

**Health Ministry Announced on Friday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic in Iran Increased to 81,796 With 124 More Iranians Killed by the Deadly Virus Over the Past 24 Hours**

# IRAN NEWS

**Iran Has Set the July Official Selling Price (OSP) of Its Iranian Light crude Oil Grade for Asian Buyers at \$1.60 Cents Above the Oman/Dubai Average, Up 10 Cents From the Previous Month**

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**Djokovic to Play Nadal In French Semis**



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## Iran Warns Against IAEA Impartiality

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's Ambassador to the Vienna-based international organizations Kazem Gharibabadi has criticized the neutrality of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Gharibabadi delivered a speech to the Governing Council, outlining the Islamic Republic of Iran's stances on the agency's director general's report on some safeguards issues.

The agency's silence on the threat of the Zionist regime's nuclear weapons program and acts sabotage of Iran's nuclear facilities calls into question the agency's credibility and neutrality and creates a political organization about it, he underlined.

It is unacceptable that over the past decade, the Iranian nuclear issue continues to be raised here at the agency occasionally based on unfounded claims, he said, adding that while there is not a single piece of evidence that nuclear material has strayed toward non-peaceful purposes.

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## Tehran Blasts Restrictions on Non-Military Activities in Space

TEHRAN (MNA) - At a meeting of the UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) Wednesday, Iran lambasted the sanctions against its non-military entities operating in space.

The Iranian Space Agency attended the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) in Vienna and read out a statement on the third day of the session. In its statement, the Iranian Space Agency called for amending the rules and regulations relating to Geosynchronous orbit and criticized the First come and First serve and Use it or Lost it ideas.

Iran also criticized the British proposal on responsible behavior in space and also stressed the need for decision-making and legal documents based on multilateralism and within the framework of international organizations.

The Iranian Space Agency also criticized the NASA Artemis program and called for preventing an arms race in space. It also stressed peaceful activities in space while it called on international bodies to ease restrictions on activities in space.

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## Russia Helps Iran to Build 2 Nuclear Power Plants



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - President Hassan Rouhani says Iran has started constructing two new nuclear power plants in cooperation with Russia, praising the close relations that the two sides have forged in various fields, especially defense, besides the energy sector.

At the inauguration ceremony of projects belonging to the Energy Ministry via video conference on Thursday, Rouhani expressed gratitude to his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, for his endeavors to consolidate political and economic relations between the two countries.

Before issuing the order to start the construction of 1400-mgw Sirik Power Plant in southern Hormozgan province, Rouhani said the project, which is also joined by Russia, is of great importance due to the "friendly and close" ties between Iran and its northern neighbor, the Russian Federation.

He referred to the construction of two nuclear power plants in a joint project with Russia and said, "We have good relations with Russia in military and defense areas, which saw a boost after the imports of the S-300 [missile system] from Russia."

"Over the past eight years, the relations between the two countries have developed in various areas. In this regard, I thank Mr. Valdimir Putin, the honorable president of Russia, for all his efforts during this period in the political, economic and regional dimension," he said.

"Iran and Russia have had very important cooperation in the field of Syria and significant trilateral partnership in the field of Azerbaijan and the Caucasus. We also have very good cooperation regarding Eurasia with Russia and member states. Concerning the legal regime of the Caspian Sea, we have taken very important steps with friendly countries, including Russia."

The Iranian chief executive further highlighted military and defense ties with Russia as well as the construction of the two nuclear power plants.

"Our relations with Russia have broadened compared to the past. Also in these days, efforts are being made with Russia to revive the JCPOA. So, the development of ties with the important neighbor, Russia, will be in the interest of the two nations and certainly benefits the region and global issues," Rouhani said, referring to the 2015 nuclear deal by the acronym of its official name, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

He also referred to the agreement between Tehran and Moscow on the implementation of joint projects, including power plants and railways in Iran.

Iran and Russia, both subject to Western sanctions, enjoy cordial relations in different sectors.

Meanwhile some media outlets claimed Russia is preparing to supply Iran with an advanced satellite system that will give Tehran an unprecedented ability to track potential military targets across the Middle East and beyond, according to current and former U.S. and Middle Eastern officials briefed on details of the arrangement.

The plan would deliver to the Iranians a Russian-made Kanopus-V satellite equipped with a high-resolution camera that would greatly enhance Iran's spying capabilities, allowing continuous monitoring of facilities ranging from Persian Gulf oil refineries and Israeli military bases to Iraqi barracks that house U.S. troops, the officials said. The launch could happen within months, they said.

While the Kanopus-V is marketed for civilian use, Iranian military officials have been heavily involved in the acquisition, and leaders of Iran's elite Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps have made multiple trips to Russia since 2018 to help negotiate the terms of the agreement, the officials said. As recently as this spring, Russian experts traveled to Iran to help train ground crews that would operate the satellite from a newly built facility near the northern city of Karaj, the officials said.

Details of the agreement were described by a current and a former U.S. official as well as a senior Middle Eastern government official briefed on the sale. The three officials spoke on the condition of anonymity, citing sensitivities surrounding ongoing intelligence collection efforts. The Russian Foreign Ministry in Moscow did not respond to an email request for comment.

## ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

## What a Strange World

After the Ukrainian passenger plane was shot down due to human error in Iran, some countries like Canada decided to take advantage of this mishap in favor of themselves to put pressure on the Islamic Republic of Iran in order to dictate their own so-called human rights principles.

One of these countries was and is still Canada which persistently seeks to increase pressure on Iran by resorting to different pretexts. Last week the Superior Court of Justice of the Canadian province of Ontario ruled that Iran owes damages to families who sued over the crash, which killed 176 people, 138 of them with ties to Canada. Of course Iran's foreign ministry by issuing a statement rejected this ruling and said, "Everyone knows that the Canadian court has no jurisdiction over this air crash" since it occurred outside Canada." Although Iran has repeatedly said he has arrested those who mistakenly shot down the plane will stand trial and the country will pay the damages, Canada as one of the so-called defenders of human rights resists Iran's measures. This happens while recently Canada has witnessed one of the most horrible crimes and the world is waiting for reaction of this country's officials regarding to this crime.

This claim comes when the remains of 215 Indigenous children were on the grounds of the Kamloops Indian Residential School in Canada.

An estimated 150,000 Indigenous children passed through the schools between their opening, around 1883, and their closing in 1996. Since taking office in 2015, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has prioritized putting in place a list of 94 actions for commemorating the students and improving the lives of Indigenous people. But Indigenous leaders believe the government still has a long way to go.

The discovery of the graves has given new impetus to the nation's debate on how to atone for its history of exploiting Indigenous people as the country is one of the so-called defenders of the human-rights. Many are asking how so many children could have wound up in that burial space.

While the world and UN independent experts have asked for a probe on this horrible crime, the country faced another crime this time again the Muslim community.

Flags throughout Canada were put at half-staff and impromptu memorials comprising children's moccasins or shoes, often marked with "215," have sprouted, including one in front of Canada's Parliament building in Ottawa. See Page 7

## IAEA Urged to Refrain From Politicizing JCPOA

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Moscow has called on the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to refrain from politicizing the situation around the Iran nuclear deal, Russia's Permanent Envoy to International Organizations in Vienna Mikhail Ulyanov said, addressing a meeting of the IAEA Board of Governors on Thursday.

According to him, Russia has carefully studied the part of IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi's report concerning the use of the safeguard agreement in relation to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

"In this regard, I would like to point out that the main goal of the agency's inspections under the safeguard agreement is to make sure that a country does not use raw and fissionable materials for purposes related to nuclear weapons and any other nuclear explosive devices," Ulyanov stressed. "We urge the IAEA to ease tensions around these matters, refrain from politicizing them, and return to regular technical cooperation with Iran. Problems should be solved in strict compliance with the safeguard agreement," the Russian diplomat said.

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## U.S. Drops Sanctions on Former Iranian Officials

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The United States said on Thursday it had removed sanctions on three former Iranian officials and two companies that previously traded Iranian petrochemicals, a step one U.S. official called routine but that could show U.S. readiness to ease sanctions when justified.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, the U.S. official said that the moves by the U.S. Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) were unrelated to efforts to revive Iranian and U.S. compliance with the 2015 Iran nuclear deal.

"Today, OFAC and the Department of State are also lifting sanctions on three former Government of Iran officials, and two companies formerly involved in the purchase, acquisition, sale, transport, or marketing of Iranian petrochemical products," the Treasury said in a statement.

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## No First-Class, Second-Class Citizen in Country

TEHRAN – One of the presidential election candidates said that first-class citizen and the second-class citizen in the country is meaningless.

Delivering a speech among the Sunni elites and clerics on Thursday in Tehran, Ebrahim Raisi said that Shia and Sunnis were living together in the Islamic Republic of Iran and had common interests.

He stressed that the discrimination between ethnic groups, Shias, and Sunnis was not acceptable, and all facilities should be shared fairly among all without any first-class and second-class citizen classifications.

## Top Commander Hails Iran's Naval Power



**TEHRAN (PressTV) - A top Iranian military commander says an Iranian naval fleet, including two ships, has entered the Atlantic Ocean, saying Iran is entitled under international law to have a naval presence in international waters.**

In remarks on Thursday, Deputy Chief of Army for Coordination Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari said the two ships, including the Makran port ship and the Sahand destroyer, have managed to reach the Atlantic Ocean without making stops at other countries' ports, marking the first time the Iranian navy has gotten this far into the Atlantic.

"We consider our presence in international waters an inalienable strategic right of the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy and we will continue this path with strength," Sayyari said.

He said the ships departed from the Iranian port city of Bandar Abbas in the Persian Gulf on May 10 and have so far sailed some 6,000 nautical miles, passing through the Cape of Good Hope during their thirty days of traveling in high seas.

The ships "are now in the Atlantic Ocean and continue their route to perform [the Navy's] longest maritime mission toward the North Atlantic Ocean," the rear admiral added.

The remarks came a day after American news website Politico reported that the Joe Biden administration is warning Venezuela and Cuba to turn away the two Iranian ships, citing unnamed U.S. officials as saying that the ships may be carrying arms intended for transfer to Caracas.

"The delivery of such weapons would be a provocative act and understood as a threat to our partners in the Western Hemisphere," Politico quoted a senior official with the Biden administration as saying.

The source added that the U.S. would reserve the right to take appropriate measures in coordination with its partners to deter the transit or delivery of what he claimed to be weapons.

The Iranian ships' journey across the Atlantic has been described as a "significant step" for Iran's navy, showing the Islamic Republic's naval capabilities and the Iranian Navy's increasing access to the Western Hemisphere.

"This powerful presence indicates the naval capability and strength of the Islamic Republic of Iran," Sayyari remarked.

"When we declared our intention to enter the Atlantic Ocean, some countries, including the global arrogance, stated that the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy was not capable of doing that, but in practice they saw that we did it with strength," the former chief of the Iranian Navy added.

Earlier this month, Politico reported that the U.S. national security community had been monitoring for the past two weeks two Iranian vessels whose ultimate destination might be Venezuela.

## New Round of Vienna Talks To Resume in Coming Days

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi said that the new round of Vienna talks will resume in the coming days.

Referring to the new round of Vienna talks to revive the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Araqchi said that the negotiations have reached a point where some key issues remain and must be decided.

He added that of course, disputes on the issues are not new, and they are about how the parties would return to the agreement.

Earlier, Araqchi, who also heads the Iranian delegation in talks in Vienna with G4+1 in a bid to revive the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, said that the talks have made good progress but key issues are still unresolved that is yet to be discussed.

It is the other side that has to make tough decisions, Araqchi said, adding that Iran hopes they would be able to make such a decision.

The fifth round of Vienna talks between the remaining parties to the deal came to an end after 10 days of negotiations. The delegations have gone back to their capitals for further consultations.

The latest round of Joint Commission meetings started on April 2 with a virtual conference and is pursued by other meetings in person in Vienna.

## Saudis Cannot Make Up Their Defeats by Negotiation

TEHRAN (IP) - Iranian Parliament speaker's special aide for international affairs met with U.N. Special Envoy for Yemen in Tehran.

Hossein Amirabdollahian stressed that the Yemeni crisis could be resolved through Yemeni-Yemeni dialogue with the participation of all political groups and parties, adding that Saudi Arabia could not make up for the defeat on the battlefield at the negotiating table.

"Iran has repeatedly stated that war is not the solution to the Yemeni crisis," Amirabdollahian said.

"The only solution to the Yemeni crisis is political dialogue to establish regional peace and stability," he added.

There is a strong political argument for lifting the siege of Yemen, and I will take it seriously," U.N. Special Envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths said.

## Iran Shares Plan With UN to Eliminate FSO Safer Oil Spill Risk

TEHRAN (IFP) - The UN Secretary General's Special Envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths met Ali-Asghar Khaji, the Iranian Foreign Minister's senior advisor, to discuss the latest developments in Yemen.

In this meeting, the two sides conferred on the latest political and on-the-ground situation of Yemen, especially the recent visit of Mr Griffiths to Sana'a, the developments in Ma'rib province, the need for the removal of economic siege against the Yemeni people, and the ways to establish peace and stability in the country.

Griffiths and Khaji also conferred on the elimination of the possible risk of oil spill from the FSO Safer oil tanker.

Khaji presented Iran's initiative to eliminate the oil spill and environmental pollution risk, and said Tehran is still ready to help establish peace in Yemen.

The UN envoy, in turn, presented a report on his visits to the region, and elaborated on the UN's efforts to settle the Yemen crisis. The civil war in Yemen has suspended essential maintenance on the increasingly fragile vessel FSO Safer with more than 1 million barrels of oil in its hold and hindered disaster preparedness.

The decaying super-tanker anchored off Yemen with 1.1 million barrels of Marib light crude oil in its hold looks increasingly likely to wreak havoc in the Red Sea, experts are warning.

Talks between the UN and the Houthis administration in control of the area aimed at brokering a deal for international intervention reached a "dead end" late June 1.

The structural integrity of the FSO Safer is rapidly deteriorating, risking a catastrophic oil spill that threatens the region's people and marine ecosystem, which scientists describe as a critical refuge from climate change for corals. A solution has proven elusive in a country mired in civil war and humanitarian crisis.

## Gov't Supplying Clean Water to 9m People In Countryside



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian says access to clean water in the countryside has increased by nine times in eight years to cover a total of nine million people across Iran.

Reza Ardakanian said on Thursday that an average of 30 villages had been provided with clean water every week in the past eight years. The minister made the remarks on the sidelines of a ceremony to inaugurate major water projects across Iran.

The project opened virtually by President Hassan Rouhani included a dam near the border with Iraq in the western Ilam province. The earthfill dam has cost over 4 trillion rials (nearly \$20 million) to build and has a capacity to hold 84 million cubic meters of water.

During the inauguration ceremony, Rouhani hailed his government's records on expansion of Iran's water infrastructure, saying a total of 56 dams had been launched across Iran since he came to office for a first term in August 2013. The figure is on par with the total number of dams rolled out in the country between the victory of the Islamic Revolution in 1979 and the start of his administration, said Rouhani.

The Iranian president said his government had opened an average of six water treatment facilities and 12 sewage plants per year since 2013.

A report by the official IRNA agency said that the government had executed water drainage systems in nearly 345,000 hectares of agricultural lands over the past eight years.

That comes on top of massive desalination plants opened in recent years on the Persian Gulf coast to supply water to arid regions in central Iran.

President Rouhani through a video conference inaugurated four national projects related to the Ministry of Energy on Thursday.

About 42,000 billion tomans have been invested in the projects in Hormuzgan in the south and Ilam and Kermanshah Provinces in the west of the country.

Two gas combined cycle power plants, a dam, and a water plan are the four inaugurated projects.

Every week, the president opens several important projects on petrochemicals, oil, industry, tourism, sports, infrastructure, development, and health to follow goals behind "Surge in Production" which is the name of the past Iranian year (March 20, 2020- March 20, 2021) declared by the Supreme Leader.

## Problem in Supplying Foreign Vaccines Backs to Sanctions

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - President Hassan Rouhani on Thursday said that if Iran hadn't been sanctioned, it wouldn't have a problem supplying foreign vaccines for COVID-19.

Iran's incumbent government has planned to vaccinate all target groups by the end of the year 1400, Rouhani pointed out.

If it were not for the imposed sanctions and the inhumane moves of the U.S., we would certainly not have encountered the problems in supplying vaccines, he added.

The government will make efforts to ensure that by the end of the government, the vaccination of the target group (phase one, phase two, phase III) has been carried out, he stated.

The necessary steps have been taken to provide the vaccines needed for the fourth phase, he further noted.

## Astan Quds Razavi, Defense Ministry to Launch Production Line of Fakhra Vaccine

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's Astan Quds Razavi (AQR) and Defense Ministry will launch over the next 10 days a production line for a domestically-developed COVID-19 vaccine developed by a research center formerly headed by nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, who was assassinated last year.

Malek Rahmati, the AQR's deputy chief custodian, made the announcement on Thursday, saying the production line for the Iranian vaccine, Fakhra, will open on June 22, coinciding with the birthday anniversary of Imam Reza (AS) — the eighth Shia Muslim Imam.

Astan Quds Razavi (AQR) is an organization based in the Iranian city of Mashhad that manages the holy shrine of Imam Reza (AS).

Rahmati said the commercial and industrial



development phase of Fakhra will start with the help of Astan Quds Razavi and under the supervision of the Health Ministry at the Samen Pharmaceutical Company in the holy city of Mashhad.

Iran launched the second phase in the human trial of Fakhra on Wednesday, with officials in charge of the vaccine's clinical trial saying 135 volunteers got jabs in the first phase and that the vaccine proved to be "safe and secure."

In addition to Fakhra, Iran has developed three other vaccines against the COVID-19 disease named COVIran Barekat, Razi COV-Pars and the joint Iran-Cuba vaccine.

It has also imported foreign vaccines despite the illegal US sanctions that have seriously hampered the country's fight against the coronavirus pandemic.

## ICT Minister Meets Qatari Officials in Doha

TEHRAN (IP) - During his visit to Qatar, Iran's Minister of Information and Communications Technology held meetings with Qatari officials.

According to Iran Press News Agency, "Iran's Minister of Information and Communications Technology who are in Qatar for meeting with Doha's senior officials wrote in his Instagram page: "After meeting with the Prime Minister Khalid bin Khalifa bin Abdulaziz Al Thani and the Minister of Communications of Qatar, I visited Al Jazeera news channel, and I also met with the head of the TV."

Azari Jahromi wrote that negotiations with the Qatari side for the participation of Iranian companies in the upcoming FIFA World Cup in Qatar would continue, and the Iranian national football team will not be alone in Qatar.

Iran's Minister of Information and Communications Technology, Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi, heading a delegation to Qatar, met with the Prime Minister on Wednesday.

During the meeting, the two sides discussed expanding and strengthening relations between the two countries, especially in communications and technology.



## U.S. Sanctions Policies Against Iran, Cuba Failed

TEHRAN (MNA) – While emphasizing the development of trade and economic ties with the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Cuban Embassy said that U.S. sanctions policies imposed against Iran and Cuba have failed.

The Cuban Embassy in Tehran issued a press statement on Wednesday, calling that the US sanctions imposed against Iran a failure.

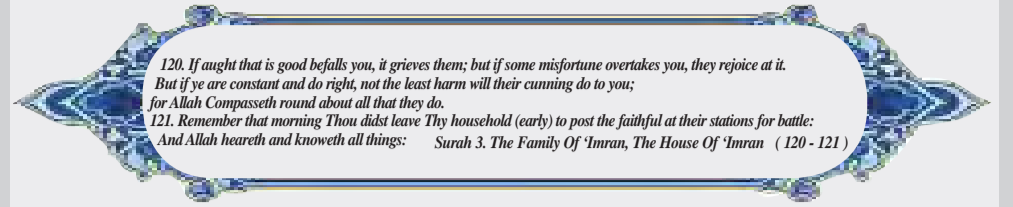
Concurrent with the Cuban government's efforts at the UN General Assembly to end

US sanctions against the country, the Cuban Embassy in Tehran issued a statement, while emphasizing the development of economic and trade relations with Iran, and called the US sanctions policies against Cuba and Iran 'a failure'. Cuba is once again calling for an end to the unjust and inhumane economic, trade and financial blockade that has been imposed by the United States against Cuban people for more than six decades which showed a more severe form of genocide during the coronavirus global pandemic.



## PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:04
■ Evening (Maghreb)	20:41
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:01
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	05:48



## Tehran, Baku Agree to Build Bridge on Border River of Astarachay

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN - Iran and Azerbaijan have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to jointly finance and construct a bridge on Astarachay, the river that separates the Iranian city of Astara from its namesake town on the other side of the border.**

The MoU was signed on Wednesday between Iran's transportation minister Mohammad Eslami and Azerbaijan's deputy prime minister Shahin Mustafayev in a meeting in Baku.

Azerbaijani media reported that the agreement would cover the construction of a major road bridge as well as a pedestrian crossing on Astarachay.

A report by the Iranian transportation ministry said that the bridge would connect the Astara-Baku Highway in Azerbaijan to the Astara-Ardabil Ring Road on the Iranian side of the border.

The report said the new connection would boost trade ties between Iran and



Azerbaijan as the two countries plan to set up a new terminal on the border for processing road traffic.

A rail link was built over Astarachay in 2017 to connect the two cities of Astara on the Iranian and Azerbaijani side of the border.

The Iranian transportation ministry said the road bridge on Astarachay is planned to finish within a year through equal funding provided by Iran and Azerbaijan.

Eslami and Mustafayev pledged to provide support for new projects on the border once restrictions related to the coronavirus are eased.

Azerbaijan has sought to expand its economic and trade ties with Iran since the end of a war with neighboring Armenia last year that led to the liberation of territories recognized as Azerbaijani under the international law but controlled for decades by ethnic Armenian groups.

Iran seeks to benefit more from use of roads and railways in Azerbaijan to increase its exports to Russia and countries in Europe.

## Austrian Airlines to Resume Flights to Tehran

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC NEWS

TEHRAN - The Australian flag carrier Austrian Airlines will resume its flights to Tehran from July 17.

According to Tasnim news agency, Austrian Airlines will start the direct flight between Vienna and Tehran.

According to the report, the airline will have three flights per week between Vienna and Tehran.

Earlier and in the late March, German airline Lufthansa had resumed its flights to Tehran.

Austrian Airlines AG, often shortened to Austrian, is the flag carrier of Austria and a subsidiary of the Lufthansa Group. The airline is headquartered on the grounds of Vienna International Airport in Schwechat where it also maintains its hub.

The Austrian carrier stopped its flights to Tehran from late January 2020 and following the Ukrainian passenger plane was shot down over Tehran.



## Iran Economy Should Be Fortified Against Sanctions, Other Shocks



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Presidential candidate Seyed Ebrahim Raisi says he has set an agenda for securing a removal of the sanctions imposed on the Iranian nation, emphasizing the need for the country's economy to be fortified in the face of both sanctions and any other shock that may hit.

Raisi, the Judiciary chief, told reporters on Wednesday that the Iranian administration should do all in its power "to confront those who seek to breach the Iranian nation's rights and pursue the removal of the sanctions."

"Definitely, action should be taken to [bring about] the removal of the sanctions, and the strategy [to do so] is already there," he said. "Iran's economy should be built in a way that neither sanctions nor any other shocks, from the coronavirus to flooding and incidents, can shake it."

Iran has been the subject of tough American sanctions over the past decades. The U.S., however, tightened the economic restrictions in May 2018, after it withdrew a multinational nuclear agreement on the Iranian nuclear program.

Raisi said the current economic conditions in the country was "unacceptable" since the people are not able to predict their financial situation due to constant fluctuations.

Elsewhere, Raisi said efforts should be made to allay the people's concerns over high healthcare prices by increasing the administration's share in paying the costs.

The people currently have to pay 43 percent of healthcare costs, an amount that should be lowered, he added.

To that effect, Raisi said, "green credit cards" should be devised to help the people cover their healthcare costs and resolve issues over admission to hospital and treatment.

"We have to give credibility to health insurance cards, and the next stage would be developing supplementary insurance to soothe the people's concerns over healthcare costs," Raisi added.

## Golestan Province Holds Roundtable Dedicated to 30th Independence Anniversary of Kazakhstan

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - On Wednesday, in Golestan province of Iran, the Embassy and the Consulate General of Kazakhstan together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iran held a round table dedicated to the 30th Anniversary of the Independence of the Republic of Kazakhstan with the participation of about 100 people.

The main speakers of the event were the Ambassador of Kazakhstan to Iran A.Orazbay, the Governor of Golestan Province H.Hakshinas, members of the Iranian Parliament G.Kuksari and R.Sangdovini, a member of the Council for Ethnic Affairs of Golestan province and a member of the Kazakh diaspora T.Purbegei, the Head of the Representative Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iran in Golestan province Z.Amirshahi, Head of the regional Chamber of Commerce A.Chuponi, as well as Iranian Ambassador to Kazakhstan S.Saber who participated in the videoconference format.

The Ambassador of Kazakhstan Askhat Orazbay in his speech told in detail about the achievements of the Republic of Kazakhstan over the years of independence, conducted reforms, internal political transformations, foreign policy

initiatives implemented over 30 years, as well as the results in the development of Kazakh-Iranian relations.

The Ambassador emphasized the role of the First President of the Republic of Kazakhstan - Elbasy N.A. Nazarbayev in the success of the state.

The rest of the speakers of the round table also praised the achievements of Kazakhstan despite being a young and independent state, and great results in the development of bilateral relations between the two countries.

The high reputation of Kazakhstan in the world arena, which the country has achieved over the years of independence, was especially emphasized. The roundtable participants praised the economic reforms carried out over 30 years, thanks to which the young republic has transformed into the leader of Central Asia.

Noting the significant potential of the country, the speakers expressed high interest in cooperation with Kazakhstan in many areas, both at the interstate and interregional levels.

Within the framework of the round table, a video film about the achievements of Kazakhstan during the years of independence, Kazakh national music compositions, as well as national Kazakh costumes were presented to the attention of the participants.



## Iran Receives New Shipment of Russian Sputnik COVID-19 Vaccine

TEHRAN (IP) - An Iranian airliner, Mahan, carrying the ninth shipment of the Russian Sputnik vaccine for coronavirus, landed at Imam Khomeini Airport on Thursday afternoon.

The ninth package of the Russian Sputnik vaccine in a volume of 100,000 doses was delivered to the representative of Iran's embassy in Russia on Wednesday morning before shipping to Tehran.

Last week, the eighth shipment of 100,000 doses of the Sputnik-V vaccine arrived in the country.

This is while about 920,000 doses of the vaccine have been sent to Iran from Russia.

At the same time, the Sputnik-V COVID-19 joint production project in Iran has entered the operational phase.

Moreover, two Iranian companies have successfully cultured vaccine production cells, and joint production will begin soon.

## World Bank Revises Up Iran's Growth Estimates, Forecasts

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The World Bank has revised up its estimates and forecasts for Iran's economic growth in its latest Global Economic Prospects reports published in June.

According to the report, the economy is forecast to experience 2.1% and 2.2% growth in 2021 and 2022 respectively.

New forecasts have been revised up by 0.6 and 0.5 percentage points respectively. This is while report forecast for 2023 GDP growth is at 2.3% in the new report.

The estimate for 2020 has been revised up to 1.7% from -3.7% in the previous report published in January.

According to the World Bank, Iran's economy saw 6% and 6.8% contraction in 2018 and 2019 respectively. The report's quarterly estimates put the respective 2019 Q4, 2020 Q1, Q2, Q3 and Q4 growth rates at 1.8%, -6.8%, -2.9%, 4.9% and 3.4%.

"Despite continued pandemic-related disruptions, rising oil prices and faster-than-expected recoveries in most regional economies are supporting activity to 2.1% in 2021 and 2.2% in 2022 with a rebound in industrial production outweighing continued suppressed demand for services due to a high number of Covid-19 cases," it said.

## Amirkabir University Teachers, Officials Visit Chadormalu Co.

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Following the signing of MOU on cooperation between Amirkabir University of Technology, University of Ardakan and Chadormalu Mining and Industrial Company (CMIC) for developing scientific and technical cooperation, president of Amirkabir University and heads of faculties of the university as well as teachers and senior officials paid a several hour-long visit to the company and toured mines and production units of this gigantic complex while they were in the process of extraction and process of iron ore.

Before this tour and in a joint meeting, the CEO of Chadormalu Company Eng. Naser Taghizadeh briefed the guests of the goals and developmental plans of the company and its priorities regarding discovery and achieving the modern state-of-art international technologies as well as creating proper ground for smartizing the process of iron ore production and steel units.



## Tajgardoon Dismissed Following Publication of His Astronomical Paycheck

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Gholamreza Tajgardoon, former chairman of the Planning and Budget Commission in the Tenth Majlis, was dismissed from sarmad insurance for receiving salaries known as "astronomical."

The former MP's pay stings were published on Wednesday and on Thursday the board of directors of Sarmad Gholamreza Tajgardoon Insurance Company was removed from office.

Mr. Tajgardoon was appointed CEO of this insurance company in March last year.

According to reports, pay stubs published by Tajgardoon in this position show the receipt of "astronomical" figures of 73 and 85 million Tomans as salaries in the first two months of his activity in April and May of this year, respectively.

The former MP's credentials were not approved by lawmakers in the 11th Majlis for financial violations and were removed from the 11th Majlis.

## Call for Bolstering Ties With Pakistan

ISLAMABAD (IRNA) - The new Consul General of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Pakistan's financial hub Karachi has stressed the need to use the capacities of the two countries to deepen relations and expand comprehensive cooperation.

Hassan Nourian who previously headed the Passport Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Consulate General of Iran in Hyderabad, India, on Thursday expressed satisfaction with the beginning of his tenure as Counsel General in Karachi on his Twitter account.

"Both countries as friendly neighbors have many potentials to deepen their ties," he said.

Hassan Nourian stressed that the diplomatic mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Karachi is determined to cooperate with Pakistani state officials to achieve common goals.

Nourian replaces Ahmad Mohammadi, whose tenure ended in February last year.

## Iran Exports \$1.8b Worth of Handicrafts in 12 Months

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Ali Asghar Mounesan announced that the value of exports of Iran's handicrafts, exclusive of traditional pieces of jewelry and suitcase trade, was 1.8 billion dollars by the end of the previous Iranian year (ended March 20, 2021).

In a Twitter message on the occasion of World Handicraft Day on June 10, Mounesan wrote on Wednesday that the figure was gained thanks to the efforts made by our dear artists and industrialists, particularly the artist women, who comprise a major part of the workers in this field. Although the pandemic decreased the growth in this field, we can hope that the current trend will not be halted and that the Iranian artists have found their way to the international markets, he added.

Mounesan also said that one of the important events during last year for the country's handicrafts was the national and international registration of craft cities and villages of Iran at the World Crafts Council. Such registration has helped development in the area of handicrafts and the creation of sustainable employment, the minister noted.

## Wife of “El Chapo” Pleads Guilty to Drug Trafficking

WASHINGTON (AFP) - The wife of jailed Mexican drug lord Joaquin “El Chapo” Guzman pleaded guilty on Thursday to helping her husband smuggle narcotics into the United States.

Emma Coronel Aispuro, a 31-year-old former beauty queen, could face up to life in prison.

Coronel admitted three counts, including drug trafficking and money laundering, during a court appearance in Washington.



## Man Who Slapped Macron Sentenced to 18 Months

PARIS (Dispatches) - A French court on Thursday sentenced a man who slapped French President Emmanuel Macron across the face this week to a prison term of 18 months, 14 of which were suspended.

Damien Tarel, a 28-year-old medieval history enthusiast, has been in custody since the assault on Tuesday which a prosecutor called “absolutely unacceptable” and “an act of deliberate violence”.

The court gave Tarel a sentence of 18 months in jail, but 14 of those months were suspended, the broadcaster reported. Earlier, Tarel told the court in Valence in southern France, that he acted because the president stood for all that was rotten with France, the news channel said.



## Biden Meets Johnson to Warn Over N. Irish Peace



LONDON (Dispatches) - U.S. President Joe Biden brought a grave Brexit warning to his first meeting with British Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Thursday: Prevent a row with the European Union from imperiling the delicate peace in Northern Ireland.

On his first trip abroad since taking office in January, Biden met Johnson in the English seaside resort of Carbis Bay ahead of a Friday-Sunday G7 summit, a NATO summit on Monday, a U.S.-EU summit on Tuesday and a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Geneva the following day.

Biden will try to use the trip to burnish his multilateral credentials after the tumult of Donald Trump’s presidency, which left many U.S. allies in Europe and Asia bewildered and some alienated.

Biden, though, has an uncomfortable message for Johnson, one of the leaders of the 2016 Brexit campaign: Stop heated EU divorce negotiations from undermining a 1998 U.S.-brokered peace deal known as the Good Friday Agreement that ended three decades of bloodshed in Northern Ireland. “President Biden has been crystal clear about his rock-solid belief in the Good Friday Agreement as the foundation for peaceful co-existence in Northern Ireland,” White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan told reporters aboard Air Force One.

“Any steps that imperil it or undermine it would not be welcomed by the United States,” said Sullivan, who declined to characterize Johnson’s actions as imperiling the peace.

As the two leaders met in Carbis Bay, though, they appeared relaxed as they admired the view across the turquoise waters of the Atlantic with the First Lady, who wore a jacket embroidered with the word “LOVE”, and Johnson’s new wife, Carrie, who wore a red dress. “It’s a beautiful beginning,” the First Lady said as she looked out across the sea.

Britain’s exit from the European Union strained the peace in Northern Ireland to breaking point because the 27-nation bloc wants to protect its markets, yet a border in the Irish Sea cuts off the British province from the rest of the United Kingdom. Northern Ireland shares a border with EU member Ireland.

Such is Biden’s concern over Northern Ireland that Yael Lempert, the top U.S. diplomat in Britain, issued London with a demarche - a formal diplomatic reprimand - for “inflaming” tensions, the Times newspaper reported.

Ireland hailed Biden’s intervention while European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen warned Johnson against taking any more unilateral steps to undermine the Brexit deal.

The 1998 peace deal largely brought an end to the “Troubles” - three decades of conflict between Irish Catholic nationalist militants and pro-British Protestant “loyalist” paramilitaries that killed 3,600 people.

## China Passes Law to Counter Foreign Sanctions

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China passed a law to counter foreign sanctions, as it strives to resist U.S. and EU pressure over trade, technology, Hong Kong and Xinjiang.

Individuals or entities involved in making or implementing discriminatory measures against Chinese citizens or entities could be put on an anti-sanctions list by a “relevant department” in the Chinese government. Those on the list may be denied entry into China or be expelled from China. Their assets within China may be seized or frozen. They could be restricted from doing business with entities or people within China. The new law is China’s latest and most wide-ranging legal tool to retaliate against foreign sanctions and is intended to give Chinese retaliatory measures more legitimacy and predictability, according to local experts.

Foreign companies, however, worry about the dampening impact it might have on foreign investment.

China’s top legislature, the National People’s Congress (NPC) standing committee passed the law on Thursday, according to state television CCTV. All 14 vice-chairpersons of the committee are under U.S. sanctions for passing the National Security Law last year that critics say has crippled political freedoms in Hong Kong. Beijing says it was needed to restore stability in the city.

President Xi Jinping called last November for the ruling Communist Party to use legal means to defend China’s sovereignty, security and interests against foreign parties. The NPC said in its annual work report in March that it wants to “upgrade our legal toolbox” to address the risks from foreign sanctions and interference.

In January, the commerce ministry announced mechanisms to assess if foreign restrictions on Chinese trade and business activities were justified, and for Chinese individuals or companies to sue for compensation in a Chinese court. The United States and its allies have increasingly sanctioned Chinese officials to express concern about how China treats its Muslim Uyghur minority in Xinjiang and pro-democracy activities in Hong Kong, triggering counter-sanctions by China on U.S. and EU politicians and officials.

## Former PM Wins Mongolia’s Covid-Hit Presidential Election

ULAANBAATAR (AFP) - Mongolia’s former prime minister has won a Covid-hit presidential election, preliminary results showed Thursday, with historically low voter turnout for the third election in two years.

The country went to the polls on Wednesday to replace populist businessman Battulga Khaltmaa -- a former world champion in the martial art of sambo who cannot run for a second presidential term under constitutional rules.

In the early hours of Thursday, former PM Khurelsukh Ukhnaa declared a decisive victory after getting nearly 70 percent of votes cast. “From the bottom of my heart, I thank my fellow Mongolians,” he said.

Enkhbat Dangaasuren, his main rival, gathered only around a fifth of the votes and conceded defeat. An official announcement of the results is expected Thursday afternoon, according to Mongolia’s state news agency.

The strong showing marks a turnaround for Khurelsukh, who has cultivated a macho persona and has in the past posed shirtless with a hunting gun -- similar to the famous images of Russian leader Vladimir Putin.

Khurelsukh also got the nickname “Fist” after a video of him punching a member of parliament went viral in 2012.

This is the first presidential win in 12 years for his Mongolian People’s Party -- but voter turnout was just 59 percent out of around two million eligible voters.

Landlocked Mongolia, located between China and Russia, has struggled with political instability since it became a democracy. Its first constitution was passed in 1992 after decades of communist rule.

His main challenger Enkhbat, an internet entrepreneur who largely appealed to the country’s youth, only got around a fifth of the votes.

His momentum was squashed when he tested positive for the coronavirus during the election campaign and was forced into quarantine.

Gerelt-Od, senior lecturer at the Mongolian National University of Education, told AFP that low turnout was a sign of apathy towards all parties.

## Victory in Sight for Castillo With 70,000 Vote Margin

LIMA (Dispatches) - Peruvian socialist Pedro Castillo maintained a slim lead over rival Keiko Fujimori with 99.998% of the votes counted and as electoral authorities met to scrutinize contested votes.

Castillo, an elementary school teacher and political novice who won widespread grassroots backing for pledges to rewrite the constitution of the world’s No. 2 copper producer and redistribute wealth, had 50.2% of the vote, maintaining a 0.4 percentage point lead over right-wing Keiko Fujimori, or 71,441 votes.

Some 300,000 contested votes are being scrutinized by an electoral jury, a process that will take several days to complete and could delay the announcement of who will be the next president to take over from interim leader Francisco Sagasti at the end of July.

However analysts said any outstanding votes were now unlikely to tip the balance. “Pedro Castillo is all but certain to be the next president,” said Eileen Gavin, principal analyst of Global Markets and the Americas for United Kingdom-based risk consultancy Verisk Maplecroft.

On Wednesday night, Fujimori, the daughter of polarising former president Alberto Fujimori, alleged that about 500,000 votes were suspicious, without providing substantial evidence. She questioned the likelihood of voting tables grouping up to 300 ballots in which she got no votes at all.

“We think it is crucial that these (allegations) be analyzed in the final count,” Fujimori said, who added that she was not saying that electoral authorities were complicit in any wrongdoing.

The ethics tribunal of the National Jury of Elections (JNE), the body charged with overseeing the legality of the electoral process, said in a statement on Twitter on Thursday morning that throwing doubt on the results without evidence, and calling for protests as both camps have done since the vote on Sunday night, was “irresponsible.”

“They feed a climate of social polarization and weaken electoral organisms,” the statement said.



## Thousands of Greeks Protest Monstrous Labor Reform Bill

ATHENS (Dispatches) - Thousands of Greeks marched in Athens on Thursday against government plans to overhaul labour laws which unions say will undermine workers’ rights and let companies bring in longer hours through the back door.

Greece’s biggest private and public sector unions staged a day-long strike that brought public transport to a standstill and kept ferries docked at ports.

“It won’t pass,” public sector union ADEDY said.

At least 10,000 people joined the rally outside parliament, which is expected to vote on the bill this month.

In announcing the bill in May, Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis’ conservative government said the measures would modernize “antiquated” laws dating back decades to a pre-internet time when most workers clocked into their offices and factories at the same set hours.

It said the changes would offer workers more flexibility to decide their own schedules and help tackle exploitation, unpaid overtime and undeclared work

which have fuelled a large, untaxed grey economy.

The most contentious part of the bill allows employees to work up to 10 hours on one day and less time on another. Unions fear that will enable employers to force workers to accept longer hours.

A banner unfurled near the Labour Ministry in central Athens read “Hands off the 8-hour workday.”

Critics say the government is seeking to raise the eight-hour working day to 10 hours and scrap the five-day working week and collective bargaining agreements, as well as make it harder to call strikes.

The left-wing Syriza party said the bill was a “monstrosity” and called on the government to withdraw it. “They will not take us back to the 19th century,” Syriza said.

The bill would also give workers the right to disconnect outside of office hours and introduce a “digital work card” to monitor employees working hours in real time, as well as increase legal overtime to 150 hours a year.



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(adviser)

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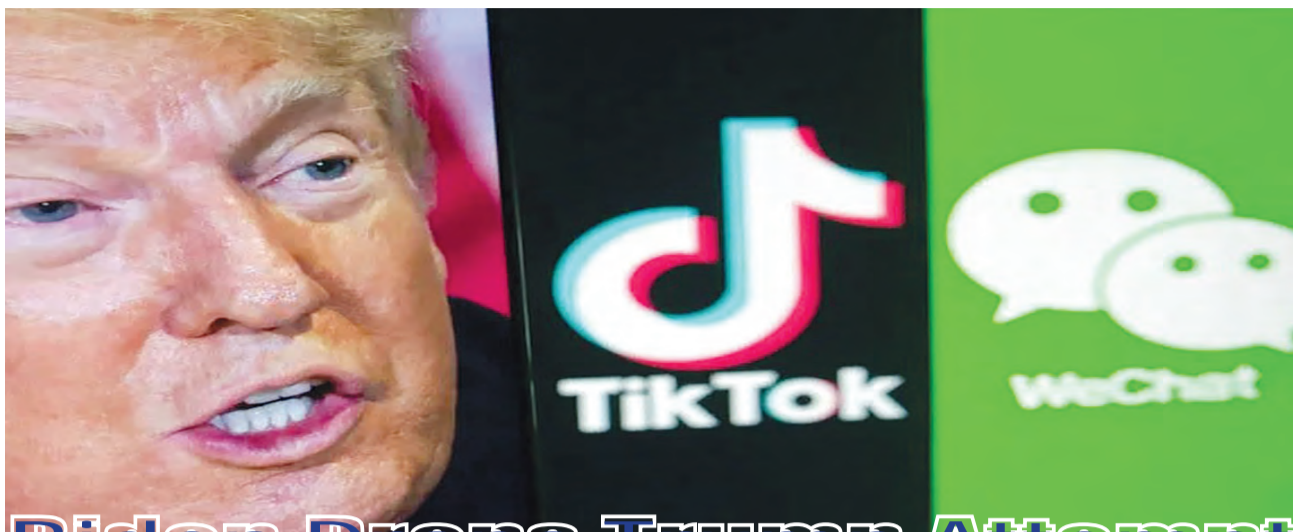
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## Volkswagen Expects Chips Shortage to Ease in Q3

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Volkswagen expects a shortage in semiconductor supply to ease in the third quarter but sees the bottlenecks continuing in the long-term, a board member told Handelsblatt newspaper.

"At the moment we have reached the lowest point. We are facing the toughest six weeks," Murat Aksel, the head of procurement on the Volkswagen board, told the newspaper in an interview.

He said he expects around 10% shortage in chips over the long-term as building up production capacities takes up to two years.



## Biden Drops Trump Attempt To ban TikTok, WeChat

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - President Joe Biden withdrew a series of Trump-era executive orders that sought to ban new downloads of WeChat and TikTok, and ordered a Commerce Department review of security concerns posed by those apps and others.

The administration of former President Donald Trump had attempted to block new users from downloading the apps and ban other technical transactions that Chinese-owned short video-sharing app TikTok and WeChat both said would effectively block the apps' use in the United States.

The courts blocked those orders, which never took effect.

A separate U.S. national security review of TikTok launched in late 2019 remains active and ongoing, a White House official said, declining to offer any details. The White House remains very concerned about the data risks of TikTok users, another administration official told reporters. The Biden order directs the Commerce Department to monitor software applications like TikTok that could affect U.S. national security, as well as to make recommendations within 120 days to protect U.S. data acquired or accessible by companies controlled by foreign adversaries.

TikTok declined to comment. WeChat did not immediately comment.

WeChat, which has been downloaded at least 19 million times by U.S. users, is widely used as a medium for services, games and payments. Michael Bien, the lead lawyer for the WeChat Users Alliance, which had sued to block the Trump order, praised the Biden administration for

revoking the "wrong-headed ban on WeChat that ... would have led to the unprecedented shutdown of a major platform for communications relied on by millions of people in the United States."

Biden's new executive order revokes the WeChat and TikTok orders Trump issued in August, along with another in January that targeted eight other communications and financial technology software applications. The January Trump order directed officials to ban transactions with eight Chinese apps including Ant Group's Alipay and Tencent Holdings Ltd's QQ Wallet and WeChat pay; no bans have been issued to date.

The Trump administration contended that WeChat and TikTok posed national security concerns because sensitive personal data of U.S. users could be collected by China's government.

Both TikTok, which has over 100 million users in the United States, and WeChat have denied posing national security concerns.

In February, Reuters reported corporate sponsors raced back to TikTok after some had paused or delayed efforts following Trump's August announcement. General Motors flagship Chevrolet brand began advertising on TikTok in February through its own channel. The Trump administration had appealed judicial orders blocking the bans on TikTok and WeChat, but after Biden took office in January, the U.S. Justice Department asked to pause the appeals.

A spokesman for the U.S. Department of Justice declined to comment. Status reports are due in the appeals cases on Friday. Biden's order says collecting of data from Americans "threatens to provide foreign adversaries with access to that information." The order directs the Commerce Department to "evaluate on a continuing basis" any transactions that "pose an undue risk of catastrophic effects on the security or resiliency of the critical infrastructure or digital economy of the United States."

Biden's executive order requires within 60 days that U.S. intelligence and Homeland Security agencies provide vulnerability and threat assessments on U.S. data controlled by foreign adversaries to the Commerce Department as it conducts its review.

## Bangladesh to See 3.6% GDP Growth in FY22

DHAKA (Dispatches) - Bangladesh's gross domestic product (GDP) is set to grow 3.6% in the fiscal year 2021-22 instead of 1.6%, the World Bank said.

The global lender also said that the country's economic growth will be 5.1%, higher than their earlier forecast of 3.4%, as mentioned in "Global Economic Prospects," their flagship publication.

This was refuted by Finance Minister Mustafa Kamal. He said Bangladesh's economic growth will surpass their projections while speaking to the media after attending a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Public Purchase on Wednesday.

The World Bank's report also said that private consumption is the main engine of growth which is supported by normalizing activity, moderate inflation, and rising apparel exports. While there is uncertainty regarding the stability of private consumption, Bangladesh's growth is expected to experience a gradual recovery, the publication further mentioned.

Contrary to the World Bank's projection, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) had higher growth projection rates for Bangladesh for FY22, 7.2% and 7.5% respectively.

In the national budget for FY22, the government's GDP growth target is 7.2%. The 8th five-year plan also targeted 7.7% GDP growth in FY22. World Bank President David Malpass said: "How national governments, the private sector, and international institutions respond to the challenges of poverty, inequality, and climate change as we emerge from a crisis that has affected us all will be defining choices of our age."

"There is a data deficit. We still do not know what the growth rate was for the current fiscal year 2020-21. Although, every year a provisional growth rate is published through BSS this year we have not been provided with any such data. We do not have a base to compare the growth rate," said Prof Mustafizur Rahman, distinguished fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD).

"The World Bank has given us a 'projection' of 5.2% GDP growth rate, although according to the government, the growth target for the current fiscal year is 6.1% and 7.2% for the next fiscal year. As per the proposed budget, and taking the trend for the last four years into consideration, the expected growth rate will approximately be around 5% or a bit more. With the country facing the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic and its induced restrictions, we still face uncertainties from the adverse impacts that are still to unfold before us," he also said.



## Global Food Import Costs to Surge 12% to Record This Year

ROME (Dispatches) - Global food import costs are expected to rise 12% in 2021 to a record due to surging commodity prices and robust demand during the COVID-19 crisis, the United Nations food agency said.

The world's food import bill, including shipping costs, is projected to reach \$1.715 trillion this year, from \$1.530 trillion in 2020, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said in its twice-yearly Food Outlook report on Thursday.

Growth in agricultural trade during the pandemic showed the inelastic nature of food consumption and the resilience of international markets, but price rises since late 2020 were raising risks for poorer import-reliant countries, the FAO said. Its monthly food price index hit a 10-year high in May, reflecting sharp gains for cereals, vegetable oils and sugar.

The FAO said a separate index of food import values, including freight costs that have also soared, reached a record in March this year, surpassing levels seen during previous food price spikes in 2006-2008 and 2010-2012. A strong volume increase for staple food imports last year had already driven up global import costs 3% to a record. Exceptions were beverages and fish products that are more sensitive to economic conditions and which saw demand curbed by supply chain difficulties, the FAO said.

China's imports have been a driver of agricultural demand and prices in the past year, partly reflecting Beijing's efforts to rebuild its pig industry after a disease outbreak. Chinese maize (corn) imports in the upcoming 2021/22 season were expected to rise to 24 million tonnes, keeping China as the world's top importer after its maize imports are expected to quadruple to 22 million tons in 2020/21, the FAO forecast.

## IMF Head Sees G-7 Giving Tens of Billions to Covid-19 Vaccine Finance

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - International Monetary Fund Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said she expects the Group of Seven economies to provide "tens of billions" of dollars in financing for vaccinating the world.

"My suspicion is that we'll see this in the tens of billions, not in the couple of billions"

Georgieva said at a Eurasia Group online event on Wednesday, referring to the amount that the world's seven largest advanced economies will allocate for vaccine financing.

The IMF last month called for a \$50 billion spending plan to help immunize people worldwide against Covid-19 and avoid a scenario where developing economies recover much more slowly than advanced nations. The World Health Organization, World Bank and World Trade Organization have endorsed the plan.

Georgieva said that IMF analysis shows advanced economies this year will have 1 billion excess vaccine doses that could be redirected to the rest of the world. The gap in access threatens to derail the global economic rebound, she said.

Georgieva's comments come as G-7 leaders are gathering in the U.K. for a summit this week.

The IMF has called for vaccinating at least 40% of the global population by the end of this year and 60% or more by the first half of 2022. While saving lives, a faster rebound would also deliver a potential \$9 trillion economic boost by 2025, the fund estimates.

Georgieva said that she expects the fund's board of governors to vote on the issuance of \$650 billion in new reserve assets by mid-August, boosting resources for nations dealing with the global pandemic. She dismissed concerns raised by some Republican lawmakers in the U.S. that the assets known as special drawing rights, or SDRs, will be used by poor countries to pay debts to China.

"China actually would like to make sure the SDRs work as intended," Georgieva said. "They are indicating interest to contribute some of their new SDR issuance to a pool of funds at the disposal of the management of the IMF, to be directed to support countries in need."

## Middle East Airlines See 82.8% Slump in Passenger Demand in April

DUBAI (Dispatches) - The ongoing struggles of Middle East airlines to cope with the impact of the global coronavirus pandemic was laid bare on Wednesday as figures showed demand was more than 82 percent down on normal levels during April.

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) said the region's airlines posted an 82.9 percent demand slump in April compared to April 2019, which was weaker than the 81.6 percent decline in March. Capacity declined 65.3 percent and load factor fell 41.1 percent to 39.6 percent, IATA said.

Middle East travel continues to be hit by government-imposed restrictions around the world, with the UAE particularly frustrated at remaining on the UK's red list, a normally lucrative route for carriers. Globally, IATA announced that domestic travel demand improved in April compared to the prior month, although it remained well below pre-pandemic levels, while recovery in international passenger travel continued to be stalled in the face of travel restrictions.

Total demand for air travel in April was down 65.4 percent compared to April 2019. That was an improvement over the 66.9 percent decline recorded in March versus March 2019. The better performance was driven by gains in most domestic markets.

UAE citizens and residents still reeling from the suspension of passenger flights between key destinations can still enjoy a summer holiday, with Dubai-based Emirates operating to over 30 cities in 19 countries across its network.

International passenger demand in April was 87.3 percent below April 2019, little changed from the 87.8 percent decline recorded in March versus two years ago. Because comparisons between 2021 and 2020 monthly results are distorted by the extraordinary impact of Covid-19, unless otherwise noted all comparisons are to April 2019, which followed a normal demand pattern.

"The continuing strong recovery in domestic markets tells us that when people are given the freedom to fly, they take advantage of it. Unfortunately, that freedom still does not exist in most international markets. When it does, I'm confident we will see a similar resurgence in demand," said Willie Walsh (pictured below), IATA's director general.

"As we enter the peak summer travel season in the Northern Hemisphere, we know that many people want to enjoy their freedom to travel. But for that to happen safely and efficiently amid the Covid-19 crisis, a more targeted approach is needed. Most government policies today default to the closing of borders. After a year-and-a-half of Covid-19 there is sufficient data for governments to manage the risks of Covid-19 without blanket travel bans.

"With indications that Covid-19 is becoming endemic, governments and industry must work together to rebuild global connectivity while managing the associated risks," said Walsh.

## Japan's Wholesale Prices Rise At Fastest Pace in 13 Years



TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japan's wholesale prices rose at their fastest annual pace in 13 years reflecting higher commodity costs, data showed on Thursday, a sign global inflationary pressures are pinching firms already struggling amid the coronavirus pandemic.

With companies seen slow in passing on the higher costs on to households, the uptick in wholesale inflation is unlikely to prod the Bank of Japan into withdrawing its massive stimulus any time soon, analysts say.

"We're seeing emerging signs of cost-push inflation. If this is not accompanied by rising wages, we could see Japanese consumers' purchasing power decline," said Mari Iwashita, chief market economist at Daiwa Securities.

The corporate goods price index (CGPI), which measures the prices companies charge each other for their goods, rose 4.9% in May from a year earlier, Bank of Japan data showed on Thursday, more than a median market forecast for a 4.5% increase. It followed a 3.8% gain in April and was the biggest annual increase since September 2008, when a global spike in food and raw material costs pushed up a range of prices in Japan.

China also saw factory gate prices rise at their fastest annual pace in over 12 years, underscoring the tricky balance policymakers face in supporting their economies while keeping unwelcome inflationary pressures at bay. The rise in raw material costs is particularly damaging for Japan, where state of emergency curbs to combat the pandemic are cooling consumption and making it difficult for retailers to charge households more for their goods.

Core consumer prices - the key benchmark the BOJ looks at in setting monetary policy - fell 0.1% in April from a year, marking the ninth consecutive month of decline.

"Rising commodities prices reflecting the global economic recovery is pushing up wholesale prices for a broad range of goods," Shigeru Shimizu, head of the BOJ's price statistics division, told a briefing on Japan's wholesale price data.

## Ismail Haniyeh Reportedly To Visit Iran, Lebanon

TEHRAN (MNA) – Lebanese source says the Head of the Palestinian Resistance movement Hamas Ismail Haniyeh is to make trips to Iran and Lebanon.

The Lebanese newspaper Al-Akhbar reported today (Friday), quoting informed sources, that Haniyeh, who is currently in Cairo, will visit Iran and Lebanon.

The same report added that the head of Hamas' political bureau intends to travel to some countries in the region and has begun making arrangements for trips to Lebanon and Iran.

In these two trips, Haniyeh will meet with Iranian and Lebanese senior officials as well as the leaders of the Palestinian Resistance groups and the Leader of the Lebanese Hezbollah movement.



## Pandemic Shakes Up Rankings of World's Most Liveable Cities

LONDON (Dispatches) - The pandemic has shaken up the rankings of the world's most liveable cities, a study released on Wednesday showed, with metropolises in Australia, Japan and New Zealand leaping ahead of those in Europe.

Auckland tops The Economist's annual survey of the world's most liveable cities in 2021 followed by Osaka and Tokyo in Japan, Adelaide in Australia and Wellington in New Zealand, all of which had a swift response to the COVID pandemic.

"Auckland rose to the top of the ranking owing to its successful approach in containing the COVID-19 pandemic, which allowed its society to remain open and the city to score strongly," the Economist Intelligence Unit said.

In contrast, "European cities fared particularly poorly in this year's edition." "Vienna, previously the world's most liveable city between 2018-20, fell to 12th. Eight of the top ten biggest falls in the rankings are European cities," according to the study.

The biggest fall overall among the European cities was the port city of Hamburg in northern Germany, which fell 34 places to 47th.

The trend was motivated by a "stress on hospital resources" which the study said increased for most German and French cities and resulted in a "deteriorated healthcare score".

Pressure on European health systems also had a knock-on effect on culture and overall liveability because of restrictions on movement, the Economist said.

The most notable rise was recorded by Honolulu, Hawaii, in the United States, which came 14th in the ranking and moved up 46 places because of its containment of the pandemic and fast vaccination program.



Damascus remains the city where life is most difficult because of Syria's ongoing civil war.

### What a Strange World...

FROM PAGE 1

The recent hate attack that took the lives of four members of a Muslim family and left a fifth one seriously injured has shaken Canada to its core and raised fears of similar attacks triggered by religious or racial bias, in a country known for its big immigrant population and ethno-cultural diversity.



On Sunday evening, a driver mounted a curb and plowed his pickup truck into the family who were out on an evening walk near their home after attending a mosque in London, Ontario, killing both parents, a daughter and grandmother.

Their 9-year-old son is reportedly now in stable condition. The heinous crime has triggered heated debates about the emergence of Islamophobia in Canada and has drawn reactions from a number of Canadian officials.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has vowed to take more action to fight far-right hate groups.

Trudeau made the remarks as he joined several thousand mourners in a vigil at the London Muslim Mosque to remember three generations of the Afzaal family, of Pakistani origin, who lived in Canada.

"This was an act of evil. But the light of the people here today, the light of the lives of the Afzaal family – that will always outweigh the dark," Trudeau said as he addressed the mourners, after placing flowers on the steps of the mosque.

Canadian premier has labeled as a "terrorist attack" the recent killing of four members of a Muslim family who were killed in a "premeditated" vehicle attack in Ontario province.

Despite the prime minister's claim, Canada has no good record in human-rights and the racism is growing due to the passiveness of the government.

So Canada is better to defend its human rights record rather than blaming Iran for ignoring human rights by resorting to different pretexts to step up pressure on Iran because Iran will never bow down to the Western kind of human rights. One a strange world Canada which is a violator of the human rights preaches others to observe human rights.

### Iran Warns Against...

FROM PAGE 1

Such claims are aimed at creating a political situation and polarization within the agency, threatening its integrity and technical missions in accordance with its statutes, he further noted.

Before it is too late, he said, noting this unjustifiable and useless game in the agency should be avoided.

Whereas Iran entered into practical and constructive interactions and working relationships with the agency and tried in good faith to address alleged questions about a number of non-urgent issues of the past, he stated, adding that unfortunately, the Agency Secretariat has adopted a counterproductive approach at the expense of distorting its credibility.

Earlier he said that Tehran should not be expected to make good on its commitments under the 2015 nuclear deal known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

Gharibabadi said Iran had every right to scale down its obligations under the nuclear accord.

"Whatever we have done, so far, to reduce our commitments has been in accordance with our rights under the JCPOA, and cannot be regarded as a violation of, or non-compliance with the JCPOA," he said.

"The reason is that other countries, including the United States, the EU and the three European countries failed to deliver on their commitments under the JCPOA with regards to the lifting of sanctions," he explained.

"These countries should not expect Iran to remain committed to its obligations while it is under the most intense and brutal unilateral sanctions by the U.S.," the Iranian envoy added.

"I said it clearly today that the countries which asked Iran to stop its remedial measures, should know that this is not an appropriate and proper expectation," he said.

### Tehran Blasts...

FROM PAGE 1

The statement also lambasted the sanctions against its non-military entities which are operating in the space field and called for its legitimate rights to operate peacefully in space.

Stressing the need for small satellites for emerging space actors and protesting against any legal and technical restrictive practices against the activities of developing countries in the field of small satellites were other issues that Iran's statement objected to.

## World Bank Provides Turkey \$135m



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The World Bank today approved \$135 million for a project in Turkey to protect 90,000 poor and vulnerable people, half of whom are women, against natural and climate-induced hazards and increase their livelihood opportunities.

The Turkey Resilient Landscape Integration Project (TULIP) is aimed at improving livelihoods and resilient infrastructure services for rural communities in the Bolaman River Basin, located in the eastern Black Sea Region, and Cekerek River Basin in central Anatolia Region. Both basins are highly vulnerable to climate change impacts, including seasonal floods and droughts, soil erosion, and landslides.

The regions are also marked by high poverty rates, low agricultural productivity, inadequate infrastructure (including for water storage, treatment and irrigation), natural resource degradation, limited road connectivity, and loss of human capital due to outward migration. Although it was planned before the COVID-19 pandemic, the TULIP project will contribute to rural communities' recovery from the economic impacts of the pandemic.

"The World Bank is pleased to support sustainable economic development in and around Turkey's river basins," said Auguste Kouame, World Bank Country Director for Turkey. "Combating land degradation and building resilient infrastructure in some of the poorest and most vulnerable rural communities in river basins will play an important role in the country's green, resilient and inclusive recovery from the pandemic and enhance resilience to future shocks.

Funding from the World Bank will provide for an integrated approach that will create shovel-ready jobs and diversify livelihood opportunities while building climate and disaster resilience and setting the foundations for sustainable land management.

The 90,000 direct beneficiaries of the project are the local populations in the Bolaman and Cekerek river basins. They will benefit from increased access to resilient infrastructure for flood protection, drinking water storage, irrigation supply for agricultural production, and improved road conditions to facilitate mobility and market access.

Another 13,000 poor households in forest village communities, who depend on pastures and forest resources, will benefit from green infrastructure and livelihood diversification activities; and an additional 20,000 farmers will benefit from technical support for adoption of sustainable agricultural practices and assets for agricultural diversification activities.

Notably, the project will increase women's participation in and access to income-earning opportunities and enable their ownership and control of productive assets by providing technical and financial support to women-owned or led enterprises.

"The positive environmental, economic and social impacts of the project are expected to be significant, given the focus on strengthening the resilience of landscapes and livelihoods in the two river basins with a focus on Nature-Based Solutions," said Stavros Papageorgiou, one of the two World Bank Team Leaders for the project.

## Child Labor Swells for First Time in Two Decades

GENEVA (AFP) - The world has marked the first rise in child labor in two decades and the coronavirus crisis threatens to push millions more youngsters toward the same fate, the United Nations said Thursday.

In a joint report, the International Labor Organization and the UN children's agency UNICEF said the number in child labor stood at 160 million at the start of 2020 – an increase of 8.4 million in four years.

The hike began before the pandemic hit and marks a dramatic reversal of a downward trend that had seen child labor numbers shrink by 94 million between year 2000 and 2016, it said.

Just as the Covid-19 crisis was beginning to pick up steam, nearly one in 10 children globally were stuck in child labor, with sub-Saharan Africa the worst affected. While the percentage of children in child labor remained the same as in 2016, population growth meant that the numbers rose significantly.

And the pandemic risks worsening the situation significantly, the agencies said. They warned that unless urgent action is taken to help ballooning numbers of families plunging into poverty, nearly 50 million more kids could be forced into child labor over the next two years.

"We are losing ground in the fight to end child labor," UNICEF chief Henrietta Fore told reporters, stressing that "the Covid-19 crisis is making a bad situation even worse."

"Now, well into a second year of global lockdowns, school closures, economic disruptions, and shrinking national budgets, families are forced to make heart-breaking choices."

If the latest projections of poverty increases due to the pandemic materialize, another nine million children will be pushed into child labor by the end of 2022, the report said.

But statistic modelling shows that number could potentially be more than five times higher, according to UNICEF statistics specialist Claudia Cappa, who co-authored the report.

"If social protection coverage slips from the current levels... as a result of austerity measures and other factors, the number of children falling into child labor can go up (an additional) 46 million" by the end of next year, she told AFP.

The report, which is published every four years, showed that children aged between five and 11 accounted for over half of the global figure.

Boys were significantly more likely to be affected, accounting for 97 of the 160 million children toiling in child labor at the start of 2020. But the gender gap narrows by half when household chores performed for at least 21 hours per week are counted, the report said.

Particularly concerning, perhaps, was the significant increase seen in children between the ages of five and 17 who are doing so-called hazardous work, which is deemed to affect a child's development, education or health.

### IAEA Urged to...

FROM PAGE 1

"We would like to make it clear that political speculations and external pressure are counterproductive and will only lead to an impasse," the Russian envoy added.

Ulyanov highlighted the need "to find a solution that will make it possible to exclude the risks of nuclear proliferation and draw a line under the remaining issues, preventing them from turning into a protracted problem."

In-person talks between Iran and the five-member international group (Russia, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, and China), aimed at restoring the Iran nuclear deal in its original form, have been going on in Vienna since April. Three expert groups are working on an agreement on resuming the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, which would include the lifting of US sanctions on Iran, Washington's return to the deal, and Iran's move to resume compliance. The deal's participants are also holding separate consultations with a delegation of the United States, which withdrew from the agreement in 2018.

### U.S. Drops Sanctions...

FROM PAGE 1

It said the delisting reflected "a verified change in behavior or status" of those sanctioned and "demonstrate the U.S. government's commitment to lifting sanctions in the event of (such) a change."

A Treasury spokesperson said the three individuals had established "that they are no longer in their positions within entities affiliated with the Government of Iran," adding there was no reason to maintain sanctions on them.

The oil market briefly plunged after being spooked by media reports suggesting sanctions were lifted on Iranian oil officials, showing the potential impact of additional Iranian barrels if a deal is struck and sanctions lifted.

U.S. and Iranian officials are expected to begin their sixth round of indirect talks in Vienna this weekend about how both sides might resume compliance with the nuclear deal, formally called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

Under the deal, Iran limited its nuclear program to make it harder to obtain fissile material for atomic weapons in return for relief from U.S., EU and U.N. sanctions.

U.S. President Joe Biden hopes to negotiate a mutual

return to compliance, a task that requires defining the nuclear limits Iran will accept, the U.S. sanctions to be removed, and how to sequence these.

Asked about the talks, State Department spokesman Ned Price told reporters: "We've made progress, but, and you've heard this before; challenges do remain, and big issues do continue to divide the sides."

The Treasury statement did not name the three former Iranian officials or the two companies dropped from its sanctions lists.

However, on its website, OFAC said it removed three men from one of its sanctions lists: Ahmad Ghalebani, a managing director of the National Iranian Oil Company; Farzad Bazargan, a managing director of Hong Kong Intertrade Company, and Mohammad Moinie, a commercial director of Naftiran Intertrade Company Sarl.

OFAC said it removed some sanctions on Sea Charming Shipping Company Limited and on Aoxing Ship Management Shanghai Limited.

"This is just a decision by Treasury in the normal course of business – nothing to do with JCPOA," said the U.S. official who spoke on condition of anonymity, describing it as the "regular process of delisting when (the) facts so dictate."

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## Pellegrini Joins Italy's Euro 2020 Injury List

ROME (Dispatches) - Lorenzo Pellegrini on Thursday joined Italy's injury list on the eve of their Euro 2020 opener against Turkey, the Italian Football Federation (FIGC) confirmed. Italy have submitted a request to UEFA to bring in Fiorentina's Gaetano Castrovilli in their 26-man squad after Roma midfielder Pellegrini pulled up with a muscular problem in training midweek. "Subject to diagnostic tests this morning, (Pellegrini) will still remain in the national team that will move to Rome this morning," the FIGC said.

## Celtic Appoint Postecoglou as Manager

LONDON (Dispatches) - Former Australia national coach Ange Postecoglou has been set the task of restoring Scottish giants Celtic's supremacy over bitter rivals Rangers after being named manager on Thursday. The 55-year-old Australian signed a 12-month rolling contract and fills the vacancy on a permanent basis left open when Neil Lennon resigned in late February. "Celtic Football Club is delighted to announce that it has appointed Ange Postecoglou to the position of Football Manager," read a club statement.

# Djokovic to Play Nadal in French Semis

PARIS (Dispatches) - It took 3 1/2 hours, a cut on his hand and a delay to remove fans, but world No. 1 Novak Djokovic defeated Matteo Berrettini in the quarterfinals of the French Open to set up another date with Rafael Nadal.

The top-seeded Serbian defeated the ninth-seeded Italian 6-3, 6-2, 6-7 (5), 7-5 in three hours, 28 minutes in a match that was interrupted when the 5,000 fans at Roland Garros refused to leave Court Philippe Chatrier in adherence of a curfew that was put in place. Djokovic and Berrettini were asked to leave the court in the middle of the fourth set while the fans were cleared.

Djokovic lost his footing and cut his hand after play resumed. "This match had it all: falls, crowd, break. It was a lot of intensity," said Djokovic, who let out a roar when the match was completed. "I just felt under tension the entire time. It was just super, super stressful to constantly be under pressure on my service games, because his service games were quite smooth with the big serve.

Berrettini, 25, had 55 winners compared to 44 for Djokovic, but the Italian's 51 unforced errors were the difference. Djokovic committed only 19.

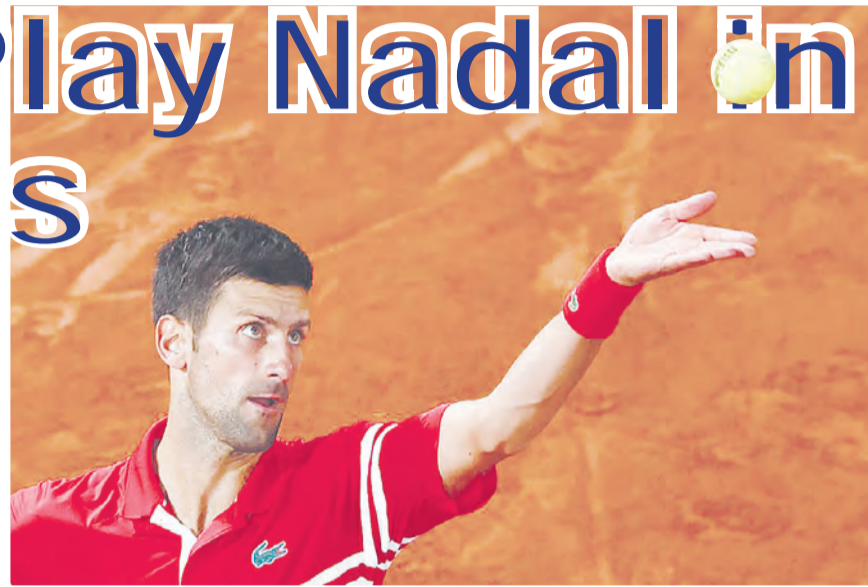
"I'm really proud of myself, really proud of my team, what we achieved," Berrettini said. "I'm really happy, but at the same time I don't want to stop here. I'm still young. This is my second quarterfinals in a Slam. I don't want to stop here."

In the first quarterfinal, third-seeded Nadal defeated 10th-seeded Diego Schwartzman of Argentina 6-3, 4-6, 6-4, 6-0 in two hours, 45 minutes. Nadal's 36-set winning streak came to an end, but the Spaniard made it to his 14th semifinal at Roland Garros.

"I started badly in the second set, then I was able to come back," Nadal said. "But at 4-4, returning with the wind, I played a bad game and hit a double fault in the next game. I needed to play more aggressively and I did so throughout the rest of the match. I won an important match today against a tough opponent. I was able to find a way to play my best tennis in the moments that I really needed to."

Nadal won 108 total points compared to 77 for Schwartzman. Nadal converted on 7 of 14 break points. Schwartzman was outdone by 39 unforced errors as Nadal committed 29.

Djokovic leads Nadal 29-28 overall, but Nadal is 10-6 vs. Djokovic in Grand Slam



events, including a 7-1 mark at Roland Garros. The upcoming match will be their first semifinal meeting since Wimbledon 2018.

"Each time we face each other, there's this extra tension, expectations and just vibes are different walking on the court with him," Djokovic said after his match. "That's why our rivalry has been historic for this sport and I've been privileged to play him so many times.

"Rivalries with him and Roger (Federer) have made me a stronger player and allowed me to understand how I need to improve my game to get to the level where they were when I actually started playing professional tennis. I'll probably pick Raffa as the biggest rival that I've ever had in my career. The anticipation for the match against him, any match on any surface on any occasion is always different from any other."

Seventh-seeded Adrian Mannarino of France lost to British qualifier James Duckworth 6-3, 6-2 in the Round of 32 at Stuttgart, Germany. German Dominik Koepfer also fell, dropping a 2-6, 6-3, 6-2 decision to wild-card entrant Jurij Rodionov of Austria. Germans Peter Gojowczyk and Yannick Hanfmann posted victories.

In other action, Spain's Feliciano Lopez defeated Alexei Popyrin of Great Britain in straight sets; American Sam Querrey topped Altug Celikbilek of Turkey in straight sets; Switzerland's Dominic Stephan Stricker defeated Moldova's Radu Albot; and Great Britain's Jordan Thompson took down Guido Pella of Argentina in straight sets.

## Ronaldo Scores as Portugal Breeze Past Israel

LISBON (Dispatches) - Cristiano Ronaldo was on the score-sheet as European champions Portugal beat Israel 4-0 on Wednesday in their final warm up for the defence of their title.

Manchester United star Bruno Fernandes bagged twice as Ronaldo and Joao Cancelo added for a comfortable win in Lisbon.

Ronaldo's 44th minute strike was his 104th international goal in 175 matches, and leaves him five short of the record held by Iran's Ali Daei.

"We put things right from the match against Spain," Portugal coach Fernando Santos said regarding the 0-0 draw with Spain in their previous match in Madrid.

"I know what we have to do to win, and I have great confidence in this team," he said.

Portugal are in the tricky looking Group F at the Euros with Hungary their first opponent on June 15 before they take on Germany four days later and then the reigning World Cup holders France June 23.



## Pavlyuchenkova Reaches First Grand Slam Final

PARIS (Dispatches) - Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova beat world number 85 Tamara Zidasek of Slovenia 7-5, 6-3 to reach a first Grand Slam final at a record 52nd attempt at the French Open.

The 29-year-old Russian will face Greek 17th seed Maria Sakkari or the unseeded Barbora Krejickova of the Czech Republic for the title on Saturday, 14 years after her Grand Slam debut.

Pavlyuchenkova, a quarter-finalist in Paris a decade ago, became the first woman to play more than 50 majors before making her first final, breaking the previous mark of 44 set by 2015 US Open runner-up Roberta Vinci.

"I am so tired and so happy, it is very emotional," said Pavlyuchenkova. "It was difficult, I tried to fight very hard and to work on the tactical side. It is important to stay focused and in the right zone for the final on Saturday."

The 31st seed dropped serve in the opening game on a sun-drenched Court Philippe Chatrier but capitalised on a fourth break point against Zidasek to break back for 2-2.

Pavlyuchenkova, a former junior world number one and Roland Garros girls' singles finalist in 2006, surged 5-3 ahead as Zidasek sprayed a forehand wide. But the Slovenian immediately broke back, rewarded for her persistence and tireless defence -- pulling off a remarkable backhand volley, throwing her racquet at the ball and watching in astonishment as it caught the line.

Zidasek then carved herself two break points at 5-5 but Pavlyuchenkova managed to hold, and the Russian struck the following game to wrap up the first set as her opponent committed a costly double fault.

## Former Roma Coach Fonseca In Talks With Spurs

ROME (Dispatches) - Former AS Roma coach Paulo Fonseca is in talks with Premier League side Tottenham Hotspur to be their next manager, according to British media reports.

The 48-year-old Portuguese would fill the vacancy on a full-time basis and replace his compatriot Jose Mourinho who was sacked in April -- Mourinho has since taken over the reins at Fonseca's old club Roma.

# Inter Miami in Talks Over Messi Move



with Messi about joining the Florida franchise for a short-term stint built into his new Barcelona contract.

Reports in Spain have said that under the new deal proposed by Barcelona, Messi will play two more seasons with the La Liga giants through to the end of the 2022-2023

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Lionel Messi could move to Inter Miami as part of a new 10-year deal the Argentinian superstar is negotiating with Barcelona, the owner of the Major League Soccer side said Wednesday.

The Miami Herald newspaper reported that Inter owner Jorge Mas and co-owner David Beckham have had "serious talks"

campaign before ending his playing career with two seasons in Miami.

He would then return to Barcelona for six years in a "global ambassador" role.

Inter owner Mas told the Herald on Wednesday that he was optimistic that Messi would eventually play in Miami.

"David and I have been working really hard, we have aspirations of bringing the best players here and Leo Messi is a generational player, arguably the best player of all time," Mas said.

"I am optimistic Messi will play in an Inter Miami shirt because I think it will complete the legacy of the greatest player in our generation and will meet with the ambitions of the owners of Inter Miami to build a world class team."

Speculation about Messi's future has intensified with the 33-year-old out of contract with Barcelona at the end of this month.

The six-time Ballon D'Or winner told Spanish television last December he hoped to play in MLS eventually.

## Suns Scorch Nuggets for 2-0 NBA Series Lead



LOS ANGELES (AFP) - Chris Paul scored 17 points and handed out 15 assists without a turnover to propel the Phoenix Suns to a crushing 123-98 victory over Denver and a 2-0 lead in their NBA playoff series.

Veteran point guard Paul was the keystone of the Suns' dominant victory, pulling down five rebounds and finishing the night without a turnover.

Every Suns starter scored in double figures and Phoenix did not give the Nuggets a chance to celebrate the NBA Most Valuable Player award that Denver center Nikola Jokic received on Tuesday.

Devin Booker scored 18 points for Phoenix. Deandre Ayton added 15 points and 10 rebounds and also kept Jokic in check for much of the night.

Jokic finished with 24 points, 13 rebounds and six assists, sitting out the fourth quarter with Phoenix in full control.

"It was a team effort, once again," Paul said.

"We knew how important this game was," he added, noting the Suns did not want to head to Denver for game three on Friday with the series split. "We just wanted to maintain home-court advantage and get the win." Leading 52-42 at halftime, the Suns pushed the lead to 60-43 with the help of two three-pointers from Jae Crowder.

## Neymar to Lead Brazil for Copa America



BRASILIA (Dispatches) - The Copa America has been rocked by one surprise after another, but there were none Wednesday as Brazil coach Tite named his squad for the troubled tournament, led by superstar Neymar.

The defending South American champions will keep a roster nearly identical to the one that beat both Ecuador and Paraguay 2-0 this month to extend the Selecao's win streak in World Cup qualifying to six matches.

Paris Saint-Germain striker Neymar, who missed Brazil's 2019 Copa America win due to injury, will lead a squad with just one change: returning from injury, 36-year-old Chelsea defender Thiago Silva will replace Rodrigo Caio of Flamengo.

There are two notable absences for the defending champions, both due to injury: Dani Alves of Sao Paulo, the captain of the 2019 squad, and Philippe Coutinho of Barcelona.

The bigger question-marks hanging over the tournament, scheduled to open Sunday when Brazil face Venezuela, are playing out off the pitch.

The last-minute decision to move the tournament to Brazil from pandemic-battered Argentina and protest-racked Colombia has triggered controversy, given that the emergency host country is also reeling from Covid-19.