

2 DOMESTIC

Haniyeh Pens New Letter To Supreme Leader to Brief on Palestine



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Iranian, UK Businesses Discuss Future Ties

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Businesses from Iran and the United Kingdom as well as UK government officials have attended meetings in the embassies of the two countries in Tehran and London to discuss potentials for increased trade and economic cooperation in the near future.

Iran's official IRNA news agency said in a Thursday report that the meetings had been held a day earlier under the auspices of joint chambers of commerce that represent businesses in Iran and Britain.

Paul Wilson, who serves as Director General at British Iranian Chamber of Commerce, told IRNA reporter in London that the meetings showed that there is a genuine tendency on the side of the UK to engage with Iran economically in case the country is relieved from sanctions imposed by the United States. Wilson said that the UK government would have not dispatch representatives to the meeting held in the Iranian embassy in London if it was not eager to expand economic ties with Tehran.

The IRNA report said the meetings were mostly focused on opportunities for cooperation between Iranian and UK businesses in the fields of agriculture, livestock farming and trade.

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Time for U.S. to Lift Sanctions



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's top negotiator at the Vienna talks says it is time for the United States to lift sanctions against Iran and return to the 2015 nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

Abbas Araqchi said the negotiating teams present in the talks have not yet decided on some key issues.

"Talks on reviving the JCPOA will continue after the May 21 deadline," he said, referring to the date when an agreement between Iran and the IAEA expires.

"The Iranian delegation is leaving Vienna hoping that it can resume work next week," said the senior negotiator. He further expressed hope that the discussions will produce the desired outcome.

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In a thought-provoking move by the government, the private sector is once again at the corner of the ring. Ministries such as the Ministry of SAMT these days are trying to stone the private sector and support production under any pretext. They have taken measures that not only do not facilitate production, but also mock Article 44 of the country's constitution. In this regard, we can point to the controversial margins of the transfer of the Sheytur iron ore mine to Mobarakeh Steel Company of Isfahan. The veracity of this measure has not been confirmed, but despite the highest bid submitted by the private sector for the acquisition of the Sheytur mine, the subdivisions of the Ministry of SAMT are reluctant to announce the winner of the auction. They prefer to experience the same fate as many semi-government mines and be run directly by the government. The interesting thing about this is that despite being the obvious winner of the auction, Sheytur is one of the private sector companies. There is no desire to assign this issue. Rather, lobbying for the mine has been started by private-state companies. In the meantime, the name of Mobarakeh Steel Company of Isfahan is heard. Although the company is the largest steel producer in Iran, but due to the illegal employment of retirees in its management, which has led to many violations, as well as its private-public nature has been repeatedly criticized by MPs and even mining experts. However, once again, an atmosphere has been created in which the lobby of private-state companies to take over the mines has intensified. At a time when, despite all the inconveniences in the field of production, especially mining, the private sector has taken action to save the mines from government confinement, and even, for example, in the mining auctions, has proposed a higher proposal to the Ministry of SAMT than private-state companies. But the story of paper transfers and government closures does not seem to be over. The Ministry of SAMT is not only not very accountable for the poor condition of companies transferred to private-state companies, but also continues to follow the procedure. This is one of the scourges of the implementation of Article 44 of the Constitution.

Confusion of production people

These days, various officials in the country are talking about removing barriers and supporting production. It seems a good thing, but in the opinion of experts, it is necessary to fulfill these words, to be fully acquainted with the conditions and characteristics of the field of action and to know the ways of realization, and finally the courage and will to make timely and appropriate decisions. It seems that the Ministry of SAMT and its subdivisions are in charge of the largest production sectors in the country, but lack these three main elements, and this has caused confusion among residents and activists in the field of industry and mining. The employment and transfer of two ministers and supervisors in the most sensitive Ministry of Industry of the country during the last three years was entrusted to those who did not have the responsibility of a mine or a large industry even before. They do not even have any background in this regard. Also, the lack of expertise in diagnosing complications and recognizing problems, especially

in the mining sector and mining industries, is one of the problems that have caused the production sector in the country not to have a suitable trustee for growth and development.

Lack of transparency in policies

Other factors that have marginalized the private sector include the replacement of three deputy miners in the Ministry of SAMT in less than a year, the issuance of contradictory instructions in the presentation of steel chain products, the lack of transparency in steel chain export policies, the creation of rents with golden signatures, Export ticks in the ministry with rent, even the vague stages of order registration, lack or support of domestic production, Imidro overselling, subordination of subsidiaries in the sale of lumps, transfer of mines without considering the scope of bids and creating false competition. They were content with just one sentence of the law on the transfer of mines through auctions in order to absolve themselves of responsibility. These are issues that have not only marginalized the private sector and real producers, but also provided the space to hit high-value sectors of the economy. On the other hand, the lack of correction of iron ore sales rates in old contracts based on free rates and world prices, and at the same time the violation of these contracts by the Ministry of SAMT, has played a role in creating export duties and preventing exports and domestic sales. The non-observance of Article 90 of Article 44 of the Privatization Law in compensating for these decisions also calls into question the claims of the officials of this ministry regarding the protection of production. It seems that these words are purely propaganda and in practice no effective action is taken to remove the barriers to production that the Supreme Leader desires.

Pressure from private-state companies

But it seems that the officials of various ministries of the country, including the Ministry of SAMT and its subdivisions, including Imidro and the Iranian Minerals Production Company, do not intend to put an end to the false procedures in their collections. They do not want to direct the domestic environment for the growth of production and industry in a positive direction, along with the spread of good international news about the revival of Borjam. That is why, even if the international environment for Iran's economic growth and development goes well, it will still not be possible to lift domestic sanctions unless the country's authorities make a serious decision and work to support production. The story of the Sheytur mine is also one of the issues that has been marginalized by the government due to the negligence of the country's officials towards privatization as well as ownership in economic affairs.

Dominance of State-owned private Companies Over the Sheytur Mine

One of the private sector activists in the auction offered a higher price than the state-owned private companies and actually won the auction. But private-state steel and mining companies have come under pressure from all directions to re-establish inefficient private-public management of the mine. The final winner has not been determined yet. The CEO of Kian Foolad Damavand Company told: "Sheytur Iron Ore Mine is located 85 km southeast of Bafgh city center in Yazd province." The final winner of the operation of this mine has not been determined by the Ministry of SAMT. Mohammad Alizadeh stated: Sheytur iron ore mine was one of the large mines that was in the possession of the government. The Minerals Production Company, on behalf of Imidro, published the auction documents of this mine in October 2020 so that the government would award this mine to the best bidder. In this regard, he said: "One of the most important conditions mentioned in this auction was that only those who work in the steel chain should participate in this auction." Alizadeh continued: Damavand Kian Steel Company participated in this auction along with companies such as Mobarakeh Steel Company, Zobahan Ahan and Sangahan Markazi Iran. Finally, the company won the first place in the reopening session of the envelopes by obtaining 75 points and presenting 91% of the bid price of iron ore to Imidro, compared to other competitors such as Mobarakeh Steel and Isfahan Steel Company with a price offer of 90%.

No response was given to us

The CEO of Damavand Kian Steel Company said: This company gained the highest score in the face of competitors in the iron ore and steel market. The important point is that this auction does not have a second winner because the price difference between the first and second person is more than the guaranteed amount. This means that Kian Foolad Company should have been announced as the winner of the Sheytur mine auction immediately after this issue was determined. Alizadeh continued: About five and a half months have passed since the opening of the envelopes. We are waiting for the task to be determined. The Minerals Production Company announces that we are still investigating. He stated: "Of course, this New Year's Eve, the secretary of the transaction commission of the Mineral Production Company announced in response to our company's repeated letters that this issue is being investigated." But after that, despite going to Impasco several times to follow up in person, we were not answered. The CEO of Damavand Kian Steel Company stated: "We have heard that Impasco intends to transfer the Sheytur mine to Isfahan

Mobarakeh Steel Company with these delays." This is while the auction does not have a second person, but there are interactions that show that the preparations for this work are being prepared. Alizadeh said: Kian Foolad Company is 100% private sector and has no affiliation with private-public holdings. It is not clear why, despite the company winning the auction, the issue remains unresolved. It is unknown at this time what he will do after leaving the post.

There is nothing left until the end of 6 months

In response to a question about whether the Ministry of SAMT and its subdivisions have violated in this regard, he said: "According to the auction documents, no violation has taken place." Systematically, Impasco has six months to announce the outcome. But there is nothing left until the end of this time, while we have not yet received an answer. The CEO of Kian Steel Damavand Company added: "Since the country is currently facing a shortage of iron ore and steel companies are in dire need of iron ore for production, they should have announced the result of this auction to the winner much earlier." In fact, plans for steel production at the macro level of the country make it necessary to announce the winner of this auction sooner, because iron ore mining is the first stage of the steel production chain. According to the proposed percentage, Kian Foolad Company is supposed to pay 91% of the price of the extracted iron ore to the government and take 9% of the investment profit. Alizadeh replied: "This action is possible for us and is economically viable." If you consider a unit that only operates in the mining sector, this would be detrimental to it. But Kian Foolad Company is located during the steel cycle and plays a role from mining to activities such as the production of concentrate, pellets, sponge iron, ingots and finally rebar. Therefore, this measure is economically viable for our company. In fact, we can say that we have recognized our profit in the production of rebar. He continued: "We intend to enter the mining sector and supply the raw materials of this industry, and for this purpose, we have participated in the Sheytur mine auction."

Planning for additional explorations

Alizadeh emphasized: We are waiting for the announcement of the winner of the Sheytur mine auction. In this way, Damavand Kian Steel Holding provides them with the raw materials of steel production factories and brings these factories out of the recession. Kian Foolad Holding chain is becoming more complete than before and can have a say among steel industry activists. He also said about the Sheytur iron ore mine: the registered amount of 61 million tons of magnetite with an average grade of 35 to 37 percent. We anticipate that with additional

exploration at the mine, the company will add about 200 to 300 million tons to its reserves. With further discoveries, the carat will probably reach 45%. The CEO of Kian Foolad Damavand Company continued: "After acquiring the mine, we plan to carry out additional explorations along with extraction and exploitation." In fact, our first priority is to complete exploration in the mine and increase reserves. He added: "After producing concentrate in this complex, in the first stage, we will supply it to pellet producers in Yazd province, because some pellet producers in this province have empty capacity." However, in the current situation, Sheytur mine does not have a proper access road and we are looking to build a suitable road for mining activities. In addition, we plan to build a 60-kilometer railway. The private sector activist also criticized the fact that the current cost of extracting each ton of ore is very high, saying that since miners have to obtain the currency they need from the open market, importing machinery will be very expensive for the miner. And this has a direct impact on increasing mining costs. While the government should increase the desire of investors to participate in this sector by providing subsidies or any other support.

Government departments should be left to the people

Although Hassan Rouhani, the head of the 12th government, announced in January 2018 during the presentation of the 98th budget bill to the parliament that he insists every day that the parts belonging to the government be handed over to the people, it seems that the subordinate organs of the government are very reluctant. They do not have privatization. In this regard, even Mohammad Reza Poorabrahimi, the head of the Economic Commission of the parliament, has repeatedly criticized the transfer of companies and mines and stated that the transfer was mainly to groups that were not real private sector. In fact, the government ostensibly transferred the property, but all the enterprises are managed by the government. However, if our private sector was active in the country, the impact of sanctions on the country would be much less today. In this regard, regarding the transfer of the Sheytur iron ore mine in Yazd to Mobarakeh Steel, although it is said that this is not true and according to the tender figures of this company, it is in the third place, but the evidence shows something else. In fact, the transfer will be approved when Imidro and the Trading Commission approve the contract. Unfortunately, Imidro has not yet made a final decision on the Sheytur mine, and the role of the private company that won the auction is unclear. According to the official institutions, out of the total number of mines with exploitation licenses in the country, the licenses of about 50 large mines in the country belong to Impasco Imido, in the name of development organizations and state-owned companies. According to the Supreme Leader, Article 44 should be applied in the country and the facilities of the private sector in various economic fields should be considered by the government. Unfortunately, we see that in the name of privatization, more than 20,000 billion toman of Imidro assets have been given to quasi-governments. Government pressure to seize the country's mines continues.

Tehran Keen to Expand Its Cooperation With Dublin

TEHRAN (IFP) - Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has held talks on issues of mutual interest with Irish President Michael D. Higgins during his trip to Dublin.

In the Wednesday meeting, the Iranian Foreign Minister expressed Tehran's interest in expanding its collaborations with Dublin in political, economic, and cultural fields, which was welcomed by the Irish president. The two sides also conferred on the latest developments in Palestine, Yemen, and Afghanistan.

At the end of this meeting, Foreign Minister Zarif presented President Higgins with a book of poems by Omar Khayyam on the occasion of the birth anniversary of the eminent poet.

Haniyeh Pens New Letter To Supreme Leader to Brief on Palestine

TEHRAN (MNA) – Head of the Palestinian resistance movement Hamas Ismail Haniyeh penned a new letter to the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei to brief him on the latest developments revolving around Palestine.

Haniyeh, head of the Palestinian resistance movement, has penned a new letter to the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Thursday to brief him on the ongoing developments in occupied Palestine.

The Hamas leader called for the mobilization of Arab, Islamic and international support in order to stop the brutal crimes of the Zionists against the Palestinian people and Al-Aqsa Mosque amid ongoing deadly aggression on Gaza and Quds.

"The crimes against the Palestinians began exactly on April 13, when the Zionist occupiers and settlers attacked Al-Aqsa Mosque, occupied Jerusalem and the Sheikh Jarrah area. Our nation opted for patience against the Zionist regime's aggression. We in the Hamas Islamic Resistance Movement also consider it our duty to respond decisively to these aggressions," the Hamas leader says to begin his letter.

He went on to talk about the Zionists action in evicting 28 Palestinian families from Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in holy Quds to change the demography of the holy city followed by blocking the Bab al-Amoud with the aim of preventing Palestinian worshippers from going to Al-Aqsa Mosque and to prevent them from performing their religious rites as the beginning of the new Israeli aggression.

"In the face of these endless crimes, in consultation with various regional parties, we needed to immediately mobilize Islamic, Arab and international positions in order



to take a decisive stance and force the Zionist enemy to stop its crimes against the people of the besieged Gaza," he said, adding "We demanded an end to any aggression against the residents of Al-Quds and its holy places, and an end to any aggression against Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Palestinian worshippers."

"The insistence of the criminal leaders of the Zionist regime on continuing their aggression against the nation, the land and the holy sites of Palestine required a decisive and legitimate response through resistance in the Gaza Strip," the letter continues.

The Hamas leader goes on to call for "immediate action to take a firm stance against these crimes and to try to mobilize Arab, Islamic and international support to prevent the Zionist enemy from continuing its brutal crimes against the Palestinian people and its land and holy places in the occupied Quds city."

In the end, Haniyah asks God al-mighty to give health to the Leader and success and prosperity to the Islamic Republic.

World Powers Agree to Lift Oil, Banking Sanctions on Iran

TEHRAN (IFP) - President Hassan Rouhani says the world powers involved in the ongoing negotiations in Vienna have agreed to remove the anti-Iran sanctions in the oil, banking, shipping, and insurance fields.

"Those involved in the Vienna talks acknowledge that all major sanctions will be removed," Rouhani said on Thursday. "The current negotiations are just focused on small details," he added, referring to the ongoing talks in Vienna between Tehran and the P4+1.

"They have accepted to remove all major sanctions including those related to oil, petrochemical, shipping, insurance, and banking fields as well as the Central Bank," he added.

The Iranian president said, "It is over now. We have taken the main and big step. The deal on key issues has been reached." He at the same time noted that "there are points on which we are negotiating to reach a final deal, but the government has done its job."

Continuation of Sanctions as a Negotiation Tool Unacceptable

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif on Friday said that the continuation of the sanctions against Iran should not be applied by the US administration as a negotiation tool.

The fundamental change of the approach, as a prerequisite for making Vienna talks successful, is the political decision that the US president must make to this end, Zarif told the EU's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell over the phone.

During the telephone conversation, both sides conferred on the latest situation of the Vienna talks, the achieved outcomes as well as the remaining issues to be discussed.

Thanking Burrell for his efforts, Zarif criticized the continuation of US economic terrorism over the past five months and the prolonged violation of its obligations.

Childbearing Down by 25%

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - A Health Ministry official says that in the past four years, childbearing in Iran has decreased by "25 percent" and that "the country's rationality" should take immediate action to resolve the problem.

Hamed Barakati, director general of the Ministry of Health's Office of Population, Family and Schools, told ISNA news agency.

He also told Tasnim news agency in March 2020 that future population declines would be more dangerous for Iran than the current coronavirus challenge.

In general, he has declared the population situation in Iran "declining" and "difficult" over the past few years, but added that in the last four years, the decline has become very significant.

"From 1,570,000 births in 2015 to 1,196,000 in 2019 and 1,120,000 in 2019, we are still in a declining trend," Barakati said.

"The opportunity to intervene is short and the rationality of the country, with every creed and profession, and in every political front, right or left, should believe this and work to resolve it," the health ministry official said.

"We are on the edge of a path that if we don't do something now, we can't solve the problem easily anymore, if the fertility index falls below 1.5, it becomes almost impossible to return to normal demographic trends," according to the health ministry official.

According to him, the fertility number in Iran in 1981 is about 6.8% and currently, it is 1.7%.

In another part of her remarks, the Director General of the Iranian Ministry of Health's Office of Population, Family and School Health identified women as "population generating engines", adding, "We currently have about 23 million women of reproductive age."

Explaining the decline in fertility rates in Iran, she said: "One million and 120,000 births in 2019 are fertile with 23 million women, while 2 million and 200,000 births took place in the early 1980s with 10.5 million women of childbearing age."

"The fertility rate per woman has dropped by nearly a quarter, and the trend is very worrying, especially since we are also below the replacement level," Barakati reported.

No Sanctions, Pressures Will Deter Iran From Supporting Palestine



TEHRAN (PressTV) - The commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) says no matter how much pressures and sanctions are imposed on the Islamic Republic, it will never let Palestine be alone in its confrontation with the Zionist regime.

According to Lebanon's al-Mayadeen news network, Brigadier General Esmail Qa'ani made the remarks in separate letters on Thursday to Mohammed Deif, chief of staff and supreme commander of the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades, which is the military wing of Hamas resistance movement, and Akram al-Ajouri, who heads al-Quds Brigades, the military wing of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

"I reiterate here that we abide by the promise made to you by [former] martyred commander [of the Quds Force] Hajj Qassem Soleimani. No matter how much pressure mounts [on Iran] and to what degree sanctions are intensified, we will never let Palestine be alone," the Iranian commander said in his letter to Deif.

"We will not stop until the usurping Zionist regime is annihilated and every inch of the land of Palestine is liberated," the Iranian commander said.

"The Operation al-Quds Sword has clearly proven that those who were involved in the process of selling out Palestine did this on their own behalf and will soon regret what they have done," General Qa'ani said in clear reference to normalization deals signed between a number of Arab countries' governments and Israel during past months through agreements brokered by Trump.

Elsewhere in his letter to Deif, General Qa'ani said that today, "the enemy is well aware that Palestine is not alone, but the resistance front is getting more extended and stronger with every passing day."

Noting that Palestinian resistance groups have pulled off a huge epic task through their steadfastness, and proven the weakness of the enemy, the Quds Force's commander added, "al-Quds continues to be the compass of the resistance front and the Kiblah of its jihad."

In his letter to Ajouri, the commander of IRGC's Quds Force lauded the unity and steadfastness of Palestinian resistance groups, which in his words "brought humiliation to the Zionist army" of Israel.

Qa'ani noted that capabilities of resistance groups are much higher than the enemy has seen so far or can even imagine, saying, "We will stand with you with our soul and spirit... We have no doubt that we will [finally] enter al-Aqsa Mosque and say prayer in it with power and dignity."

He concluded his letter to Ajouri by saying, "I kiss the hands of all those fighters who made possible this brilliant victory."

Outcome of Vienna Talks Must Be Practical

TEHRAN (IP) - The first deputy speaker of the Iranian Parliament said that the outcome of the nuclear talks in Vienna should lead to practical and effective measures.

Amir-Hossein Ghazizadeh-Hashemi explained the parliament's position on a possible agreement to revive the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in Vienna.

Ghazizadeh-Hashemi said: "If the outcome of the Vienna talks only leads to the signing of two texts, this agreement is worthless." He said: "The way how the agreement will be implemented in the text must be clear, otherwise the agreement is useless and just good news that does not lead to practical measures."

Ghazizadeh-Hashemi went on to say: "The structure of the talks was attritional and time-consuming for the Americans. Given that Iran has fulfilled its commitments, but the Americans have not, the US can now benefit the time."

Western Countries Complicit in Israeli Crimes

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif says some Western states' routine way of backing the oppressor against the oppressed in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict amounts to their abetment of the Israeli regime's atrocities.

Zarif made the remarks to a Thursday meeting of the United Nations General Assembly held to address more than a week of significant and hugely deadly escalation by the Israeli regime against the blockaded Palestinian territory of the Gaza Strip.

"The immoral approach of some Western governments in equating victims with culprits is reprehensible, unjust, and unacceptable," said the statement that was read out by Majid Takht Ravanchi, Iran's permanent ambassador to the UN.

Such approach, the statement added, "amounts to complicity in the crimes perpetrated against Palestinians."

The foreign minister was referring to the decades-old attitude on the part of the United States and its European allies of upholding the occupying and aggressive regime's so-called "right to defend itself" against the Palestinians.

Those states have reiterated the position since last Monday, when the regime began ramping up its assaults against Gaza. Hundreds of Palestinians have died and more than 1,400 others injured in the escalation.

Citing an instance of the unjust approach, Zarif noted how the US has been preventing the United Nations Security Council from upholding the UN Charter by passing the relevant resolution in condemnation of the savagery.

"And yet, the Security Council – despite the continued mass dispossession, occupation, and persecution of the Palestinian people by the Israeli regime – remains obstructed by the US from upholding its Charter duties and shouldering its responsibility to stop violation of United Nations resolutions," he said.

The top diplomat also pointed to the regime's intensified attacks against the Palestinians in the occupied West Bank over the past weeks, including its efforts to evict them from the territory's Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood.

He underscored that the atrocities had come against the backdrop of "more than seven decades," through which "the Israeli brutal policies and practices have continued to violate the fundamental human rights and dignity of the Palestinian people." Zarif urged the Assembly to live up to its duty to condemn the Israeli brutality, and reiterated Iran's changeless support for the Palestinians in the face of the regime's occupation and aggression.

GC Extends Candidate Vetting Process After Missing 1st Deadline

TEHRAN (PressTV) – The Guardian Council has extended the process of vetting candidates for the June 18 presidential election, saying it needs another five days to finalize the examinations.

"We have not reached a final conclusion with regard to reviewing the qualifications, and we are going to use the second 5-day deadline," Abbas-Ali Kadkhodae, the Council's spokesman, said in a TV interview.

Presidential candidates running for the June 18 election had until Saturday to register. The Guardian Council Council was expected to wrap up the vetting within five days, but under Iranian election law, the body can extend the process for another five days.

Approved candidates can begin campaigning on May 28.

"In the morning and in the afternoon today, we held meetings to review the qualifications of the candidates, and given the expert reports and the meticulousness of the esteemed members [of the Council], the reviews will continue," Kadkhodae said.

He said it is highly unlikely that the Guardian Council would be able to announce the results to the Interior Ministry before the 10-day deadline, adding that it takes hours for the members of the Council to study each case and reach a conclusion.

According to Kadkhodae, the Council is checking out only the 40 candidates who submitted the required documents during the registration period.

Meanwhile, the Interior Ministry has announced that 592 people, including 552 men and 40 women, registered as candidates between May 11 and May 15.

The spokesman also dismissed rumors about the number of approved candidates, saying neither he nor any other 12 members of the Constitutional Council know who will receive the 7 votes needed from the Council members.

In recent days, unofficial social media accounts have published what they claimed to be the names of approved candidates. Earlier on Wednesday, Kadkhodae dismissed all lists as "fake news".

"These days, there is a lot of fake news circulating about reviewing the [candidates'] qualifications," he wrote in a tweet.



Announced at the Annual General Assembly;

Profit Sharing 1300 Rials Doodeh Sanati Pars In the year 1400

Doodeh Sanati Pars Co, one of the subsidiaries of Social Security Investment Company (Shasta) in 2020, faced a 92% increase in net profit. The company was able to distribute a cash dividend of 130 Tomans per share in the annual general assembly of the company. According to the report of the board of directors, the net profit of Pars Industrial Soot reached 67 billion Tomans. Despite the conditions caused by the outbreak of Corona, the company was able to see a 30% increase in operating income by adopting appropriate strategies to reach 341 billion tomans of revenue from the sale of the company. The annual general assembly of the company, which was held in person and online with the presence of 80% of shareholders. The CEO of Doodeh Sanati Pars Co presented the report of the board of directors. Engineer Mohammadi emphasized: Although at the beginning of last year, due to the corona outbreak and the resulting recession, the hard line was taken out of production, but by taking appropriate measures, we were able to return the hard line to the production circuit and continue production with two lines. He added: until the end of the 9-month period, the company's performance continued in accordance with the forecasts. We were able to operate according to the projected budget. Equipment and filters needed to be repaired due to decay. We had ordered the equipment from the beginning of the year, but it was delayed due to the corona outbreak. After that, we faced a change in the rules for customs clearance of this equipment. Finally, we were able to clear this equipment in February. Referring to the impact of this delay in the company's production process, the CEO of Pars Industrial Soot said: "In the last quarter of last year, we lost the hard line and the soft line continued to operate at low capacity, because of the need to overhaul and install new filters." Was. In the initial budget, the company's profit was projected at 35 billion tomans. Finally, we faced a profit of 67 billion tomans. Despite the basic need for overhaul and barriers last year, due to the reduction in the cost of timely purchase of raw materials, we were able to achieve a profitability plan of 92% in the commercial sector at a reasonable price. Mohammadi pointed to the supply of Pars industrial soot products in the commodity exchange. "We were the first company to offer products on the commodity exchange last year," he said. As a result, the price of our products is determined by supply and demand and we are not subject to pricing. He emphasized: in the period of April 15 to 27 of this year, the main overhaul of the company was done by repairing the reactors, replacing the main filter bags and replacing the pipes that had high corrosion. With this measure, in addition to eliminating production bottlenecks in production lines, an important obstacle in optimizing energy consumption will be removed. He expressed his hope: In general, these measures will cause Pars Industrial Soot to increase its net profit in 1400 with a suitable profitability trend. In this regard, Pars Industrial Soot will continue to upgrade technical knowledge, reduce the coefficient of raw materials, enter new markets, increase competitiveness in domestic markets and continue to modernize equipment, and in this regard will cooperate with domestic knowledge-based companies. At the end of the annual general assembly of Pars Soot Industrial Company, with the approval of the financial statements of the fiscal year ending March 2010, a cash dividend of 130 Tomans per share was distributed among the shareholders. Also, Hamoon Kish Investment Company, Iran Carbon, Sahand National Development Group Investment Group and Sahand Framcoelastic Engineering were selected as new legal members of the company.



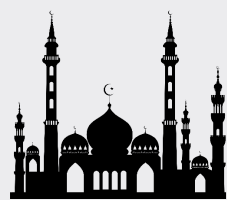
Profit and Loss Statement	
Description	2032020
Profit (Loss) Net	671.101
Accumulated profit (loss) at the beginning of the period	373.442
Annual adjustments	0
Accumulated profit (loss) at the beginning of each adjusted period	373.442
Approved dividends (previous year's meeting)	336.911
Capital changes from profit (loss) accumulated	0
Accumulated profit at the beginning of the unallocated period	36.531
Transfer from other items of equity	0
Distributable profit	707.632
Transfer to legal reserve	18.892
Transfer to other reserves	0
Accumulated profit (loss) at the end of each period	688.740
Approved dividends (this year's assembly)	616.879
Accumulated profit (loss) at the end of each period (taking into account the approvals of the assembly) (Rials)	71.861
Net profit (loss) per share	1.414
Cash profit per share (Rials)	1.300
Fund	474.522

Financial statements			
Description	Period ending on 12301399	Renewed 12291398	period ending
	Audited	Audited	
Current assets	1.356.647	843.061	
Non-current assets	662.004	537.673	
Total assets	2.018.561	1.380.734	
Current debt	866.100	460.246	
Non-current debt	54.202	43.964	
Total debts	920.302	504.210	
Equity	1.098.349	876.524	
Total debts and equity	2.018.651	1.380.734	



Attendees at the General Assembly		
Iran Carbon Company	207633403	43.76 %
Petrochemical Investment Company	95861056	20.2 %
National Development Group Investment Company	61215452	12.9 %
Saba Gostar Oil and Gas Marketing Private Investment Fund	14742538	3.11%
Other Shareholders	99217	0.02 %
Total	379551666	79.99%

Board members		
Company Name	Name of the representative of legal entities	Job position
Petrochemical Industries Investment	Majid Mohammadi	Vice Chairman and CEO
Chemical Industry Development	Hojjatullah Bramaki Yazdi	Chairman of the Board (non-executive)
Hamoon Kish Investment	Ali Kadkhoda Shahriari	Member of the Board of Directors
Iran Carbon	Hadi Vakili	Member of the Board (non-executive)
National Development Group Investment	Amir Anbardar	Member of the Board (Non-Executive)



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:01
■ Evening (Maghreb)	20:28
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:12
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	05:53

88. In that will they dwell; nor will their penalty be lightened, nor respite be (their lot):-
89. Except for those that repent (Even) after that, and make amends; for verily Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.

Surah 3. The Family Of 'Imran, The House Of 'Imran (88 - 89)

President Orders Launching \$1.3b National Projects

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - In a video conference on Thursday, President Hassan Rouhani ordered launching of Oil Ministry's petrochemical national projects worth 1,304 million dollars.

In the 68th edition of weekly national projects inauguration program, President Rouhani ordered the launch of several petrochemical projects in Khuzestan and Bushehr provinces, creating 2,454 jobs.

The projects are Sabalan Petrochemical Plant, Masjed Soleiman Petrochemical Plant and Elixir Helal of Assaluyeh.

Sabalan Petrochemical Plant has been launched with an annual production capacity of 1,650,000 tons of methanol worth \$412 million.

A supplier of AA grade methanol, the plant came online as another project in the second petrochemical leap of the country.

Sabalan Petrochemical Plant has been built with a total investment of \$406 million in Phase 2 of Pars Energy Special Economic Zone. The project was financed by shareholders, Chinese credit line financing and short-term facilities.

Sepehr Energy Company with 99.96% stocks is the main shareholder of the project. Dena Petrochemical Company, Siraf Energy Investment Company, SECO International Trade Company and Ghotb Sepehr Lavan Petrochemical Company are other shareholders of this plant.

The feedstock required for Sabalan Petrochemical Plant is one million tons of natural gas per year, which is supplied by Damavand Petrochemical Company, and the annual sales value of the complex's products is estimated at \$412 million.

By building the project, 4,200 jobs were created during its construction and 834 jobs during its operation. The second project that was launched via videoconference on Thursday was Masjed Soleiman Petrochemical Plant.

It is built with an annual production capacity of 1,755,000 tons of urea and ammonia. The Masjed Soleiman urea and ammonia project is another of the projects of the second



leap of the petrochemical industry whose construction began in March 2015 with the aim of producing 680,000 tons of ammonia and 1.075 million tons of urea annually.

It is fed with 861 million cubic meters of natural gas per year and is built on a 50-hectare land in Haft Shahidan Region of Masjed Soleiman, the southwestern Khuzestan province.

The plant is estimated to generate \$268 million a year by selling its products.

The investment company of the National Pension Fund Company possesses 66.55% of the plant's stocks and the private sector holds 33.45% of its shares.

The \$850 million capital for building this complex was provided from the shareholders and the credit line of China.

Masjed Soleiman Petrochemical has created employment for 5,000 people during construction and 1,500 during operation.

The ammonia unit of this complex has been licensed by Switzerland's Casale and the urea and granulation units have been licensed by Japan's Toyo.

Elixir Halal Assaluyeh Company, as the first pentane and hexane production unit in Iran's petrochemical industry, with a total annual production capacity of 50,000 tons, was officially put into operation by order of the President.

Construction of the project started in Assaluyeh in back in 2018 with the aim of producing 40,000 tons of hexane and 10,000 tons of pentane annually.

The sales value of the company's products is estimated at \$40 million annually.

The \$48 million investment in the project was provided by Takht Jamshid Petrochemical Company as the main shareholder of the plant.

Elixir Halal Assaluyeh project created employment for 600 people during its construction and 120 people during operation.

Investments in Oil Industry Would Double Without Sanctions

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Oil Minister Bijan Zangeneh said on Thursday that if it weren't for US sanctions, Iran could use foreign financial sources to double investment in oil industry.

Zangeneh made the remarks in the 68th edition of weekly national projects inauguration which was allocated to oil industry projects.

He mentioned three projects that were inaugurated by Iran's President Hassan Rouhani in the same ceremony, singling out the urea and ammonium production plant built in Masjed Soleiman country.

"I'm pleased that a plan with the capacity to produce 1.76 million tons ammonium annually has been erected in this region," the minister said.

Zangeneh said that the oil ministry has been authorized to develop oil refining project in Masjed Soleiman base on associated gas to improve investments in this region.

He also pointed to the other major projects underway in Asalouyeh which would produce 1.65 million tons of methanol on a yearly basis and said the methanol produced in this plant would be pumped to propylene

production chain in the country.

Three projects were launched today at the order of the President. The projects were part of the so-called 'second surge' program from which, Zangeneh said, ten projects were yet to be inaugurated.

He further explained that by launching remaining projects by the end of 2021, Iran's petrochemical production would reach 100 million tons each year.

Zangeneh also said the country is planning to launch 10 petrochemical projects by 2022 which will bring the country's annual petrochemical production capacity to 100 million tons.

He said construction of 40 petrochemical plants is under way which will bring the country's annual petrochemical production capacity to 133. The average progress of these projects is about 30%.

He announced the start of operations of mixed feed megaprojects in the coming weeks, adding Hormoz plant with a capacity of 5.8 million tons and Aria Oil and Gas with a capacity of 4.8 million tons are among those projects. These plans will come online by 2027.



Iran Registers Highest Number of Int'l Handicrafts Cities, Villages

YAZD (IRNA) - So far 11 Iranian cities and three villages have been internationally registered for their unique craftsmanship and quality of their handicrafts, in which Iran ranks 1st in the world.

Managing Director of the Handicrafts Training and Promotion Office of the Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Ministry Vida Towhidi said here on Wednesday that more than 2 million of our citizens are industrialists in 295 branches of Iranian handicrafts, each of those branches have several sub-branches.

She referred to the presence and role playing of the youth in the field of handicrafts, emphasizing that that potential needs to be further improved and encouraged.

Towhidi also stressed the need for brand-making in the handicrafts field, arguing: The presentation and distribution of the products need to be with internationally recognized logos.

Managing Director of the Handicrafts Training and Promotion Office of the Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Ministry said that last winter Meyod township of Yazd was chosen as the international city producing Ziloo (a traditional Iranian floor mat), which increased Iran's share of the world market for this product.

So far the Tabriz carpets, Isfahan creational handicrafts, Mashhad precious stones, Laljin of Hamedan province clay works, Sirjan of Kerman province Gilims (a traditional Iranian floor mat), Marivan township of Kurdistan province's Givehs (traditional cotton shoes), Abadeh's inlaid woodworks, Meybod's Zilooos, Kharashd villages in South Khorasan's towel weaving, and Kalpoorgan of Sistan and Baluchestan's clay works with 7,000 year history have entered the list of the International Council of Handicrafts.

Iran, China Sign Document to Expand Customs Ties



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran and China have signed a document to expand their cooperation in the field of customs as the two countries eye increased trade ties under a 25-year economic partnership deal.

The document was signed on Wednesday between the director general of the Iranian customs office (IRICA) Mhedi Mir Ashrafi and China's Deputy Customs Commissioner-General Wang Lingjun during a video conference call.

Under the document, IRICA will introduce measures to facilitate customs inspections for certain companies certified and rated by the Chinese customs office. The Chinese authority will reciprocate the move for Iranian companies that are authorized by IRICA.

Mir Ashrafi said the agreement will help minimize customs procedures needed to clear goods exported by authorized merchants on the two sides.

That would lower the costs incurred on traders and speeds up the process to have the cargoes released, said the IRICA chief.

China has been the largest importer of Iranian goods while remaining the top exporter into the country in recent years.

The two countries have maintained a smooth flow of trade despite rounds of American sanctions that have targeted Iran and its exports of crude since 2018.

Mir Ashrafi said Iran and China would be able to further expand their customs ties in future as part of a broader agreement signed earlier this year by Iranian and Chinese foreign ministers which sets out a roadmap for economic cooperation between the two countries for the next 25 years.

"It will be a good start for us so that we can have stronger and more sustainable customs ties with our top trading partner in future," he said.

Iranian Capital Flight to Neighboring Countries "Serious"

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Chairman of Tabriz Chamber of Commerce Mr. Younes Zhaeleh believes problems of the business climate in Iran is the main reason for the capital flight to the neighboring countries like Turkey and it should be taken seriously.

In the meeting of the government officials and the private sector of East Azarbaijan which was held in Tabriz, Zhaeleh said eagerness of Iranian investors for investment in the neighboring countries like Turkey is a great danger for the business climate of Iran.

Referring to Iran's 178th place in the World Bank business climate rankings, he said this position in the world rankings make the condition tough for the activists in the private so that it does not let the banking accounts of Iranian nationals remain open and therefore the door has opened for attraction of Iranian investors in the neighboring states and they are doing their best to attract more Iranian investors.

Zhaeleh added that some 15,900 Iranian investors have gone to Turkey and due to restriction and rigidness in the country, billions of dollars of Iranian capitals and especially from East Azarbaijan has been transferred to Turkey and it is a great danger threatening the business climate in the country.

He also blamed international and domestic sanctions as the major hurdles in way of sanctions in the country, adding that one of the major problems of the big enterprises is in the field of tax and insurance and many of active units in the field of apparel and tourism have been hurt due to the COVID-19 pandemic and some of them have faced 100 percent shutdown.

He added that tax and insurance offices demand tax and premium from those units and even they ask for fine for delay in payment.

Zhaeleh called activists in the production as the soldiers in the economic scene but they face a large number of problems.

PGSOC, National Star of Public Relations of Iran



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The public relations and international affairs of Persian Gulf Star Oil Company was feted with the National Star of the Public Relations award during the eight national stars of the public relations of Iran.

According to the reports, during the ceremony for marking the national public relations and in the festival of the stars of the public relations of Iran, the award of the national star of the public relations went to the public relations and international affairs of Persian Gulf Star Oil Company (PGSOC) in presence of top managers of the public relations of the country.

The festival was held by the Public Relations of Society of Iran and International Public Relations Association and the organizers choose the top public relations of the country.

The manager of the public relations and international affairs of PGSOC Ms. Narges Sedaghat received the statue and plaque of honor for the creative actions of the public relations of the company during the coronavirus pandemic.

Kerman-Armavir, Named Sister Cities

TEHRAN (IP) - The sisterhood agreement between the Kerman Municipality, Iran, and the Municipality of Armavir, Armenia was signed virtually in the presence of representatives of the two countries' Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Seyed Mehran Alamzadeh, Mayor of Kerman, in an online meeting held on Wednesday evening in the presence of the Ambassador of Armenia and the Municipality of Armavir, stressed the appropriate position of Kerman in various historical, cultural, and economic fields, emphasizing the promotion of international interactions.

Alamzadeh expressed hope that the Kerman Municipality will be able to share its experiences with Armavir Municipality in the field of urban development, urban planning, urban services, and sustainable urban incomes, as well as in the field of culture and tourism. The Ambassador of Armenia to Iran, Artashes Tumanian, also mentioned in this virtual meeting, referring to the cooperation of other Armenian provinces with different provinces of Iran: "I hope that a good cooperation and relationship will be established between Kerman and Armavir."

Armavir Mayor David Khudatyan also expressed hope that the conclusion of this memorandum and the establishment of good communication and interaction between the two provinces will be used as a model for cities and parts of the two countries that do not interact with each other.



Shanon
(adviser)

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L.balcony
Fully Furn

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600sq.m b/up
S/p, Sauna
Jacuzzi, yard
enough pkgs

Parsian

Apt (\$4000)
Zaferanieh
400sq.m, 4bdrs
S/pool, S, J, pkg
L.balcony, & F.F

Sa'adat abad Apt (\$1700)
170sq.m, 3bdrs, balcony, & F.F

Jordan (\$1400) 2bdrs, & F.F
Jordan (\$1900) 3bdrs, & F.F

bldg (\$10000)
Andarzgoo
5storey, 20bdrs
S/p, S, J, pkg lots
brand new, & F.F

Sa'adat abad (\$1600)
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India's Vaccine Output Likely To Fall Short of Target

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India's output of COVID-19 shots for August-December is likely to be lower than the government's public estimate, according to internal projections shared with Reuters by two sources.

Lower-than-expected production could delay India's plans to vaccinate all its adults this year, amid fears the country will face another surge of coronavirus infections in the winter. India's ongoing second wave, the world's worst since the pandemic began, has overwhelmed its health system. The government last week publicly estimated 1.46 billion doses of its three approved shots - AstraZeneca, Sputnik V and Covaxin - would be made between August and December.



COVID Vaccines Must Be Produced in Africa, Latin America

LONDON (Dispatches) - The head of the World Trade Organization (WTO) said Thursday that it is of paramount importance to diversify vaccine manufacturing and to have more production taking place in Africa and Latin America to contain the COVID-19 pandemic.

On the eve of a global health summit in Rome, WTO Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala told European Union legislators that normal market forces for exports and imports couldn't apply when it comes to the life-or-death issue of COVID-19 vaccines, as many of the world's wealthiest nations were hoarding the shots for their own populations when the coronavirus crisis hit their home turf.



Gaza Ceasefire Takes Between Israel and Hamas



BEIRUT (Dispatches) - A truce between Israel and Hamas began on Friday at the hour set by Egyptian mediators, and US President Joe Biden pledged to salve the devastation of the worst fighting in years with humanitarian aid for Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

Palestinians, many of whom had spent 11 days huddled in fear of Israeli shelling, poured into Gaza's streets. Mosque loud-speakers feted "the victory of the resistance achieved over the Occupation (Israel) during the 'Sword of Jerusalem' battle".

In the countdown to the 2am (23:00 GMT Thursday) ceasefire, whose timing Hamas had confirmed but Israel did not, Palestinian rocket salvos continued and Israel carried out at least one air strike.

Each side said it stood ready to retaliate for any truce violations by the other. Cairo said it would send two delegations to monitor the ceasefire.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office confirmed the "mutual and unconditional" ceasefire after a late-night meeting of the Security Cabinet, saying it had unanimously accepted an Egyptian proposal but that the two sides were still determining exactly when it was to take effect.

A Hamas official told Reuters the ceasefire would be "mutual and simultaneous". In a televised address on Thursday, Biden welcomed the ceasefire as "a genuine opportunity to make progress" towards lasting peace in the Middle East, and hailed Egypt's role in brokering the agreement.

He extended condolences to bereaved Israelis and Palestinians and said Washington would work with the United Nations "and other international stakeholders to provide rapid humanitarian assistance" for Gaza and its reconstruction.

Biden said aid would be coordinated with the Palestinian Authority - run by Hamas's rival, President Mahmoud Abbas, and based in the Israeli-occupied West Bank - "in a manner that does not permit Hamas to simply restock its military arsenal".

Biden also said the U.S. was committed to helping Israel replenish its supply of interceptor missiles for its Iron Dome protection system and to working with the Palestinian Authority - not Hamas - to provide humanitarian aid to Gaza.

The U.S. State Department said that Secretary of State Antony Blinken planned to travel to the Middle East "in the coming days", where he would meet with Israeli, Palestinian, and regional leaders to discuss recovery efforts.

Blinken spoke with his Israeli counterpart Gabi Ashkenazi, who "welcomed Secretary Blinken's planned travel to the region", State Department spokesman Ned Price said in a statement.

EU Parliament Freezes China Deal Ratification Until Beijing Lifts Sanctions

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - The European Parliament halted on Thursday ratification of a new investment pact with China until Beijing lifts sanctions on EU politicians, deepening a dispute in Sino-European relations and denying EU companies greater access to China.

The resolution to freeze ratification passed with 599 votes in favor, 30 votes against and 58 abstentions.

The EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment, agreed by negotiators in December after seven years of talks, aimed to put EU companies on an equal footing in China and cement Beijing's status as a trusted trading partner.

But Beijing imposed sanctions in March on 10 EU politicians, as well as think-tanks and diplomatic bodies, in response to Western sanctions against Chinese officials accused of the mass detentions of Muslim Uyghurs in northwestern China. China's sanctions include five members of the EU assembly and its human rights sub-committee.

"With its sanctions, China has miscalculated. They should learn from their mistakes and rethink. Because of China's sanctions, the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment has been put into the freezer," said Reinhard Butikofer, a German EU lawmaker who Beijing targeted with its sanctions.

EU lawmakers say the Chinese sanctions are not based on international law, while the bloc's measures, like those of Britain and the United States, tackle abuses of human rights upheld in United Nations treaties.

Beijing denies any wrongdoing. The parliament "demands that China lift the sanctions before dealing with (the investment accord)", it said in its resolution, which is not legally binding but is now the assembly's official position. "EU-China relations may not continue business as usual," it said.

The impasse is a setback for both China and the EU. Ratification of the pact would allow greater protection of European investment and intellectual property rights in China. China was hoping for improved international standing as a fair and respectful trading partner, European diplomats say.

Activists and U.N. rights experts say at least 1 million Muslims are detained in camps in Xinjiang. The activists and some Western politicians accuse China of using torture, forced labour and sterilisations. China denies rights abuses in Xinjiang and says its camps provide vocational training and are needed to fight extremism.



Kremlin Hails U.S. Pipeline Sanctions Waiver Ahead of Summit

MOSCOW (AFP) - The Kremlin on Thursday praised the waiving of U.S. sanctions against the Russian-controlled builder of a Russia-Germany gas pipeline, while Ukraine's leader warned Joe Biden's administration against cancelling the sanctions altogether.

The U.S. waiver was announced as Moscow and Washington seek to defuse the biggest crisis in ties in years ahead of a planned summit between Biden and Russian leader Vladimir Putin.

On Wednesday, the United States formally waived sanctions against Swiss-based Nord Stream 2 AG, the Russian-controlled builder of a major Russian-German gas pipeline.

The U.S. announcement was a significant reversal of Washington's earlier stance and was primarily aimed at easing tensions between Washington and Berlin over the \$12-billion project, which Germany and other European countries see as crucial to securing long-term energy supplies.

But U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken also said that Biden's administration would "continue to oppose the completion of this project", arguing it would weaken European energy security. Russian neighbors Ukraine, Poland and the Baltic states have fiercely opposed the pipeline, fearing it will increase Moscow's political leverage in regional politics.

The U.S. announcement came as Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov met on the sidelines of an Arctic Council meeting in Reykjavik, the first high-profile talks between the two countries under Biden's administration.

Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Thursday that the sanctions waiver was a "positive signal".

"We are convinced that the project should not be a target of pressure from third parties. This is illegal," he told reporters.

In 2020, the possibility of U.S. sanctions held up pipeline-laying operations for nearly a year.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky expressed concern over the US policy reversal on the Russian-led pipeline and said he was worried Washington could move to completely lift the Nord Stream 2 sanctions.

Clashes on Morocco Border as Madrid Accuses Rabat of "Blackmail"

FNIDEQ (AFP) - Spain accused Morocco of "blackmail" on Thursday for allowing a record 8,000 migrants to reach the Spanish North African enclave of Ceuta, sparking a crisis that saw clashes on the Moroccan side of the border overnight.

Spanish authorities were caught by surprise on Monday when large numbers of mostly young people began swimming or using small inflatable boats to cross the frontier as the Moroccan border forces looked the other way, quickly leaving the tiny territory overwhelmed.

But Madrid moved quickly to return most of the migrants and calm has largely returned the Spanish beach of Tarajal in Ceuta, where soldiers and armoured vehicles have been deployed in large numbers.

The outskirts of the Moroccan border town of Fnideq were deserted on Thursday, also under a heavy security presence.

However the previous night hundreds of Moroccan youths threw stones at Moroccan forces guarding the border, forcing them to retreat, according to an AFP correspondent at the scene.

The youths also set fire to a motorcycle.

The migrant influx comes amid tensions between Rabat and Madrid over Spain's decision to provide medical treatment for the leader of the Polisario Front, Brahim Ghali, who has Covid-19.

The Polisario Front has fought for the independence of Western Sahara, a former Spanish colony mainly under Moroccan control.

Spanish Defence Minister Margarita Robles said Morocco's actions were "an aggression of Spanish borders and of the borders of the European Union".

"We are not talking about youths aged 16, 17, children as young as seven or eight were allowed through according to NGOs... ignoring international law," she said in an interview with Spanish public radio on Thursday.

"Call it what you want but I call it blackmail," she said, adding "it is not acceptable to put the lives of minors or of people of one's own country, at risk."

Spain's government said that around 5,600 of the 8,000 migrants had already been sent back, and there were no new entries on Wednesday as anyone who reached Ceuta's beach was immediately returned.

Some of the returned migrants said they hoped to try cross over into Ceuta again if border controls were eased once more.

"I have no future here, I want to work to help my family," 17-year-old Mohamed told AFP in Fnideq after being returned from Ceuta.

He left his studies and his family in Morocco to try to enter Spain in search of a better life.



Lebanese Scuffle With Syrians Voting Abroad In Support of Assad



BEIRUT (Dispatches) - Scuffles erupted on Thursday between Lebanese and Syrians, who were on their way to cast votes at their embassy in Lebanon in favour of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, as polling abroad began before next week's presidential election.

The voters were driving in a convoy of cars and buses, waving Syrian flags and blasting pro-Assad songs on speakers, heading to the embassy on the outskirts of Beirut, when a group of Lebanese attacked their vehicles, witnesses said.

The Lebanese smashed windows and burned their flags, snarling up traffic on the thoroughfare, the witnesses said.

Lebanon's relations with neighboring Syria have often be fraught in the past. Syrian forces were deployed to Lebanon in the 1975-1990 Lebanese civil war, ending their 29-year presence in 2005. Lebanon now hosts 1 million refugees from Syria's own civil conflict.

"They can go and vote and leave but carrying the Syrian flag here, that's not right," said one Lebanese protestor who asked not to be named. "This is provocation," he said.

Syrians abroad vote on Thursday before the May 26 election inside Syria, a vote Assad is all but certain to win.

Assad, who took power in 2000 on the death of his father who had ruled for 30 years, has regained control of most of Syria after 10 years of fighting that has devastated the country.

Syria's government says the election shows the country is functioning normally despite the war.

Votes Show Damascus Moving In Right Direction of Democracy

TEHRAN (MNA) – Majlis Speaker’s Special Aide for the International Affairs Amir-Abdollahian has attached great importance to the holding of the ongoing Presidential elections in Syria.

“Timely holding of presidential elections in Syria shows that Damascus is moving in the right direction of democracy,” said the Special Assistant to the Speaker of the Iranian Parliament for International Affairs Hossein Amir-Abdollahian in a post on

his Twitter account in reference to the first stage of the Presidential elections in Syria for the Syrians residing in other countries yesterday.

The Iranian parliamentary official added that “The governments that resorted to staging a the terrorist war with the goal of tearing down and disintegrating Syria are now opposing the presidential elections in Syria, but the people will make their choice.”



Record 55m People Internally Displaced Worldwide

LONDON (Dispatches) - Conflicts and natural disasters forced someone to flee within their own country every second of last year, pushing the number of people living in internal displacement to a record high, monitors said Thursday.

This came despite strict restrictions on movement imposed around the globe in efforts to halt the spread of Covid-19, which observers had expected to push down displacement numbers last year.

But 2020 was also marked by intense storms, persistent conflicts and explosions of violence, forcing 40.5 million people to become newly displaced within their countries, according to a joint report by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC).

That is the highest number of newly displaced reported in 10 years, and brings the total number of people living in internal displacement around the world to a record 55 million, the report showed.

“Both numbers this year were unusually high,” IDMC director Alexandra Bilak told AFP, saying the surge in internal displacement was “unprecedented”.

The number of internally displaced people is now more than double the some 26 million people who have fled across borders as refugees.

“It’s shocking that someone was forced to flee their home inside their own country every single second last year,” NRC chief Jan Egeland said in a statement.

“We are failing to protect the world’s most vulnerable people from conflict and disasters.”

Bilak said it was “particularly concerning that these high figures were recorded against the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic”.

Pointing out that movement restrictions obstructed data collection and “fewer people sought out emergency shelters for fear of infection”, she suggested the true figures were higher.

The pandemic had meanwhile exacerbated socioeconomic conditions for displaced people, she said, warning that “those numbers may rise even more as countries go down further into an economic crisis.”

The report found that three quarters of people who fled internally last year were victims of natural disasters, in particular ones related to extreme weather.

Intense cyclones, monsoon rains and floods hit highly exposed and densely populated areas in Asia and the Pacific, while the Atlantic hurricane season “was the most active on record,” it pointed out.

“Extended rainy seasons across the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa uprooted millions more.”

Experts say that climate change is increasing the intensity and frequency of such



extreme weather events.

“We can only expect with the future impacts of climate change for these disasters to become more frequent and more intense, and therefore for the numbers of internally displaced people to grow,” Bilak said.

In addition, nearly 10 million of those newly displaced last year were fleeing conflicts and violence, the report said.

It added that escalating violence and the expansion of extremist groups in Ethiopia, Mozambique and Burkina Faso had fuelled some of the world’s fastest growing displacement crises last year.

Drawn-out conflicts like those in Syria, Afghanistan and the Democratic Republic of Congo had also continued to force large numbers of people to flee.

Unlike disaster-driven displacement, which is usually short-lived as people return to rebuild damaged or destroyed homes once the storms have passed, conflict-fuelled displacement can last years.

All but seven million of the 55 million people living in internal displacement at the end of last year had fled conflict, the report said.

It also warned that a convergence of conflicts and natural disasters was making the problem worse, with 95 percent of last year’s new conflict displacements occurring in countries vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

“Climate change and the overexploitation of natural resources may aggravate instability and conflict, which in turn may trigger displacement.”

World’s Largest Iceberg Forms In Antarctica



LONDON (Dispatches) - A giant slab of ice has calved from the frozen edge of Antarctica into the Weddell Sea, becoming the largest iceberg afloat in the world, according to the European Space Agency.

The iceberg, dubbed A-76, is about 4,320km square (1,668 sq miles) and is slightly larger than the Spanish island of Mallorca, ESA said in a statement.

It is 175km (106 miles) long and 25km (15 miles) wide.

The world’s second-largest iceberg is also located in the Weddell Sea – the A-23A, which is approximately 3,880km square (1,305sq miles).

Scientists spotted the A-76 in recent satellite images captured by the Copernicus Sentinel-1 mission.

ESA said the iceberg had broken away from the western side of Antarctica’s Ronne Ice Shelf, which is near the base of the Antarctic Peninsula.

Ronne is one of the largest floating ice sheets that connect to the continent’s landmass and extend out into surrounding seas.

Periodic calving of large chunks of those shelves is part of a natural cycle, said Ted Scambos, a research glaciologist at the University of Colorado at Boulder, and the breaking off of A-76 is not linked to climate change.

In an email to the Reuters news agency, Scambos said that the Ronne and another vast ice shelf, the Ross, have “behaved in a stable, quasi-periodic fashion” over the past century or more.

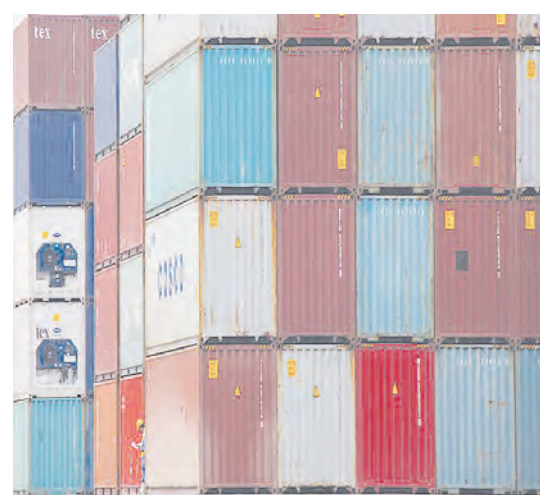
Because the ice was already floating in the sea before dislodging from the coast, its break-away does not raise ocean levels, he said in an email.

Some ice shelves along the Antarctic Peninsula, farther from the South Pole, have undergone rapid disintegration in recent years, a phenomenon scientists believe may be related to global warming, according to the US National Snow & Ice Data Center.

Japan’s Exports Jump Most in Decade

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japan’s exports grew the most since 2010 in April while capital spending perked up on surging global demand for cars and electronics, lifting hopes that an improvement in trade could help lead the world’s third-largest economy back to growth.

Also brightening the outlook, confidence among the nation’s manufacturers hit a more than two-year high in May on the back of solid overseas orders, a Reuters survey showed on Thursday.



“In Japan, capital spending tends to move in sync with external demand, so an export recovery is encouraging for machinery orders and capital expenditure.”

By destination, exports to China, Japan’s largest trading partner, rose 33.9% year-on-year in April, led by shipments of chip-making equipment, hybrid cars and scrap copper.

U.S.-bound exports grew 45.1% in the year to April, the fastest gain since 2010, on the back of demand for automobiles, car parts and ship engines.

Separate data from the Cabinet Office showed Japan’s core machinery orders, a highly volatile data series regarded as an indicator of capital spending in the coming six to nine months, rose 3.7% in March from the previous month.

The rise in core orders, which exclude those of ships and electric utilities, compared with a 6.4% increase seen in a Reuters poll of economists, the data showed.

The Cabinet Office maintained its assessment on machinery orders, saying that a pick-up is stalling.

Japan’s economy fell back into decline in the first quarter and economists have sharply revised down estimates for growth this quarter as emergency curbs hobble consumer spending that makes up more than half the economy.

“Export growth is welcome for the Japanese economy, but that doesn’t mean the whole of Japan can benefit from it,” said Ayako Sera, market strategist at Sumitomo Mitsui Trust Bank.

“What’s important now is a recovery in service-sector activity helped by a progress on coronavirus vaccination.”

Iranian, UK...

FROM PAGE 1

Wilson said that the UK side was quite surprised by the level of progress achieved in the Iranian farming sector in the past 40 years.

The British businessman suggested in his remarks that food and agriculture would be a major part of future economic ties between Iran and the UK as he insisted that those exchanges could still take place even if the U.S. does not lift its sanctions.

The meetings come as Iran and world powers continue with talks in the Austrian capital Vienna as they seek to revive a 2015 deal on Iran’s nuclear program.

Britain is a party to the deal, known as JCPOA, which has suffered since 2018 when a former US government decided to pull out and impose illegal sanctions on Iran.

Time for U.S...

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He said that while “a framework or structure” of an agreement has been reached, differences still remain on “some key issues.”

“We cannot yet say that the work has finished, but very good progress has been made, and we are hopeful that next week, when the talks resume, all delegations will have made the necessary decisions [in their capitals] to reach an agreement,” Araqchi said.

He further underlined that Iran will, later on, decide on the possibility of continuing its cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Meanwhile, at the end of Thursday meeting, the Russian diplomat Mikhail Ulyanov tweeted, “The 4th round of the Vienna talks is over. The #JCPOA participants at their meeting today noted that “good”or “significant” progress was made and that an agreement is “within reach”. The Joint Commission will resume its work early next week. Hopefully the 5th round will be final.”

Meanwhile the U.N. nuclear watchdog is still in talks with Iran on how to proceed with a three-month monitoring deal that expired on Friday, it said on Thursday, adding that it will provide an update within days.

The International Atomic Energy Agency and Iran announced in February that although Tehran would reduce cooperation with the IAEA including by ending snap inspections, they had struck a deal on continuing “necessary” IAEA monitoring and verification activities in Iran. The arrangement is important to keeping indirect talks between Iran and the United States on reviving the 2015 nuclear deal on track. Senior diplomats from France, Britain and Germany warned on Wednesday that finding a solution is critical.

“(IAEA) Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi and Vice-President of Iran and Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, Ali Akbar Salehi, on 21 February agreed on a temporary bilateral technical understanding (for up to 3 months) that remains in effect,” the IAEA said in a statement.

“The Agency and Iran are currently in consultations regarding the implementation of the existing understanding. The Director General will provide an update to the (IAEA) Board of Governors in the coming days,” it added. The IAEA has described a black-box-type system in which data is collected without the IAEA being able to access it immediately. Diplomats say it includes real-time monitoring of Iran’s uranium-enrichment levels and that the equipment might simply keep running for a time in the absence of an extension.

European, Indian...

FROM PAGE 1

The Reuters report said that Indian refiners ready to resume oil imports from Iran include state-run Bharat Petroleum Corp, Hindustan Petroleum Corporation, Indian Oil Corp as well as Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Ltd.

Indian energy officials have repeatedly announced that supplies from Iran would be preferable mainly because of lower prices and suitability of the Iranian crude for refineries in India. India was the second top importer of Iranian crude before May 2019 when it cut purchases amounting to half a million bpd after Washington terminated waivers that it had given to some countries,including India.

India will resume buying crude oil from Iran once the U.S. sanctions are eased, an Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) executive on Thursday said, adding Iranian crude was beneficial for Indian refineries.

India stopped importing oil from Iran in mid-2019 following sanctions on the Persian Gulf nation by the Trump administration. “I do not have any doubt why we will not be buying Iranian crude if sanctions are lifted,” IOC Director (Finance) S K Gupta said on a conference call with investors to discuss earnings.

Indian refiners have begun preparatory work and can swiftly enter into contracts once the sanctions are lifted.

“Iranian crude is favorable to Indian refineries,” he said, alluding to the crude quality being suited for processing at refineries traditionally built considering oil from the Middle East as a staple diet.

Iranian oil coming into the market will not just cool prices but also help India diversify its import basket.

In 2020-21, Iraq was India’s biggest oil supplier, followed by Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Nigeria was the fourth-largest supplier and the U.S. was the fifth.

India -- once Iran’s second-biggest customer -- imports more than 85 per cent of its oil needs. Iranian crude will bring several benefits, including a longer credit cycle and shorter voyage savings on freight costs.

“What kind of commercial terms are offered is premature to comment as of now,” Gupta said, responding to a question if Iranian terms will continue to be favorable. Previously, Iranian oil was a lucrative buy for refiners as the Persian Gulf nation provides 60 days of credit for purchases, terms not available from suppliers of substitute crudes -- Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, Nigeria and the U.S.

Not just IOC, other state-owned firms, whose refineries are suited to the crude, have committed to buy Iranian oil once sanctions are lifted, industry sources said.

Bach to Visit Japan From July 12

TOKYO (Dispatches) - International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach will visit Japan from July 12, ahead of the start of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, according to a letter released by IOC senior official John Coates.

Plans for Bach to visit Japan in May were postponed because of a government-issued state of emergency in Tokyo and other areas aimed at containing the spread of coronavirus infections.

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Leverkusen Name Swiss Seoane as New Head Coach

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Bundesliga side Bayer Leverkusen on Wednesday named Swiss Gerardo Seoane as their new head coach for next season.

The 42-year-old has signed a three-year deal having just won a third-straight Swiss league title with Young Boys Bern and replaces caretaker coach Hannes Wolf.

"In the professional and ambitious environment at Bayer, I see ideal conditions to play attractive football and to be among the top teams in the league and in Europe," said Seoane in a statement.

James Provides Game-Winning Three-Pointer for Lakers

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - LeBron James shot a game-winning three-pointer as his Los Angeles Lakers mounted a comeback to defeat the Golden State Warriors and earn the seventh seed in the Western Conference playoffs.

The defending champions trailed the Warriors by 13 points at half-time of the play-in game, but fought back for a 103-100 victory courtesy of James's 22 points, 11 rebounds and 10 assists as well as 25 points and 12 rebounds from Anthony Davis.

Los Angeles advances to open the playoffs on Sunday against the second-seeded Phoenix Suns, while Golden State has one final chance to progress as the eighth seed if they defeat the visiting Memphis Grizzlies.

Memphis earlier ended the San Antonio Spurs' season in the first of the West's play-ins.

Dillon Brooks poured in eight of his 24 points in the final quarter as the hosts downed the Spurs 100-96 in front of a 40 per cent crowd of 7,019 fans at FedExForum.

The Grizzlies are trying to halt a run of three-straight seasons without appearing in the play-offs, after their last campaign ended with a loss to Portland in the league's first play-in.

Dillon Brooks scored eight of his 24 points in the fourth quarter to help put Memphis ahead to stay and the Grizzlies eliminated the San Antonio Spurs 100-96 on Wednesday night in the first Western Conference play-in game.

The Grizzlies will play the Golden State Warriors or the Los Angeles Lakers, who played later Wednesday night for the No. 7 seed, for the No. 8 seed Friday night and a first-round series starting Sunday against the top-seeded Utah Jazz. Memphis is trying to snap a skid of three straight seasons without a postseason berth.

Jonas Valanciunas had a season-high 23 rebounds and 23 points for Memphis. Ja Morant added 20 points and six assists. Jaren Jackson Jr. had 10 points.

DeMar DeRozan and Rudy Gay each scored 20 points as the Spurs lost their fifth straight. Dejounte Murray had his fifth triple-double with 10 points, 13 rebounds and 11 assists. Keldon Johnson added 11 and Jacob Poeltl 10.



The Spurs last led 83-81 on Johnson's 3 with 6:55 left. Brooks started his scoring spurt with the Grizzlies trailing 80-79, and his driving 5-footer with 5:57 to go put Memphis ahead to stay at 85-83.

Memphis pulled out all the stops possible in a pandemic in the biggest home game since the Grizzlies' last playoff appearance in 2017 against these very Spurs.

In five playoff series between these teams, the Spurs swept three of the four San Antonio won. Memphis' only series victory came in 2011 as the then-No. 8 seed, the start of seven straight playoff seasons for the Grizzlies.

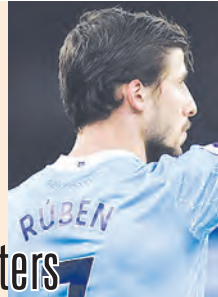
Those players are long gone with Mike Conley now with the Jazz and Marc Gasol with the Lakers.

On this night, the Grizzlies' next generation took over with a roster that was the second-youngest at the start of this season and Jackson, the No. 4 overall draft pick in 2018, along with Morant, the second overall draft pick in 2019 and reigning NBA Rookie of the Year.

The Grizzlies led 38-19 after the first quarter. Gay dunked late in the first quarter, starting the Spurs on a 22-3 run that pulled them within 41-39 of the Grizzlies. But Morant ended Memphis' cold spurt with a dunk, and Memphis led 56-49 at halftime.

The teams each scored 16 points in the third as this game turned into a battle. Memphis took a 72-65 lead into the fourth quarter.

Dias Named Player of The Year by Football Writers



LONDON (Dispatches) - Manchester City defender Ruben Dias has been voted the Football Writers' Association's footballer of the year, it was announced on Thursday.

The Portugal international was a comfortable winner ahead of Tottenham forward Harry Kane and City teammate Kevin De Bruyne.

Dias, 24, has enjoyed an outstanding first campaign at the Etihad Stadium since signing for around £65 million (\$92 million) from Benfica in September.

He has helped Pep Guardiola's City win the League Cup once more, regain their Premier League title and also reach the Champions League final, where they will face Chelsea in Porto on May 29.

"It is a huge privilege. Obviously I could not have done it without the success of the team," Dias said in an interview with the FWA.

"I think me receiving this prize is the major example of how our team works, the way we build our game.

"It reflects all the togetherness we have on the pitch, how we perform and the spirit that is in the team and with these players."

PSG Win French Cup In Domestic Double Bid

PARIS (Dispatches) - Paris Saint-Germain have a domestic double in their sights after they won the French Cup by beating Monaco 2-0 in Wednesday's final at the Stade de France.

Goals from Mauro Icardi and Kylian Mbappe won a largely uninspiring final for PSG who now go into the weekend's final round of Ligue 1 fixtures with a record-equalling 10th league title still a possibility.

The French champions have now won the French Cup six times in the last seven seasons having reached the final every year since 2015.

It was also the second trophy of coach Mauricio Pochettino's managerial career after he won the Champions Trophy for PSG in January, although this will for many count as his first major honour.

"We work every day to experience this kind of feeling, reward and recognition," said Mbappe.

"It's the work of a whole group, staff, all the people who work every day for us, the club and of course the supporters who couldn't be there. We think a lot about the fans and this title is for them as well."

Monaco meanwhile continue their wait to win the French Cup for the first time since 1991, in their first final since 2010 when they were also beaten by PSG.

Niko Kovac's side have however had a positive season and can finish it on a happier note at the weekend by qualifying for the Champions League for the first time since 2018.

Played with no fans present, in contrast to England's FA Cup final and the Italian Cup final which was being played on the same evening, the match lacked the sense of occasion that would normally characterise an end-of-season showpiece between two of France's most famous clubs.

It was also jammed in the middle of the denouement to possibly Europe's most exciting league title race, with PSG trailing leaders Lille by a single point heading into the final round of fixtures this weekend.

Hummels Returns From Exile to Boost Germany



BERLIN (Dispatches) - The recall of Mats Hummels to the heart of the Germany defense will strengthen their back four at the Euro 2020 finals, based on his impressive performances this season for Borussia Dortmund.

Two years after both Hummels, 32, and Thomas Mueller, 31, were axed by Joachim Loew from the Germany squad, the pair have been recalled for the European Championship due to current form.

"I'm glad to be back @dfb_team. I'm really up for a new chapter," Hummels posted on Instagram Wednesday.

Just as he had for his club, the center-back can lend experience to a youthful German defense.

He has excelled in recent weeks to help Dortmund lift the German Cup and qualify for the Champions League by winning their last six Bundesliga games.

Hummels' ability to deliver accurate long-range passes from the back can quickly turn defense into attack.

He will bring a calming influence to a Germany defense drained of confidence by a 6-0 thrashing in Spain and shock home defeat to North Macedonia this season.

The five goals Hummels has scored in the 2020/21 Bundesliga is his best single-season haul in a decade - the same figure he scored in Dortmund's 2010/11 title-winning campaign under Jurgen Klopp.

He can be lethal in the air but can also tuck chances away having played as a striker earlier in his career.

He scored twice in a man-of-the-match performance in Dortmund's 2-0 win at Arminia Bielefeld last October, a week after his headed goal sealed a 3-0 win over Schalke in the Ruhr derby.

He turns 33 in December and has compensated for any loss in pace by anticipating where the ball will go and ensuring he is a step ahead of his opponent.

Maradona Doctors Face Premeditated Murder Charge

BUENOS AIRES (AFP) - Seven people under investigation over the November death of Argentine footballing legend Diego Maradona face charges of premeditated murder, AFP has learned from a judicial source.

The accused -- which include Maradona's neurosurgeon Leopoldo Luque, psychiatrist Agustina Cosachov and psychologist Carlos Diaz -- face eight to 25 years in prison if found guilty.

The indictment is based on findings by a board of experts into Maradona's death from a heart attack last year, a source from the San Isidro Attorney General's Office, which is leading the investigation, said Wednesday. That report concluded that the footballing icon received inadequate medical care and was left to his fate for a "prolonged, agonizing period" before his death, which came just weeks after undergoing brain surgery on a blood clot.

"After so many injustices, the case has come full circle," the source told AFP.

The accused are prohibited from leaving the country and must appear ahead of an inquiry between May 31 and June 14.

The legal proceedings were prompted by a complaint filed by two of Maradona's five daughters against Luque, who they blamed for their father's deteriorating condition after the brain surgery.

Prosecutors believe Maradona's death was not the result of malpractice or negligent actions of his doctors, but that they knew the former soccer star would die and did nothing to prevent it.

The prosecutors obtained a series of messages and audio that show that the medical team were aware that Maradona was using alcohol, psychiatric medication and marijuana in the last months of his life.



Chiesa Fires Juventus to Coppa Italia Glory

ROME (Dispatches) - Federico Chiesa clinched a Coppa Italia triumph for Juventus and a first trophy for coach Andrea Pirlo with a 2-1 victory over Atalanta in the final on Wednesday.

Another early Champions League exit and a limp Serie A title defence left Pirlo staring at a disappointing debut season as Juventus coach, but goals from Dejan Kulusevski and Chiesa earned his side Italian Cup glory.

With fans in attendance for the first time in Italy since March, it was Juve who took the lead at the Mapei Stadium, against the run of play, thanks to a fine finish from Kulusevski in the 31st minute.

Atalanta, looking to win their first Italian Cup since 1963, deservedly levelled through Ruslan Malinovskyi four minutes before the break. But Pirlo's side stepped it up after the break and Chiesa fired home his 13th goal in all competitions this season in the 73rd minute to spark jubilant scenes among the Juve players and staff at the final whistle.

"It was wonderful for everyone," Chiesa told Rai Sport. "For those who have suffered in recent months. We players are protected but there are people out there who have suffered and are suffering. It is a reward for the efforts made in these difficult months."

Atalanta's Duvan Zapata created the first real chance, using his strength to barge past Matthijs de Ligt before squaring the ball for Jose Luis Palomino, but the defender could not steer the chance home.

It remained all Atalanta, with Zapata's strength continuing to cause problems, but on their first real attack, Juve opened the scoring after Cristiano Ronaldo drove at the heart of the defence, and the ball fell loose for Kulusevski curled home.

