of slashing the sector's carbon emissions by 2030.

Washington should implement policies, including a clean energy standard, or CES, to ensure the electricity industry cuts carbon

emissions 80% below 2005 levels by 2030, the group of 13 power interests, including generators Exelon Corp, PSEG and Talen Energy Corp, said in a letter to Biden.

The letter, a copy of which was seen by Reuters, did not mention Biden's goal to fully decarbonize the power sector by 2035 as part of his strategy to fight climate change. But it said the 2030 timeline is consistent with Biden's wider goal of decarbonizing the entire economy by 2050.

"A federal policy framework can be designed to support the power sector's deployment of strategies that are technically feasible, ensure reliability, and maintain affordability for customers," said the letter, sent to Biden on Friday.

The White House did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The 2030 goal was consistent with Evergreen Action, an advocacy group that proposed a CES in February. Sam Ricketts, a co-founder, said utilities should worry less about the 2035 goal, and focus on early wins as the last portion of emissions cuts is the hardest to achieve. Several lawmakers, including Democrats U.S. Representative Frank Pallone and Senator Tina Smith, have introduced legislation that includes a CES.

The standard would set gradually rising targets for the power industry to cut emissions until they hit net-zero, with a range of methods from adopting wind and solar power, using existing and advanced nuclear energy, or sucking up carbon from coal and natural gas plants before they reach the atmosphere.

The White House this month included a CES in its \$2.3 trillion infrastructure package, without detailing how it would work.

Some plans for a CES include flexibilities such as allowing utilities to earn bankable credits for over-achieving in early years that could be used for compliance in later years when progress on cutting emissions becomes more difficult.

Turkish Economy to Have Strong Rebound in 2021

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Predictions point to Turkey's economy regaining its pace in 2021 in a rebound from coronavirus pandemic measures, while high inflation is forecast to remain its main issue, a survey showed last week.

The economy is expected to expand by 4.8% in 2021, according to the median forecast in a Reuters poll of 34 economists, surveyed between April 6-13.

The forecast comes as growth is expected to surge to 14.9% in the second quarter due to a so-called base effect. The poll median showed the economy was expected to expand 3.7% next year.

Turkey was one of only a few countries to avoid an economic contraction in last year's coronavirus fallout.

The gross domestic product (GDP) grew 5.9% in the fourth quarter and 1.8% in 2020 as a whole, according to official data. It contracted around 10% in the second quarter but recovered thanks to a burst of state bank lending in the second half of the year.

"In Turkey, authorities could revert to policies that prioritize short-term growth via looser monetary policy and faster loan growth," said UniCredit, revising up its 2021 growth forecast due to an expected expansion in the first quarter.

A sustainable easing of coronavirus restrictions and recovery in tourism could support the service sector, UniCredit also said in a research note, adding that exports would drive economic growth this year. The government this month reimposed weekend lockdowns, limited restaurant services and gatherings amid rising coronavirus infections, just before the summer tourism season, the main source of foreign currency revenue.

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on Tuesday announced new restrictions for the first two weeks of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan to contain surging cases, warning that tougher curbs could follow if case numbers did not drop.

Long an issue for the economy, Turkey's annual inflation climbed above 16% in March for the first time since mid-2019.

The Central Bank of the Republic of Turkey (CBRT) expects inflation to drop to 9.4% at year-end and has pledged tight policy until it hits the 5% target in 2023.

New CBRT Governor Şahap Kavcıoğlu has said tight monetary policy is needed for now, given high inflation.

The central bank lifted its benchmark policy rate — the one-week repo rate — from 10.25% to 19% under former chief Naci Ağbal. Ağbal was removed on March 20 after about five months on the job and two days after the higher-than-expected 200 basis points rate hike.

Malaysia Leads World in Islamic Economy, Finance for Eighth Consecutive Year



KUALA LUMPUR (Dispatches) — Malaysia continues to forge the way in Islamic economy and finance, leading the way for the eighth consecutive year based on the ranking by the Global Islamic Economy Indicator (GIEI). Its burgeoning Islamic financial technology (fintech) and economy sectors continue to flourish aided by governmental support and Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation's (MDEC) continuous push to expand the digitalization of the economy and an aggressive creation of a conducive ecosystem for which it can thrive on.

For years, the government of Malaysia has identified Islamic finance and Islamic digital economy as key economic growth activities towards achieving and maintaining its position as the global Islamic fintech hub. Malaysia is the largest sukuk issuer in the world as well as having one of the best halal standards globally.

"These global recognitions pave the way for Malaysia to continue to lead as the global Islamic fintech hub and towards becoming the heart of digital Asean. With our strong digital economy ecosystem within the Organization of Islamic Cooperation member nations, we have comparative advantage over others in providing syariah-compliant Islamic finance and fintech services globally."

"MDEC will continue to work with financial regulators and industry partners from all relevant areas to further enhance our capabilities, facilities and capacities to ensure we maintain our global leadership position," said MDEC vice-president of digitally-powered businesses division Gopi Ganesalingam.

According to the State of the Global Islamic Economy Report 2019/20, Muslims are expected to spend US\$2.4 trillion by 2024, up from US\$2.2 trillion in 2018.

GIEI also revealed that 66% of consumers are willing to pay more for ethical products while a report from Thomson Reuters projected syariah-compliant assets worldwide will reach US\$3.8 trillion by 2022. On top of the recently-signed Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement which created the world's largest trading bloc, Malaysia stand to capture 30% of the world population.

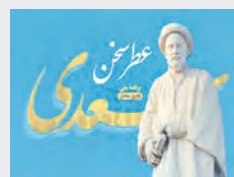
Iran to Hold Special Program To Mark Saadi Day on April 21

SHIRAZ (IRNA) - Iran will hold special program on the first day of Iranian month of Ordibehesht (April 21) to mark National Day of Saadi, the prominent Persian poet.

Office of libraries in southern Iranian province of Fars is to hold the program virtually.

The program is named smell of Saadi's words.

Saadi of Shiraz- born in 1,208 in Shiraz, capital city of Fars Province- is one of the Persian masters of Ghazal or love poem in the history of Persian poetry.



India in Crisis as Hospitals Run Out of Beds and Oxygen for COVID-19 Patients

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - An alarming spike in COVID-19 cases has created a crisis across India, particularly in the capital, New Delhi, recording more than 25,000 cases — about one in three of those tested — in the past 24 hours, according to official data.

The situation in New Delhi, which has a population of more than 20 million people, forced Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal to write to the federal government seeking more hospital beds. Several health care facilities have said they can no longer accommodate patients, leading to a rise in fatalities due to lack of space, oxygen cylinders and drugs.

"The situation in Delhi is very grim," Kejriwal wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

He asked the PM to "earmark 7,000 beds out of 10,000 in the federal government-run hospitals in Delhi" for COVID-19 patients to "tide over the crisis."

"There is an acute dearth of oxygen in Delhi, and it should be supplied immediately," Kejriwal added. On Sunday, India registered a record single-day rise of 261,500 coronavirus infections taking the nationwide case total to almost 1.48 million.

More than 1,500 people died from the coronavirus disease on Sunday alone, another record for the nation of 1.39 billion, bringing the national toll to 177,168 deaths.

Several residents in New Delhi said that most private and government hospitals had run out of beds with many patients desperate to get admitted to hospital.

"Since yesterday evening I have been trying to admit my sister in a hospital but seven or eight hospitals I reached refused admission," Tabish Jamal, a Delhi resident, told Arab News on Sunday.

"My sister's oxygen level is dipping, and she needs immediate medical intervention, but it's a grim scenario. We are so helpless," she said, adding that "a small nursing home with basic facilities" had admitted her sister, but "we are getting desperate."

Lucknow, the capital of the eastern state of Uttar Pradesh, is also facing a bleak scenario with media reports saying that people were "waiting in hordes to be admitted to hospitals," with at least 50 seen queueing outside the King George's Medical University, the city's main facility.

"It's a grim scenario in the city and around Lucknow," Kulsum Mustafa, a senior journalist in Lucknow, said on Sunday.

She accused the government of "hiding the exact figures and not showing the true picture."

"The fact is that there is not only an acute shortage of beds and oxygen, but the testing facilities are minimal too," Mustafa said.

India's most populous state, Uttar Pradesh reported close to 27,550 cases on Sunday making it the second-worst affected area, after the western state of Maharashtra, which had registered more than 67,000 patients in the past 24 hours.

Meanwhile, in the western state of Gujarat, which is PM Modi's home state, officials reported scenes of "chaos at most hospitals" in the capital city of Ahmedabad.

"Ahmedabad city, like other places in India, is facing a shortage of oxygen, hospital beds and important medicines such as Remdesivir," Dr. Mona Desai, chief of Ahmedabad Medical Association, said on Sunday.



"With the new variant of coronavirus, the oxygen level starts to dip very soon, and the state is not prepared to supply oxygen to all. The timely intervention of oxygen is important; otherwise, vital organs fail," she added.

On Sunday, Gujarat registered nearly 10,000 cases, which Desai said is "not the real figure."

"The death toll is high this time, but the government data is not showing that. I don't know why they hide the data."

Health Minister Harsh Vardhan said that the "oxygen production is being doubled."

"Oxygen production is being diverted from industrial to medical use. The center is providing additional ventilators to the states," he told a press conference on Sunday.

He said that Maharashtra, with Mumbai as its capital, would get 1,121 ventilators, Uttar Pradesh 1,700, Jharkhand 1,500, Gujarat 1,600, Madhya Pradesh 152 and Chhattisgarh 230.

Experts and medical practitioners, however, questioned the "sincerity of the government" in fighting the pandemic.

"It's more than one year, and the government is not ready to face the challenges posed by a coronavirus," Mustafa said, adding before questioning the "rationale of allowing the Hindu festival Kumbh to take place in this year." The Kumbh Mela is a month-long festival that takes place once every 12 years, with organizers expecting a footfall of 150 million Hindus — equivalent to the population of Russia — to converge on the northern state of Uttarakhand for a ritual dip in holy waters at four dedicated sites this year.

So far, 5 million people have visited the sacred sites since the festival began on April 1.

Kazakhstan's Economy Shows Steady Growth in Q1



NUR-SULTAN (Dispatches) - Kazakhstan's real sector of the economy has demonstrated a stable growth dynamic excluding the mining industry, reported Kazakh Minister of National Economy Aset Irgaliev during Last week's governmental meeting.

The results of the country's socio-economic development were discussed at the government session chaired by the Prime Minister.

"We have observed a trend of gradual improvement in the indicators of the basic sectors of the economy. In order to create additional conditions for increasing economic activity, the government will continue to implement comprehensive measures to support businesses," said Kazakh Prime Minister Askar Mamin at the meeting.

Fixed capital investment, also excluding mining, increased by 34 percent with high investment activity retained across the majority of the regions.

As a result, the GDP growth rate has improved from minus 2.9 percent to minus 1.6 percent between February and March. "Despite the serious impact of the global economic crisis, the economy of Kazakhstan is demonstrating a gradual recovery in key indicators," Mamin said.

Key industries include 7.5 percent growth in manufacturing, 13.1 percent in the construction industry and 2.8 percent in agriculture. In addition, annual inflation slowed down to 7.0 percent. The information and communications sector, in particular, demonstrated a 9.9 percent growth.

The car industry showed stable growth due to the production of cars, trailers and semi-trailers, machinery and equipment, production of computers, electronic and optical equipment, electrical equipment, repair and installation. The production of crude iron, carbon steel and ferrosilicomanganese increased. In the pharmaceutical industry, production increased by 9.1 percent.

Kazakhstan's 13 regions displayed economic growth with Nur-Sultan at the forefront due to its growth in the production of concrete, refined gold, railway cars and locomotives. Almaty city's growth has been achieved due to the increase in the production of metal structures, buses and concrete. The Almaty region's economic development has been propelled by the growth in the production of tobacco products and batteries.

Cuban Economy, Internet on Party Agenda Ahead of Castro Exit

HAVANA (Dispatches) - A dire economic crisis and the "subversive" nature of the internet were on the agenda Saturday and Sunday as a historic congress of the Communist Party of Cuba meets ahead of longtime leader Raul Castro's departure from power.

Some 300 delegates from across the country are gathered in Havana for the congress, which began Friday and is being held behind closed doors. Castro, 89, will step down as the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) first secretary -- the most powerful position in Cuba -- ending a near six-decade family hold on power that started in 1959 under his revolutionary brother, Fidel, who died in 2016.

The official handover of power to the first non-Castro is expected on the fourth and final day of the congress on Monday.

In the meantime, the delegates have been divided into three working committees to focus on the economy, "ideological activity," plus the party and leadership promotion.

Most urgent on the agenda is the economy, which plummeted by 11 percent in 2020 -- the worst decline since 1993 -- thanks in no small part to recent strengthening of the US embargo and the coronavirus pandemic.

On Friday, in his last major speech as party head, Castro called for "revitalizing the process of updating the economic and social model," an initiative he began in 2008 with the cautious opening of the private sector and foreign investment. Cuba, with a population of approximately 11.2 million, faces recurrent shortages and must import 80 percent of what it consumes for lack of sufficient local production.

Nonetheless, Castro warned Friday that "there are limits that cannot be crossed" as the economy opens "because the consequences would be irreversible and would lead to strategic errors, to the very destruction of socialism."

Another touchy subject in Cuba is the mobile internet, which arrived on the island at the end of 2018 and has strengthened citizens' demands for civil society and is even used by some to encourage demonstrations, previously unheard of in the country. On Saturday, some 20 activists, independent journalists and artists said on Twitter that they had been prevented from leaving their homes by police, a technique commonly used by authorities to prevent dissident gatherings.

Slamming social networks for "subversion" and the propagation of what he called fake news, Castro said the platforms spread "a virtual image of Cuba as a dying society with no future, on the point of collapse, giving out under a social explosion."

The notion, which he said was favored by the United States, demands "urgent transformation... on the ideological front."

Ties with the United States, after a historic but temporary easing of tensions under president Barack Obama between 2014 and 2016, worsened under Donald Trump, who reinforced sanctions.

Castro will pass the reins to 60-year-old Miguel Diaz-Canel, who has already served as Cuba's president since 2018.

Ukraine...

FROM PAGE 1

Khosravi described efforts made to take political advantage "of a bitter incident, which is related to sentiments of scores of bereft families" as "regrettable and inhuman," adding, "Various independent expert groups have delved into all the existing hypotheses about targeting of the Ukrainian plane."

All those groups, the Iranian official said, "have asserted categorically and based on technical and expert evidence that this incident has been unintentional and a result of human error."

"So far, no foreign authority has offered any other technical reason to dismiss or even undermine Iran's expert report [on this incident] and [some parties] are merely trying to mount political pressure on Iran by creating [an adverse] media atmosphere and provoking sentiments of the families of this incident's martyrs," Iran's security official said.

Khosravi concluded by saying that judicial measures are underway in hearing of culprits of this bitter incident and their punishment will be soon meted out through the competent court.

On January 8, 2020, the Ukraine International Airlines flight PS752, en route to Kiev and carrying mostly Iranians, crashed minutes after takeoff near the Iranian capital, killing all the 176 on board.

Tehran Welcomes...

FROM PAGE 1

In order to prevent the talks being erosive, Khatibzadeh said, Iran has offered its demands in text and has asked other participants of the JCPOA to do the same.

"If the U.S. administration decided to distance itself from Trump legacy and act in the framework of its commitments, the talks would move forward easier," he added.

He stressed that there would be no other deal except for the JCPOA, adding there have been signals from the American side but for Iran, what would be achieved is more important.

Referring to the Russian Foreign Minister's visit to Iran and the non-signing of a comprehensive cooperation document between Tehran and Moscow, Khatibzadeh said, "Two parallel documents are being completed. What is considered as a document of cooperation between the two countries is renewed every five years, which ended in April this year, and it is automatically renewed according to its contents."

"This document is valid, but we are working on a comprehensive cooperation document that was also discussed during this trip," he added, saying, "This document is being followed up and will be signed at an appropriate time."

Stating that Afghanistan's stability and security are of high priority for Iran, Khatibzadeh, said, "Peace talks must be between Afghans. Iran, as a neighbor, is ready to do its utmost in this direction. All regional actors and Afghanistan's neighbors should also play a supporting role."

"For the past 20 years, our policy has been for Afghan parties and groups to engage in dialogue with the Afghan government," he noted.

Referring to the consultations between Tehran and Kabul regarding the comprehensive document of cooperation between the two countries, he added, "Regarding bilateral relations, including the cooperation document, these talks have taken place and 99% of the cases have been agreed, and in some cases, the talks are ongoing."

Iran Aims to...

FROM PAGE 1

So, the sanctions affect imports and exports of commodities, as well as transportation and banking activities, he said, if the obstacles are removed, Iran can move in line with the economic growth predicted by Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei for the current year.

Zadboom also said that Iran's export indices show a 15 percent decrease in export in terms of weight and value in the last Iranian year (ended March 20, 2021) in comparison to the previous year, adding that the volume of imports also reduced 11.7 percent in terms of value and 5.8 percent in terms of weight.

Lockdown and border closure in the first three months of the last Iranian year caused a decline in export, the TOPI chairman said.

The reduction of gas export to Turkey in that year was an important element of the decrease in total export, he noted.

He also expects that trade events in the current Iranian year will help grow trade, adding that negotiations concerning free trade with the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and Pakistan, as well preferential trades with India, Serbia, Uzbekistan, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Azerbaijan, will be held virtually sooner in a bid to boost trade ties.

Zadboom further noted that five trade consultants were selected last year and they will be dispatched to Russia, China, Oman, Armenia, and the Republic of Azerbaijan, adding that Iran will add the number of consultants for trade ties with Pakistan and Iraq.

According to the official, India, Turkey, and Pakistan are the next countries on the list, where Iran will dispatch trade consultants to.

Islamabad...

FROM PAGE 1

Welcoming the resolution of disputes between members of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council, he stressed: "Pakistan has good relations with Islamic countries and supports the maintenance of peace and stability in the region."

Pakistani Foreign Minister's regional visit to four countries, including the Islamic Republic of Iran, began yesterday with the agenda of strengthening bilateral relations and consensus to advance the Afghan peace process.

Pakistani Foreign Minister is scheduled to travel to Tehran, Doha, and Ankara, respectively, after Abu Dhabi; The visit, which coincides with U.S. President Joe Biden's decision to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan by 9/11, is crucial.

He is expected to arrive in Tehran today (Tuesday).

Quartararo Wins Portuguese MotoGP

PORTIMAO (AFP) - Fabio Quartararo won his second consecutive race when he took the Portuguese MotoGP at Portimao on Sunday, with six-time champion Marc Marquez seventh in his first race back after nine months out. "I feel full confidence," said French Yamaha rider Quartararo, who started last season strongly only to fade out of contention. Italian Francesco Bagnaia on a Ducati was second with Spanish world champion Joan Mir of Suzuki third.

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

Young Boys Win Fourth Straight Swiss League Title

ZURICH (Dispatches) - Young Boys sealed a fourth consecutive Swiss Super League title with seven matches remaining in the season after a 3-0 home win over Lugano on Sunday. The Bern side also booked a spot in next season's Champions League second qualifying round. Cameroon forward Jean-Pierre Nsame scored a hat-trick at the Wankdorf Stadium. Victory over the visitors earned Young Boys their 15th league crown. The club urged fans not to congregate in the capital but to party at home instead, due to Covid-19 restrictions on public gatherings.

Verstappen Wins Chaotic Imola Classic

IMOLA (AFP) - Max Verstappen kept his cool to claim a chaotic rain-hit Emilia Romagna Grand Prix on Sunday as seven-time Formula One champion Lewis Hamilton recovered from a rare mistake to sneak in second.

Red Bull driver Verstappen muscled past pole sitter Hamilton on the first corner at Imola to set up his impressive first win of the season.

"I surprised myself. We worked really hard to make that better. In these tricky conditions we did a great job," the delighted Dutch driver said.

Lando Norris in a McLaren took third ahead of Charles Leclerc for Ferrari at the F1 giant's 'home' track close to their Maranello HQ.

The outcome of a compelling second leg of the Formula One season confirmed Verstappen's stature as a formidable obstacle to Hamilton's quest for an unprecedented eighth drivers' crown. After winning the season-opener in Bahrain and putting in the fastest lap on Sunday Hamilton leads Verstappen by a mere point - 44 to 43 - ahead of the Portuguese Grand Prix next time out.

Drama in the race itself had been on the cards as rain drenched the Autodromo Enzo e Dino Ferrari in the run up to lights out, sparking mayhem.

Aston Martin mechanics had to scramble to douse flames on the rear brakes of Lance Stroll's car, their counterparts at Mercedes got to work repairing a puncture on Valtteri Bottas' car, as Fernando Alonso's Alpine underwent a nose job after the two-time former champion hit a wall.

Drivers then stood under umbrellas during a passionate rendition of the Italian national anthem. As the last note faded, the Italian AirForce's Arrows squadron executed an immaculate and deafening flyby over the circuit.



The pair collided at over 300kmh on lap 34, both drivers shaken as their wrecked cars were lifted off the track. Russell was furious, remonstrating with Bottas before the Finn had even got out of his car, slapping his helmet.

The air was filled with four-letter expletives as the pair let off steam. Once back in the pits Russell tweeted: "Thanks for all the messages. I'm fine, just disappointed."

The red flags appeared a lap after an uncharacteristic slip-up from Hamilton saw the Mercedes world champion hurtle off the circuit into a gravel pit when placed second on a treacherous rain-hit track.

Half an hour after the suspension, a rolling re-start saw Verstappen set off in front of Leclerc and Norris. Hamilton, his car repaired, had work to do from ninth.

As Verstappen calmly reeled in his 11th career victory, but first in Italy, Hamilton weaved his way up to sit third, and then second after passing Norris with three laps remaining.

"On my side it wasn't the greatest of days. First time I've made a mistake in a long time, but I'm grateful I could bring he car home," said a relieved Hamilton.

He more than anyone had benefitted from the red flag intervention as his run-off had left him with a damaged car and one lap behind. "I was just trying to get over the gutting feeling when you make a mistake and moving on from it and learning from it - then get back into racing spirit and we still had some really fun battles with the guys," he reflected.

With Norris in third this was the first time two Britons had climbed the podium since 2012. "It is nice to be fighting these guys. Nice to be here on merit," said Norris.

Tsitsipas Wins Monte Carlo Open



MONTE CARLO (Dispatches) - Stefanos Tsitsipas crushed Andrey Rublev 6-3, 6-3 on Sunday in a one-sided final in the Monte Carlo Open for his first Masters 1000 title.

The Greek 22-year-old world No. 5 took one hour and 11 minutes to beat the Russian, ranked eighth, for the best victory in his career, after his triumph in the year-end Masters in 2019.

"I'm overwhelmed with emotion," said Tsitsipas. "It's the best win of my life so far."

"It is the best thing winning my first Masters 1000 and it is even more special doing it here on home soil in Monte-Carlo and doing it on clay, which is my favourite surface."

"I knew that he was going to be a very difficult opponent to face. There were a lot of nerves coming into that match," he added, noting that he and Rublev were old foes who "always want to bring the best out of each other."

The Greek's victory in their seventh meeting gave him a 4-3 advantage in their head-to-head meetings. "I'm proud of the way I handled myself on the court," he added.

Tsitsipas now has six titles on the ATP Tour, including the year-end Masters in 2019 and four ATP 250 tournaments (Stockholm 2018, Marseille and Estoril 2019, Marseille 2020).

Atletico Thump Eibar to Move Four Points Clear

MADRID (Dispatches) - Atletico Madrid put their La Liga title challenge back on track by thrashing Eibar 5-0 on Sunday to go four points clear at the top of the table.

Four wins in 11 league games had seen Atletico's 10-point advantage in February reduced to one before this weekend, with Real Madrid and Barcelona threatening to overtake the leaders during the run-in.

But a thumping victory over struggling Eibar may prove the spark to turn Atletico's form around while also putting pressure on Real Madrid.

Fourth-placed Sevilla, six points adrift, could yet join the race after they defeated Real Sociedad 2-1 earlier on Saturday.

Barcelona, who beat Athletic Bilbao to win the Copa del Rey on Saturday, are five points off the top, with their next game on Thursday at home to Granada.

Atletico's problems were deepened by an injury to their top scorer Luis Suarez earlier this month but Marcos Llorente and Angel Correa filled the void, both scoring twice either side of Yannick Carrasco making it three just after half-time.

It is the first time Atletico have scored five goals since they hammered Cadiz back in September, a comfortable win appearing almost cathartic for a team that have struggled so much for goals in recent weeks.

Eibar, who stay rooted to the bottom of the table, were perhaps the perfect opponents for the start of a recovery but games against Huesca, the out-of-form Athletic Bilbao and Elche should now offer Atletico a chance to regain momentum before a crunch trip to Barcelona on May 8.

Atletico scored four goals in 11 minutes either side of half-time, with Correa finding the net in the 42nd and 44th minutes, first prodding in at the back post before twisting on Carrasco's pull-back to make it two.

Carrasco then scored himself four minutes after the interval, sent clear by Saul Niguez's ball over the top and poking it through the goalkeeper's legs to finish.

Nagelsmann Tipped to Join Bayern Munich



football on Saturday by revealing he wants to be released from his Bayern contract, which runs until 2023, at the end of the season.

However, in a terse statement on Sunday, Bayern's management said it "disapproves of the one-sided communication by Hansi Flick".

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Julian Nagelsmann is top of the German media's list of contenders to become the next head coach of Bayern Munich while the club said Sunday it "disapproves" of Hansi Flick's bombshell announcement that he wants to leave the club world champions.

Despite steering Bayern to the treble by winning the Champions League last season, Flick sent shock waves through German football on Saturday by revealing he wants to be released from his Bayern contract, which runs until 2023, at the end of the season.

However, in a terse statement on Sunday, Bayern's management said it "disapproves of the one-sided communication by Hansi Flick".

The club's board said Flick informed it of his wish to leave on Saturday but both sides had agreed to focus on next week's league matches against Leverkusen and Mainz "so as not to disrupt the full concentration of the entire club".

Last month, Bayern chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge said that he would "have to be crazy" to grant an early contract release for Flick, who has been tipped to replace Joachim Loew as head coach of Germany.

On Saturday, Flick would only say his reasons for wanting to leave "remain internal for now".

However, simmering tensions with Bayern sports director Hasan Salihamidzic over recruitment and squad planning are believed to be a factor.

"It is a great relief for him to have communicated this officially," former Bayern captain Lothar Matthaeus and TV pundit told Sky on Sunday.

"There was no other way to solve it (the tension between Flick and Salihamidzic), the cloth had been cut."

UEFA Will Ban Breakaway Clubs Competing in Super League



NYON (Dispatches) - UEFA and English, Spanish and Italian football authorities announced on Sunday that any clubs who take part in a so-called European Super League would be banned from all other domestic and continental competitions.

European football's governing body (UEFA) said it had learned that some English, Spanish and Italian clubs might announce a breakaway competition.

"The clubs concerned will be banned from playing in any other competition at domestic, European or world level, and their players could be denied the opportunity to represent their national teams," UEFA said in a statement.

Media reports on Sunday suggested that an announcement on plans to create a Super League could be made later in the day.

Sky Sports reported that Liverpool, Manchester United, Arsenal and Chelsea were among six Premier League teams set to be part of the plans.

"If this were to happen, we wish to reiterate that we -- UEFA, the English FA, RFEF, FIGC, the Premier League, La Liga, Lega Serie A, but also FIFA and all our member associations -- will remain united in our efforts to stop this cynical project, a project that is founded on the self-interest of a few clubs at a time when society needs solidarity more than ever," read the statement.

UEFA is planning to announce its reforms to the Champions League on Monday, with an expansion to 36 teams from 32 and two 'wildcard' slots expected to be among the plans.

There have been no reports that French or German clubs would be part of the Super League.

"We thank those clubs in other countries, especially the French and German clubs, who have refused to sign up to this," UEFA added.

Federer Will Play at Roland Garros



PARIS (Dispatches) - Roger Federer confirmed on Sunday he will play the French Open at Roland Garros this year having skipped the 2020 edition to recover from knee surgery.

"Hi everyone! Happy to let you know that I will play Geneva and Paris. Until then I will use the time to train. Can't wait to play in Switzerland again," the 39-year-old said on Twitter.

Federer, a 20-time Grand Slam winner, captured Roland Garros for the only time in 2009. His last appearance in the French capital in 2019 ended in a semi-final loss to Rafael Nadal, now a 13-time champion.

Should Nadal triumph again in June, he will win a record-setting 21st major.

Federer, who will turn 40 in August, has played just one tournament in 2021, winning one match in Qatar in March on his return from 13 months on the sidelines after undergoing two bouts of knee surgeries. He had been intending to return to action on clay in Madrid from May 2 but will now have his only pre-Paris warm-up in Geneva from May 16.

Roland Garros will start on May 30, a week later than originally scheduled.

Federer, with 103 career titles to his name, has not won a tour clay title since Istanbul in 2015. For the great Swiss, his two major objectives in 2021 are an assault on a ninth Wimbledon crown and a gold medal in singles at the Tokyo Olympics. His brief excursion into the clay season is a means of helping to build match sharpness before Wimbledon.

"I'll just see how much workload the body and the knee still take and what's the best way to prepare all the way for basically the beginning of the season for me, which is the grass court season," Federer said in Doha. "What comes before the grass courts are the clay courts. So from that standpoint, I have no choice but to play on clay if I want to play matches," he added.