

**Health Ministry Announced On Monday That the Number of Deaths From the COVID-19 in Iran Increased to 78,848 With 251 More Iranians Dying From the Deadly Virus Over the Past 24 Hours**

# IRAN NEWS

**The World Steel Association in Its Latest Report Said That Iran's Steel Production in April Increased by 6.4% Co to the Same Period in 2020 As the Country Produces 71.4% of Steel Manufactured in West Asia**

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## Leader Says Palestinians Will Win Battle

TEHRAN (PressTV)- Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei has responded to letters by Palestinian resistance leaders, hailing their fight against Israel as a divine struggle against oppression and predicting that they will win the battle.

"I received your letter in which you wrote with detail and analysis about the recent Palestinian jihad. Your struggle is the resistance against oppression, heresy and arrogance," the Leader wrote in his letter to Hamas political bureau chief Ismail Haniyeh.

"Such a struggle pleases the Almighty, Revered God and is the proof of 'O you who have faith! If you help Allah, He will help you and make your feet steady'," the Leader wrote, citing verse 7 of the 47th chapter of the Holy Qur'an.

"You will be victorious by the power of God and cleanse the holy land from the filth of the usurpers, God willing," Ayatollah Khamenei added.

## Tehran, IAEA Agree to Extend Monitoring Deal by One Month



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran and the U.N.'s nuclear watchdog agreed on Monday to a one-month extension to a deal on surveillance cameras at Tehran's atomic sites, buying more time for ongoing negotiations seeking to save the country's tattered nuclear deal with world powers.

The last-minute discussions, including the International Atomic Energy Agency pushing back a statement planned for Sunday, further underscored the narrowing window for the U.S. and others to reach terms with Iran as it presses a tough stance with the international community over its atomic program. The Islamic Republic is already enriching and stockpiling uranium at levels far beyond those allowed by its 2015 nuclear deal.

Speaking at a news conference Monday in Vienna, IAEA Director-General Rafael Mariano Grossi told journalists that came after a discussion with Ali Akbar Salehi, the head of Iran's civilian nuclear program. He acknowledged that challenges remain, however, as the agency still can't access images taken by its cameras.

"I'd want to stress this is not ideal," Grossi said. "This is like an emergency device that we came up with in order for us to continue having these monitoring activities."

Kazem Gharibabadi, Iran's representative to the IAEA, acknowledged the deal at the same time on Twitter. He said Tehran's civilian nuclear agency, the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, would keep the material already recorded by the IAEA cameras. "We recommend the negotiating countries to seize the extra opportunity provided by Iran in good faith for the complete lifting of sanctions in a practical and verifiable manner," Gharibabadi wrote.

Meanwhile Iran's Supreme National Security Council released a statement on the extension of the agreement between Iran and the IAEA until June 24. "Today, May 24, 2021, the quarterly opportunity regarding the storage of data of surveillance cameras installed in Iran's nuclear facilities expires," it said.

Emphasizing the suspension of the voluntary implementation of the Additional Protocol by Iran in accordance with the law on "Strategic Action Plan to Lift Sanctions and Protect Iranian Nation's Interests", the Iranian council announced its decision on the method of cooperation with the IAEA after the expiration of the previous agreement.

"Due to ongoing technical negotiations on the settlement of safeguards issues between Iran and the IAEA, which are being held simultaneously with the Vienna talks, surveillance camera data will be stored for one month as of May 24 to provide the opportunity for further negotiations and reaching a final conclusion."

Under a confidential agreement called an "Additional Protocol" with Iran, the IAEA collects and analyzes images from a series of surveillance cameras installed at Iranian nuclear sites. Those cameras helped it monitor Tehran's program to see if it is complying with the nuclear deal. Western diplomats have said that not extending the IAEA deal could jeopardize efforts to salvage the 2015 accord, which aims to keep Iran from being able to develop nuclear weapons. Tehran says it has never wanted to build them.

Iran and world powers will resume talks in Vienna this week on the nuclear deal, which Washington abandoned three years ago and then reimposed sanctions on the Islamic Republic. "I recommend that they use this opportunity, which has been provided in good faith by Iran, and lift all the sanctions in a practical and verifiable manner," Gharibabadi said. Iran's move to curb IAEA access arose from parliamentary legislation widely seen as pressure on President Joe Biden's administration to return to the nuclear pact and lift sanctions.

## No Access Beyond Safeguards

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Foreign Ministry Spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said that if the previous agreement between Iran and the IAEA is extended, the IAEA will not be granted access beyond safeguards.

Speaking in his weekly press conference on Monday, Khatibzadeh answered questions on a wide range of topics.

Answering a question about the extension of the agreement between Iran and the IAEA, Khatibzadeh said, "It is being discussed in the Supreme National Security Council and the Atomic Energy Organization will make an official announcement as soon as the process is finalized."

"It is important to note that this agreement does not give the Agency access beyond safeguards and this is an internal decision of the Islamic Republic of Iran to agree with the agency's request to maintain its video recording within the framework of the Additional Protocol. No access to the Agency has been granted since the day the Parliament's law implemented," he added.

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## Iranian Borders Impenetrable

TEHRAN (MNA) - The chief commander of the IRGC Major General Hossein Salami termed Iranian borders as impenetrable.

He made the remarks on Sunday on the occasion of May 23, the anniversary of the Liberation of Khorramshahr, during his visit to the southeastern borders of the country.

Heading a delegation, Salami made the trip to assess the combat and defense readiness of the operational units of the IRGC's forces and evaluate the security situation of the southeastern borders of the country.

On the sidelines of the visit, he described the borders of Iran as impenetrable.

He announced that along the entire borderline with neighboring countries, especially Pakistan in the southeast, security is ensured.

Emphasizing that the strength of a country relies on the stability of its borders, he added: "No country is safe without having secure borders."

## India Still Interested in Iran's Farzad B Gas Field

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India is still hopeful it can participate in the Farzad B natural gas field development in the Persian Gulf after Iran decided to go ahead with the project without foreign participation, oil ministry officials told S&P Global Platts.

With U.S. and Iran talks progressing to end sanctions against the Middle East country, some Indian refiners also told Platts they are looking forward to resuming crude trade with Iran. "Any positive development on Iran would reduce crude price and help consuming countries like India," M.K. Surana, chairman and managing director of Hindustan Petroleum Corp. Ltd (HPCL), India's No 3 state-run refiner, told Platts. Oil prices are unlikely to go much beyond \$70/b for long.

"Any price beyond \$70/b would be a temporary phenomenon," Surana said. Other refineries in India, the world's third-largest crude importer, also said they would resume imports as Iran's crude grades suit Indian refineries. Indian refiners processed 19.88 million mt of crude oil in April, or an average of 4.86 million b/d, up 34.86% on the year, according to the oil ministry. The April figure was 5.24% lower than March as retail demand for fuels shrank.

An official from India's No. 1 refiner Indian Oil Corp. declined to comment as to when India would resume crude imports from Iran after a gap of more than two years.

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## Inclusive Iran-Pakistan Diplomacy Urged for Security, Trade Collaboration

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches)- The experts from both sides noted that Pakistan-Iran diplomatic relations are based on the commonalities of language, literature, culture and religion that can enhance bilateral strategic and trade collaboration for a win-win situation.

Post withdrawal of the U.S. troops from Afghanistan, the two countries should have a mutually agreed strategy to handle the emerging situation of security and peace in the region. They said the enhanced cultural collaboration and heritage tourism can bring the people from both sides closer to each other beyond the ethnic and religious divide.

Youth engagement in a variety of sectors is imperative. The CPEC could be another economic and trade bond for closer ties between Iran and Pakistan. A youth expedition from Chabahar to Gwadar would lead to a much better understanding between the people of both sides and will open many vistas of collaboration. Development Communications Network (Devcom-Pakistan), DTN and Tehran International Studies and Research Institute (TISRI) jointly organized the webinar on "Iran-Pakistan diplomatic relations: opportunities for cooperation and convergence" on Sunday.

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Sokhan Gostar Institute

# IRAN NEWS

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## Goldman Sees Oil Hitting \$80/bbl

LONDON (Dispatches) - Goldman Sachs said it expects oil prices to climb to \$80 per barrel in the fourth quarter of this year, arguing that the market has underestimated a rebound in demand even with a possible resumption in Iranian supply.

"The case for higher oil prices therefore remains intact given the large vaccine-driven increase in demand in the face of inelastic supply," the bank said in a note dated Sunday.

Even "aggressively assuming" a restart of Iranian exports in July, Brent prices would still reach the \$80 mark by the fourth quarter, it said. Oil prices fell last week after Iran's president, Hassan Rouhani, said the United States was ready to lift sanctions on Tehran's oil, banking and shipping sectors.

Crude recouped some of those losses on Monday as a potential snag emerged in reviving the 2015 Iran nuclear deal that could add more oil supply, with indirect talks between Washington and Tehran due to resume this week.

Goldman Sachs said a demand recovery in developed markets would offset a recent coronavirus-led hit to consumption and likely slower recovery in South Asia and Latin America. Global demand could increase by 4.6 million barrels per day through year-end, with most of the gains likely in the next 3 months, it said. "Mobility is rapidly increasing in the U.S. and Europe, as vaccinations accelerate and lockdowns are lifted, with freight and industrial activity also surging," the note said. The bank also expects the Organization of the Oil Producing Countries (OPEC) and allies including Russia, a grouping known as OPEC+, to offset any ramp-up in Iran production by halting for two months an increase in its output in the second half of 2021.

This would help offset the perceived bearish impact in the physical market of the release of Iranian floating storage, it said.

# Leader to Meet With Parliament Members

TEHRAN (IP) - The Spokesman of the Presiding Board of the Parliament said that the parliament members will meet the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei on Thursday.

"This meeting will be via videoconference, on the anniversary of the inauguration of the 11th parliament," Mohammad Hossein Farhangi noted.

## Industry Growth Proves Ineffectiveness of U.S. Maximum Pressure Policy

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

**TEHRAN – President Hassan Rouhani says production growth figures relating to Iran’s industry prove the failure of the United States’ so-called maximum pressure policy against the country.**

"Production growth figures in various industrial sectors of the country are the best evidence of the ineffectiveness of the US maximum pressure policy," President Hassan Rouhani said at a meeting of the government’s economic coordination headquarters in Tehran.

Hailing the Iranian people’s resistance in the face of an economic war, Rouhani pointed out that even the U.S. government acknowledges that the maximum pressure policy has failed.

He said Washington has clearly voiced its readiness to remove the sanctions during the ongoing talks in Vienna which are aimed at restoring the 2015 Iran nuclear agreement.

"We will continue the negotiations until [reaching] a final agreement," the president added.

Iran and the other five remaining parties to the nuclear deal – Russia, China, France,



Britain and Germany – began discussions early last month to bring the US and Iran into full compliance with the deal, officially called the JCPOA.

The JCPOA was signed in 2015, but the US abandoned the deal in 2018 to inflict "maximum pressure" on Iran. In response, Iran began in 2019 to gradually ditch its nuclear commitments under the deal.

The talks in the Austrian capital are also attended by the US, but Tehran and Washington are not in direct contact.

The fifth round of the talks, which will begin in the coming days, is widely speculated to be the last one, as participants noted the "good" progress that was made in the fourth round and said an agreement is "within reach".

Also, President Rouhani said on Thursday that the participants had agreed to remove all main sanctions targeting the country’s oil, petrochemical, shipping and insurance sectors as well as the Central Bank of Iran.

## World Will Soon Witness End of Israel

TEHRAN (IP) - The commander of Iran’s Basij organization stressed that the world would soon witness the end of the Israeli regime.

Brigadier General Gholamreza Soleimani, the commander of the Basij Organization, said today, the rain of precise missiles and the closure of all Israeli airports, despite the system so-called the Iron Dome, show the continuation of 'Operation Reaching Quds' and the Islamic Revolution in the occupied territories.

The commander of the Basij Organization added: "The people of the Islamic world will see the final victory, and the end of the Zionist regime will be seen according to the prophecy of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution."

The Israeli cabinet unanimously agreed to a ceasefire in a three-hour meeting on Thursday night after 11 days of inability to stop rocket attacks by resistance groups in Gaza.

The ceasefire was established between Palestinian groups and the Israeli regime at 2 am on Friday, and the Palestinian people celebrated the victory of the resistance.

## \$5b Capacity Exists in Iran’s Trade Ties With Kazakhstan

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Head of Iran-Kazakhstan joint chamber of commerce believes that there is a capacity for Tehran to increase trade ties with Nur-Sultan to five billion dollars.

Free trade agreement with Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) has created many opportunities for Iran’s economy, Amir Abedi told IRNA on Monday.

The EAEU with its five members - Russia, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia and Kazakhstan - started taking economic policies on free trade agreements with other states as of 2015.

As Abedi said, Iran’s geopolitical position has provided good capacity for fostering foreign trade.

He described trade agreement with EAEU as the best customs agreement which has also been approved by Majlis (Iran’s Parliament) and government.

Referring to Kazakhstan as the second biggest market of EAEU, the official said Nur-Sultan has a special



place in historical and cultural relations with Tehran, the relations which can be extended to more economic fields as well.

At his remarks, Abedi pointed to facilitation of issuing visa between Iran and Kazakhstan as the way to have positive impact on trade.

Further, he described Kazakhstan

as a safe partner for Iran as it is located on the Silk Road.

Abedi also said that exchanging delegations, signing agreements, and holding joint exhibitions are planned by Iran-Kazakhstan joint chamber of commerce.

According to reports, Iran’s trade ties with the five members of the EAEU have been near 3.5 billion dollars during the past Iranian calendar year (ending on March 20).

In late 2020, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said that the country gives priority to strengthening relations with China, neighbors, and EAEU member states in all areas, including energy and technology.

## Source Denies Report of Fire at Iran Defense Industry Factory

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – An informed source at the Defense Ministry of Iran dismissed reports about a fire at the ministry’s industrial complexes in Isfahan.

The informed source said on Monday that none of the Defense Ministry’s subsidiaries or affiliated industries in the central city of Isfahan has caught fire.

The source said the reports of fire cited by hostile media outlets relate to an incident at a private sector’s factory producing incendiary materials.

The comments came after The Guardian reported on Sunday that a complex housing a factory that makes Iranian drones has suffered a major explosion in Isfahan.

It said that the blast has injured at least nine workers at the petrochemical factory, claiming that the Iran Aircraft Manufacturing Industrial Company (Hesa) is located in the complex owned by Sepahan Nargostar Chemical Industries.

## First COVID-19 Vaccine Made by Iran Private Sector to Undergo Clinical Trial

TEHRAN (IFP) - The fifth Iranian-made COVID-19 vaccine has been permitted to undergo the Phase II of its clinical trial.

The recombinant vaccine has been produced by Cinnagen company, and is the first one developed by the private sector.

Four other homegrown vaccines are already undergoing their clinical trials at different phases.

The Covo-Pars vaccine developed by Razi Institute, the conjugate vaccine jointly developed by Iran’s Pasteur Institute and Cuba’s Finlay Institute, the CovIran Barekat vaccine funded by the Executive Office of Imam Khomeini’s Order, and the Fakhra vaccine funded by the Iranian Ministry of Defence are the other four vaccines that are passing their final tests.

## Iranian Parliamentary Delegation to Monitor Syrian Presidential Election

TEHRAN (IP) - A parliamentary delegation from the Iranian parliament will monitor the Syrian Presidential Election at the invitation of the Syrian government.

Member of the National Security and Foreign Policy Commission of the Iranian Parliament, Zohreh Elahyan, stated that in addition to the Iranian parliamentary delegation, other parliamentary delegations from different countries would be present in Syria to monitor the presidential election.

"Evidence suggests that we will see a high-turnout election, and the people will vote for the most suitable person to rebuild Syria and make progress," she noted.

Regarding the Iran-Syria parliamentary relations, especially after the start of the war in Syria, she pointed out that the parliamentary relations between the two countries had always been strong, and the Iranian Parliament had supported the Syrian people in all circumstances and maintained relations with the Syrian parliament.

The presidential election inside Syria will be held on May 26.

Bashar al-Assad, Abdullah Salloum Abdullah, and Mahmoud Ahmad Marie are the three candidates for the Syrian presidential election.

## Khorramshahr Liberation, Turning Point in Sacred Defense Epic

TEHRAN (MNA) – The Coordinating Council of Islamic Development Organization (IDO) in a statement on the occasion of May 23, "Liberation of Khorramshahr", said that Liberation of Khorramshahr is a turning point in history of Sacred Defense.

"Liberation of Khorramshahr" is a turning point in the history of eight years of Sacred Defense (Iraqi imposed war against Iran in 1980-1988) and a model of resistance of the noble Iranian people against Iraqi Ba’ath regime.

The statement is read as follows,

May 23, 1982 is reminiscent of the liberation of capital of self-sacrifice and perseverance of Islamic Iran "Khorramshahr" from seizure of Ba’ath party of former regime of Iraq and criminal deposed Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein.

The resilient people of Khorramshahr, despite 576 days of occupation and crime by Ba’athist regime of Iraq, who had turned the area into a heap of blood and ashes, never surrendered and resisted against the enemy, that had been armed to teeth, with the support of all walks of Iranian people and recorded a lasting and brilliant epic in the glorious history of the Islamic Revolution forever.

## Top Diplomat Urges U.S. to Provide Verifiable Sanctions Lifting

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Abbas Araqchi in a message emphasized that the United States should first provide verifiable sanctions lifting.

"Yesterday I spent 4hrs before our Parliament’s NatSec/FP Commission to brief MPs on Vienna talks. Very tough. But useful," Araqchi wrote in his Twitter account on Monday.

"Bottom line is same: Having left JCPOA, U.S. must first provide verifiable sanctions lifting," he added.

"Iran will then resume full implementation. Is the U.S. ready?" he noted.

Meanwhile on Sunday Araqchi said the parties in Vienna talks have agreed over lifting 95% of the total sanctions against Iran.

Araqchi briefed the Members of the Parliament’s National Security and Foreign Policy Committee about Vienna talks.

Shahriar Heydari, a member of the Committee, told Iran Press about the meeting: "Araqchi said that the sanctions were negotiated in two parts, thematic and individual, and most of the thematic sanctions were lifted."

The Committee member said on the sanctions of institutions and individuals and legal entities, out of 1,500 sanctions, 1,100 sanctions have been lifted and we are negotiating the lifting of another 400 sanctions, including those related to human rights.

"Araqchi also referred to the discussion of the fact-finding mechanism of lifting sanctions and we hope to see the result in the implementation phase," he added.

He announced that the parties in Vienna talks agreed on the lifting of 95% of the total sanctions and that they are negotiating on lifting the remaining 5% that would be lifted in the future, the parliament member highlighted.

## Trump Legacy, Release Billions of Dollars Held Hostage



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif says the U.S. has a "legal and moral obligation" to remove sanctions on Tehran, turning the tables on Washington after Secretary of State Antony Blinken demanded that the Islamic Republic "come back into compliance on the nuclear side".

"Lifting Trump’s sanctions, Secretary Blinken, is a legal and moral obligation. Not negotiating leverage," Zarif tweeted Monday in a post addressed to the top U.S. diplomat.

The administration of President Joe Biden is showing an aversion to remove a web of sanctions which its predecessor imposed on Iran with the aim of negotiating what it characterized as a better nuclear deal with the Islamic Republic.

Washington’s resistance has complicated the negotiations currently underway in Vienna to bring the US back to compliance with the nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which former president Donald Trump abandoned in 2018.

While the U.S. is not a party to the negotiations, it has sent a delegation to the Austrian capital in order to make its presence felt as much as possible.

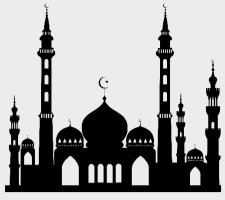
On Sunday, Blinken sought to put the ball in Iran’s court, saying the United States had not seen yet whether Iran would move to comply with its nuclear commitments in order to have the sanctions removed.

"Iran, I think, knows what it needs to do to come back into compliance on the nuclear side, and what we haven’t yet seen is whether Iran is ready and willing to make a decision to do what it has to do. That’s the test and we don’t yet have an answer," Blinken told ABC News.

In his Monday posts, Zarif dismissed Blinken’s political grandstanding, saying it "didn’t work for Trump—won’t work for you".

"Release the Iranian people’s billions of dollars held hostage abroad due to U.S. bullying," he said. "Trump’s legacy is past its expiration date. Drop it, president of the United States."

With a fifth round of talks in coming days, Blinken’s comments poured fresh cold water on the prospects of a breakthrough in the standoff.



## PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:01
■ Evening (Maghreb)	20:30
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:10
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	05:52

94. If any, after this, invent a lie and attribute it to Allah, they are indeed unjust wrong-doers.  
95. Say: "(Allah) speaketh the Truth: follow the religion of Abraham, the sane in faith; he was not of the Pagans."  
Surah 3. The Family Of 'Imran, The House Of 'Imran (94-95)

## Tourism, Transportation Can Boost Cooperation Between Tehran and Sofia

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN – Bulgarian Ambassador to Tehran Ms. Nikolina Kuneva believes tourism and transportation can pave the ground for boosting cooperation between Iran and Bulgaria.**

Kuneva met Chairman of Iran's Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mine and Agriculture (ICCIMA) Mr. Gholam-Hossein Shafei and during the meeting both sides explored ways for boosting cooperation between the two states.

Kuneva went on to say that Tehran and Sofia have good relations and Bulgaria's Embassy in Tehran tries to provide the grounds for boosting the bilateral ties more than ever, and it also tries the talks between the two countries not to be halted.

She went on to say that in 2019, the trade volume between Iran and Bulgaria was \$80m and the figure rose to \$120m in 2020 and of course, this amount should increase more. Kuneva noted that before the outbreak of the COVID-19, annually between 10,000 to 20,000 Iranian tourists visited Bulgaria and even now Iranian tourists who are vaccinated can travel to Bulgaria.

She also referred to the cooperation in the field of transportation which has been always active, and emphasized Bulgaria welcomes the launch of the direct flight between Tehran and Sofia.

Meanwhile Shafei, for his part, referred to the current relation between Iran and Bulgaria and said the relation is in a good level so that economic cooperation between provinces of the two countries has been shaped. He stated of course the trade volume between Tehran and Sofia has decreased during the sanctions era comparing to the pre-sanctions but the relation has still continued.

He then pointed to the features and position of Bulgaria's economy and said Bulgaria has a free economy and it has helped the country to enjoy good growth, adding that the major trade between Iran and Bulgaria has been in the field of transportation, and by the way, Bulgaria has a good tourist attraction for Iranians.



Shafei emphasized that tourism is a good ground for economic cooperation and the problems in this field should be resolved, adding that these two countries due to their good capacities can also be good trade partners.

He went on to say that geographically, Bulgarian can be a gateway for Iran's presence in the Eastern European countries and the Balkan states as the markets in Bulgaria's surrounding are important markets.

Shafei went on to say that Iran and Bulgaria had already had cooperation in the fields of auto industry and auto part manufacturing and this opportunity still exists. He said that Bulgaria has good opportunity for cooperation for Iranians in the field of food industries and agriculture, and by the way, Iran is challenging with constant droughts and using modern irrigation system is very vital for Iran.

He expressed hope that in the future the trade volume between Iran and Bulgaria would rise to a considerable amount.

Then head of the international affairs of ICCIMA Mr. Mohammad Reza Karbasi, for his part, said that since the U.S. pullout from the JCPOA, Bulgaria has been the only country which has held its joint economic commission meeting with Iran in the ministerial level.

He added in the meeting, some good agreements were reached and nine documents on cooperation were signed and launching the direct flight between Tehran and Sofia was one of the agreements.

At the end of the meeting, Kuneva called for the meeting of the heads of the chambers of commerce of Iran and Bulgaria in the near future in order to explore technically ways of boosting economic cooperation between the two countries.

## Iran Trade Volume Exchange With Turkey Up 53% in Q1

TEHRAN (MNA) –

Iran's volume of trade exchanged with the Republic of Turkey in the first three months of the current year in 2021 registered a 53 percent growth as compared to the same period of last year.

According to the official statistics of Turkey, Iran's trade value exchanged with neighboring Turkey in the first quarter of the current year in 2021 stood at about \$986 million.

In this period, the Islamic Republic of Iran's volume of trade exchanged with the Republic of Turkey has recorded about 53 percent hike from Jan. 1 to April 20, so that about \$505 million of which is related to the export of products by the Islamic Republic of Iran to Turkey while about \$481 million of which belongs to the import of products from neighboring Turkey.

Another statistic shows that Iran's trade balance with Turkey has turned 'positive' in the first three months of the current year in 2021 which is in favor of the Islamic Republic of Iran.



## "COV-Iran Barekat" Vaccine Is Reassuring

TEHRAN (IP) - The head of the Iranian parliament's commission for health, treatment, and medical education said there was more confidence in producing Iranian COVID vaccines.

Hossein-Ali Shahriari stated about the safety level of 'COV-Iran Barekat' vaccine: "With the studies performed and the groups that took this Iranian vaccine in the first and second phases of clinical studies, the efficacy results have been very high."

Noting that he injected the vaccine in the third phase of its clinical trial, Shahriari said domestic vaccines would work better in the future and we're no different from foreign vaccines.

Head of Parliament's Health commission expressed confidence in the domestic production of the COVID vaccine and expressed hope that the Iranian people could be vaccinated with homemade vaccines as soon as possible.

The final phase of clinical trials of the 'COV-Iran Barekat' vaccine was done on Saturday.

After clinical studies, this vaccine is delivered to the Food and Drug Administration of Iran, and the produced vaccine enters the injection cycle after the organization's approval.

## ESCO Has No Materialistic Approach To Environmental Projects

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

ISFAHAN – Head of the

Assistant Directorate for

Exploitation of Esfahan Steel

Company (ESCO) emphasizes

that the company does not have

any materialistic and profit-

earning approach to its

environmental projects and

according to the estimates, the

cost for changing the flexible

doors was around \$7m that with half of that figure,

these doors were indigenized.

Touching upon indigenizing the flexible doors of

ESCO, Mehrdad Tavallaiean said the importance of the

project for the ESCO is more related to the

environmental issues.

He noted that ESCO by changing the flexible doors related

to the battery No. 3 of the coke-making unit will save it from

the leakage of surplus gases from the batteries.

Tavallaiean went on to say that when there is no leakage

of gas from the flexible doors, then there will be no gas

waste and even the production quality will improve.

He said gas exists in this unit for cooking the coke

and when the gas exits these doors, it pollutes the

environment and even affects the quality of the coke.

He once again said that ESCO in its environmental

projects do not at all have any profit-earning approach and

indigenization of the flexible doors is just for the sake of

the health of the personnel as well as those who live

surroundings of ESCO in order to minimize the pollution.

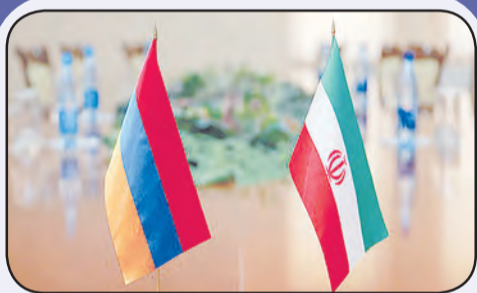
Tavallaiean noted that early estimates showed that the

project would cost the company \$7m but the company

through domestic design and manufacture halved its cost.



## Iran Intends to Use Armenian Route in Part of N-S Corridor



TEHRAN (MNA) – Minister of Roads and Urban Development said that the two countries of Iran and Armenia will hold direct talk for using Armenian route in a part of North-South Corridor.

Mohammad Eslami made the remarks at Imam Khomeini International Airport (IKIA) on Monday before his trip to Armenia.

Turning to the efforts and measures taken by the government to develop trade and business relations with other countries, the Minister of Roads and Urban Development said that establishing widespread and expensive interaction with the world countries especially neighboring states is one of the pivotal strategies of the government of Islamic Republic of Iran.

Accordingly, the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development has currently followed up bilateral and multilateral talks and interactions with other countries in the world especially neighboring countries with a focus on boosting trade, business, transportation and transit ties, the minister emphasized.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Eslami pointed to his visit to Armenia and stated, "According to the scheduled plan, officials of the two countries of Iran and Armenia will hold bilateral talks on relevant issues in this visit."

Referring to the cultural affinity of Islamic Republic of Iran and Armenia, he said, "Apart from the fact that some Armenians live in Iran, there is a kinship and cultural connection between the two countries, so that it is necessary that cultural interaction between people of the two countries should be facilitated and stronger infrastructures must be created between the two countries to expand freight and passenger exchanges."

The use of Armenian route for a part of North-South corridor is one of the main issues that will be discussed between Iranian and Armenian officials in this visit, he said, adding that this visit also would bring about positive effects both culturally, socially and economically.

## Local Manufacturing Helped Cut Imports by \$5.4b

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran says local manufacturing helped cut imports by \$5.4 billion in the 18 months to late March. Figures by Iran's ministry of industries (MIMT) shows that a campaign to launch local manufacturing for imported goods and machinery helped cut the government's imports bill by around \$5.4 billion in the 18 months to late March.

A senior MIMT official said on Sunday that the ministry had achieved some 77% of the targets set in the campaign for local manufacturing of products that used to be imported before September 2019.

Mohammad Mehdi Hadavi, who chairs MIMT's Center for Localized Manufacturing, said that most of the goods that replaced imported products have been parts and components that are widely used in the manufacturing and construction sectors in Iran.

"With the help of expert groups, we managed to launch local production for \$5.4 billion or 77% of the parts that are used in the projects," Hadavi was quoted as saying by the semi-official Mehr news agency.

Iran's manufacturing sector has experienced a major boom in recent years thanks to growing government support and the increased involvement of private investors.

The boost in manufacturing activity has helped the country offset the impacts of the US sanctions on supplies of goods and services while it has also led to increased number of jobs for Iran's youth population.

In remarks published on Sunday, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani hailed the robust growth in Iran's manufacturing sector as a sign of utter failure for US policy of imposing sanctions on the country.

"Production growth figures reported in various parts of the country's manufacturing sector is the best evidence of the futility of the US maximum pressure policy," said Rouhani.

## President Orders to Prevent Cryptocurrency Exchange Closures

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Following news of the possibility of stopping online exchange portals selling cryptocurrencies, the presidential body in a letter called on the central bank governor to stop blocking these ports.

The letter which was published on Monday said that "more than 60,000 transactional agents and cryptocurrency exchange businesses should be requested to prevent the blocking of internet payment gateways."

News of the blocking of authorized cryptocurrency exchange portals came to strength after Majlis Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, in a letter to the head of the Central Bank and the Minister of Economic Affairs, asked not to authorize cryptocurrency exchanges until further notice.

## Students Stranded in India, Pakistan to Return Home

TEHRAN (MNA) – Spokesman for Iranian Civil Aviation Organization (CAO) revealed the launch of an extraordinary flight for returning Iranian students stranded in India and Pakistan due to COVID-19 variant.

Mohammad-Hassan Zibakhsh Spokesman for the Civil Aviation Organization broke the news on Monday and reiterated that special flight has been launched for returning Iranian students stranded in two countries of India and Pakistan due to the rising spread of coronavirus, COVID-19, in these two Asian countries.

In order to return Iranian students from India and Iranian nationals in Pakistan to the country, an extraordinary flight will be launched for this reason by fully observing of health protocols and guidelines as instructed by the National Coronavirus Combat and Prevention Headquarters, Zibakhsh added.

The ban on Iranian flights to the countries of India and Pakistan had been imposed on Apr. 24 following the widespread outbreak of COVID-19 variant in India, he said, adding, "Accordingly, a special flight will be launched by Iran's Mahan Airlines to India on Friday this week and another flight by Iran's National Flag Carrier (Iran Air) to Pakistan next week."

# Exiled Activist Held At Belarus Airport

MINSK (Dispatches) - Belarusian opposition Telegram channel Nexta said Sunday its former editor and exiled opposition activist Roman Protasevich had been detained in Minsk after his flight made an emergency landing under orders from President Alexander Lukashenko.

The move comes amid an intensifying crackdown following historic demonstrations that gripped the ex-Soviet country after a disputed presidential election last year.

Nexta Live and its sister channel Nexta -- with close to 2 million subscribers on the Telegram messenger -- are prominent voices of the Belarus opposition and helped mobilise protesters.



# Italian Cable Car Crash Kills 14 People

ROME (Dispatches) - At least 14 people died and a child was seriously injured on Sunday when a cable car linking Italy's Lake Maggiore with a nearby mountain plunged 20 meters to the ground, local officials and rescuers said.

The Stresa-Mottarone cable car takes tourists and locals from the town on Lake Maggiore, almost 1,400 metres above sea level to the top of the Mottarone mountain in 20 minutes.

"We are devastated, in pain," Marcella Severino, Stresa's mayor told broadcaster RAI, while Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi voiced his condolences to the families of the victims.



# UN Urges Political Process Amid Gaza Reconstruction



GAZA CITY (Dispatches) - A UN official in war-battered Gaza Sunday called for a "genuine political process" to avert further bloodshed after the military conflict between Israel and Islamist group Hamas that ravaged the Palestinian enclave.

As emergency response teams worked to clear the rubble, and Gaza residents assessed the damage to their homes and shops, top UN staff visited the territory after an Egyptian-brokered ceasefire Friday halted 11 days of mutual bombardment.

Israeli air strikes on the Gaza Strip since May 10 have killed more than 200 Palestinians, rendered thousands homeless and laid waste to buildings and key water and power infrastructure in the blockaded territory.

It was the latest such bombardment to hit the crowded Mediterranean coastal strip of some two million people after three previous wars with Israel since 2008.

Philippe Lazzarini, head of the UN Palestinian refugee agency UNRWA, told AFP that the reconstruction needed to go hand in hand with efforts to create "a different political environment".

"We need to have a genuine, genuine focus on human development, on proper access to education, on proper access to jobs, on proper access to livelihoods," he said.

"But this needs to be accompanied by a genuine political process."

Speaking earlier to a group of journalists, he said "the layers of hardship in Gaza keep getting thicker" because the root causes of the conflict have not been addressed.

U.S. President Joe Biden on Friday pledged to help organise efforts to rebuild Gaza and said creating a Palestinian state alongside Israel is the "only answer" to the conflict.

"We still need a two-state solution," he said.

Israeli strikes on Gaza killed 248 Palestinians, including 66 children, and have wounded over 1,900 people, the Gaza health ministry says.

Rockets and other fire from Gaza claimed 12 lives in Israel, including one child and an Arab-Israeli teenager, an Israeli soldier, one Indian, and two Thai nationals, medics say. Some 357 people in Israel have been wounded.

There is controversy about how many of those killed in Gaza were combatants, and how many were civilians. Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the bombing campaign had killed "more than 200 terrorists" in Gaza.

Lynn Hastings, of the UN humanitarian agency OCHA, said that beyond the material damage, the intense bombing had done severe harm to many people's mental health.

During the last war in 2014, "we had humanitarian pauses, where people were able to get out, and were able to go to the shops, they were able to feel safe again," she said.

"That really speaks to the amount of trauma that was experienced this time, where there was absolutely no pause for people to breathe."

# Qatar Offers Backing To Libya Unity Gov't

TRIPOLI (Dispatches) - Qatar on Sunday gave its support to Libya's internationally backed political process, which aims to lift the North African nation out of a decade of conflict and foreign interference.

"We support the UN-sponsored political process in the hope that it preserves the territorial integrity of Libya and prevents foreign interference in its affairs," Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani said on a visit to the Libyan capital.

"Our exchanges were fruitful, in particular on support for the transition process in Libya... Qatar's position is firm," he told reporters, standing alongside his Libyan counterpart, Najla al-Mangoush.

Since Libya's new government took power, several countries have reopened embassies, and Mangoush said she hoped that Doha would soon follow suit.

"I think I have had good news," Mangoush added, without providing further details.

The toppling and killing of dictator Moamer Kadhafi in a 2011 NATO-backed uprising plunged Libya into a bloody, decade-long struggle for power.

But in October, rival groups signed a truce, setting in motion a UN-led process.

Libya's interim unity government came into being in March -- replacing two rival administrations, one based in the capital Tripoli and the other in the country's east -- to lead the country to elections in December.

Qatar, along with Turkey, had backed the government in the west of Libya, while countries including the United Arab Emirates, Russia and Egypt had backed the eastern forces.

According to the UN, more than 20,000 foreign mercenaries and military personnel are still in Libya. They include Turkish, Russian, Sudanese and Chadian mercenaries.



# Court Allows Suez Canal to Keep Holding Ever Given

CAIRO (Dispatches) - An Egyptian court on Sunday rejected a complaint by the Japanese owner of a container ship that blocked traffic in the Suez Canal for six days in March against the vessel's continued detention by canal authorities, a lawyer said.

The Ever Given, one of the world's largest container ships, became jammed across the canal in high winds on March 23, halting traffic in both directions and disrupting global trade. read more

The complaint was attached to a case at the economic appeals court in Ismailia in which the Suez Canal Authority is seeking \$916 million in compensation from the Ever Given's owner Shoei Kisen over the blockage and the operation to free the ship.

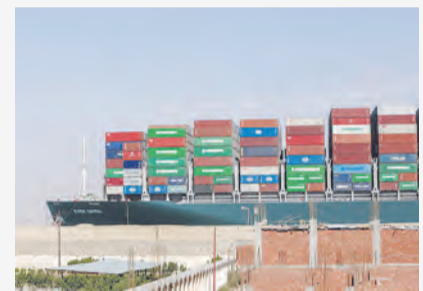
The court on Sunday referred the case back to a court of first instance, which is due to consider it on May 29, said Ahmed Abu Ali, one of the lawyers representing the owner.

Any ruling made by the lower court could trigger appeals by either side, said another lawyer on the case, Ahmed Abu Shanab, indicating that legal wrangling could drag on.

In a statement following Sunday's ruling the SCA said it bore no responsibility for the Ever Given's grounding, reasserting that responsibility lay with the ship's captain alone, and rebutting arguments made a day before by Shoei Kisen's legal team.

It also defended its \$916 million claim, citing the costs of freeing the ship and a salvage bonus stipulated in maritime law, material and reputational damage, and the diversion of some shipping away from the canal.

One boat sank during the operation to free the ship, resulting in the death of a worker, the SCA said.



# Paris Protesters Decry Gaza Conflict's Palestinian Death Toll

PARIS (Dispatches) - There was a mood of quiet indignation among the small crowd protesting in Paris on Sunday about this month's eleven-day flare-up of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in which at least 260 people were killed, the majority of them Palestinian.

The gathering at Place de la République in eastern Paris appeared to be far smaller than the crowd in the same location the previous day.

The protests came after an Egyptian-brokered ceasefire between Israel and Hamas came into effect on Friday. But demonstrators doubted that this will do anything to avoid repeated bouts of violence in the future.

"I think [the Israeli government] is making it seem like the fighting's over and done with so that they can strike harder in the future," said Rania, 15, who had come to the protest from the suburb Boulogne-Billancourt on the other side of the Paris region with a group of friends the same age.

"It feels very good to be here to support a people in distress," Rania said. At the same time, she continued, coming to protest was a "very sad" experience, because "no nation deserves to go through what the Palestinians have been through; it's unacceptable".

Rania added that she was calling for a solution to the conflict as opposed to allowing the status quo to re-emerge now that the ceasefire is holding: Such a solution would be "beneficial to the Palestinians and

for the Israelis too", she emphasised.

Like yesterday's protest, this was a "static" demonstration, after Paris police banned a planned march through eastern Paris the previous weekend. French authorities feared a repeat of the ugly scenes at protests during the 2014 Gaza conflict, which saw synagogues targeted and chants of "death to Jews".

Protesters in Paris on Sunday underlined that they support the Palestinian people while disavowing anti-Semitic and anti-Israeli sentiment.

"We're not against Israel; we're against the Israeli government's mistreatment of Palestinians," said Cathy, 34, who brought her children to Sunday's demonstration. "I understand that they were fighting against Hamas, but they also killed lots of innocent people including lots of children," Cathy continued.

At least 248 Palestinians were killed by Israeli airstrikes during this month's conflict, including 66 children. Hamas rocket attacks killed 12 people in Israel, including one child; Israel's Iron Dome missile defence system blocked many salvos.

The Israeli military said during the conflict that it did its utmost to minimise civilian casualties when responding to Hamas rocket attacks from Gaza, but that the Islamist militant group - classed as a terrorist organisation by the EU and US - was in effect using them as human shields.



# Castillo Builds Lead Over Fujimori Ahead of Peru Presidential Vote

LIMA (Dispatches) - Socialist candidate Pedro Castillo continued to regain ground among voters, a poll showed on Sunday, boosting his lead over conservative contender Keiko Fujimori two weeks ahead of Peru's presidential election.

Castillo, an elementary school teacher seeking to implement new taxes and royalties on the mining sector, obtained 44.8% support in the survey of the Institute of Peruvian Studies (IEP), while Fujimori, a business-friendly conservative, netted 34.4%.

The poll of 1,208 people was conducted for Peru's La Republica newspaper on May 20-21 and had a margin of error of 2.8 percentage points.

Castillo, who had begun to flounder in polls earlier in May, has gained significant ground since the same IEP survey in mid-May, in which he obtained 36.5% among intended voters and Fujimori 29.6%.

On Saturday, protesters marched in Lima and other major Peruvian cities toting banners and shouting the slogan "Fujimori never again." Fujimori's father, the former president Alberto Fujimori, is in prison over corruption charges.

Castillo, who stormed into the run-off with Fujimori following a win in a shock first-round election, has strong support among Peru's largely poor, interior rural communities. Marketwatchers, however, view his candidacy as a potential threat to industry in the world's No.2 copper producer.

The Sunday poll also indicated that 13% intend to vote blank or annul their vote in the June 6 ballot, while 5.1% were still undecided.



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PUBLISHER OF NEWSPAPERS

Background: Cityscape with skyscrapers under a blue sky.

# Bitcoin Falls 11.3% to \$33,250

LONDON (Dispatches) - Bitcoin dipped 11.33% to \$33,250 on Sunday, losing \$4,248.98 from its previous close.

Bitcoin, the world's biggest and best-known cryptocurrency, is down 48% from the year's high of \$64,895.22 on April 14.

Ether, the coin linked to the ethereum blockchain network, dropped 16.59% to \$1,915.34 on Sunday, losing \$380.97 from its previous close. Bitcoin markets operate 24/7, setting the stage for price swings at unpredictable hours.



## Korean Business Bodies Welcome Outcome of Summit

SEOUL (Dispatches) - Major business associations in South Korea welcomed the outcome of President Moon Jae-in's visit to the U.S., and praised announced partnerships on strategic business areas including semiconductor chips and batteries.

The Federation of Korean Industries, a major business lobbying group here, issued a statement on Sunday on the business agreements made over the weekend in line with President Moon's summit talks with his U.S. counterpart Joe Biden.

"We view the agreement of the two countries to cooperate on semiconductor investment, advanced technology, and distribution channels as a very valuable achievement. We also agree with the direction the alliance is heading, going further over defense to cover business," the statement read.

The FKI also said it sees promise in the partnership forged between the two countries on COVID-19, and wished the best for their joint efforts to support the world in overcoming difficulties caused by the pandemic.

The Korea Enterprises Federation and the Korea International Trade Association released similar statements.

"It is a meaningful result that South Korea and the U.S. have agreed to cooperate to restore the global supply chain of chips, batteries, key materials and drugs as well as to deepen partnership on new technologies, amid the rise of economic nationalism," the KEF said.

"The enterprise circle will also make best efforts so that the achievement from the summit leads to tangible plans, and helps (the country) overcome the economic crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic."

Agreements made between the two sides to establish a distribution network for the manufacturing sector involving semiconductors and electric vehicle batteries was a "fruitful result," KITA said, as their supply shortage has hit industries around the globe.

"We wish for the two countries to become No. 1 partners to lead the fourth industrial revolution and the era of digital transformation," KITA said in the statement.

The Korea Chamber of Commerce and Industry highlighted Chairman Chey Tae-won's economic diplomacy, as he accompanied Moon to the U.S., meeting with various industry officials and leaders to encourage cooperation with South Korea.

Not only was it Chey's first trip as the newly appointed KCCI chief since March, but he was the only head of a Korean economic organization to take part in the delegation, as the government sought to organize a small group to join the summit trip amid concerns over the COVID-19 pandemic.

On Friday, Chey joined the Korea-U.S. Business Roundtable alongside Moon, where he spoke with Joshua Bolten, the president and chief executive of the Business Roundtable, an association of CEOs of leading US companies.

They also met with leaders from major economic organizations and think tanks, including the Information Technology Industry Council and Atlantic Council, to build his network, the KCCI said.

"During his visit to the U.S., Chey utilized his U.S. network to encourage business cooperation between the two countries," said Kang Seok-gu, the head of the organization's international affairs division.

"Following the summit visit, KCCI will continue to create ways to work together with the US in various economic sectors, including trade, investment and joint research and development."

## Covid Crisis Costs Germany Almost 300b Euros

BERLIN (Dispatches) - The Covid-19 pandemic has had a huge financial impact on Germany with the German Economic Institute (IW) estimating the country would be 300 billion euros better off had it never happened.

"It will take years for the losses and structural upheavals to balance out," Michael Hüther, the head of the Cologne-based institute, told Germany's Welt am Sonntag on Sunday.

The institute's economists based their estimates on actual and forecast growth compared with that of so-called potential growth. Potential growth predicts how much the German economy would have grown in the past six quarters if the Covid-19 pandemic hadn't happened.

The past three quarters (Q4 2020 to Q2 2021) accounted for just under 140 million euros, with a little less than a third of this loss due to the lockdown that was imposed as a result of the second wave. Restrictions are only just beginning to ease as vaccinations progress and infection rates drop.

"The vaccination rate is finally picking up, that is a signal to the economy that should not be underestimated," said Hüther.

"Nonetheless, we should not be under any illusion that the crisis will just not leave its mark. Without Corona, the economy would have grown significantly," he added.



## Switzerland Fears Impact of Minimum Corporate Tax Rate

ZURICH (Dispatches) - The looming shadow of a global minimum corporate tax rate could threaten Switzerland's status as a hub for multinational company headquarters.

The United States says that no country should tax companies less than 21%, a proposal that has added momentum to talks over a worldwide minimum corporate tax rate. The average corporate tax rate among Swiss cantons currently stands at around 15%, according to KPMG.

"I can imagine a 21% tax rate would deter foreign investment coming into Switzerland," Swiss Business Federation (economiesuisse) tax expert Frank Marty told SWI swissinfo.ch. "Switzerland is a small nation with few natural resources and no links to the ocean. Smaller countries should have the right to use the assets that they have - and tax is fundamental."

The idea of taxing companies at a global minimum rate has been around for a few years but recently found renewed impetus at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the G20 group of powerful economies.

The talks being held by the G20 and OECD also propose measures to make companies pay taxes where they generate their sales and not just where they are located. The potential impact of these measures is hard to gauge as the details have yet to be hammered out. But it's clear that Switzerland could lose tax revenue from the likes of Nestlé and Roche, which generate most of their sales and profits abroad.

Marty believes that a minimum tax rate could be agreed upon at the G20 /OECD level by the end of the year. He urges Switzerland to fight for a minimum rate of no higher than 15%.

Switzerland has so far called for "simple, clear and moderate solutions External link". Finance Minister Ueli Maurer says he is willing to discuss reforms, despite warning two years ago that the OECD's proposals could cost the Swiss economy up to CHF5 billion (\$5.5 billion).



In reality, Switzerland would have no option but to comply should there be global consensus on how to tax companies in future. "So far, no major economy has spoken out against a minimum rate of corporation tax," said KPMG Switzerland's Peter Uebelhart. The proposed minimum tax rate would apply to a company's overseas profits.

But if a country taxes these profits at a rate lower than the minimum threshold, the firm's home government could levy a charge to top up the taxes to the minimum rate - eliminating any tax advantage from the tax haven.

The tax consultancy group recommends that Switzerland spend more on enhancing its infrastructure for companies as the only reasonable way to keep the country attractive to multinational firms.

At the end of 2019, some 8,765 foreign company groups had a base in Switzerland, supporting more than half a million jobs. They generated twice the turnover of domestic multinational companies in Switzerland.

There are already signs that Switzerland is losing its edge in the competition to attract multinational operations. In 2019, consultancy firm McKinsey warned that other countries are pulling ahead. In recent years, Switzerland has been forced to reform its corporate tax code that favoured foreign holding companies and has voted to restrict the influx of European Union workers.

## Pakistan's Economic Growth to Increase by 6%

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Pakistan Finance Minister Shaukat Tarin on Sunday revealed that the government will be giving targeted subsidies to the power sector in 2021.

According to the details, while addressing a news conference in Islamabad today, Shaukat Tareen said that the government is focusing on enhancing exports, revenue collections, and many different administrative measures in a bid to achieve sustainable economic growth.

Tarin stressed the need to build foreign exchange reserves to ensure sustainable growth. "Higher reserves will help avoid any balance of payment crisis."

"The recent indicators show an economic growth of 3.94 percent," said the Finance Minister; adding that, "But unfortunately deliberated attempts were made to make these statistics controversial."

He said if the pace continues 5 percent economic growth is expected next year and over 6 percent in 2023. Shaukat Tarin said long, short, and medium-term strategy is being evolved in 12 sectors. He said price stability is the top priority to bring down inflation and provide relief to the people.

Moreover he said that for both federation and provinces to have fiscal independence, the tax to GDP ratio has to be 18% to 20%.

He said enhancing revenue collection and reducing fiscal deficit are also the priority areas of the government.

## Azerbaijan to Benefit From Improved Regional Connectivity and Rural Development

BAKU (Dispatches) - A new \$65 million loan to the Republic of Azerbaijan to finance the Regional Connectivity and Development Project was approved today by the World Bank Board of Directors. The project will provide safe, efficient and climate resilient transport connectivity and improve market accessibility along the Salyan-Bilasuvar road in the south of the country. About 250,000 people living along this route will benefit from upgraded road infrastructure, as well as improved economic opportunities and easier access to essential service facilities.

"This project will help Azerbaijan to achieve its national development priorities," said Sarah Michael, World Bank Country Manager for Azerbaijan. "With the World Bank's support, the country is committed to ensuring this decade that the benefits of development are evenly distributed across all areas of

Azerbaijan, to build inclusive and sustainable communities, tap the full potential of rural areas, and improve people's skills."

The project will finance three key areas. First, investments in roads and ancillary agricultural and logistics infrastructure will contribute to supporting connectivity and market accessibility, with a view to maximizing the socio-economic development impact of upgraded roads.

Second, the project will support financial sustainability and efficiency within the road sector, through technical assistance for developing road network management systems and study options for introduction of user charges and prevention of vehicle overloading.

Third, the project will support the design and arrangement of roadside logistics and market facilities, and provision of skills training to local entrepreneurs, to improve income-generating opportunities for local communities.

"The project will support aspects such as raised road embankments and the use of appropriate road materials to address climate vulnerabilities," said Nijat Valiyev, World Bank project team leader. "It will also provide job opportunities, both during construction of the roads and during operation of roadside facilities that will contribute to the post-COVID19 recovery."

Agriculture is the primary economic sector in the region where the project is being implemented. Improving the capacity of local markets and enhancing access to markets in the Baku Metropolitan area are crucial for the economic development and livelihoods of local farmers. By improving road connectivity, with climate-resilient measures, the project is expected to reduce transportation costs and time a, as well as road disruption risks, for agriculture supply chains and logistics.

Azerbaijan joined the World Bank in 1992. Since then, the World Bank has financed over 50 projects with total commitments of \$4.4 billion.

## Corruption Cost Iraq \$150b



BAGHDAD (Dispatches) - Corruption has cost Iraq \$150 billion (\$A 194 billion) smuggled abroad since 2003, the country's President Barham Salih says.

Iraq is experiencing a deep economic crisis compounded by a fall in oil prices, the country's main source of income, and the coronavirus pandemic.

"The total value of Iraq's crude oil exports since 2003 until now has exceeded 1000 billion dollars, while the scale of corruption is estimated at 150 billion dollars smuggled abroad through deals," Bahram said in a televised address.

He proposed setting up an international anti-corruption alliance, patterned after a multinational military coalition that fought Islamic State militants in Iraq and neighboring Syria.

"Corruption and terrorism are inter-related," Salih said. He added that he had presented a draft bill to the Iraqi parliament to help retrieve money allegedly smuggled abroad through corruption.

Street protests have sprung up in Iraq since October 2019, with demonstrators calling for an end to corruption and an overhaul of the country's political system, which has been in place since the 2003 U.S.-led invasion.

The protests calmed somewhat after a new government led by Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi was formed in May last year and pledged reforms

## Iran Army to Stage Electronic Warfare Drill

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The Iranian Army is going to hold a large-scale military exercise to practice electronic warfare tactics.

The joint war game, dubbed 'Sky Shield 1400', would involve electronic warfare forces from the four units of the Army. The exercise will kick off on Tuesday and cover large areas of Iran. According to Deputy Chief of Iran's Army for Coordination Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari, Sky Shield 1400 will be the most practical joint exercise that the electronic warfare units have held in recent years. Participants in the upcoming drill, whose headquarters will

be located in the central province of Isfahan, will exercise electronic defense tactics against small aircraft and intruding drones, practice aerial interception and cyber defense maneuvers, and evaluate eavesdropping, electronic jamming and target detection systems.

Iran's Air Defense holds annual war games in order to enhance capabilities to defend the country's airspace. In 2018, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei underlined the important role that Iran's Air Defense plays in protecting the country, saying it is on the front line of countering enemies.



## Uzbekistan Keen to Build Rail Link Between Central, South Asia

LONDON (Dispatches) - Uzbekistan's eagerness to improve rail links between the Central and South Asia countries has nudged many global financial bodies like the World Bank, the European Investment Bank, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, and the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) to express their interest to contribute in the project.

According to Uzbekistan's Ministry of Investment and Foreign Trade (MIFT), the World Bank has indicated a willingness to finance the fieldwork and to provide technical assistance in the design for the construction of a railway network between Afghanistan's Mazar-i-Sharif-Kabul and the Pakistani city of Peshawar.

After discussions with Anna Bjerde, vice president of the World Bank for Europe and Central Asia, the ministry declared that this railway project connecting Afghanistan with Pakistan will cost around US\$ 5 billion. It will involve the construction of a 573-kilometer (356 miles) railway line with an annual transit potential of up to 20 million tons of cargo.

The new transport corridor will improve connectivity between Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, and further to the states of Southeast Asia. Its construction will have three key advantages. Firstly, it will significantly reduce the time and cost of transporting goods between South Asia and Europe through Central Asia.

Secondly, the new trans-Afghan railway, which provides access to the three Pakistani seaports of Karachi, Bin Qasim, and Gwadar, will dramatically increase the transit potential and cargo flow to Central Asia. Thirdly, the initiative will revive the region's historical role as a connecting link between Europe and Asia through the shortest land route.

As part of the vision for wider regional connectivity Russian Railways has proposed to Uzbekistan to look into deeper cooperation in building a Russia-India transport corridor through Uzbekistan and Afghanistan. The company anticipated this initiative could draw Central Asian states to closer technical cooperation to mutually earn long-term rewards via expanded connectivity.

Consultations between Uzbek transport authorities and the chief of the Russian Railways this week also underlined that this project will reduce the time and cost of transportation of goods from East and South Asia to Central Asia and Europe by 30%. During the discussions, further steps were discussed to increase the use of the railway corridors between Russia and Uzbekistan by upgrading and optimizing the conditions of cargo transportation.

The design and technical documentation of the Mazar-i-Sharif - Kabul - Peshawar railway will be undertaken by the Russian Railways, Uzbek officials announced following talks with Russian Railways Chief Oleg Belozherov in Tashkent on May 19.

"An agreement was reached aimed at the comprehensive preparation of the project, including the development of technical documentation, and the early start of construction," the Uzbek press service said in a statement issued in Tashkent.

Strategic planners in Tashkent see this as the launch of a new paradigm for regional development in which Afghanistan will provide a connecting link between Central



and South Asia for mutually beneficial interregional cooperation. They believe that it is important to recognize the new strategic opportunities and to take advantage of them by intensifying dialogue between all regional countries and external players.

Eldor Aripov head of Uzbekistan's Strategic Studies Institute says that the Trans-Afghan corridor will open several advantages for the Central Asian countries. Not only will it provide the shortest path to the promising markets of South Asia, but will also diversify transport flows and significantly reduce export-import costs. The launch of the Mazar-i-Sharif-Peshawar railway will also create a powerful platform for achieving inclusive economic growth in Central and South Asia.

This project is also seen to create a unique opportunity for ensuring peace and stability in Afghanistan by stimulating growth and creating tens of thousands of new jobs - necessary conditions for the development and exploitation of rich reserves of minerals (copper, tin, zinc, iron ore, marble, granite, travertine, and others).

Uzbek officials believe that the new rail link will significantly contribute to ensuring regional security and stability of the region. They anticipate that a multiplier effect including the construction of roadside infrastructure, creation of conditions for the development of rich mineral resources along the railway route will help in the creation of thousands of jobs.

The resultant economic benefits will entice players in the Afghan conflict and external forces to work for a peaceful settlement and early stabilization of the situation in the war-torn country. And with financial gain, many will realize that trading is much more profitable than fighting. A regional consensus built on such realization will prove far effective than any political agreement or geopolitical deal.

## Most of Vietnam's Economic Indicators In April Were Good



HANOI (Dispatches) - The World Bank Vietnam has announced its updated report on Vietnam Macro Monitoring in May 2021, which states that most of Vietnam's economic indicators in April were good. However, it warns of several risks to the Vietnamese economy due to the most recent outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in late April.

In its report, the WB stated that most of Vietnam's economic indicators in April were good. Industrial production continued its strong growth momentum in April, increasing by 1.1% compared to March, 24.1% higher than the same period in 2020.

Revenue from retail sales in April also expanded by 2.3% as compared to March, after two consecutive months of decline. The consumer price index in April also recorded an increase of 0.5% compared to March, reflecting a recovery in household consumption.

In terms of exports, a double-digit growth rate was recorded in all major export items, with the fastest increase in the export revenue of machinery. This was attributed to the ongoing economic recovery in the US and China.

According to the WB, although foreign direct investment (FDI) decreased in April, reaching only US\$2.2 billion (53% lower than the previous month), it was generally stable.

The WB also valued the accelerated progress of vaccinations against COVID-19 in Vietnam with 506,000 doses administered in April compared with about 50,000 doses in late March.

However, the WB warned that Vietnam is experiencing its fourth COVID-19 outbreak from the end of April 2021, forcing the government to quickly respond by closing schools and applying new restrictive measures on travel. This will affect domestic economic activities, especially tourism, transportation and retail.

Therefore, the World Bank recommended that if it is necessary to maintain or tighten these new restrictive measures on health and travel, the Government of Vietnam should consider a new fiscal stimulus package, including a support package on a larger scale for people and businesses affected by the pandemic.

## Sweden Warned Not to Fall Into U.S. Trap to Ban Chinese Firms

STOCKHOLM (Dispatches) - As a Sweden court is weighing a decision that could decide Huawei's fate in the country, Chinese analysts warned that Sweden - along with other European countries - should be aware that a Huawei ban at the behest of the US may hurt their own companies and dampen their roles in the 5G sector.

Analysts also cautioned that the U.S. may have treated Sweden with some "sweetness" for the decision, but the latter must avoid falling into a "U.S. trap," as the U.S. will sacrifice the interests of its so-called "allies" at any time for its own benefit.

The remarks come as a verdict that will decide Huawei's role in Sweden's 5G market is looming.

In October last year, telecom regulator the Swedish Post and Telecom Authority (PTS) banned the use of equipment from Huawei and ZTE by its telecom operators taking part in 5G auctions. Huawei in January appealed against the decision, and a verdict is expected to come in the next few weeks, according to a Reuters report.

"It feels extremely strange that the PTS would make a decision almost overnight that excludes us from the Swedish market, just because we have our domicile in China. It would of course be commercially devastating for Huawei not to always put our customers first and risk destroying the relationship we have built," Kenneth Fredriksen, executive vice president at Huawei's central east Europe and Nordic region, said in a statement on the company's website in April.

On May 10, the Global Times learned from sources that after the Huawei fallout, Ericsson's fate in China may also be at risk, and Sweden faces the last chance to pull back its wrong decision to exclude Chinese firms such as Huawei from participating in the country's 5G construction.

While Ericsson has been invited to participate in 5G equipment tests in China, that does not mean it will be chosen. Sweden has to carefully reconsider its China policy, sources told the Global Times in an exclusive interview.

Chinese officials have repeatedly asked Sweden several times to correct its wrong decisions and provide Chinese companies with an open, fair, and non-discriminatory business environment to avoid a negative impact on bilateral economic and trade cooperation as well as Swedish companies' operations in China. "If Ericsson loses the chance to stay in China, it will lose the experience field of the world's most advanced 5G technology, and can only practice its technologies in second-rate scenarios, which will further dampen its ability," Xiang Ligang, director-general of the Beijing-based Information Consumption Alliance, told the Global Times.

## Inclusive Iran-Pakistan...

FROM PAGE 1

The panel of experts included Chairman Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed, former ISI chief and geopolitical analyst Muhammad Asad Durrani, research analyst and former ambassador to Iran Asif Durrani, Iran's former ambassador to Pakistan Dr. Mashaallah Shakeri, Iran's Cultural Counsellor Ehsan Khazaei, Director South Asian Studies at TISRI Dr. Somaye Morovati, and Devcom-Pakistan Executive Director Munir Ahmed who moderated the discussion.

Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed said three factors will promote ties between Iran-Pakistan in the near future. First, CPEC and regional connectivity are key to the economic future of both Pakistan and Iran, with the Iran-China deal a plus for Pakistan, securing Pakistan's Western flanks and good for the development of Gwadar Port. Second, with instability likely in Afghanistan post-US withdrawal, counter-terrorism border cooperation and border management will bring the two countries closer as both seek lasting peace, stability and security in Afghanistan as well as on their border. Third, with pressures from the Biden Administration on both Iran and Saudi Arabia, Pakistan can play the role of a bridge between Tehran and Riyadh, especially on issues like Palestine and Kashmir. He said Pakistan also supports the revival of Iran's nuclear deal and the removal of all sanctions on Iran as Pakistan too once faced discriminatory sanctions from the West. One new plus point is a closer rapport between the military and security establishments of both countries, with greater trust among them.

Lt General (r) Muhammad Asad Durrani said Pak-Iran relations have generally been good - ranging from close to correct - at their peak before the Revolution. During the Khomeini era, the U.S., then our close ally in Afghanistan vacated, wanted our relations downgraded because of the siege of its Embassy in Tehran, but we refused and have ever since represented Iranian interests in Washington. He said after the American invasion of Afghanistan, the two countries started addressing irritants like Jandullah and with Russia, China and Turkey joined hands to manage the chaos post the U.S. withdrawal. Balancing our relationship with Saudi Arabia and Iran has been a challenge - mostly met with finesse. Post-2003 instability in the Region, especially after Mohammed Bin Salman foolishly invaded Yemen, it became more complex but was still taken care of. Some bigots have at times aired sectarianism, but the deep commonality of interests prevailed.

## No Access Beyond...

FROM PAGE 1

"If the agreement is extended, the Agency will not be granted access beyond safeguards," the spokesman said, adding, "If we reach an agreement in Vienna, these video recordings can be made available to the Agency. Finally, this decision will be announced today."

He also pointed to the JCPOA Joint Commission meetings in Vienna, saying, "Good progress has been made and we believe an agreement is achievable."

"The United States tried with all its might to destroy the JCPOA, and by inaction destroyed all potential facilities and capacities for Iran's benefit from the deal."

"Saudi Arabia must decide whether it still wants to use its boring words and not change its behavior, or whether it has decided to distance itself from expansionist and belligerent policies as a constructive partner in the region alongside other countries in the region," Khatibzadeh said about the remarks of the Saudi Foreign Minister. "We are waiting to see the changes in the actions and behavior of Riyadh. Of course, Iran's policies on regional dialogue and arrangements are nothing new," he added, saying, "We welcomed the presence of Saudi Arabia and we think that it can be a constructive party if it distances itself from boring policies."

Answering a question about the exact time of the end of JCPOA meetings in Vienna, FM spokesman said, "We do not consider any exact time for the end of the meetings except when all the interests of the great nation of Iran are served within the framework of the JCPOA."

"The JCPOA will be our roadmap," he added, saying, "We told the other sides that they should avoid using Vienna's opportunity to talk about non-negotiable issues and that nothing beyond the JCPOA would be discussed."

"The United States has been asked to fulfil its obligations within the framework of the Joint Commission of the JCPOA," the Iranian diplomat noted. Khatibzadeh also answered a question about the Presidential Election in Syria, saying, "Everyone knows that it was within the framework of Astana and Geneva to write the new constitution of Syria, but it is clear that international law recognizes the current constitution, and accordingly, presidential elections are being held in Syria."

"Iran has always supported the political process in Syria, and a parliamentary delegation visited the country as an observer, and this process was also supported during Zarif's visit," he added. The foreign ministry spokesperson went on to say, "Voting began at the Syrian embassy in Tehran, and this election, like all other democratic processes, can contribute to the stability and peace of Syria."

"Other countries must be careful to avoid undue interference and sedition inside Syria," he stressed.

Khatibzadeh also announced that Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif will leave for Azerbaijan and Armenia for a short visit on Tuesday.

Answering a question about the accusation of the Bahraini Attorney General to Al-Mustaqbal Bank, the Central Bank and several Iranian banks for money laundering, he said, "These recurring charges have no legal basis. The bank operated within the framework of Bahraini law and the Central Bank of Bahrain supervised all its activities."

"These false claims have nothing but political overtones," he noted. "Iran does not recognize the verdict of this court and we think it is very destructive."

## India Still Interested...

FROM PAGE 1

India stopped procuring supplies from Iran after former President Donald Trump withdrew the US from the nuclear deal in 2018 and re-imposed sanctions, which have severely constrained Iran's oil production and exports. Iran pumped 2.43 million b/d of crude in April, according to the latest Platts survey of OPEC output, down from its pre-sanctions production of between 3.8 million-3.9 million b/d.

Iran's heavy sour grades compete directly with crudes such as Saudi Arabia's Arab Heavy, Arab Light and Arab Medium; Iraq's Basrah Light, Basrah Medium and Basrah Heavy; Russia's Urals; the UAE's Upper Zakum; Oman Crude Blend; Kuwait Export Crude; Venezuela's Mesa 30 and Merey 16; and Mexico's Mata, among others.

Iran also produces and exports ultra-sweet low sulfur oil or condensates, especially from South Pars, which is similar to condensates produced by Norway, Qatar, the US and Australia. Last week, India lost the OVL-developed Farzad-B gas field after Iran awarded a \$1.78 billion contract to develop the giant gas field to a local company.

In 2020, Iranian oil ministry officials said any foreign participation was unlikely because of US sanctions that have all but eliminated outsiders from working on Iran's energy projects. India may join the project in later stages of growth, Indian oil ministry officials told Platts.

In 2008, an ONGC Videsh-led consortium discovered Farzad B gas within the Farsi offshore gas block along with Oil India and Indian Oil. In 2016, Iran said it was examining the Indian proposal but that an agreement was unlikely because of the difference between Iran's demanded gas price and India's offer. Farzad B's gas in place is around 23 Tcf. India offered a \$6.2 billion development plan and a gas price of around \$4/MMBtu for Farzad B in 2018.

## Evans Wins Portugal Rally Victory

**L**ISBON (Dispatches) - Elfyn Evans surged to victory in the Rally de Portugal winning three of the five stages on Sunday to put recent near misses behind him.

The 32-year-old Welsh Toyota driver took control of the race late Saturday, when Estonian Ott Tanak retired while in the lead.

Evans finished the last of the 20 stages 28.3 seconds ahead of Spaniard Dani Sordo 28.3 seconds back in a Hyundai.

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## Nibali to Have Scan After Giro Fall

**R**OME (Dispatches) - Two-time Giro d'Italia winner Vincenzo Nibali will undergo a scan after taking a knock to his ribs in a fall in Sunday's 15th stage, his Trek-Segafredo team announced.

The 36-year-old, who won the race in 2013 and three days later, crashed after braking suddenly to avoid a bike.

The Italian got back in the saddle but suffered from soreness to his chest area as the stage progressed between Grado and Gorizia, on the border with Slovenia.

## Verstappen Claims Monaco Grand Prix to Take World Championship Lead

**M**ONACO (Dispatches) - Max Verstappen's win at the Monaco Grand Prix is unlikely to have stirred the soul of Formula One fans. Yet from a broader perspective the Dutchman's victory from the front to the flag is the absolute tonic the title fight required.

With Mercedes and Lewis Hamilton foundering they let slip what for so long has been an impregnable grip on both world championships.

Verstappen revelled in his victory, the 23-year-old's first in Monaco, while Carlos Sainz was second for Ferrari and McLaren's Lando Norris a superb third, his first podium in the principality.

Verstappen drove flawlessly, threading the needle on the streets of Monte Carlo for 78 laps with no hint of an error, while his Red Bull team were equally professional operationally.

A win here is one drivers covet over most others but in the context of this season it has even greater significance.

Hamilton had gone in to the race with a 14 point lead over Verstappen, every one hard fought after a bruising four meetings battling with the Dutchman.

Now he must cope with an abrupt volte-face in the course of one afternoon in Monte Carlo. After suffering from a lack of grip and qualifying in seventh he could not improve in the race and was disappointed and frustrated with the Mercedes strategy in finishing also in seventh.

He took the point for fastest lap but Verstappen has taken the lead by four points in the drivers' championship, the first time he has led the title fight in his seven years in F1.

Worse still, with Mercedes having to retire Hamilton's teammate Valtteri Bottas during a pitstop after a mechanical failure of the wheel nut meant they could not remove his right front wheel, they have also surrendered the lead in the constructor's championship by a single point to Red Bull. It is the first time since 2013 Red Bull have led both championships.

Verstappen, increasingly a wise head on still very young shoulders, celebrated his win but tellingly so in the context that he too knows there is a bigger job still to be done.



"You always want to win this grand prix. I remember when I was very little, you always want to win this one," he said. "So of course, I'm very proud, but I'm also thinking ahead, it is a very long season."

He also believed he had answered Hamilton's pre-race barb that the Dutchman charged hard because he something to prove.

Verstappen looks increasingly like the finished article now. Weaknesses early in his career, unforced errors and a tendency to overreach have been largely replaced by a control and maturity beyond his years.

Hamilton endured a trying afternoon and had little to show for it. Mercedes pitted him early in a bid to gain a place which did not work out, indeed he lost two, jumped by Sebastian Vettel and Sergio Pérez who both stayed out longer through the stops. He questioned the team's decision to stop early and could do nothing to move again through the field with passing all but impossible. His frustration was palpable.

After he crashed in qualifying there was concern Leclerc's gearbox would have to be replaced. Ferrari had checked it and pronounced it OK on the morning of the race but on the way to the grid Leclerc reported he had a problem.

The team worked on the car and identified an issue with the driveshaft they could not rectify. Leclerc could not join the grid, leaving his hopes shattered.

Clearly deeply upset, he was consoled by the Ferrari president John Elkann and then by Prince Albert of Monaco. Leclerc showed great maturity and sportsmanship to remain to the finish to congratulate his teammate Sainz. Leclerc's failure meant Verstappen had the front row to himself but Bottas had a clear run up the inside line to turn one.

## Tsitsipas Blasts to Lyon Title



**L**YON (Dispatches) - World No.5 Stefanos Tsitsipas swept to the Lyon ATP clay court title on Sunday with a 6-3, 6-3 victory over Briton Cameron Norrie.

With a week to go before the prestige Roland Garros tournament the 22-year-old Tsitsipas lifted his seventh career title and his second red surface win this year.

Tsitsipas lost in the Barcelona final to Rafael Nadal but landed the Monte Carlo ATP with a 6-3, 6-3 win over Russian Andrey Rublev.

Playing with confidence and power Tsitsipas rampaged around the Lyon court with his shoulder length hair kept under a headband and lost just a single set all week, in the semi-final against Lorenzo Musetti.

"I kept my objectives in mind and it worked," said Tsitsipas.

"Now I'm going to rest up and get back to training for Roland Garros. It's the Grand Slam I adore the most," he said. "I hope to do well there."

On Sunday, he blasted his way through the first set in 39 minutes and finished off the victory by taking the second set in just 30 minutes, losing a single point in the last two games. The loss left the 25-year-old Norrie still seeking his first tournament victory.

## England Goalkeeper Pope Risks Missing Euro 2020

**L**ONDON (Dispatches) - Burnley and England goalkeeper Nick Pope is a major doubt for Euro 2020, with the Premier League club confirming on Sunday he will have knee surgery this week.

After the operation the 29-year-old will be assessed to see if he can make Gareth Southgate's squad for the Euros, which is named on Tuesday.

"Unfortunately, Nick is going to need a minor operation on his knee this week," Burnley manager Sean Dyche told BT Sport, as he was forced to leave Pope out of the season-ending clash with Sheffield United.

"That's not ideal for him or us and possibly for the England team. We'll wait and see. It's nothing too serious, we don't think, but it still needed doing."

"He was trying to get right for this game to give it a test but didn't quite come through in training, so he and we have had to make a judgment call on that."

Jordan Pickford has been recognized as England's number one for the past few years but Pope was the man in possession of the gloves, having started all three games in the recent international break.

## Campeñaerts Goes All-In For Giro 15th Stage

**R**OME (Dispatches) - Qhubeka RASSOS' Belgian rider Victor Campeñaerts said his team went "all-in" as he won Sunday's 15th stage of the Giro d'Italia with Colombian Egan Bernal holding the leader's pink jersey.

Campeñaerts, 29, finished ahead of Dutch breakaway companion Oscar Riesebeek of Alpecin-Fenix on the 147km stage which crossed into neighbouring Slovenia.

Germany's Nikias Arndt, riding for Team DSM, finished third seven seconds behind the leading pair on a road made slippery by heavy rain late in the day.

Ineos' Bernal, the 2019 Tour de France winner, finished 21st, over quarter of an hour off the winner, but holds a 1min 33sec overall race lead ahead on Britain's Simon Yates before the mountainous 16th stage in the Dolomites.

## Djokovic Building Up to Shine at Roland Garros



**B**ELGRADE (Dispatches) - Novak Djokovic celebrated his 34th birthday this weekend at the Belgrade tennis centre which carries his name but with one eye on Roland Garros where he intends "to shine".

The world number one is top seed at the pre-French Open event in the Serbian capital before heading to Paris where he seeks a second career triumph.

"We are working so that I reach my maximum, that everything is perfectly adjusted in Paris, where I want to shine," Djokovic said

at a news conference on Sunday.

Djokovic, who turned 34 on Saturday, has endured a roller-coaster clay court season. He lost in the third round at the Monte Carlo Masters before reaching the semi-finals when Belgrade staged its first event of the spring in April.

He then lost the final of the Rome Masters last weekend to Rafael Nadal, the 13-time champion at Roland Garros.

"I'm really satisfied to be able to play at home twice. It brings me mental serenity and the joy of being able to prepare at home for one of the most important tournaments of the year," said Djokovic.

The Serb is an 18-time Grand Slam title winner with his lone Paris triumph coming in 2016. If he wins another Roland Garros, he will become the first man in more than 50 years to have won all four majors more than once.

## Mane Makes Sure of Top-Four Finish For Liverpool

**L**ONDON (Dispatches) - Liverpool secured a place in next season's Champions League by sweeping aside Crystal Palace 2-0 as 10,000 fans returned to Anfield on Sunday.

Sadio Mane struck either side of half-time as the Reds registered an eighth win in their final 10 games of the season to finish third in the Premier League.

Jürgen Klopp's men had to celebrate the club's first league triumph for 30 years in an empty stadium last season and their Premier League title defence was blown off course by a series of long-term injuries to key players.

But they avoided the financial hit of missing out on Europe's premier club competition on top of the economic consequences of the pandemic by finding their form in the final months of the season. When Liverpool beat Palace 7-0 in December, Klopp's men moved five points clear at the top of the table.

Just three wins from their next 14 league games, including six consecutive home defeats for the first time in the club's history, left them languishing down in eighth.

However, Liverpool took 26 points from a possible 30 in their last 10 games to make sure they will be in the Champions League for a fifth consecutive season.



## Agüero Breaks Record For Most Premier League Goals Scored for One Club

**L**ONDON (Dispatches) - Nine years after his goal won Manchester City's first Premier League title, Sergio Agüero performed more final-day magic.

Agüero came off the bench to score twice on Sunday against Everton, setting the record for most Premier League goals scored by a player for a single club. City won 5-0.

In what is likely his final Premier League appearance for City, Agüero pushed his career total to 184 goals, surpassing former Manchester United star Wayne Rooney's 183 for the Red Devils. The record arrived in the 76th minute, when Agüero snapped a header into the net off a cross from Fernandinho.

Agüero had already danced through the Everton defense to bag his first a few minutes prior:

The 32-year-old announced in late March he was leaving City after this season, and is reportedly joining Barcelona to link up with international teammate Lionel Messi. He signed with City in July 2011 and scored 23 goals his first league campaign, none more memorable than the last, which completed a 3-2 City comeback on the final day of the season against Queens Park Rangers and clinched the club's first Premier League title in stoppage time.

