

The Ground Force of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Has Dismantled a Team of Miscreants and Anti-Revolutionaries Who Were Attempting to Enter the Country From the Northwestern Border

# IRAN NEWS

Health Ministry Announced on Sunday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic in Iran Increased to 79,939 With 198 More Iranians Killed by the Deadly Virus Over the Past 24 Hours

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## Palestine's Missiles, Drones Nightmare for Israel

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Defense Minister of Iran Brigadier General Amir Hatami hailed the elevated unity of all Palestinians as a major achievement of their recent victory over the Zionist regime, saying Palestine's missiles, drones and defense gear have turned into a nightmare for Israeli settlers.

Speaking at an online meeting of the Defense Ministry's ranking officials on Sunday, General Hatami said the most important achievement of the victory against the Israeli regime in the recent 12-day war was closer unity and rapport among all Palestinians across the occupied territories in the face of the criminal Zionist regime and its Western and American supporters.

From now on, the missiles, drones and defense capabilities of the owners of Palestine will be a nightmare for the usurper Zionist settlers, the Iranian minister added.

He further urged caution against hostile attempts at undermining Iran's resistance, misrepresenting the Islamic Republic's achievements, and disrupting the Iranian nation's social cohesion, saying the enemy is aware that the strong Iran is now the source of major developments at the regional and international levels.

Denouncing the enemy's push for a low turnout in the upcoming presidential election in Iran, the defense minister said what guarantees the country's interests and national security will be the maximum presence of voters.

In comments on Wednesday, President Hassan Rouhani described popular votes as a guarantee of the Iranian establishment's legitimacy and a symbol of freedom

## Iran Produces 1m Doses of COV-Iran Barekat Vaccine

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The managing director of COV-Iran Barekat vaccine research group said on Sunday that one million doses of COV-Iran Barekat vaccines were produced, which will be delivered to Ministry of Health.

Hassan Jalili said production of the vaccine will increase to three million doses during the current Iranian calendar year (starting on March 20).

The figure will increase to 18 million doses soon.

Earlier, the official in charge of COV-Iran Barekat COVID-19 vaccine project said that the first industrial production line for the domestically-developed vaccine was launched with a capacity to produce three million doses a month.

Mass production of the vaccine would start as soon as the results of the third clinical test of the vaccine are confirmed by the Health Ministry, he added. Public vaccination with COV-Iran Barekat is going to start in mid-June after clinical results are confirmed, Mazhari noted.

COV-Iran Barekat coronavirus vaccine was developed by Execution of Imam Khomeini's Order organization.

## President Sacks CBI Governor Over Presidential Candidacy



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - President Hassan Rouhani has dismissed the central bank governor, Abdolnaser Hemmati, one of the few moderates running in a June 18 presidential election, who said he accepted the decision that he must step aside at the bank in order to stand for president.

Hemmati, appointed central bank governor in 2018, is one of seven candidates for president, with the others after a vetting body, the Guardian Council, announced the vetted candidates.

Some media identified several possible candidates to succeed Hemmati at the bank, including Akbar Komeijani, a deputy governor of the bank, and Hamid Pourmohammadi, deputy head of the Budget and Planning Organization. The bank could not immediately be reached for comment.

But some media outlets claimed Pourmohammadi is to take helm of the CBI.

Some reports claimed that Komeijani, attended a meeting of the Rouhani administration's economic coordination committee yesterday instead of the Central Bank Governor.

Later in the day, the news of his removal from office was confirmed by an informed source speaking to Mehr News Agency. Komeijani was later named as the new Governor of the Central Bank, replacing Hemmati who is one of the seven candidates approved by the Guardian Council to run for president.

In a Saturday night discussion on the Clubhouse social media app, Hemmati said Rouhani had told him that he would have to stand down at the bank if he stands for president, "because it affects monetary and exchange rate policies".

"I told him that I had no problem with his decision," he said.

Abdol-Nasser Hemmati, the governor of Iran's Central Bank and a candidate in the 2021 presidential election, says he should not be lumped together with those responsible for the economic status quo.

Writing on his Instagram page, Hemmati said he had been trying to change the economic situation of the country since two and a half years ago.

"Some individuals who themselves are responsible for the status quo say Hemmati's performance is partially [to blame for] the current situation," he said. "I have for the past two and a half years been partially responsible for changing the status quo not bringing it about."

He implied that his monetary policies had saved the Iranian economy.

"If the past monetary and foreign exchange policies had been continued, there would have remained nothing to compete over," he said, apparently referring to the presidential race.

The Rouhani administration has been the focus of much criticism for high inflation and rampant poverty in the country.

## ViewPoint Biden Following Trump

After Joe Biden won the U.S. presidential elections, many in the U.S. and in the world expected him to change the direction of the U.S. policy in the world but it seems most of Biden's election campaign promises have been void and he goes in the same direction that his predecessor Donald Trump had gone before.

One of the issues that the world expected the U.S. to return to the pre-Trump condition was the country's return to the Open Skies Treaty with Russia. The pact allows unarmed observation aircraft to fly over countries' territories to observe military forces.

But the U.S. has informed Russia of its refusal to rejoin a major arms control treaty to mutually conduct surveillance overflights ahead of a presidential summit between the two nuclear rivals.

Deputy U.S. Secretary of State Wendy Sherman told Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov that the Biden administration had decided not to rejoin the Open Skies Treaty.

Former president Trump withdrew from the agreement that allowed surveillance flights over military facilities in both nations.

"The United States regrets that the treaty on Open Skies has been undermined by Russian violations," a State Department spokesperson, cited by NBC News, said.

"In concluding its review of the treaty, the United States therefore does not intend to seek to rejoin it given Russia's failure to take any actions to return to compliance."

The unnamed spokesperson said recent Russian actions, including in Ukraine, did not indicate it was a partner "committed to confidence building," referring to Russia's recent military exercise within its own borders with Ukraine in response to a surge of war games by the U.S. and its NATO allies.

Russia has rejected Washington's allegations that it failed to abide by the treaty and blasted Trump's decision to exit the agreement.

The pact allows unarmed observation aircraft to fly over countries' territories to observe military forces. The treaty was intended to promote transparency and defuse potential tension between Russia and the West.

Biden had censured Trump's withdrawal from the pact as "short-sighted" when he was still a candidate.

Last May, he said, "In announcing the intent to withdraw from the Open Skies Treaty, President Trump has doubled down on his short-sighted policy of going it alone and abandoning American leadership." *See Page 7*

## Iran, Iraq Reach Agreements On Customs Affairs

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Ministerial delegations from Iran and Iraq agreed on plans to promote cooperation on customs affairs, pave the way for joint investment, and expand the capacity for transportation between the two neighboring countries.

After two rounds of meetings on Saturday, delegations led by Iranian Economy Minister Farhad Dejjpasand and Iraq's Finance Minister Ali Abdul-Amir Allawi reached agreements on closer trade ties between Tehran and Baghdad.

Speaking at a press conference after the meetings, Dejjpasand said the new agreements entail plans to address the problems relating to customs, exchange experiences in customs affairs, and facilitate the activities of the two countries' business people.

He noted that Iran and Iraq have also agreed on organized plans for joint investment in order to increase foreign investment in the two countries by setting up new industrial complexes.

Another issue agreed upon in the meetings was the expansion of the capacity for the transportation of rail passengers and cargo between the two neighbors. *See Page 7*

## U.S. Claims Two Iranian Warships Heading for Venezuela

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The U.S. security officials claim they are monitoring two Iranian warships whose ultimate destination may be Venezuela.

The U.S. national security community is monitoring two Iranian naval vessels whose ultimate destination may be Venezuela, Politico claimed.

An Iranian frigate and the Makran, a former oil tanker that was converted to a floating forward staging base, have been heading south along the east coast of Africa, said the people, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss a sensitive subject.

U.S. officials do not know for sure the destination of the Iranian ships, these officials said, but claim they may be ultimately headed for Venezuela.

Lawmakers privy to the most sensitive intelligence information were informed over the past few days that the U.S. claimed that the Iranian ships may be heading toward Venezuela, but cautioned that the destination could change, according to a person briefed on the matter.

The mere presence of Iranian warships in America's backyard would represent a challenge to U.S. authority in the region.

Iranian media has said the 755-foot long Makran, which was commissioned this year, can serve as a platform for electronic warfare and special operations missions, and Iranian officials have pointed to the ship's missile and weapons capabilities.

It is able to carry six to seven helicopters, as well as drones.

Meanwhile according to the reports, the U.S. national security community is monitoring the vessels whose ultimate destination may be Venezuela, according to three people familiar with the situation, in what would be a provocative move at a tense moment in U.S.-Iran relations.

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## Ignoring Health Protocols Is Electoral Violation

TEHRAN (IP) - Jamal Orf, the Election Headquarters Chief, says that ignoring health protocols by the presidential candidates' electoral campaign headquarters is an electoral violation.

The seven presidential candidates have been briefed on health protocols, Jamal Orf, the election headquarters chief, said on a TV program about holding presidential elections during the coronavirus pandemic on Saturday night.

The election headquarters chief stated that many countries held elections during the pandemic for one or more days. Iran's law also does not allow for an increase in voting days, so we planned to extend election hours.

## Raeisi Urges Youth to Vote

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Presidential candidate Seyyed Ebrahim Raeisi has called on the Iranian youth to go to the ballot boxes in the June 18 presidential vote in spite of all their current economic hardships, asking them not to "exact revenge" on the next administration for the woes they have faced during the terms of President Hassan Rouhani.

Speaking to reporters, Raeisi described the young generation as Iran's "most significant resource" and said the issues facing the youth today, such as unemployment, economic challenges of marriage, and increasing housing prices, need special attention.

"Dear youth, decide your own fate! If you have complaints about the current [economic] situation, you should not take revenge on the future administration [for the issues you experienced] in this administration," he said. "Dear youth, make sure you will take part in the election with a whole lot of hope for a bright future." Raeisi said an educated, young work force could serve a driving force in the country's economy.

Meanwhile, Iranian news agencies reported late Saturday that Saeed Mohammad, who had applied to join the upcoming presidential race but was disqualified from running, held a "friendly" meeting with Raeisi.

During the two-hour-long meeting, Mohammad briefed Raeisi on the popular teams that had been formed to boost his campaign before he was disqualified by the Constitutional Council from running.

Mohammad said the popular teams stood ready to boost Raeisi's campaign and help him on the path toward realizing a "young, revolutionary administration."

The reports also carried a photo of the two standing next to one another.

Earlier on Saturday, Raeisi joined a program on Iran's Radio Eqtasad (economy), during which he elaborated on the what he saw as the root causes of the country's economic woes and presented his plans on how to tackle them.



During the program, which was aired later in the day, Raeisi said he saw production and inflation as "closely and directly interrelated," and that a boom in production can not only rein in inflation but can also help solve other issues such as unemployment and high prices.

The presidential candidate said, "We have no other option but to bring change. The people should feel that a change has come about. An administration official should have a correct understanding of the root causes of the problems and take urgent measures, albeit without rush."

Besides the measures to take at home, "active economic diplomacy" is need to boost business activity within the country, he added.

According to Raeisi, the country's Foreign Ministry should include a "economic diplomacy" department tasked with increasing Iran's share of the region's economy and find a market there for domestic products.

All of the seven Iranian presidential candidates have been largely campaigning on a platform of improving the country's economy, which has been hit by a set of harsh American sanctions as well as the outgoing administration's failure to control the economic repercussions of the restrictive measures.

Among the seven, Raeisi became the first to start campaigning. Braving the coronavirus outbreak, he took the initiative in the early days to meet with two significant strata of the country's economic sector, signaling that economy would top his potential presidential agenda.

## President Hails Massive Turnout of Syrian People in Election

TEHRAN (PressTV) - President Hassan Rouhani says massive turnout of the Syrian people in the presidential election was an important step towards determining their own fate and prosperity.

In a message to his Syrian counterpart Bashar al-Assad, the Iranian president extended his sincere congratulations to him over the successful holding of the election and his decisive victory.

"The Syrian people took an important step towards determining the fate and [achieving] prosperity of Syria through their large turnout and decisive choice," Rouhani said.

He expressed his absolute confidence that the two friendly and brotherly countries would witness further expansion of cooperation during new phase of Syrian political life.

He also wished health and success for Assad and dignity for the people of Syria.

Syrian parliament speaker Hamoudeh Sabbagh announced on Thursday that Assad had overwhelmingly won the country's presidential election as opposed to 88.7 percent in the 2014.

He said that about 14 million of the estimated 18 million eligible voters inside and outside Syria cast their votes, with a turnout rate of 78.64 percent.

## Israeli Regime Making Threats Because Knows It Is Declining

TEHRAN (MNA) - A spokesman with the Iranian Armed Forces said that the Zionist regime is making threats after suffering successive defeats because it knows it is declining.

In an interview with Al-Masirah, Brigadier General Abolfazl Shekarchi stressed that the decline of the Zionist regime is near.

"The Zionist Mossad says that its priority is Iran and the Zionist regime is threatening us because it knows that it is declining and weakening after successive defeats," he said.

"The threats of the enemy and Mossad against Iran are of no value in reality because it is time for the enemy to accept the collapse of its regime," he added.

"Unfortunately, some reactionary countries in the region, such as Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the UAE, are cooperating with the Zionist regime to maintain their throne, despite the differences of their people regarding the Zionist regime," Shekarchi noted, stressing, "But they will fall in the end."

## Iran Ready to Enhance Sports Cooperation With Afghanistan

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The president of Iran National Olympic Committee said here on Sunday that the Committee has been interested from long ago in having bilateral sports cooperation with friend and brother country of Afghanistan.

Reza Salehi Amiri made the remarks in a meeting held in Tehran with his visiting Afghan counterpart Hafizullah Wali Rahimi.

Sports cooperation can include development of sports relations and exchange of sports knowledge, Salehi Amiri said.

For his part, the Afghan official said his country is very interested in cooperating with Iran in sports field.

He went on to say that Afghanistan can overcome its weaknesses in sports through cooperation with Iran.

In a related development, Mohammad Ali Jafari - an Afghan teacher who studied MA in Iran - told IRNA in October 2020 that Iran has acted as a responsible neighbor to Afghanistan.

Experts believe that Iran and Afghanistan, which enjoy considerable commonalities in language and culture, have good neighborly relations.

## Gov't to Support Coronavirus-Affected Sectors



TEHRAN (IP) - President Hassan Rouhani said that despite all the restrictions, the government has tried its best to protect the coronavirus-affected sectors.

The meeting of the Government's Economic Coordination Headquarters was held under the chairmanship of President Hassan Rouhani, and in this meeting, a report on the measures taken regarding the necessary support and assistance against the economic consequences of coronavirus in the last Iranian year was presented.

With regard to the approval of the extension of facilities and coronavirus-related support to enterprises and businesses, proposals to support businesses in the current Iranian year in various areas were reviewed and necessary decisions were taken.

Supports provided in three household sectors, including housing rental loans and corporate support, electricity and gas-related support, social security, municipal tolls, and unemployment insurance for unemployed workers due to coronavirus restrictions were among the most important areas in the report.

President Rouhani in this regard referred to the effects and heavy losses caused by the outbreak of COVID-19 disease during the all-out economic war stressed: "The government, despite financial restrictions and foreign exchange earnings, has worked as hard as it can to support the affected ones, both in terms of households and the manufacturing enterprises, and will continue to do so."

The meeting also discussed the coordination and cooperation of various agencies to provide the required foreign exchange for the purchase and supply of basic goods.

## Iran Ready to Boost Syria's Defense Power

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - In a congratulatory message for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad on his reelection, Iran's highest-ranking military commander expressed the country's readiness to enhance the Arab country's defense capabilities and help in the process of post-war reconstruction.

Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Hossein Baqeri on Saturday congratulated Bashar al-Assad on his reelection as Syria's president in a landslide victory.

Giving an assurance that the "strategic and friendly" cooperation between the armed forces of Iran and Syria will continue and grow, the top commander voiced Iran's readiness to help boost Syria's defense capabilities, assist in the process of reconstruction, and address the problems resulting from the war against Daesh (ISIL) and other Takfiri terrorist groups.

Major General Baqeri also hailed President Assad's victory in the election as an auspicious and historical event that manifests the Syrian nation's resolve to safeguard the Arab country's independence against the hostile plots, support the aspirations of resistance, and keep up the fight against Takfiri terrorism and the "fake and wolfish" Zionist regime.

## Iran-Cuba COVID Vaccine Finishing Clinical Studies

TEHRAN (IP) - Head of Iran's Pasteur Institute announced that the Iran-Cuba joint COVID vaccine was in its clinical study's final phase (phase three).

Alireza Biglari stated yesterday that the initial injection of the joint vaccine of the Pasteur Institute of Iran and the Finlay Institute of Cuba was in the final phase.

He noted that the vaccine had been injected for 24,000 Iranians in seven provinces and eight cities.

Of the 24,000 initial injections of the vaccine, there were no particular concerns about side effects, he pointed.

The vaccine has successfully completed phases one and two of clinical studies in Cuba, and the third phase is being conducted simultaneously in Iran and Cuba.

The third phase of the clinical study of the vaccine is underway with 24,000 volunteers in Iran and 44,000 volunteers in Cuba.

## MP Calls for Planning to Generate Nuclear Electricity

TEHRAN (MNA) - Chairman of Iranian Parliament Energy Commission said that the country must make necessary planning for producing nuclear electricity, because, nuclear power is a reliable and safe method of generating electricity.

Speaking in an open session of Parliament held on Sunday, Fereydoon Abbasi pointed to the recent power outage across the country and stated that early warming in the country in this season, water shortage problem, decommissioning of several steam power plants, the emergence of crypto miners' phenomenon, low efficiency of power plants and loss in the power grid, low electricity prices and also lack of attention to electricity generation are among the main reasons for power outages in the country.

In the upstream plans, 123,000-MW electricity generation is predicted in the combined cycle power plant, he said, adding, "But unfortunately we did not reach this figure today and the necessary planning must be done to reach this figure."

People are highly recommended to take necessary measures to reduce energy consumption, he said.

Addressing the Minister of Energy Reza Ardakanian, the lawmaker asked him to explain about this issue that what Paris Agreement has had serious impact in generation of electricity in the county.

## Iran, Russia to Cement Academic Ties

TEHRAN (IP) - The President of the University of Tehran announced the expansion of scientific cooperation between Iranian and Russian universities.

Speaking at the signing ceremony of the Memorandum of Understanding for the establishment of a virtual mission office of St. Petersburg University in Tehran, Mahmoud Nili-Ahmadabadi, the president of the University of Tehran, said the "Encyclopedia of Iranistica" is going to be compiled with the support of two universities.

Nili-Ahmadabadi emphasized the development of bilateral cooperation between the two

universities, adding: "The conclusion of this memorandum will help develop cooperation."

"In 2018, a center for Iranian studies and research was opened at the university," said Nikolay Kropachev, president of St. Petersburg University in Russia.

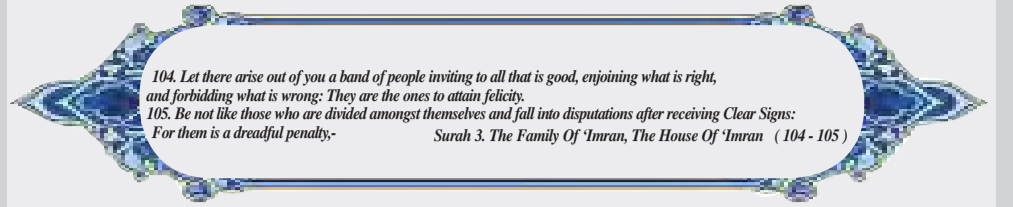
The President of the University of St. Petersburg, Russia added: "The University of Tehran is one of the best and closest colleagues of the University of St. Petersburg."

The purpose of the encyclopedia is to provide an accurate and clear picture of Iran to Russian-speaking audiences anywhere in the world.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:02
■ Evening (Maghreb)	20:34
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:05
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	05:49



# Tehran, Baghdad Discuss Settling Iraq Gas Debt to Iran

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN – Oil Minister Bijan Zangeneh on Saturday hosted a meeting with an Iraqi delegation here in Tehran on Saturday to discuss how to settle Baghdad's gas dues to Iran.**



During the meeting with the Iraqi delegation headed by the Iraqi Minister of Finance Ali Abdul-Amir Allawi, Mr. Zangeneh voiced Iran's readiness to bolster gas exports to Iraq, adding: "We hope Iraq would pay its debt to Iran as soon as possible." During the meeting, which was also attended by Iranian Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian, the payment of Iraq's electricity debt to Iran was also discussed. The meeting was accompanied by Iraqi Finance Minister Ali Abdul Alawi, Iraqi Electricity Minister Majid Mahdi Hantoush and State-owned Trade Bank of Iraq (TBI) CEO Salem Chalabi. Iran and Iraq are set to find a final solution to settling Iraq's debt to Iran this week through joint meetings. This is the second meeting between Iranian Minister of Petroleum Bijan Zangeneh and the Iraqi delegation in less than a month. During the meeting in May, Zangeneh had said: "Two important contracts in the field of Iranian gas exports to Iraq have been signed with the Iraqi Ministry of Electricity in recent years and 27 billion cubic meters of Iranian gas have been exported to Iraq so far." After the meeting Iranian Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian said after the meeting on Saturday that Iraq's TBI would process payments worth \$125 million from Iranian funds held in the bank to a Swiss lender for supplies of more than 16 million doses of coronavirus vaccines ordered by Iran under an international scheme. "It is expected that administrative work is completed until the end of this working week (Thursday) and these vaccines will soon be available to the Iranian health ministry," said Ardakanian.

# Price of 27 Goods Increased Between 2 and 4 Times

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - A new report by the Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade shows a 2 to 4-fold increase in the price of 27 goods over the past year, many of which are edible products. According to the 174-page report published on the Website of the Ministry of Health on Saturday, the price of 41 goods has also become 50 to 100 percent expensive. Among the edible products that have more than doubled in price are Pakistani and Thai rice, live chicken, vegetable oil, pasteurized butter, barley, corn, bran, peas and lentils, meals, bananas and some other goods. The largest price growth was related to imported soybean meal, which grew by 270% and nearly quadrupled. But it's not just food products that have more than doubled in price. Statistics from the Ministry of Health show that the price of iron products such as round mills, beams, steel sheets and wires, as well as automobile tires have more than doubled. Among the commodities with prices growing between 50 and 100 percent are pinto beans and red beans, yellow apples, chicken meat, eggs, yogurt, cheese, etc. Also, the price of some household products such as refrigerators, freezers and washing machines of Iran's own production has grown by more than 50%. The only commodity that was cheap last year was onion, which has risen from nearly 9,000 tomans at the end of 2019 to 5,400 tomans in March 2020. The drop in onion prices over the past months had led to protests by onion workers in some parts of the country.

# Iran Carpet Exports Almost Zeroed

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – A member of board of representatives of Tehran Chamber of Commerce says the amount of carpet exports has been almost zeroed this year. Seyed Razi Miri said that according to the statistics, the amount of Iran's carpet exports was around \$70m but this amount has declined and almost been zeroed. On the latest condition of Iran's hand-woven carpet exports

to different countries, he said since the country is under sanctions, Iran cannot export carpet to the U.S. so the exports to the U.S. are zero unless exports are done via the third party countries or changing the documents of the exports. He said Iranian carpets are taken to a country like Pakistan or Turkey and its document is illegally changed in order to be exported to the U.S. He reiterated that even after Joe Biden took office in the U.S., nothing has changed regarding Iran's carpet exports to this country.



He added that Iran's carpet exports to other countries have also declined in recent years due to the changes in the domestic regulations, adding that Iran's carpet exports according to the statistics were around \$70m which have now been almost zeroed. Meanwhile the head of Industry, Mine, and Trade Organization in Kerman Province said that over 2 million dollars of hand-woven carpets exported from this province to other countries. Mehdi Hosseinejadian said that in past one year, over two million dollars of hand-woven carpets exported from this province to other countries. Carpet weaving is a well-known Iranian art worldwide and is also very popular in different Iranian cities especially Kerman, Isfahan, and Chahar Mahal and Bakhtiari provinces. Rouhollah Latifi, the spokesman for Iran's Customs Administration, said on Dec 19, 2020 that the value of exports of the country's hand-woven carpets has been 48.9 million dollars in past eight months of the Iranian year (starting on March 20, 2020). The figure shows 800,000 dollars decrease that seems logical due to the pandemic and closure of the borders, Rouhollah Latifi told IRNA.

# Isfahan Refinery Plan to Improve Diesel Quality Enters Pre-Startup

TEHRAN (Shana) - The project to improve the production process and quality of diesel at the Isfahan refinery, with an investment of 540 million Euros and 37,000 billion Rials, entered the pre-startup phase.



According to IRNA, the project is carried out with the aim of increasing the production capacity of Euro-5 diesel by 10 times and reducing sulfur content by 1,000 times. With the aim of improving operational processes and increasing the quality of the produced items, Isfahan Refinery has defined and implemented projects that were pre-launched today. These projects, which have been implemented with a hard currency budget of 540 million Euros and 37,000 billion Rials, will reduce the sulfur concentration in the produced diesel from 100,000 ppm to 10 ppm, and this will remove 300 tons of polluting sulfur per day from 100,000 barrels of the produced diesel; also, the daily production of Euro-5 diesel in this refinery will increase from 2 to 3 million liters to 18 to 20 million liters. In addition, 10 process units have been defined in Isfahan Refinery, which, with the consent of the Department of Environment, convert the fuel oil produced in the facility into lighter items, and by exploiting this plan, the amount of fuel oil produced in the Isfahan refinery will be reduced to zero from currently 18% of the plant's output.

# The International Charity Foundation of Abshar Atefeh did another kindness. Donation of 300 Series of Dowry Assistance and Presentation of 3,000 Livelihood Packages

On Wednesday, June 25, the first phase of deprivation was carried out by the International Foundation for the Fall of Emotions in Hormozgan Province in 2021.



300 sets of dowry donations to young couples were donated by this charity and donors. 3,000 livelihood packages were also distributed. In addition, 14 toilets and bathrooms were put into operation in the homes of the needy. 5 representative offices of Abshar Atefeh International Charity Organization were opened in Hormozgan province to support the families of prisoners. Fatemeh Choupani, the head of the deprivation elimination project of the International Charity Foundation of Abshar Atefeh, said: "The real value of each series of dowry assistance is 80 million rials and each livelihood package is 400 thousand tomans. All these donations have been provided by the donors of Abshar Atefeh International Charitable Foundation in Tehran province". In the deprivation plan of this charitable foundation for deprivation in the country, conferences are held every year in deprived provinces and various programs are implemented. Other people who participated in this project are Mr. Ali Raufi as the political-security and social deputy of Hormozgan province, Azizullah Kanari as the governor of Bandar Abbas, Dr. Amir Teymouri as the director general of social affairs, deputy of the Hormozgan province relief committee, president of the Judo Federation, Head of Sports and Youth Affairs, Deputy Minister of Sports and Youth Affairs, Provincial Red Crescent and Ms. Yeganeh as Director General of Women Governorship. Abshar Atefeh International Charity Foundation was established in the month of Ramadan in 2001 to perform the life of the Amir al-Momenin. The main goal of this foundation is to alleviate poverty and help the development of the country by attracting global support. To check the performance of Tehran branches, visit [www.absharatefeh.org](http://www.absharatefeh.org) and also use ussd code to donate. \*741\*3\*800#



# Car Production by Major Companies Exceeds 118,500 in 2 Months

TEHRAN (MNA) - Three major Iranian carmakers, namely Iran Khodro Company (IKCO), SAIPA Group, and Pars Khodro, manufactured 118,546 vehicles during the first two months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-May 21), the data released by Codal website showed. According to the data, the production by the mentioned companies has increased by 1.1 percent compared to the last year's same two months in which the output stood at 117,257. During the said two months, IKCO manufactured 54,281 vehicles, registering a 6.2 percent decline compared to the same period last year. SAIPA manufactured 48,560 vehicles in the mentioned period, of which 27,166 were manufactured in the second month (April 21-May 21). Production by this automaker increased by 12.06 percent in comparison to the previous year's same time span. Pars Khodro also manufactured 15,705 vehicles in the period under review, of which 6,639 were manufactured in the second month. Three mentioned major Iranian carmakers, IKCO, SAIPA, and Pars Khodro, had manufactured 900,714 vehicles in the previous year (ended on March 20), which was 4.3 percent more than the figure of its preceding year. According to Codal data, during the past year, IKCO manufactured 480,338 vehicles, which was 21.9 percent more than the output in its preceding year, which was 393,812 vehicles. SAIPA manufactured 317,321 vehicles, with a 12.6-percent fall from 363,379 vehicles manufactured in 1398. And Pars Khodro manufactured 103,055 vehicles in the past year, showing a 2.8-percent drop from the output of its previous year, which was 106,072 vehicles.

# Khudafarin Border Customs To Be Opened Soon

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The Khudafarin border customs, which is located on the Iran-Azerbaijan border, will be opened in the near future, the Governor of Iran's East Azerbaijan Province (northwestern Iran) Mohammad Reza Pourmohammadi said. The governor emphasized that necessary steps have been taken to launch this border customs. "After the liberation of the Khudafarin border of Azerbaijan from occupation, the launch of this border customs has been in the spotlight of Azerbaijani and Iranian officials," he added. Pourmohammadi noted that the Khudafarin border customs can significantly contribute to the development of economic and trade turnover in Iran's East Azerbaijan Province.

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 Night number: IR770630187875907720500001

## Vietnam Discovers New Covid-19 Strain

HANOI (Dispatches) - Vietnam has discovered a new coronavirus variant that's a hybrid of strains first found in India and the U.K., the Vietnamese health minister said Saturday.

Nguyen Thanh Long said scientists examined the genetic makeup of the virus that had infected some recent patients, and found the new version of the virus. He said lab tests suggested it might spread more easily than other versions of the virus. Viruses often develop small genetic changes as they reproduce, and new variants of the coronavirus have been seen almost since it was first detected in China in late 2019. The World Health Organization has listed four global "variants of concern" - the two first found in the U.K. and India, plus ones identified in South Africa and Brazil.



## Hungary Marks Anniversary of Danube Boat Disaster

BUDAPEST (Dispatches) - With the tolling of a bell and a wreath lowered into the water, Hungary marked the second anniversary on Saturday of a Budapest boat accident which killed 27 people, mostly South Korean tourists, in the worst river accident on the Danube in decades.

The 135-metre (443 ft) Swiss river cruiser Viking Sigyn hit a 27-metre (88 ft) tourist boat called Mermaid, causing it to capsize and sink under a bridge during heavy rain on the evening of May 29, 2019.

"It is still very strange to be here," said Zsolt Sogor, a legal representative of the company that owned the Mermaid. "I am here because there are many for whom this day opens deep wounds."



## Libya Strongman Haftar Eyes December Polls as Support Wanes



TRIPOLI (Dispatches) - Libya's military strongman Khalifa Haftar is polishing his political image ahead of elections, after a crippling rout on the battlefield and with his support waning at home and abroad, analysts say. Haftar's eastern-based forces battled for more than a year to seize the capital Tripoli in the west, but their defeat last June set the stage for UN-backed peace talks, a unity government and a nationwide poll planned for December.

"He is hoping the elections will secure him a political victory after his military defeat," said international relations professor Miloud el-Hajj.

Haftar has emerged as a key player during the decade of violence that followed the 2011 overthrow of dictator Moamer Kadhafi.

The field marshal has battled Islamist militants and had built a solid base of support among eastern Libya's influential tribes -- as well as neighboring Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Russia.

But two years since his self-styled Libyan National Army launched its offensive to overthrow a Turkish-backed unity government in Tripoli, the landscape is very different.

A formal truce last October set in motion a UN-led process that led to the creation of an interim government tasked with unifying the country's divided institutions, launching reconstruction efforts and preparing for December polls.

Haftar kept a low profile throughout the talks, but in recent weeks he has made a comeback with public rallies and pledges to build three new towns and thousands of housing units for the families of "martyrs".

"His tone and language have changed... He has dropped his military discourse" in favour of pledges to improve living conditions, said Hajj.

Haftar built his power base around Libya's second city of Benghazi, the eastern cradle of the 2011 NATO-backed uprising that toppled and killed Kadhafi.

He found allies among the region's powerful tribes, who provided much of the manpower for Haftar's various offensives. But today, Haftar has "lost his base of support", according to Libyan analyst Mahmoud Khalfallah.

"He no longer enjoys the indisputable support of the tribes, who blame him for having involved their sons in a war in which many died for nothing," Khalfallah added. "He knows they no longer trust him and that they would not give up their sons again for another war."

## U.S. Drawing Up Targeted Sanctions On Belarus Officials

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The Biden administration said on Friday it is drawing up a list of targeted sanctions against key members of the Belarusian government following the former Soviet republic's forced landing of a passenger jet and arrest of a journalist on board.

White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki said the United States was also suspending a 2019 agreement between Washington and Minsk that allowed carriers from each country to use the other's airspace, and taking other actions against the government of President Alexander Lukashenko. In a statement, she called on Lukashenko to allow a credible international investigation into the events of May 23, when the Ryanair passenger jet flying from Greece to Lithuania was forced to land in Minsk.

Belarusian authorities scrambled a fighter jet and flagged what turned out to be a false bomb alert to force the plane to land, then detained an opposition journalist who was on board, drawing condemnation from Europe and the United States. Psaki said the United States, with the EU and other allies, was developing a list of targeted



sanctions against key members of Lukashenko's government "associated with ongoing abuses of human rights and corruption, the falsification of the 2020 election, and the events of May 23".

The United States last year imposed sanctions on eight Belarus officials over an August 2020 election that the West said was rigged.

President Joe Biden said on Tuesday that sanctions against Belarus were "in play", without giving details.

The Treasury Department will develop an executive order for Biden to sign that will provide increased authorities to impose sanctions on elements of Lukashenko's government, and the United States will re-impose "full blocking sanctions" on nine Belarusian state-owned enterprises on June 3, prohibiting U.S. persons from dealing with those businesses.

Last month the United States revoked an authorization for certain transactions with the nine sanctioned state-owned enterprises over alleged human rights violations and abuses.

## Several Killed as Roadside Bomb Targets Minibus in Afghanistan

KABUL (Dispatches) - A roadside bomb hit a minibus carrying university lecturers and students in Afghanistan's northern Parwan province, killing at least four people and wounding 11 others, officials said.

Interior ministry spokesman Tariq Arian said the minibus was targeted on Saturday in the provincial capital of Charikar while transferring the group to Alberoni University in the neighbouring Kapisa province.

Kapisa provincial police spokesman Shayeq Shores said the bomb was set off by remote control.

Some of the wounded were in critical condition, said Hamed Obaidi, a spokesman for the ministry of higher education. Afghanistan's TOLO News reported that the attack took place at about 3:15pm (10:45 GMT).

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the attack. Previous deadly attacks on the Kabul University in November last year were claimed by the ISIL (ISIS) group.

Large swaths of war-ravaged Afghanistan have been littered with bombs and landmines. Many have been planted by fighters to target military convoys, but they often kill civilians instead.

Saturday's attack comes weeks after the remaining 2,500 to 3,500 U.S. troops officially began leaving the country.

They will be gone by September 11 at the latest. The pullout comes amid a resurgent Taliban, which controls or holds sway over half of Afghanistan.

Under an agreement signed by the Taliban and the US last year, Washington was to pull out troops in exchange for Taliban security guarantees and for the group to start peace talks with the Afghan government.

However, in recent months, violence in the country has soared.

Three weeks ago, a bomb attack outside a school in the capital Kabul killed 68 people, most of them students, and wounded 165 others.

Nearly 1,800 Afghan civilians were killed or wounded in the first three months of 2021 during fighting between government forces and Taliban fighters, the United Nations said last month.

## Myanmar Shadow Gov't Allies With Rebels Against Military

YANGON (Dispatches) - A shadow government in Myanmar seeking to reverse the February 1 coup has joined forces with a rebel group to "demolish" military rule, it said.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the military overthrew Aung San Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy government and launched a brutal crackdown on dissent.

A group of deposed lawmakers later set up a shadow "National Unity Government" which has sought to bring anti-coup dissidents together with Myanmar's myriad ethnic rebel fighters to form a federal army to challenge the military government.

On Saturday, the rebel Chin National Front signed an agreement to "demolish the dictatorship and to implement a federal democratic system" in Myanmar, the NUG said in a statement.

They pledged "mutual recognition" and to "partner equally" the statement added, without giving further details. A CNF spokesperson could not immediately be reached for comment.

The group - which represents the mainly Christian Chin minority in western Myanmar - signed a ceasefire with the country's military, also known as Tatmadaw, in 2015.

Opponents of Myanmar's military government have declared the formation of an interim National Unity Government with members of Aung San Suu Kyi's deposed cabinet and key ethnic minority groups [File: AP Photo]

In recent years, its fighters have dwindled.

"The CNF has no real military strength, so this move is symbolic," Richard Horsey, senior adviser on Myanmar to the International Crisis Group, told the AFP news agency.

"But [it is] nevertheless significant as CNF has been quite prominent in the peace process, due to its well respected political leaders in exile."

Several of Myanmar's rebel armed groups have condemned the military coup and the use of violence against unarmed civilians.

Some are also providing shelter and even training to dissidents who flee into their territories.



## Brazil Protesters Denounce Bolsonaro Over COVID Crisis

BRASILIA (Dispatches) - Protesters have taken to the streets across Brazil to protest against far-right President Jair Bolsonaro's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has killed more than 459,000 people in the South American nation.

Bolsonaro has been widely criticized for downplaying the risks of the coronavirus and eschewing public health measures, such as lockdowns and curfews.

A Brazilian Senate commission is conducting an investigation into his government's coronavirus policies, including whether it failed to secure COVID-19 vaccines, touted unproven drugs, and pressured local leaders who sought to impose health restrictions. Holding signs reading "Bolsonaro out", protesters rallied in several Brazilian cities and towns on Saturday to demand his resignation.

Reporting from Rio de Janeiro, Al Jazeera's Monica Yanakiew said many demonstrators had turned out despite earlier concerns over holding large public protests during the pandemic. "It came to a point where now they say we really have to go out and show that there is an opposition to Bolsonaro's government," said Yanakiew, adding that left-wing parties and civil society organisations were also present.

"[They are] chanting about everything, even about Palestine - basically they're asking for Bolsonaro's impeachment and they're asking for more vaccines and for public health and public education," she said.

"The common denominator is they want Bolsonaro out."

Bolsonaro has remained defiant despite the criticism, however, and he continues to reject coronavirus-related restrictions.

Last weekend, he joined thousands of his supporters in a motorcycle rally through Rio de Janeiro and promised not to impose a national lockdown.

"Without any scientific proof, governors and mayors have imposed confinement or curfews ... We are ready to take all the measures necessary to guarantee your freedom," Bolsonaro said on May 23. But recent polls show the former army captain's approval rating is dropping - Datafolha recently said 45 percent of Brazilians said his government is "bad" or "terrible" - and he could face a stiff challenge from ex-President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva in next year's presidential elections.



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## Court Delays Hearing in Suez Container Ship Compensation Case

CAIRO (Dispatches) - An Egyptian court on Saturday postponed a hearing in a compensation case filed by the Suez Canal authority against the owners of a container ship that blocked the canal for six days in March, giving the sides more time to negotiate, legal sources 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.

The Suez Canal Authority (SCA) initially demanded \$916 million in compensation from the Ever Given's Japanese owner Shoei Kisen for disruption caused by the blockage.



## Biden's Big Budget Comes With a Modest Growth Outlook for an Aging Country

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - President Joe Biden's first budget proposal comes with a big price tag - at \$6 trillion, roughly 50% higher than pre-COVID-19 federal spending - but, at least for now, projects a relatively modest long-term lift to the economy, likely reflecting concerns about the aging U.S. population.

The administration's spending blueprint for the fiscal year ending in September 2022 would increase spending on infrastructure, education and combating climate change, echoing familiar priorities for the first-term Democrat.

But it comes with forecasts for near-term growth that do not reflect the rapid improvement in the economy so far this year.

With the help of \$1.9 trillion in additional stimulus spending approved earlier this year, the economy grew at an annualized rate of 6.4% in the first quarter, a pace projections from both the Survey of Professional Forecasters and Federal Reserve officials see persisting through the year.

By contrast, the Biden budget pegs growth this year at just 5.2%. Council of Economic Advisers Chair Cecilia Rouse said forecasts underlying the budget were locked down in early February, assumptions administration officials plan to revisit later this year.

Also notable is the rapid deceleration in growth expectations after next year, to between 1.8% and 2% each year from 2024 through 2031. While that is squarely in line with the longer-run output estimates from Fed officials, it is at least a quarter percentage point short of the consensus among private forecasters, and around a full point south of the amped-up projections from the Trump administration's final budget proposal two years ago, before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Economists said the Biden projections likely factor in two systemic headwinds to a prolonged run of above-trend growth: The country is aging rapidly, and the workforce is not growing.

The Census Bureau in 2017 estimated that 20.5% of the U.S. population would be 65 or older by 2030, compared with about 16.8% at the start of this decade. And the labor force participation rate, which at 61.7% is now roughly where it was in the 1970s, is not expected to rebound from its COVID-19 drop.

At the same time, the Biden forecasts also imply the country will grow more productive, in part thanks to the budget's investment proposals.

"These are very solid numbers in light of those demographic realities," said Julia Coronado, president of analysis firm MacroPolicy Perspectives. "The notion here is that without the investment, you are not going to see productivity growth."

Looking only at the overall growth rate alone misses the point, Coronado said. "A lot of the argument around his plan is not just about juicing up growth potential, but making our growth more sustainable, more equitable," she said.

Cornerstone Macro's Roberto Perli agreed. The White House growth projections are "realistic, with upside potential," he said, noting that the forecast of 2% growth in 2030 versus 1.8% growth in 2025, given the drag from demographics, suggests "they think productivity is going to increase over time."

It sees the U.S. jobless rate averaging 5.5% this year, down from the current 6.1% and falling to 3.8% - close to its pre-pandemic low of 3.5% - by 2023 and holding there through 2031. The Fed, by comparison, pegs the longer-run unemployment rate at 4%, the professional forecasters survey puts it at 4.1% and even the former Trump administration projected it at 4.2%.

## Italy Approves Plan to Cut Red Tape

ROME (Dispatches) - Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi's cabinet backed a plan to reduce bureaucratic obstacles, a key commitment he made to unlock the first tranche of 24 billion euros (\$29 billion) in European Union recovery funds.

The decree approved late Friday seeks to facilitate public-works projects and streamline tender procedures, easing a long-standing impediment to governments seeking to spur growth.

The green light for the plan comes amid rising support for policies adopted by the former European Central Bank head since he took office in February. According to an Ipsos poll published in Corriere della Sera on Saturday, 66% of Italians are in favor of Draghi's agenda, up from 58% at the end of April.

The new measures also seek to hasten a nationwide expansion of broadband service, speed up authorization of renewable-energy projects and boost employment among women and youths. A board to oversee management of EU funds of about 200 billion euros due to Italy is included in the decree.



Though ambitious in scope, Draghi's plans will ultimately be judged by their effectiveness. Numerous past governments, including that of his immediate predecessor, Giuseppe Conte, tried to streamline bureaucracy with limited success.

Italy is set to be the biggest recipient of funds under the EU's recovery program, and Draghi is seeking to use the money to spur an economic rebound after growth shrank 8.9% last year due to pandemic lockdowns. Industry lobby group Confindustria expects the economy to rebound significantly in the third and fourth quarter, with growth above 4%.

The government earlier approved a 40 billion-euro stimulus package that extends economic aid to businesses and families.

## U.S. Funds Leave Turkey as Erdogan Meets With Investors

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's recent meeting with U.S.-based investors coincided with a decision by two California-based retirement funds to withdraw from Turkey-owned investments, columnist Kerim Ülker wrote for Dünya newspaper.

While the California State Senate voted on the "Divestment from Turkey" bill on Thursday, Erdogan was on a video call with CEOs from some 20 U.S.-based mega-corporations, including Pepsi Co., Cargill and Honeywell, Ülker said.

In the meeting Erdogan discussed current matters related to Turkey with the CEOs, and spoke to encourage investment in Turkey.

Among the issues discussed was U.S. President Joe Biden's recent recognition of the 1915 events as the Armenian Genocide, which Turkey rejects wholesale.

Meanwhile, California state senators voted unanimously in favor of the bill, which will allow retirement funds CalPERS and CalSTRS to choose investments not issued or owned by Turkey, California Globe news website reported. The two funds that provide retirement benefits for the state's public employees and teachers are worth a combined \$650 billion, according to Ülker.

The "Divestment from Turkey" bill, introduced by state senators Anthony Portantino and Scott Wilk, aims to help place more economic pressure on Turkey, and send a message that California stands behind Armenians, California Globe said.

The bill would "impose much needed economic consequences on a regime that continues to engage in an ongoing campaign of genocide denial", the news website cited Portantino as saying.

The sizeable Armenian-American population in the state, reaching 40 percent in some cities, has "relived intergenerational trauma" when in October Azerbaijan launched an offensive to take back territory in the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region, with great support from Turkey, the senator said.

"I believe divesting from Turkey sends a strong message to the world that California does not do business with genocidal regimes and countries with a history of civil and human rights abuses. It is consistent with our basic humanitarian principles."

California will stand with Armenians "until the Turkish government acknowledges its shameful history", Wilk said.

CalPERS alone has \$200 million's worth of investments in Turkey.

Turkey acknowledges the mass deaths of Armenians following an Ottoman order for their exile during World War I, but rejects wholesale that any of them occurred in a systemic and planned manner, or in as great numbers as scholars cite. The generally accepted view is that an exile order based on some Armenian groups aligning themselves with Russia during WWI against the Ottoman Empire resulted in the death of some 1.5 million Armenians and other Anatolian Christians.

## China, U.S. Can Find Common Ground on Tariff Exclusions

BEIJING (Dispatches) - The Biden administration is unlikely to remove tariffs on Chinese goods in the short term, but China and the United States might find a middle ground by increasing tariff exclusions as a way to reduce tensions, a Chinese think-tank said.

With even free trade advocates in the U.S. lobbying that Washington should use tariff cuts as a tool for new trade negotiations with China, tariffs are likely to remain in place, said a report from China Finance 40 forum (CF40) on Saturday, an economic and finance think tank with members from regulators, academia and financial institutions.

But with the United States facing inflationary pressures in the first half of this year, Washington may look to reduce the tariff burden through tariff exclusions, which would avoid resistance in congress and ease political pressure, the report said.

The Biden administration is conducting a comprehensive review of U.S.-China trade policy, ahead of the expiry of the Phase 1 deal at the end of 2021.

The report noted that the U.S. government still retains additional tariffs on US\$370 billion of Chinese exports to the United States.

The report also noted that the Biden administration was more concerned about the impact of China's support for the technology sector and wanted the U.S. to focus on its own tech support.

"During the Biden administration, technological competition and confrontation between China and the United States in cyberspace will intensify, and the possibility of parallel systems will increase," the report said, predicting intensified competition between the two countries over creating international rules around emerging technologies.

U.S. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said on Friday the Senate would consider a sweeping package of legislation on June 8 intended to boost the country's ability to compete with Chinese technology.

## Russia's Economic Recovery Gaining Pace

MOSCOW (Reuters) - The World Bank has lifted its forecasts for 2021 economic growth in Russia, noting signs of improvement in the labour market, but said planned fiscal consolidation may hamper the expansion, the global body said.

After shrinking by 3% in 2020 under pressure from the COVID-19 pandemic and a drop in oil prices, the Russian economy is on track to rebound this year amid a global roll-out of vaccines and recovering demand.

In a new report, the World Bank said it now expects Russia's gross domestic product to grow by 3.2% in 2021 and at the same pace in 2022 versus 2.9% and 3.2%, respectively, that it forecast in March.

"This is the baseline scenario of gradual decline in new COVID-19 infections," the World Bank said in a report.

The World Bank said Russia has space for a more gradual fiscal consolidation than planned, warning of pronounced output losses from a decline in government spending.

Even though Russia's economic contraction in 2020 was the deepest in 11 years, Russia performed better than the world economy that shrank by 3.8%.

The recent U.S. sanctions on Russian sovereign debt do not threaten Russia's financial stability thanks to strong macro-fiscal buffers and relatively moderate share of foreign investor holdings of Russian government debt, which could be compensated through domestic investors, the World Bank said.

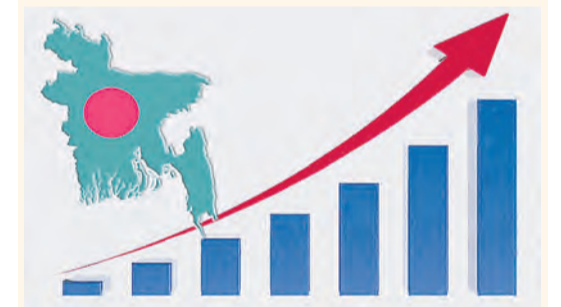
The United States barred U.S. banks from buying rouble-denominated sovereign bonds directly from Russia from mid-June, in addition to an existing ban on buying sovereign Eurobonds directly from the finance ministry.

The Russian banking sector has been resilient so far, and the labour market began showing some signs of improvement by the end of 2020 but has not recovered to pre-pandemic levels, the World Bank said.

Russia managed to contain additional spikes in the poverty rate in 2020 but disposable incomes declined and standards of living have worsened, the World Bank said.

Declining real disposable incomes is a sensitive issue for Russia ahead of the parliamentary election due in September.

## Bangladesh Is Showcasing Its Economic Rise



DHAKA (Dispatches) - "From providing India with Covid relief materials to extending financial help to Sri Lanka in its hour of crisis, Bangladesh has started to showcase its economic rise," wrote Indian digital news portal ThePrint.

Titled as 'Covid aid to India, financial help to Sri Lanka: Bangladesh is showcasing its economic rise', the report written by Nayanima Basu argued that the country is now using its economic rise 'to forge deeper ties with neighbors.'

"Earlier this week, Bangladesh agreed to extend a \$200 million currency swap facility to Sri Lanka," it said. "This will help in boosting their economy even as it will enable Colombo to tide over the massive debt crisis it is facing at present, diplomatic sources told ThePrint."

The foreign debt situation in Sri Lanka has already reached a critical juncture leading to 'a massive balance of payment issues.'

"Sri Lanka has reportedly \$3.7 billion of foreign debt maturing this year, hence this cooperation from Bangladesh is expected to be a lifeline for their economy," added the report.

ThePrint, referring to sources, further added that the arrangement was finalised during Sri Lanka Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa's visit to Bangladesh in March this year. A currency swap is a transaction in which two parties exchange an equivalent amount of money with each other, but in different currencies which helps in reducing the cost of borrowing in a foreign currency at favorable rates.

"Sri Lankan economy has been in deep trouble ever since the 2019 Easter bombings and subsequently the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic that has wreaked havoc for its tourism industry and other sectors," added the Indian digital news outlet report.

"Bangladesh is also among the 40 countries that have sent Covid relief aid to India twice as the country battles the second wave," said ThePrint.

## Monthly Production of Refrigerators, Freezers Jumps 115%

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Manufacturing of refrigerators and freezers in Iran during the first month of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21- April 20) has risen 115 percent from that of the same month in the previous year, showed the data released by the Ministry of Industry, Mining and Trade.

As reported, 102,400 refrigerators and freezers have been manufactured

during the mentioned month. In the first month of the current year, domestic companies also produced 68,700 washing machines, registering a 68.9 percent increase in production compared to the same period last year.

The production of water air coolers has also witnessed a growth of 64.7 percent in the said month and domestic manufacturers succeeded in producing 111,800 units of this product.



## Lower Global Mobility to Continue to Weigh Down Int'l Economy

LONDON (Dispatches) - A Barclays report released earlier this week found that limits on global mobility resulting from the pandemic will continue to depress economic growth for the near future.

The 37-page report reviews the extent to which the pandemic limited travel and the resulting economic ramifications. "Global mobility directly powered about 10% of global GDP before the pandemic," the report said. "The damage will not be confined to 2020, but will linger."

Even after the rollout of vaccines and the lifting of some restrictive travel policies, significant obstacles to spur-of-the-moment traveling remain. "A state of persistent pandemic may render some border restrictions permanent, making international travel more difficult. Impulsively booking a last-minute trip on a low-cost carrier may no longer be viable in such a scenario between and to some countries," the authors wrote.

In order to ease travel restrictions, governments will require not only the containment of the virus but also the vaccination of its people and the attainment of herd immunity. "Efforts to reopen international borders are also increasingly focused on vaccinations as a criterion for travel," the report said.

Even after the developed world reaches herd immunity, however, governments will likely practice caution with regard to travel restrictions as "not only is the pace of vaccination likely to stay uneven, there is still substantial uncertainty over the efficacy of these vaccines against new variants of the coronavirus."

Travel restrictions have been eased throughout 2021, though new case surges in India and elsewhere have halted progress in recent weeks.

The United Kingdom's Health Secretary Matt Hancock recently expressed uncertainty regarding whether the country would be able to proceed with reopening the economy on June 21 as previously planned, in light of the spread of the virus variant first identified in India to the UK.

The services sector, which includes travel and tourism, was the first sector to be hit and likely will be the last to recover, the report found.

The report states that developed economies, which are ahead in vaccine distribution and inoculation, will be among the first to resume travel, whereas emerging economies, which have "struggled to secure vaccine supplies," will likely be slower to do so.

Several obstacles to reaching normal levels of travel remain. According to the World Tourism Organization, 69 economies had their borders closed to foreigners, as of February 1.



Governments around the world have adopted the World Health Organization's recommendation for 14 days of quarantine for travelers, a period of time that, according to Barclays, "likely exceeds the overall length of most pre-COVID travel."

The report noted that China represents a large share of the world's outbound tourist spending - nearly double the size of the US - and that China has created certain policies for jumpstarting tourism. The "international travel health certificate", introduced on March 8, is one such method that uses a vaccine passport to restrict travel to vaccinated citizens.

Other findings of the report include a severe impact of the pandemic on the hospitality industry. In 2020, the output of accommodation and food services fell sharply, ranging from a 10% y/y contraction in China and Indonesia to a 40% decline in the case of Poland, the UK, and Mexico. The losses endured by the hospitality industry, which accounted for 3.2% of GDP in 2019 but over 10% of the total employed, is particularly disruptive to the labor market.

Visions of a total economic revitalization by this summer are unlikely to come to fruition. "A meaningful recovery is only likely to take place towards the later part of 2021 or even 2022," the report says, "and will be highly contingent on the progress towards reopening international travel borders."

## Biden Following Trump...

FROM PAGE 1

But now it seems he has swallowed his words and does not intend to return to the treaty because of his differences with Russia and it can be a new start for the Cold War between the two countries.



This decision means that only one major arms control treaty between the two powers — the New START treaty, which would have expired in February but the Biden administration moved quickly to extend it for another five years — will remain in place.

Washington's decision not to re-enter the Open Skies Treaty -- which was broadly backed by U.S. allies in Europe and by Democrats in Congress as a trust-building measure between the two nuclear powers -- came only weeks prior to a planned summit between Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin in Geneva.

Leading congressional Democrats and members of the European Union had urged the Biden administration to reconsider its exit and also called on Moscow to remain in the pact and lift flight restrictions, notably over its westernmost Kaliningrad region, which lies between NATO allies Lithuania and Poland.

A number of U.S. arms control experts have also criticized the Biden administration's decision to exit the pact, which they describe as a helpful tool to prevent an inadvertent conflict or crisis.

The Open Skies Treaty is not the only issue that Biden has retreated his promises as he has ignored his presidential election promises like issues of Iran's nuclear deal and immigrants. His violation of promises now is considered a serious threat to the Democrat Party as the Congress and Senate elections loom.

U.S. Democrat Senator Bernie Sanders has warned Democrats that Republicans will win both the House of Representatives and the Senate next year if Democrats do not renounce obstructionism and fulfill the pledges that Biden has given.

Regarding the U.S. return to the JCPOA, the Biden Administration is unwilling to remove all sanctions despite the claims had been made in the presidential election.

All one can see, since Biden has taken office, is that Biden is following Trump's path in some foreign policies of the country and the world cannot expect major change in the behavior of the U.S. administration although Biden's behavior and tone are softer and alluring unlike his predecessor who used to resort to harsher remarks.

So the world should rely on itself than waiting for any major change in the U.S. behavior because the nature of this arrogant country is unchangeable that it only dictates its policies on other countries and support of terrorists.

The Islamic Republic of Iran since 1979 has tried to show the true nature of the U.S. to the world that the U.S. is not trustworthy, and reliance on this country has no bright future and the world is gradually realizing what Iran has meant by standing against the U.S. excessive-demands.

## Iran, Iraq...

FROM PAGE 1

Iran and Iraq held the 4th session of Economic Cooperation Joint Commission in January, weighing plans for stronger cooperation in various sectors with an eye to the geographical, cultural and religious commonalities between the two Muslim neighbors.

Participants in the meeting are also planned to discuss the ways to boost economic ties, promote exports, and evaluate the markets for optimum productivity in various sectors, such as the transportation and energy industries, tourism sector, construction projects, and water and electricity industries.

## South Korea Aims to Develop Exascale Supercomputer System by 2030



SEOUL (Dispatches) - South Korea will beef up its high-performance computing infrastructure to establish an exascale supercomputing system by 2030, the country's science ministry has said.

An exascale supercomputer can perform a quintillion calculations per second. Countries like China and Japan have already moved forward on releasing such a computer in the next few years.

Under the national computing innovation strategy, South Korea targets to have the world's fifth-largest amount of computing power, secure 24 industry leading computing technologies and create 10 new service areas by 2030, according to the Ministry of Science and ICT.

The ministry said it first plans to replace the fifth-generation Nurion national supercomputer, now the world's 21st-fastest, with the sixth-generation mainframe by 2023 and with the seventh-generation system by 2028, reports Yonhap news agency.

The country is looking to utilise national supercomputing resources in sectors including nanotechnology, autonomous driving and aerospace.

The ministry said it will support research and development (R&D) activities in four areas including processors and platform solutions to bolster the country's technology prowess in the supercomputing sector.

## Coronavirus Storm Engulfs Everest

KATHMANDU (AFP) - Mount Everest guide Buddhi Bahadur Lama has spent days isolated in a tent after testing positive for coronavirus, as an outbreak that climbers say is putting lives at risk sweeps base camp.



He is one of four in his expedition team thought to have contracted Covid-19 at the foot of the world's highest mountain, along with a growing number of others.

"This is not just our problem, it is happening in most of the teams at the base camp right now," the 35-year-old told AFP.

Dozens of suspected Covid cases have been flown out of the area and at least two companies have cancelled expeditions after team members tested positive.

However authorities in Nepal have yet to acknowledge a single case at the mountain, with the stakes high for the country's tourism industry after a Covid shutdown last year cost millions in lost revenue.

Lama's symptoms are mild but he said some climbers were suffering more severely.

The warmer weather that ushers in safer conditions for scaling Everest and other Himalayan peaks has coincided with a new wave of Covid-19 infections in Nepal.

The country is reporting an average of 8,000 cases a day and the health system has been overwhelmed.

Over the last two months since the climbing season began, more than 1,000 mountaineers and their mainly Nepali guides have been camped in the tent city.

More than 350 have reached the summit so far this season, but some are still at base camp waiting for the next weather window.

Breathing is already difficult at high altitudes so the

coronavirus becomes a major threat if symptoms appear during a climb.

Officials at a camp clinic say more than 30 people have been flown out for health issues in recent weeks. Some have posted their Covid-19 diagnosis on social media.

But the government says it is unaware of any cases.

"We have asked companies and officials to report to us if they have any Covid cases but none has submitted anything yet. We need an official report," said Nepal's tourism department chief Rudra Singh Tamang.

"If people have tested positive in Kathmandu, it is hard to say where they got infected."

There is also a lack of transparency among some expedition organisers about positive cases.

Austrian expedition organiser Lukas Furtenbach, who was the first to cancel an expedition, said he had submitted a report to the government.

"There is an outbreak and there is evidence for that. But the government is denying this outbreak and putting our lives and the lives of their own people, the Sherpas, at risk," he said.

Last week Furtenbach was waiting to begin his ascent and his team of 19 climbers had already started acclimatisation treks when the virus struck.

One person in the group tested positive with a rapid test kit and the next day three Sherpas also returned positive results.

Eventually, eight in the expedition were found to have Covid-19, with seven confirmed by a PCR test in Kathmandu.

Furtenbach believes they were infected on the mountain -- the only time his expedition was in close contact with other teams.

## Sri Lanka Facing Marine Disaster From Burning Ship

COLOMBO (Dispatches) - Sri Lanka is facing its worst beach pollution crisis as tonnes of plastic waste from a burning container ship wash ashore, a senior environment official said Saturday.

Fishermen have been banned from an 80-kilometre (50-mile) stretch of coast near the Singapore-registered MV X-Press Pearl as an international firefighting operation went into a 10th day.

"There is smoke and intermittent flames seen from the ship," navy spokesman Captain Indika de Silva told AFP. "However, the vessel is stable and it is still in anchorage."

Authorities are more worried about millions of polyethylene pellets washing up on beaches and threatening fish-breeding shallow waters.

The affected seafloor is known for its crabs and jumbo prawns as well as its tourist beaches.

"This is probably the worst beach pollution in our history," said Dharshani Lahandapura, head of Sri Lanka's Marine Environment and Protection Authority (MEPA). Thousands of military and security personnel in hazmat suits are cleaning the beaches of plastic waste and other debris from the ship, which caught fire on May 20.

The impact on mangroves, lagoons and marine wildlife in the region was being assessed.

The jobs of thousands of fishermen are at risk, according to authorities, and the MEPA said a possible oil leak would only add to the devastation.

## Iran Membership in SCO Among Its Main Plans

TEHRAN (MNA) - The Tajik ambassador to Tehran said that Iran's membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization is one of the organization's main programs, adding that the organization's decisions need the approval of all members.

Tajikistan's Ambassador to Iran Nizamuddin Zahedi said in a press conference about the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) on Sunday that, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization is one of the most influential organizations in the world."

The ambassador continued to explain how and when the SCO started and said that his country has assumed the presidency over the organization.

Asked about Tajikistan's position on Iran's membership in the SCO, Zahedi said: "I was the first person to propose Iran's membership in the Shanghai Organization."

He, meanwhile, said that all the decisions in the SCO must be made with the consent of all countries.

The Tajik diplomat added that "Iran's membership is one of the main programs of the Shanghai Organization, and if other countries are ready to accept Iran, Tajikistan will."

He also said about the upcoming Shanghai summit, "The summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization is held once a year and the decision over its presidency will be made in September, and it seems that the next presidency will go Uzbekistan after us."

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## Spalletti Named as New Napoli Coach

ROME (Dispatches) - Former Roma and Inter Milan boss Luciano Spalletti was on Saturday named as Napoli's new coach.  
"Welcome Luciano, together we will do a great job," the Serie A club's president Aurelio De Laurentiis posted on twitter.  
He succeeds Gennaro Gattuso, who left after failing to qualify Napoli for the Champions League.

## Bernal Closes On Giro Title

ROME (Dispatches) - Italian Damiano Caruso earned a first Grand Tour victory in the 20th and penultimate stage of the Giro d'Italia, a 163-kilometre ride from Valle Spluga to Alpe Motta, on Saturday, as Egan Bernal closed in on the overall title.  
The final climb up Alpe Motta saw Frenchman Roman Bardet and Caruso lose their domestique riders and pull clear with five kilometres to go, with home favourite Caruso digging deep to comfortably take the stage victory.

## Chelsea Upset Man City to Win Champions League

LONDON (Dispatches) - Manager Thomas Tuchel promised a more open and positive Chelsea effort heading into Saturday's Champions League final.

The Blues held true to his word. They're heading back to London with the trophy because of it. Kai Havertz's goal shortly before halftime was the difference as Chelsea beat Manchester City 1-0 in Porto and won the Champions League for the second time in club history.

Chelsea's Christian Pulisic made history himself by becoming the first American male to play in a UEFA Champions League final when he replaced Timo Werner in the 66th minute. Zack Steffen, City's backup goalkeeper and the United States national team's No. 1, did not make it off the bench.

Havertz sunk favored Manchester City, which was -250 to win per BetMGM, in the 42nd minute off a splendid ball forward from Mason Mount, dinking around City keeper Ederson and slotting into the back of the net.

Chelsea's Ben Chilwell kickstarted the play with an impressive touch toward Mount, and that provided a neat summation of the match's most crucial tactical chess play. Chilwell and Reece James, nominal fullbacks who also caromed into the attack, helped suffocate the wide areas this City team has exploited much of the season, while N'Golo Kanté was his typically disruptive self in the middle. The Blues could function with three defenders while going forward, and then double that when City retook possession as Chilwell and James dropped back.

In fact, manager Pep Guardiola, whose brilliance helped City win the Premier League rather comfortably, ended up making a mistake by overreacting to the appearance of five defenders in Chelsea's lineup. By opting to play the attack-minded İlkay Gündoğan in the central midfield and leaving his defensive midfielders like Rodri and Fernandinho on the bench, Guardiola inadvertently played into Chelsea's hands.

City never really sorted itself out, and Chelsea's first half expected goals and six more touches in the opposing penalty area reflected how well the wrinkle worked.

Guardiola brought on strikers Sergio Agüero and Gabriel Jesus in the second



half to chase an equalizer, which isn't ideal, since striker-less formations propelled much of City's success this season. The club also lost star Kevin de Bruyne after a blindside clash with Antonio Rüdiger.

The tying goal never came, and Chelsea won the Champions League for the first time since their miracle victory against Bayern Munich in 2012.

That title also came during a season in which Chelsea fired its manager mid-campaign, and Tuchel's work in the place of Frank Lampard, who was sacked in January, first drove the Blues back into the top four of the Premier League and now has them back at the summit of Europe.

Perhaps nowhere is it more evident than defensively. Edouard Mendy has become a stalwart in the net, and Chelsea has posted 19 shutouts across all competitions under Tuchel, including Saturday's final.

After the match German forward Havertz said he had "worked 15 years" for the moment when he scored the decisive goal.

Havertz's 42nd minute strike -- his first goal for the club in the Champions League -- gave Chelsea their second European crown nine years after they beat Bayern Munich to win their first. "I don't know what to say, I waited a long time. I've worked 15 years for this moment, I am overwhelmed," 21-year-old Havertz told BT Sport.

Chelsea captain Cesar Azpilicueta hailed the young forward.

## Alaba Signs for Real Madrid After Leaving Bayern



MADRID (Dispatches) - Austrian defender David Alaba will join Real Madrid on a five-year contract after leaving Bayern Munich, the Spanish giants confirmed on Friday.

The announcement of the signing of the 28-year-old, who had also been linked with several English Premier League clubs, comes a day after Zinedine Zidane quit as Real coach.

"Real Madrid has reached an agreement with David Alaba, who will be linked to the club for the next five seasons," Madrid said in a statement.

Alaba will be presented as a Real player after Euro 2020, the statement added.

The Austria international has been hugely successful at Bayern, having won two Champions League trophies and 10 league titles among other silverware.

Alaba had said in February that he would leave Bayern when his contract expires at the end of the season after 13 years with the German club.

Alaba and Bayern were in talks about a new contract but the club said in November 2020 that the negotiations had broken down, reportedly over the player's salary.

## Bednarek Wins 200m

LONDON (Dispatches) - American Kenneth Bednarek edged Canadian André De Grasse in a scintillating 200 metres race at the Doha Diamond League meeting as Kenyans dominated the middle-distance competitions.

Bednarek won in 19.88, one hundredth of a second ahead of De Grasse whose compatriot Aaron Brown was third (20.25) on a hot and humid night in the Qatari capital.

Bednarek was delighted with the win even though he said he was "a bit nervous. But I am excited that I got in the first place. I'll try to be even better again the next time."

Justin Gatlin, the 39-year old 2004 100m Olympic gold medallist, finished fifth in a season's best 20.49.

Jamaica's Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce, the double Olympic champion, won the 100m, putting behind her a disappointing fourth-place finish in Gateshead last Sunday. read more

Fraser-Pryce, 34, ran 10.84 seconds ahead of Nigeria's Blessing Okagbare (10.90) with America's Javianne Oliver finishing third (11.03).

Fraser-Pryce is hoping to become the first female athlete to win three Olympic 100m titles after taking gold in 2008 and 2012 in Beijing and London respectively after a silver at Rio 2016. "I am happy that I won, because it's far away from the fourth place that I did the last time," she said.

"It's going to be the final Olympic appearance (for me) so I hope it will be good. The last three Olympics I went to I was able to stand on the podium and I'm hoping to be able to make it there again God willing."

## Krejčíková Wins Maiden WTA Title

STRASBOURG (Dispatches) - Barbora Krejčíková gave her French Open preparations a huge boost when she won her maiden WTA title at the Strasbourg International on Saturday with a 6-3 6-3 victory over Sorana Cîrstea.

Krejčíková did not have the perfect match, with 10 double faults, as windy conditions in the open-air arena made serving difficult, but the Czech fifth seed converted six of 13 break points to deny her Romanian opponent a third singles title.

## Djokovic Wins on Home Soil



display against world number 255 Molcan, who battled through from the qualifying rounds. It was Djokovic's first triumph since he clinched his 18th major at the Australian

BELGRADE (Dispatches) - Novak Djokovic enjoyed success at his own tennis centre when he won the Belgrade Open with a 6-4 6-3 win over Slovakian Alex Molcan in Saturday's final but his performance left a lot to be desired ahead of the French Open.

World number one Djokovic received a standing ovation from the home crowd by the Danube river in the Serbian capital after an erratic

Open in February.

Since then, he has endured patchy claycourt season, including a last 16 exit at the Monte Carlo Masters.

Djokovic also lost to Russian Aslan Karatsev in the Serbia Open semi-finals before being defeated by Rafael Nadal in the Rome Masters final and his display against Molcan was at times unconvincing.

But Djokovic struck a happy figure as he lifted the trophy.

"I want to thank everyone who turned up and made this a memorable day, I have to admit that part of my mind is already in Paris," Djokovic said in a courtside interview.

"It was an easy decision to enter this tournament, I never had any seconds thoughts and I am delighted that we came through so magnificently with this event."

"I am aiming for the title at Roland Garros."

## Tatum Blitzes Nets for 50 Points

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Jayson Tatum busted out of a mini-slump, exploding for 50 points Friday as the Boston Celtics clawed their way back into their Eastern Conference first-round series with a 125-119 win over the Brooklyn Nets.

Tatum, who had just 31 points on nine-of-32 shooting in the first two games of the series, shot a blistering 16-of-30 from the floor and drained five threes as the Celtics cut the Nets series lead to 2-1.

Tatum also scored 50 points in a win over Washington in a play-in game making it the second time this month he has put the team on his back for a much needed post-season win.

"I just tried to be better," said Tatum. "I had a tough two games so I tried to redeem myself and do anything I can to win."

The Celtics' win over the Nets played out in front of a crowd of 4,700 at the Boston Garden. "It felt good to finally play a playoff game at TD Garden and it is great being back in front of our fans," said Tatum. Marcus Smart scored 22 points and Tristan Thompson finished with 19 points and 13 rebounds in the win.

James Harden delivered 41 points and 10 assists while Kevin Durant finished with 39 points and nine rebounds for the Nets, who were trying to take a 3-0 series lead for the first time since their first-round sweep of the New York Knicks in 2004.

Kyrie Irving was playing in front of Boston fans for the first time since leaving the Celtics under a cloud of controversy after the 2018-19 season.

He was showered with boos from Celtic faithful every time he touched the ball.

Irving scored just two points in the first half to tie a career low in a playoff game. He finished with 16 points on six-of-17 shooting.

The Celtics led 33-32 at the end of the first and 61-57 at the half, then held on down the stretch as Tatum nailed a clutch pull up jumper with 40 seconds left to make it 122-115.



## UEFA's Ceferin Favors Champions League Final Four Format

NYON (Dispatches) - UEFA President Aleksander Ceferin said he was in favor of a Final Four format for the Champions League as it could generate revenues and considerable excitement over an entire week each year.

European soccer's governing body last month made some changes to its top continental club competition by approving a new format from the 2024-25 season with 36 clubs and teams set to play four more matches compared to the current format.

But the final phase of the competition remains a knockout stage from the round of 16 onwards, with a final hosted each year by a different city.

"I'm in favor of a 'Final 4' in the Champions League. It could be great and effective in terms of revenue if done right. But everyone has to give their point of view," Ceferin told French newspaper L'Equipe.

"We are discussing it, but it is not decided. We liked the 'Final 8' last year in Portugal."

Due to months-long interruptions in play because of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, UEFA had to reschedule the competition and scheduled the final phase in Portugal.

"But a 'Final 8' is over two weeks and that's too much. For a 'Final 4', after 2024, there are advantages and disadvantages," added Ceferin.

"On the one hand, it can be a fantastic event with a football week complemented by other events like concerts. But we lose matches, especially at home, for the clubs," said Ceferin.

By playing the semi-finals in one location, teams involved would lose out on revenues had they featured in two legs.

UEFA last month had to fend off an attempt by 12 top European clubs to form a breakaway European Super League.



Manchester City face Chelsea in the Champions League final in Porto on Saturday. Both teams were among the 12 who failed in their attempt to set up the breakaway league.