

Health Ministry Announced on Sunday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic in Iran Increased to 82,098 With 187 More Iranians Killed by the Virus Over the Past 24 Hours

IRAN NEWS

President Hassan Rouhani, In a Message to His Russian Counterpart Vladimir Putin, Congratulated the Anniversary of The Russian National Day

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DOMESTIC

President Decries Denying Administration's Achievements
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Vienna Talks to Be Continued as Long as Necessary
 IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

VIENNA - The head of the Iranian negotiating team in Vienna said that they need a lot of political, technical, and legal discussions and consultations, and they would continue these talks as long as necessary.

Seyed Abbas Araçchi said that the other parties to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) must assure the Islamic Republic of Iran what happened in the past (U.S. withdrawal from the agreement) will not be repeated in the future.

The head of the Iranian negotiating team in Vienna noted: "To achieve this, we need a lot of political, technical, and legal discussions and consultations, and we will continue these talks as long as necessary."

"There are still many technical issues to reach a final agreement that need to be resolved," Araçchi said.

He also predicted that talks in Vienna between Tehran and other signatories to the 2015 nuclear deal on a potential revival of the accord are unlikely to conclude this week.

Araçchi said that the negotiations are not tied to the June 18 presidential election in Iran. **See Page 7**

Non-Oil Exports Rise Over 27% Yr/Yr



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The value of Iran's non-oil exports stood at \$3.352 billion in the second month of the current Iranian calendar year (April 21-May 21) to register a 27.5-percent rise compared to the same month in the previous year, the spokesman of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) announced.

According to Ruhollah Latifi, Iran exported 8.579 million tons of non-oil commodities to foreign destinations in the mentioned month, IRNA reported.

The country's non-oil exports in the said month also increased by 3.3 percent and 13 percent in terms of weight and value, respectively, compared to the previous month, the official stated. **See Page 7**

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SPORTS

Belgium Make Winning Start to Euro 2020
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ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

"To Progress" Or "Not to Progress" This the Question

For weeks the talks on Iran's nuclear deal, the JCPOA, have resumed in Vienna and the signatories of the deal are discussing the return of the U.S. to the JCPOA and everyday one party says something differently on the outcome of the talks.

Iran has determined its conditions for the return of the U.S. to the JCPOA and as the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution has emphasized, the U.S. should remove all imposed sanctions against Iran in order that Iran could return to its JCPOA obligations.

Despite Iran's crystal clear stand on this issue, the U.S. seems to play with words and sanctions and it is not ready to remove sanctions and it just thinks of partial removal of the sanctions. The most interesting thing is that every party in the deal claims of progress in the talks but nobody points to its details. Even Iranian negotiating team is talking about the progress.

As the new round of the talks began on Saturday, the European Union, which coordinated the talks leading to conclusion of the 2015 nuclear agreement between Iran and world countries, claimed it is hopeful about underway talks that seek to remedy the U.S.'s sabotage against the deal.

"We are making progress," EU representative Alain Matton told reporters in Vienna.

The talks started in the Austrian capital in April to potentially revive the accord that is officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). The U.S. left the deal illegally and unilaterally in 2018, returning the sanctions that the agreement had lifted.

"But the negotiations are intense and a number of issues [remain], including on how steps are to be implemented," Matton acknowledged.

His remarks were echoed by China's envoy to the United Nations in Vienna, Wang Qun, who said, "To a great extent, the major issues have been worked out as a matter of principle, though I think there are some fixes [left]."

Iran has roundly rejected the notion of any phased-out removal of the sanctions on the part of the U.S., saying Washington has to eliminate all of the measures in one go in a way that can be verifiable by Tehran.

It is only then, the Islamic Republic insists, that the country would reverse a set of remedial nuclear measures that it has been implementing since 2019 in return for the U.S. and others' non-commitment to the deal.

"The EU will continue with the talks with all the participants...and separately with the United States to find ways to get very close to a final agreement in the coming days," the European official said. **See Page 7**



ABURAIHAN Pharmaceutical Company;

As a leading Company in Production, Export and Development Plans

The Annual Ordinary General Meeting of AbuRaihan Pharmacy was held in the presence of the majority of shareholders. It was said at the meeting that all the statistics show the unique progress of this company.

At the beginning of this meeting, Meysam Nourmohammadi, CEO of AbuRaihan Pharmacy, announced: Last year, this company sold more than 662 billion Tomans and produced more than 1 billion and 800 million units of medicine. The company's sales in 2020 have increased significantly by 55%. Production has also increased by 20% compared to the previous year. The budget execution percentage was 102%. According to him, AbuRaihan was one of the few successful pharmaceutical export companies last year. The company exports more than 50 items of medicine to more than 12 countries on different continents. Good news will be announced soon. New countries will also be recognized as destinations for AbuRaihan drugs in the world. Noor Mohammadi added: In 2020, we unveiled 20 new drug items. Hopefully, there are more than 50 new drugs for 2021 in the pipeline of the company's research unit, some of which will be produced in Iran for the first time. Also, Dr. Hashembek Mahallati, the chairman of the association, praised the performance and actions of this company and said: AbuRaihan has been one of the best in the pharmaceutical industry in 2020. I appreciate all the managers and employees of this company. At the end of this meeting, a plan to increase capital by 50% this year was announced. Also, 3547 Rials cash dividend per share (90% cash dividend) was distributed among shareholders.

The most important key achievements of this company:

- 20% increase in production per year Production increase, record the highest amount of production compared to the entire length of the company.
- 50% increase in the company's exports compared to last year.
- Obtaining 20 licenses to produce new products in 2020.
- Growth of profitability indices and jump in the company's net profit margin compared to last year.
- Increasing contract production as well as using the empty capacities of pharmaceutical companies to produce new products.
- Significant increase in the activities of the company's research and development unit and planning to increase the production of new products in 2021.
- Preparation of new drug files for registration of products in exporting target countries.
- Upgrading the GMP of some of the company's product lines in 2020.
- Receive a letter of appreciation from the Vice Chancellor for Health Affairs of Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences for providing occupational safety and health services. This letter of appreciation was given in order to make the environment healthier and reduce the harmful factors of the work environment, as well as to fight Covid 19.
- Begin the process of establishing knowledge management in the company.
- Increase the company's marketing activities to cover the entire country for product marketing.

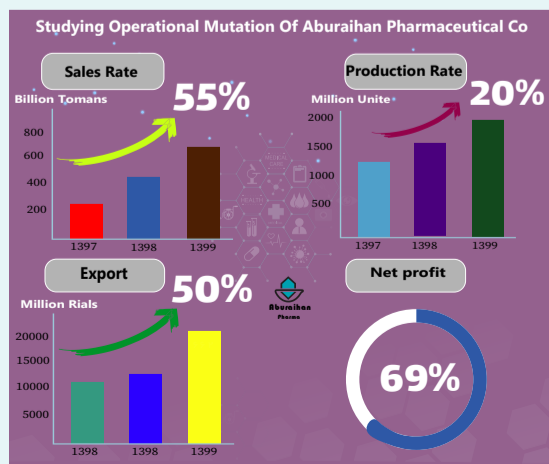
Why is AbuRaihan the first choice?



Engineer Meysam Noor Mohammadi
 Manager and Management Committee Member

He said: "Perhaps when 57 years ago, the Germans cut the ribbon of the opening of a pharmaceutical factory in the east of Tehran, they did not even imagine that this company would become a great, well-known and leading company in the pharmaceutical industry six decades later." This company is the largest producer of hormonal products and gynecological drugs in Iran. Also, with the production of about 300 items of human and animal medicine, this company is one

of the most successful and least competitive. Undoubtedly, the Germans did not even dream of exporting 50 drugs to 12 countries on different continents. All this happened. The knowledge and commitment of the Iranian youth once again painted a great epic. The company, which is now adorned with the name of a famous Iranian scientist and sage, has new technologies and a strong will. This company is committed to Iran and has a serious social responsibility, and these days it is the flagship of the nation's health and well-being. During the Covid-19 pandemic, which unfortunately made Iran, like the rest of the world, vulnerable. At AbuRaihan Pharmacy, we believe that we must be successful in practice. Therefore, we are proud of ourselves when the grateful people of Iran, the mass media and the health experts praise the performance of AbuRaihan Company. We are happy to serve the people. Earning titles, statues, awards and plaques are valuable to us. These have only a popular base and are the result of public opinion. I am proud to say that this positive feedback removes all the fatigue of our colleagues. In addition to increasing the production capacity of various and strategic drugs in the past, we want to design more than 50 new and practical products. Thanks to God, by the end of the year, most of these drugs will enter the line of operation. We will serve more society than the good people of Iran. You, the proud people of Iran, are our first choice. Our first commitment is to ensure your health and well-being.



China Says Small Groups Can't Rule World

BEIJING (Dispatches) - The Group of Seven's adoption of a controversial agenda against China has escalated tensions, drawing a stern rebuke from Beijing about outdated assumptions that small groups of countries could still rule and make decisions for the rest of the world.

Leaders of the so-called Group of Seven (G7) largest economies have adopted an openly hostile anti-China stance, including a US-proposed rival plan to counter China's multi-trillion-dollar Belt and Road initiative (BRI) by investing in infrastructure in developing countries.

The adoption of the Build Back Better World (B3W) project came after US President Joe Biden and other G7 leaders held their meeting in southwestern England on Saturday as part of attempts to confront China's surging economic and military rise over the past four decades.

"This is not just about confronting or taking on China," a senior official in the Biden administration said. "But until now we haven't offered a positive alternative that reflects our values, our standards and our way of doing business." **See Page 7**

First Vice-President Congratulates Russia Day

TEHRAN (IRNA) - First Vice President Eshaq Jahangiri congratulated the Prime Minister of Russia on the country's independence anniversary.

In a message on Sunday, Jahangiri congratulated Prime Minister Federation Mikhail Vladimirovich Mishustin and people of Russia on the country's anniversary of independence, called Russia Day.

Jahangiri expressed hope that the ties between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Russian Federation, especially in economy and trade, would expand further by the joint efforts of officials of both countries.

President Decries Denying Administration's Achievements

TEHRAN (IP) - Emphasizing that we should not allow false and unreasonable attributes to the government to remain unanswered, President Hassan Rouhani said his administration would be held accountable for its actions with courage.

President Rouhani in the meeting of the Economic Coordination Headquarters of the administration on Sunday, referring to unrealistic and false issues raised in the election debates, added: "Denying the obvious achievements of the administration in the fight against economic sanctions and the coronavirus is the strategy of the Iranian opposition, and this is not only undermining the system and the country as a whole but also undermining the people and the decisive vote of the majority of society."

The President added: "When we invite everyone to participate in the election, we should not insult the people's vote and achievement. It is the national duty of all officials to defend their glorious record of resistance by stating great achievements during the maximum pressure of the enemies and the imposition of economic war."

Rouhani has emphasized that his administration does not stutter both in expressing



honors and achievements and results of activities and accountability and in apologizing for its shortcomings and will be accountable for its actions with courage.

He said that all government officials at various levels are obliged to answer for the ambiguities and accusations that have been made against the administration's performance, adding that the government, relying on enlightenment and transparency as an accepted principle in successful governance, is open and has spoken and will speak openly, transparently and honestly to the people, and we must not allow false accusations to go unanswered.

Iran, Kenya to Expand ICT Ties

TEHRAN (RNA) - Iran Ambassador to Kenya Jafar Barmaki on Sunday said that Iran is ready for sharing its successful experience of knowledge-based companies with Kenya, and provides a platform for exchanging tech ideas and facilitate bilateral trade cooperation.

In an online meeting with Iranian businessmen and their Kenyan counterparts, Jafar Barmaki said that in January 2021, Iran opened a permanent innovation center in Kenya to facilitate export to Eastern Africa for Iranian knowledge-based enterprises.

The Iranian House of Innovation and Technology (HIT) opened with the presence of Vice President of Science and Technology Sourena Sattari and ICT, Innovation and Youth Affairs of Kenya Joseph Mucheru, and President of Kenya's Chamber of Commerce Richard Ngatia in the refurbished previous building of the Iranian Embassy in Nairobi.

The Iranian embassy in Kenya will introduce the country's business opportunities to companies interested in cooperation, we considered cooperation programs in specialized fields, and in this regard, the first Kenyan commercial delegation to Iran visited Iran, the next delegation will visit soon, Iran in the field of medical equipment, he added.

The Iranian ambassador to Kenya, in this meeting, added that Iran has programs to introduce investment opportunities to the tradesmen in Kenya, and in this regard, the Iranian Economic Processing Area as a field of cooperation between the two countries completed and will be active soon.

Vice President of Science and Technology Sourena Sattari in January 2021, in his meeting with Kenya's Minister of ICT, Innovation, and Youth Affairs Joseph Mucheru expressed Iran's readiness for sharing its successful experience of knowledge-based companies with Kenya.

Iran Prepares 24 Polling Stations in U.S. for Presidential Election

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The Interests Section of Iran in Washington, D.C., has made arrangements for the Iranian expatriates to take part in the upcoming presidential election of Iran in 24 polling places across the United States.

Director of Iran's Interests Section in the U.S., Mahdi Atefat, told IRNA that the Iranian expats residing in the United States can cast their ballots in the June 18 presidential election in a total of 24 polling stations in various states.

The number of polling stations has been increased from two regions in Washington, D.C. and New York to 24 areas in Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, Virginia, Missouri, North Carolina, Ohio, Wisconsin, and Oklahoma, he noted, adding that one or two polling places will be open in each of those states on Friday.

Atefat also said two polling stations will be available in Oregon and in Buffalo, New York State, to allow the Iranians in Canada to travel to those border cities.

However, he added, the Iranian expats in Canada may have difficulty in crossing the border because of the coronavirus restrictions.

The official noted that the polling stations for the Iranian presidential election will be open on Friday from 8 am to 5 pm local time in each state.

Six Iranian executive personnel will be stationed at every polling place, including one observer representing the Constitutional Council of Iran, he noted.

Arrangements have been made to ensure the security of the polling stations with the assistance of Diplomatic Security Service and the local police, Atefat added.

Seven candidates are racing in 13th presidential election of Iran, slated for June 18.

More than 59,310,000 Iranians are eligible to vote this year.

Raisi to Abide by JCPOA If Nation's Interests Secured

TEHRAN (MNA) - The main Principlist candidate said in the final presidential debate Sat. that he will continue the JCPOA if it secures the nation's interests, accusing Rouhani's administration of not being able to implement the deal.

The seven hopefuls started their final showdown at 17:00 Tehran local time (1230 GMT) which is under at the headquarters of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRIB) located in the north of the Iranian capital of Tehran.

Ebrahim Raeisi, Mohsen Rezaei, Mohsen Mehr-Alizadeh, Saeed Jalili, Alireza Zakani, Abdol-Nasser Hemmati, and Amirhossein Ghazizadeh Hashemi are the seven candidates are running in this round of presidential elections in Iran. The seven contenders discussed "economy" and "politics, culture and society," as the main themes of the previous two debates.

According to the figures released by election officials, over 59 million Iranians are eligible to vote at 72, 000 polling stations across the country on June 18.

Most of the debate today focused on the people's livelihood and the solutions to solve the economic problems such as the high inflation rate and foreign economic pressures. The candidates blamed their rival political camp for being unable to solve the country's problems.

The Reformist candidate Hemmati blamed the economic sanctions on the country for the economic problems while the Principlist contenders said that mismanagement was to blame.

With regard to the future of the JCPOA, the main



candidate in the Principlist camp Ebrahim Raeisi said that "If the nation's interests are secured in an agreement, we will support it."

Raeisi added his future administration will abide by an agreement (JCPOA) that met the Leader's preconditions.

Meanwhile, he accused the rival camp and the current administration of not being able to implement the deal in the format that was approved by the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Khamenei. Saeed Jalili, another Principlist contender said that the country needs to focus on the economy in the next four years with reliance on domestic capacities.

Jalili said that there is the possibility of extensive and constructive engagement with the world, especially in the economic field. Meanwhile, Hemmati said he will support an increased role for women in society, adding that if he elected, he would give small loans to housewives with the aim of increasing their employment rate.

Rezaei, who is considered to be a Principlist candidate, said that if he elected as Iran's next president, he would take implementing the JCPOA seriously.

"My administration would definitely take the issue of JCPOA seriously. I would compel the United States to implement JCPOA with real diplomacy," Rezaei said

Ghazizadeh Hashemi, for his part, said that he would support rebuilding the country's educational system based on new methods. The Principlist candidate said that he would appoint a foreign minister with a background in international trade.

He also promised to work hard to create jobs for the young generation.

Presidential Election to Be Held in Full Security

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli said that the country's upcoming presidential election will be held in full security and in a sound and legal atmosphere.

Rahmani Fazli predicted a high turnout of voters in the elections on June 18.

Iran will not face any security issues at the time of elections, the minister said. He yet noted, "We are ready for prevention in possible cases."

Referring to the risk of the spread of COVID-19, Rahmani Fazli said that both the polling stations and the voting hours have been increased in comparison to the previous elections to prevent the spread of the disease.

He also said that the Ministry of Health and Iran Red Crescent Society will have inspectors on the polling stations to monitor the optimum observation of health protocols.

Philippine Envoys in Iran, Spain Assume ASEAN Committee Chair Posts

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - The Philippine ambassadors in Iran and Spain have assumed the chairmanship of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) committees in the respective countries they are currently posted.

Philippine ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Iran Wilfredo Santos assumed the ASEAN Tehran Committee (ATC) chairmanship from the outgoing Chair, former Malaysian Ambassador to Iran Dato' Rustam Yahaya, who was represented by Chargé d'Affaires, a.i., Mohd Nizam bin Halimi of the Embassy of Malaysia, during a simple ceremony held at the Philippine Embassy in Iran on June 7, 2021.

The ACT is one of the 54 ASEAN Committees in Third Countries and International Organizations (ACTCs) that have been fully endorsed and formally established in the national capitals and other key cities around the world with the aim to promote ASEAN's interests and identity in the concerned host countries or international organizations.

It is composed of six ASEAN Member States, namely Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, and Viet Nam. The Philippines will serve as ACT Chairperson for six months.

In attendance during the turnover rites were by ACT Heads of Mission Ambassador Pengiran Abdul Samad HJ Metasan of Brunei Darussalam, Ambassador Ronny

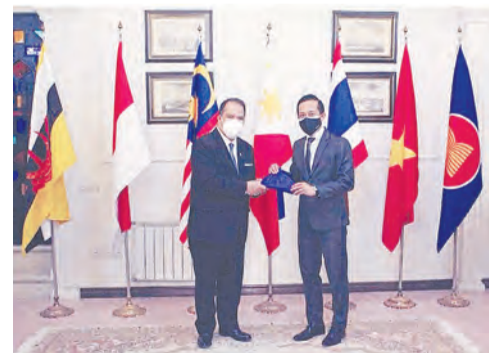
Prasetyo Yuliantoro of Indonesia, Ambassador Nguyen Manh Hien of Viet Nam, and Chargé d'Affaires, a.i Wararaj Engombun of Thailand.

Around 10 members of the ATC Working Group, mostly embassy deputies, were present to witness the event.

The turnover marks the start of the six-month chairmanship of the Philippines.

In his acceptance remarks, Lhuillier expressed his aim of elevating the engagement between ASEAN and Spain through promoting greater awareness and cultural understanding of the ASEAN region among Spanish people and through strengthening the economic ties between Spain and the ASEAN.

The ACM is composed of all ambassadors of ASEAN countries with embassies in Madrid that include Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam.



Philippine Ambassador to Iran Wilfredo Santos (L) receives the ASEAN Flag from Malaysian Chargé d'Affaires Mohd Nizam bin Halimi in Tehran

Khatami Urges Reformists to Participate In Iran's Presidential Vote

TEHRAN (IFP) - Mohammad Khatami, Iran's former president and the reformists' leader, has called for the participation of all political groups in the June 18 presidential elections.

"In this cold and desperate atmosphere, and at a time when our society is in need of bliss, hope and enthusiasm to take part in the fateful event, I hope all political and national groups, parties and camps, in this sensitive episode, manage to recognize correctly their responsibility toward the motherland and the people and succeed in fulfilling their responsibility," Khatami said in a handwritten letter. Khatami, who led Iran's reformist government from 1997 to 2005, was addressing his own reformist camp and its supporters.

Last month, a spokesman for the Iranian Reformist Front said they will not be part of the presidential elections as none of their candidates was approved by the Guardian Council to run for president.

Azar Mansouri said in a tweet that "the Reformists are denied the right to actively participate in the elections."

National Vaccination With Domestic Vaccines to Start Next Week

TEHRAN (IP)- Iran's deputy health minister said that if the necessary permits are approved and provided, vaccination of people against the coronavirus will begin next week with domestic vaccines.

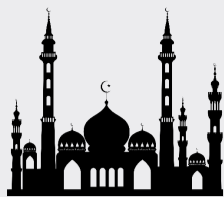
Alireza Raisi, in an interview, emphasized that nationwide vaccination will be done by domestically produced vaccines.

"Fortunately, Iranian scientists have perfectly produced COVID vaccines and are conducting clinical trials in various phases," said the official.

Raisi said that in order to vaccinate more than 70% of Iran's population, about 120 million doses of vaccine are needed, of which, in the most optimistic case, 60% would be provided from domestic vaccines and 40% from foreign vaccines.

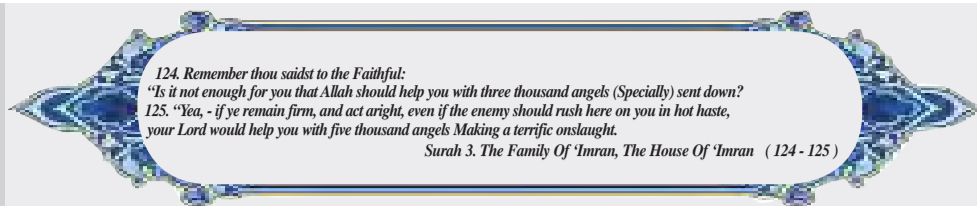
He also noted that the Iranian Ministry of Health and Medical Education has purchased 16 million and 800 thousand doses of vaccine from the COVAX, but a small amount of it has arrived in Iran so far.

Raisi said that the Iranian Ministry of Health and Medical Education has signed other contracts with different countries to purchase the COVID vaccine, adding that about 5 million and 500 thousand doses of COVID vaccine have been imported.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:04
■ Evening (Maghreb)	20:42
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:01
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	05:48



Iran Seeks More Share of Qatar's Market

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Deputy for International Affairs at Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (TCCIMA) Mr. Hessameddin Hallaj says unfortunately Iran is not among the top trade partners of Qatar and Qatar's trade partners are mostly European, China and Turkey.

On Sunday, Iran-Qatar Joint Chamber of Commerce and TCCIMA signed a MoU on expanding economic and trade exchanges between Iran and Qatar.

In the meeting, Hallaj talked about the current trend of trade between Iran and Qatar and said Iran's political relation with Qatar is very good and there are several countries that Iran has good relations with them but unfortunately the country has not taken advantage of this good relation to boost its trade.

He said the reason behind this failure is that the country's political negotiators are not fully aware of economic issues and the views of the private sector are not taken into consideration. He added so we reach a point that we have been unable to restore good economic relation with a country like Qatar which has had good relations with us as this Arab country has been a mediator country in the region.

Pointing to Iran's share of Qatar's market, Hallaj said that unfortunately Iran's share of Qatar's annual \$26.7b imports is only around \$360m, adding that unfortunately Iran is not among Qatar's top 20 trade partners and mainly European states and Turkey are Qatar's major trade partners.

He went on to say that the chamber is working on a 10-year outlook for trade with Qatar in order to plan short-term projects in different fields like the food industries,



oil products and the commodities which are the priorities of Qatar's market.

Hallaj noted that Iran's imports from Qatar are not significant and the total volume of Iran's imports from Qatar is around \$30m that they are mostly electric, electronic, audio and visual devices and tires.

He went on to say that the country should use Qatar as a country for skirting sanctions and to boost the trade with this Arab state in order to encourage them for expansion of ties.

He referred to Turkey's good performance in Qatar's market and said the Turks work very well in Qatar as they usually set long-term goal for cooperation in their target countries. He added that Turkey beside China and European states are Qatar's major trade partners, admitting that Turkey has strengthened its foothold in Qatar's market.

Hallaj went on to say that some major events are to happen in Qatar that Iran can take advantage of it like the Soccer World Cup and the Asian Games. He said the chamber has some long-term plans which are not limited to these two major sport events and urged economic activists to help the chamber for boosting economic activities in Qatar for cementing Iran's foot hold in this friendly Arab country. He also noted that the chamber is to boost its cooperation with Persian Gulf states through signing the MoUs.

Then Chairman of Iran-Qatar Joint Chamber of Commerce Adnan Mousapoor, for his part, pointed to the significance of developing trade ties between Iran and Qatar especially in boosting its handicraft exports on the eve of the Soccer World Cup in Qatar, adding that the event is the best opportunity for Iran to pick up its handicraft exports to Qatar.

The Secretary General of TCCIMA Mr. Bahman Eshqi, for his part, in the meeting said that TCCIMA expects the government and the decision-making bodies to help the chamber for boosting trade with Qatar.

98% of Iranian Cities Enjoy Natural Gas

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The head of National Iranian Gas Company for gas distribution affairs said 98% of Iranian cities enjoy natural gas.

Despite problems caused by coronavirus, National Iranian Gas Company could set a new record with regard to gas distribution in urban, rural, and industrial areas during the last Iranian calendar year (ending on 20 March 2021), Gholam Reza Mashayekhi said.

Accordingly, 98% of urban areas and 85% of rural population enjoy natural gas, he added.

Some 2,918 villages, 23 cities and 6,500 production and industrial units joined gas distribution network last year, he noted.

Iran-Vietnam Virtual Trade Meeting to Be Held

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Iran-Vietnam Joint Chamber of Commerce says the chamber is to hold the Iran-Vietnam Technology Trade virtually on June 26-30.



According to reports, the Iran-Vietnam Joint Chamber of Commerce in cooperation with Vice-President on scientific and technology is to hold the technology trade meeting between Iran and Vietnam virtually.

This specialized meeting will be focused on medical equipment, energy, IT technology and artificial intelligence and will be held on June 26-30.

Major Economic Surgery Is Necessary to Solve Problems

TEHRAN (IP) - The presidential election says that major economic surgery is very necessary in Iran.

At the end of the third and last televised debate of the presidential election, Mohsen Rezaei, in response to Iran Press on how he would implement major economic surgery in the country, said that the country's economic problems could not be solved without major economic surgery.

The candidate of the 13th presidential election emphasized that the government of 'Action and Transformation' will start a major economic surgery in the pillars of power and in this regard, constructive proposals would be presented to the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei.

Rezaei stated that the facilities of the pillars of power in the country, which are attributed to the Leader, have always been at the disposal of the administrations, and other pillars of power are defined in the framework of their duties in order to act in accordance with the law.

Solar PV Stations to Be Installed for Agricultural Wells

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran's Power Generation, Distribution, and Transmission Company (known as Tavanir), in collaboration with the Iranian Fuel Conservation Company (IFCC), is going to implement a program for installing free solar power stations for agricultural wells across the country, IRNA reported.

As reported, following the increase in the electricity consumption by the agricultural sector in the current years due to the water shortage and drought, Tavanir and IFCC have signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to collaborate for installing PV stations for the agricultural wells.

Based on the mentioned MOU, which was signed by Tavanir Head Mohammad-Hassan Motevalizadeh and head of IFCC Ali Mobini Dehkordi, farmers are not going to pay any price for the mentioned stations and all the costs are covered by the mentioned entities.

Speaking at the signing ceremony of the MOU, Dehkordi noted that under the framework of this memorandum, PV stations will be installed for 60,000 agricultural wells over a three-year period.

"In the first phase of this program, 11,000 wells are scheduled to be provided with renewable energy sources," the officials said.

"In winter, when agricultural wells are not in use, solar electricity is injected into the national grid and will be supplied to other consumers," the official stated.

Tehran, Moscow Join Forces in Building Power Plants



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's Thermal Power Plants Holding Company CEO said on Sunday that construction of the 1400-megawatt power plant in Hormozgan Province, southern Iran, with Russia-provided loan would serve as bridge for expanding bilateral cooperation in this field.

The implementation of Sirik thermal power plant in Hormozgan Province with the capacity of 1400 megawatts began on June 10 and would be completed in 55 months by Iranian and Russian contractors with the loan provided by Russia, Mohsen Tarzatab said.

He added the Iran and Russia, as neighboring countries, are trying to remove hurdles against upgrading level of economic and trading cooperation, one of its cases being joint construction of power plants.

In a condition that Iran's electricity industry faces a shortage in financial resources due to sanctions, the CEO said, leveraging different methods of funding is of significant importance.

Tarzatab underlined that using foreign investment is one of the ways foreseen in Iran's sixth development program for funding power supply projects, including the 25,000 megawatts of electricity provisioned in the program to be added to the country's power capacity.

Russia has handed Iran 1.2 billion euros in loan, i.e. 85 percent of the fund, for construction of the plants, according to the CEO.

The plant is also expected to provide 30 villages of Sirik Country with fresh water as well as job opportunities for the local people.

GTPP of West Islamabad Operational by 2024

TEHRAN (Shana) -- The CEO of the National Petrochemical Company (NPC) said the GTPP unit of West Islamabad project would come online by 2024 as the first development project of the National Petrochemical Company after privatization.

According to the National Petrochemical Company, Behzad Mohammadi said: "This project is the first national project in the petrochemical industry whose chain develops from natural gas to propylene and polypropylene."

During a visit to the facility, he said that the Islamabad-e-Gharb project is the first project that is being developed after privatization of the petrochemical industry by the National Petrochemical Company, adding: "The executive operation of this project is defined in three stages; first we will move from natural gas to methanol and from this route to propylene and finally to polypropylene production."



The NPC CEO said the plant is financed by \$545 million, and adding: "The technical knowhow of this project has been developed for many years with the efforts of Iranian researchers in the Petrochemical Research and Technology Company (PRTC) and it is predicted that its operational process will accelerate and become productive by 2024."

Mohammadi reminded: "One of the factors that has caused the country's petrochemical industry to be unsuccessful in developing propylene production plans is the lack of technical savvy for production of this strategic item which need a million tons per year."

The CEO of the National Petrochemical Company stated: "Currently, licenses have been issued for construction of some GTPP or GTP projects that produce not only propylene but also propylene derivatives. We hope to be able to supply 4 million tons of propylene by 2025 by developing these projects."

Iran, Germany Cooperating on Persian Gulf Water Desalination Project

BUSHEHR (IP) - The Persian Gulf University of Iran is cooperating with the University of Mainz, Germany, on the Persian Gulf Water Desalination Project.

Abdul Latif Hashemifard, a member of the faculty of the Persian Gulf University of Iran and a partner in the joint project, said about the implementation process: "Research teams from the University of Mainz, Germany are cooperating in the Persian Gulf water desalination project."

Hashemifard added: "Another main goal of this project is providing regional assistance in solving the global problem of water shortage, which especially affects West Asian countries."

According to Hashemifard, international cooperation with partners in the Persian Gulf countries was a good way to prevent potential conflicts over drinking water resources that may arise as a result of climate change.

The faculty member of the Persian Gulf University of Iran also said: "The countries of the region, including Iran and Iraq, have good scientific and industrial capabilities in the field of desalination."

Research groups from Germany, led by Professor Sebastian Seifert and Professor Michael Muskus, are participating in the project.

Official Describes Iran-China Cooperation in BRI Beneficial

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The head of Iran-China Chamber of Commerce said that moving forward Tehran-Beijing cooperation in the framework of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) would be beneficial for both sides.

In an interview with Chinese news agency Xinhua on Sunday, Majid-Reza Hariri said such cooperation can

help Iran's infrastructure, especially in transportation including roads, railways, ports and airports.

Iran's contribution to the BRI can also create job opportunities and development in its mining sector, he said, adding that Iran's ideal geographical location serves as its most important advantage in joining the initiative, as it connects East and West Asia both through land and the sea.

Hariri also highlighted Iran's good ties with its neighbor in east and west of the country that can be leveraged to the fullest to accelerate implementation of the initiative.

Being in connection with China and the Chinese people for almost 40 years, Hariri said that Iranians and Chinese have the capacity to work together and be friends due to their characteristics.

He hailed China's Communist Party, saying that the current development and progress in China couldn't be reached with the Communist Party.

\$1.1m Allocated to Restore Ardebil Historical Bazaar

TEHRAN (MNA) - A budget of 46 billion rials (about \$1.1 million at the official exchange rate of 42,000 rials per dollar) has been allocated to restore the Seljuk-era (1037-1194) bazaar of Ardebil, which is situated in northwest Iran.

The project aims at restoring the vaulted passage of Zanjirlu to the closest original state, the provincial tourism chief has said. Following the complete restoration of the passage, some 24 stalls and shops will be available for use, Nader Fallahi announced on Sunday. The project is planned to be completed in a year and a half, the official added.

Earlier in May, Ardebil's tourism chief Mohammadreza Shayeqi announced that a team of archaeologists and cultural heritage experts has conducted a minor excavation at Zanjirlu passage to determine the antiquity and condition of its basements and foundation.

Four Afghans Get 10-Year Jail Terms For Greek Migrant Camp Fire

ATHENS (Dispatches) - A Greek court on Saturday sentenced four Afghan asylum seekers convicted of starting fires that burnt down Europe's largest migrant camp last year to 10 years in prison each.

The court in Chios found the defendants guilty of arson while their lawyers denounced a "lack of sense of fairness". No one died in the fires.

The lawyers told AFP they had immediately filed for an appeal after the sentence was handed down.

The young Afghans were taken to the court handcuffed and were expected to return to the Avlona jail outside Athens, where they were held before the trial.



Azerbaijan Swaps 15 Armenian Prisoners

BAKU (Dispatches) - Azerbaijan said on Saturday it had handed over 15 Armenian prisoners in exchange for a map detailing the location of landmines in Agdam, a region relinquished by ethnic Armenian forces as a part of a deal to end a six-week war last year.

A Russian-brokered ceasefire halted fighting that saw the Azeri army drive ethnic Armenian forces out of swathes of territory they had controlled since the 1990s in and around the Nagorno-Karabakh region.

Irregular skirmishes continue, highlighting the fragility of the ceasefire



Johnson Warns EU Over Post-Brexit Trade



LONDON (Dispatches) - Britain will do "whatever it takes" to protect its territorial integrity in a trade dispute with the European Union, Prime Minister Boris Johnson said on Saturday, threatening emergency measures if no solution was found.

The threat by Johnson seemed to break a temporary truce in a war of words over part of the Brexit deal that covers border issues with Northern Ireland, the focus for tensions since Britain completed its exit from the EU late last year.

Despite U.S. President Joe Biden encouraging them to find a compromise, Johnson used a G7 summit to indicate no softening in his position on what is called the Northern Ireland protocol that covers border issues with the British province.

"I think we can sort it out but ... it is up to our EU friends and partners to understand that we will do whatever it takes," Johnson told Sky News.

"I think if the protocol continues to be applied in this way, then we will obviously not hesitate to invoke Article 16," he added, referring to a safeguard clause that allows either side to take measures if they believe the agreement is leading to economic, societal or environment difficulties.

"I've talked to some of our friends here today, who do seem to misunderstand that the UK is a single country, a single territory. I just need to get that into their heads."

His comments came after he met French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and top EU officials Ursula von der Leyen and Charles Michel at a Group of Seven summit in southwestern England.

The EU told the British government once again that it must implement the Brexit deal in full and introduce checks on certain goods moving from Britain to Northern Ireland. Britain repeated its call for urgent and innovative solutions to ease the friction.

The province has an open border with EU member Ireland so the Northern Ireland protocol was agreed as a way to preserve the bloc's single market after Britain left.

The protocol essentially kept the province in the EU's customs union and adhering to many of the single market rules, creating a regulatory border in the Irish Sea between the British province and the rest of the United Kingdom.

Since Britain exited the bloc's orbit, Johnson has unilaterally delayed the implementation of some provisions of the protocol, including checks on chilled meats such as sausages moving from the mainland to Northern Ireland, saying it was causing disruption to some supplies to the province.

"Both sides must implement what we agreed on," von der Leyen, European Commission president, said after meeting Johnson alongside Michel, the European Council president.

7 Killed in Blasts in Kabul

KABUL (Dispatches) - At least seven people have been killed and six wounded as separate bombs hit two commuter minivans in Afghanistan's capital, Kabul, according to officials.

The explosions on Saturday hit vehicles on the same road about 2 kilometres (1.25 miles) apart in a western Kabul neighbourhood largely populated by members of the ethnic Hazara minority.

One of the blasts killed six people and wounded two, the interior ministry said. The other, which took place in front of Muhammad Ali Jinnah hospital, killed one and wounded four. Hazaras, who are mostly Shia Muslims, have long suffered oppression and persecution in mostly Sunni Afghanistan - and were more recently targeted by ISIL-linked fighters.

An attack on a Kabul school on May 8 killed nearly 100 people, all of them Hazara and most of them young girls just leaving class. It was not immediately clear what type of explosives were used and no one immediately claimed



responsibility for Saturday's attacks. The local affiliate of ISIL (ISIS) has carried out similar bombings in the area, including four attacks on four minivans earlier this month that killed at least 18 people.

Violence and chaos continue to escalate in Afghanistan as the United States and NATO continue their withdrawal of the remaining 2,500-3,500 US soldiers and 7,000 allied forces. The last of the troops will be gone by September 11 at the latest.

Also on Saturday, a magnetic bomb placed in a bicycle was detonated in the provincial capital of the northern province of Balkh, killing at least one civilian and wounding three others, provincial police spokesman Adel Shah Adel said.

Since the beginning of the official withdrawal of the US and other NATO troops on May 1, at least 17 districts have fallen to the hands of Taliban.

On Saturday, the armed group's fighters took control of Tolak district in the country's central province of Ghor following heavy clashes with members of government forces,

Algerians Vote in Parliamentary Elections Amid Boycott Calls

ALGIERS (Dispatches) - Algerians voted in the first parliamentary elections since longtime leader Abdelaziz Bouteflika was forced to resign two years ago, but the opposition Hirak movement has called for a boycott after seven of its leaders were arrested on Thursday.

About 24 million Algerians are eligible to vote to elect 407 members of the People's National Assembly for a five-year term.

The Hirak movement has been spearheading the anti-government protests calling for fundamental changes to the political system in the country, which was ruled by Bouteflika for 20 years.

Pro-government parties have urged Algerians to take an active part in what they call a "crucial vote for the country's stability", while opponents are denouncing a "sham" election.

Seven leading protest movement figures, including leading opposition figure Karim Tabbou, were arrested on Thursday while on Friday police deployed heavily in the capital, Algiers, blocking any bid by the Hirak movement to hold anti-government protests.

The early election is supposed to exemplify President Abdelmadjid Tebboune's "new Algeria", with an emphasis on young candidates and those outside the political elite.

Those who vote in Africa's biggest nation must choose from more than 13,000 candidates, more than half of whom are listed as "independent".

The head of the Algerian League for the Defense of Human Rights, Said Salhi, has denounced the crackdown that preceded the vote.

The "repressive atmosphere and the restrictions placed on human rights and freedoms mean these elections have no democratic value", Salhi said.

Farida Hamidi, a Hirak activist in Paris, said the election meant little to young Algerians dreaming of change.

"We reject it all: the president, the parliament, the constitution, everything done by this military junta which has been ruling Algeria since 1962 - we want something else," she said.

Nigerian Police Fire Teargas to Break Up Protests Over Rising Insecurity

LAGOS (Dispatches) - Police fired teargas and detained several demonstrators in the Nigerian cities of Lagos and Abuja on Saturday during protests over the country's worsening security situation.

Anger over mass kidnappings-for-ransom, a decade-long Islamist insurgency and a crackdown on protesters in Lagos last October has fuelled demands for the government of President Muhammadu Buhari to do more to tackle violence and insecurity.

There was a heavy police presence in the country's two major cities as several hundred people gathered to protest on Democracy Day, which marks Nigeria's move to civilian rule more than 20 years ago.

Reuters witnesses in Lagos and the capital Abuja saw police shooting their guns into the air and firing teargas into the crowds to disperse the demonstrators, who held placards and chanted "Buhari must go".

"We cannot continue like this ... all the bad governance must stop," said protester Samson Okafor in Lagos, where teargas canisters smouldered in the street as police

shouted at demonstrators to leave the scene.

Officers were also seen smashing mobile phones confiscated from protesters, some of whom criticised the government's decision to suspend access to Twitter after the social media platform removed a recent post by Buhari.

Abuja police spokesman Yusuf Mariam said officers in the capital made no arrests but had "restored calm" after people gathered who were "inciting public disturbance and breaching public peace."

He did not comment on the Lagos protests, and other police spokesmen did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Before fleeing under clouds of teargas, demonstrators in Abuja marched with banners reading "#Buhari Must Go" and other slogans denouncing rising insecurity and the country's 33.3% unemployment rate.

Some also carried placards demanding the release of Ibrahim Zakzaky, the imprisoned leader of banned Nigerian Shi'ite group the Islamic Movement of Nigeria.



Castillo Close to Victory in Peru

LIMA (Dispatches) - Peruvian socialist candidate Pedro Castillo was close to being named the Andean country's next president as the vote count neared an end, making a last-minute flip by right-wing rival Keiko Fujimori increasingly unlikely.

Castillo, an elementary school teacher raised in an impoverished village, was leading the count by 51,000 votes on Saturday morning, when only around 62,000 votes remained to be counted.

"We won, teacher Pedro Castillo (is) President," tweeted his party, Free Peru, late on Friday. Fujimori, the daughter of jailed ex-President Alberto Fujimori, has doubled down this week on unsubstantiated allegations of fraud, seeking to disqualify tens of thousands of votes.

But even if Fujimori were to succeed, the number of votes still in play make it unlikely she would succeed in flipping the result.

The tense vote count is the culmination of a bitterly divisive election in Peru, where low-income citizens supported Castillo while wealthier ones voted for Fujimori.

On Saturday, Peru's electoral jury tried to push back a deadline to allow Fujimori to submit requests to disqualify up to 200,000 votes cast in Peru's poorest regions, but said in the afternoon that it had backtracked that plan, paving the way for a Castillo victory. In the end, Fujimori has only been able to challenge some 38,000 votes.

"We call for the (electoral jury) to guarantee and support a clean and just electoral process," Castillo tweeted on Friday night. "The Peruvian people deserve it."

Fujimori, meanwhile, responded on Twitter that "the field was not level." She has so far declined to concede.

Fujimori first brought up allegations of fraud on Monday, and doubled down on Wednesday when she signaled she intended to seek the annulment of some 200,000 votes in rural areas of the country that support Castillo.

One of her main arguments is that she had won no votes among voter groups in those regions that pool up to 300 people, which she said was a sign of fraudulent action.

Left-wing Castillo has spooked markets, largely because his party, Free Peru, is self-described as Marxist-Leninist.



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Abu Dhabi to Invest Nearly \$100m in Turkmenistan

DUBAI (Dispatches) - The Abu Dhabi Fund for Development (ADFD) has signed deals worth \$99.91 million to build an airport and a power plant in Turkmenistan.

The deal allocates 275 million dirhams (\$74.9 million) for the construction of an airport in Jebel in the Balkan region of the country. It aims to improve airport infrastructure in the area and enhance air connectivity in central Asia. The project includes building Jebel airport terminal with a capacity of 100 passengers per hour.

About 92 million dirhams will be used to build a 10-megawatts hybrid power plant that will provide clean energy for the people in Altyn Asyr.



G7 Rivals China With Grand Infrastructure Plan

LONDON (Dispatches) - The Group of Seven richest democracies on Saturday sought to counter China's growing influence by offering developing nations an infrastructure plan that would rival President Xi Jinping's multi-trillion-dollar Belt and Road initiative.

The G7, whose leaders are meeting in southwestern England, has been searching for a coherent response to the growing assertiveness of Xi after China's surging economic and military rise over the past 40 years.

U.S. President Joe Biden and other G7 leaders hope their plan, known as the Build Back Better World (B3W) initiative, will provide a transparent infrastructure partnership to help narrow the \$40 trillion needed by developing nations by 2035, the White House said.

"This is not just about confronting or taking on China," a senior official in Biden's administration said. "But until now we haven't offered a positive alternative that reflects our values, our standards and our way of doing business."

The G7 and its allies will use the initiative to mobilise private-sector capital in areas such as climate, health and health security, digital technology, and gender equity and equality, the White House added.

It was not immediately clear how exactly the plan would work or how much capital it would ultimately allocate.

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) scheme, which Xi launched in 2013, involves development and investment initiatives that would stretch from Asia to Europe and beyond.

More than 100 countries have signed agreements with China to cooperate in BRI projects like railways, ports, highways and other infrastructure.

Critics say Xi's plan to create a modern version of the ancient Silk Road trade route to link China with Asia, Europe and beyond is a vehicle for the expansion of Communist China. Beijing says such doubts betray the "imperial hangover" of many Western powers that humiliated China for centuries.

Leaders of the G7 - the United States, Canada, Britain, Germany, Italy, France and Japan - want to use their gathering in the seaside resort of Carbis Bay to show the world that the richest democracies can offer an alternative to China's growing clout.

The re-emergence of China as a leading global power is considered to be one of the most significant geopolitical events of recent times, alongside the 1991 fall of the Soviet Union that ended the Cold War.

China in 1979 had an economy that was smaller than Italy's, but after opening to foreign investment and introducing market reforms, it has become the world's second-largest economy and is a global leader in a range of new technologies.

The U.S. official said until now, the West had failed to offer a positive alternative to the "lack of transparency, poor environmental and labour standards, and coercive approach" of the Chinese government that had left many countries worse off.

According to a Refinitiv database, as of mid-last year, more than 2,600 projects at a cost of \$3.7 trillion were linked to the BRI, although the Chinese foreign ministry said last June that about 20% of projects had been seriously affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

As part of the G7 plan, the United States will work with the U.S. Congress to supplement existing development financing and to "collectively catalyze hundreds of billions of dollars of infrastructure investment", the White House said.

Biden made "forceful comments" to G7 leaders about the need to make a strong statement on Washington and rights group say is the use of forced labour in China, but there was a "spectrum of how far different countries are willing to go" in their criticism in a final communique from the three-day summit, another U.S. official said.

The United States has pushed for specific language in the communique about alleged forced labour in the China's Xinjiang region, officials said.

U.N. experts and rights groups estimate over a million people, mainly Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities, have been detained in recent years in a vast system of camps in Xinjiang. China denies all accusations of forced labour or abuse. It initially denied the camps existed, but has since said they are vocational centres and are designed to combat extremism. In late 2019, China said all people in the camps had "graduated". The Chinese foreign ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

S. Korea's National Debt Grows at a Rate of 3m Won Per Second

SEJONG (Yonhap) -- South Korea's national debt is growing at a rate of 3 million won (US\$2,730) per second and stands at 17.6 trillion won per person, a parliamentary office said Saturday.

The total debt by the central and provincial governments in Asia's fourth-largest economy reached 912.5 trillion won as of 3:30 p.m. Saturday, according to the National Assembly Budget Office's real time national debt clock. The national debt has steadily increased, rising from 24.5 trillion won in 1990 and 111.2 trillion won in 2000 to 392.2 trillion won in 2010, the clock showed.

It ballooned to a record high of 846.9 trillion won last year as the government sharply expanded spending to mitigate the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic and prop up the local economy.

The national debt is expected to reach 965.9 trillion won this year as the government created an extra budget to provide relief aid for small merchants and vulnerable people hit hard by the pandemic.

Since last year, the country has drawn up five rounds of extra budgets totaling 82 trillion won to tackle the economic impact of the coronavirus.

South Korea may face further debt burdens as some lawmakers are reviewing a bill designed to provide state compensation to smaller merchants and the self-employed who have suffered losses incurred by the pandemic.

Turkey's Economy to Grow 5.8% in 2021

ANKARA (Dispatches) - The Turkish economy will grow 5.8% this year and return to a lower trend from 2022 onwards, the International Monetary Fund said on Friday, calling for steps to address high inflation and low reserves.

"Mainly reflecting a large positive carryover from the sharp activity rebound in the second half of 2020, growth should reach about 5.75% this year," the Fund said in a statement concluding its 2021 Article IV consultation.

"With high external financing needs, sizeable domestic foreign exchange deposits, and low reserve buffers, the economy remains vulnerable to shocks and to changes in sentiment at home and abroad."

The rapid economic recovery after the coronavirus outbreak with state bank-led credit growth and liquidity support was exceptional, the Fund said, adding that, however, policies fuelled inflation, dollarisation and external imbalances.

The Fund also underscored the importance of adopting policies to reduce vulnerabilities and committing to a firm monetary policy stance to fight inflation.

"Directors also emphasized the importance of strengthening central bank independence, rebuilding high-quality reserves, further simplifying the operational framework, and improving policy communication," it said.

The lira has fallen some 11% so far this year, on top of double-digit falls in the past three years, while inflation is hovering around 17%.

Swiss Economic Growth Forecast Revised Upward

ZURICH (Dispatches) - Independent research group BAK Economics has revised its growth forecast for the Swiss economy upwards, as coronavirus restrictions are eased.

The Basel-based group now expects GDP to rise by 3.9% this year, compared with a previous forecast of 3.4%. On the other hand, it has revised its forecast for next year's growth down to 3.2% (from 3.9%), it said.

With the Covid-19 situation easing, the research institutes predicts a sustained recovery for the second and third quarters of this year. "With a gradual opening up, it will be the service sectors driving economic growth," it said. "At the same time, the industrial sector continues to show dynamic development."

The upwards trend is following other predictions. Government experts also forecast in March a weak start to the year but said the economic situation should pick up quickly if the pandemic situation evolves positively.

Switzerland's economy shrank 2.9% last year as a result of Covid-19, the worst annual contraction since the aftermath of the oil crisis in 1975. But official figures showed that the second wave in the autumn had a less harmful effect, with the economy growing 7.6% in the third quarter before slowing to +0.3% in the last three months of the year.

Switzerland is an attractive place to work but it is increasingly being challenged as a business location because of immigration restrictions.

Norway Isn't Giving Up On New Oil Development

OSLO (Dispatches) - Norway is betting on offshore wind, hydrogen, and electrification to meet its commitment under the Paris Agreement, but its oil and gas sector will continue to play a major role in long-term job creation, economic growth prospects, and value for the country, the government said.

Norway, Western Europe's largest oil producer, is preparing to face the energy transition, yet it believes that it can develop its petroleum resources to deliver low-emission production within its climate policy, the government's White Paper 'Putting Energy to Work' showed.

"Retaining expertise and technologies in the oil and gas sector is also vital for the development of new industries and technologies such as carbon capture and storage, offshore wind and hydrogen," Minister of Petroleum and Energy, Tina Bru, said in a statement.

"The main goal of the government's petroleum policy - to facilitate profitable production in the oil and gas industry in a long term perspective - is firmly in place," she added.

According to the Norwegian government, the domestic oil and gas industry currently faces two major challenges—maturing oilfields and increasing demands for lower emissions.

"The petroleum sector will remain a significant factor in the Norwegian economy in the years to come, although not on the same scale as today. The government will facilitate long-term economic growth in the petroleum industry within the framework of our climate policy and our commitments under the Paris Agreement," the government said.

Norway has become yet another oil-producing country that has said it would not stop investing in oil and gas since the International Energy Agency suggested in a report last month that the world wouldn't need new investment in fossil fuels ever if it wants to achieve net-zero in 2050.

The Norwegian Oil and Gas Association has also commented on the IEA report, saying that it "does not share the assumption that OPEC members alone should account for more than half of oil and gas production for the world market in a 2050 perspective. If demand does not decline as rapidly as the IEA assumes in its scenario, and the supply side is simultaneously choked off, global energy provision could be threatened and lead to very high energy prices."

Italy Central Bank Sharply Raises 2021 Growth Forecast



ROME (Dispatches) - Italy's economy will grow more than previously expected this year, buoyed by EU-supported investment, the central bank said.

The Bank of Italy said it expected gross domestic product (GDP) to rise by 4.4 percent, but warned its forecast did not take into account favorable economic data from last week.

Factoring in projections released by national statistics agency Istat on June 4, the estimate should be revised upwards by "more than half a percentage point", a statement said.

For 2022 and 2023, the bank predicted growth of 4.5 percent and 2.3 percent, respectively.

Friday's data was markedly more optimistic compared to January, when GDP was expected to expand by 3.5 percent in 2021, 3.8 percent in 2022 and 2.3 percent in 2023.

The recovery "is driven above all by investment" helped by growing confidence in the economy, low-interest rates, and the expected windfall of billions of euros from the European Union, the central bank said.

Italy was the first European nation to be hit by the Covid-19 pandemic and its economy contracted by a staggering 8.9 percent last year.

However, the economic outlook has recently turned sunnier, and the country is set to receive nearly 200 billion euros (\$242 billion) from the EU's massive post-pandemic recovery fund.

The money, covering the 2021-2026 period, is expected to be disbursed in instalments starting in the second half of the year.

The Bank of Italy said its forecast depended on continued progress with vaccinations, allowing the lifting of "most" coronavirus restrictions by the end of the year.

It also said its calculations banked on continued fiscal and monetary stimulus for the economy, and on "no significant delays" in recovery projects backed by national and EU funds.

Last week, Prime Minister Mario Draghi said Italy was "yearning to restart" and "facing a new phase" after "very tough" pandemic months.

In one of several signs of growing optimism for the eurozone's third-largest economy, industrial production returned to pre-Covid levels in April, Istat data showed Thursday.



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Horton Misses Qualifying for Tokyo

DELAIDE (Dispatches) - Olympic 400 metre champion Mack Horton will not be defending his title in Tokyo after failing to qualify at the Australian trials Saturday, stunned by Elijah Winnington who swam the world's fastest time this year.
 Horton, who beat drug-tainted Chinese star Sun Yang for the title in Rio then refused to stand on the podium with him at the 2019 world championships, has been struggling for form this season.

Su Runs 100m in 9.98 Seconds in Tokyo Trials

BEIJING (Dispatches) - Su Bingtian has confirmed his strong form by clocking 9.98 seconds to win the 100 metres at China's national athletics trials for the Tokyo Olympics in Shaoxing, local media reported.
 The 31-year-old, the first Asian-born athlete to go under 10 seconds in the blue-riband sprint, ran the same time at Zhaoqing in April.
 "The result was satisfying, though my body was not in top form," Su told China's state news agency Xinhua after Friday's run.

Belgium Make Winning Start to Euro 2020

MOSCOW (Dispatches)- Belgium striker Romelu Lukaku sent a message of support to his stricken Inter Milan team-mate Christian Eriksen after scoring, as his double helped the Red Devils open their Euro 2020 campaign with a 3-0 win over Russia on Saturday.
 Lukaku gave Belgium an early lead in Saint Petersburg, then shouted "Chris, Chris, stay strong -- I love you" into a pitchside camera during the celebration for his opening goal.
 Eriksen is recovering in hospital in Copenhagen after collapsing on the pitch during extraordinary scenes which overshadowed Denmark's 1-0 home defeat by Finland in Saturday's earlier Group B game.
 "I am really happy with the win, but it was hard for me to play because my thoughts were with Christian Eriksen," said Lukaku, who revealed he cried tears of concern before kick-off for his Inter team-mate.
 Belgium coach Roberto Martinez admitted other members of his squad were also affected after seeing Eriksen suddenly slump to the turf during the Denmark-Finland game.
 "We were watching the game live and five minutes after Christian collapsed, we went into a team meeting. As you can imagine, the last thing we wanted to do was talk about football," said Martinez.
 "There were a lot of tears from players who have shared dressing rooms and big moments with Christian."
 "All our thoughts go to him and his family, but also to the Danish team, as that was a really tough moment."
 Substitute Thomas Meunier doubled Belgium's lead on 34 minutes before Lukaku put the result beyond doubt with a late second goal.



There were fears for his life as he was given CPR by medics on the pitch as his teammates, some distraught, formed a circle around him.
 The stadium had fallen into a shocked silence as the medics worked but Eriksen was eventually carried off the field at the Parken Stadium in Copenhagen and a photo showed him apparently holding his head as he laid on the stretcher.
 The match, which had kicked off at 1800 local time (1600 GMT), resumed two-and-a-half hours later in front of a passionate crowd at the Parken Stadium.
 Meanwhile Wales captain Gareth Bale said his side were "brave" in the 1-1 draw with Switzerland in their opening game of Euro 2020 in Baku on Saturday.
 Striker Kieffer Moore, standing at 1.95m tall, equalized in the 74th minute after Breele Embolo opened the scoring just after the break.
 "We're not too disappointed with the draw, it could have been worse," Bale told S4C.
 "They're a top 10 team in the world, they're there for a reason so we knew in parts we would have to suffer and work hard as a team."
 "The best thing for us was to go 1-0 down. We showed a lot of character, like we always do, to fight back, be brave, get on the ball and get the equaliser."
 Switzerland striker Mario Gavranovic had a potential winner chalked off by VAR for offside after he had edged ahead of Wales back four.

Meanwhile Finland beat Denmark 1-0 in their opening match of Euro 2020 which was overshadowed by Christian Eriksen collapsing and having to be revived on the field by medics.
 Joel Pohjanpalo scored the only goal on the hour mark of a Group B match which was stopped for nearly two hours after Danish playmaker Eriksen slumped to the turf towards the end of the first half.

Krejčíková Wins French Open

PARIS (Dispatches) - Barbora Krejčíková won her maiden Grand Slam singles title at the French Open on Saturday, beating Russia's Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova to become the first Czech woman in 40 years to conquer Roland Garros.
 Krejčíková, ranked 33 in the world and playing just her fifth main draw in a Slams singles event, triumphed 6-1, 2-6, 6-4 for a second career title.
 The 25-year-old emulates compatriot Hana Mandlíková who claimed the trophy in Paris in 1981.
 The 25-year-old Krejčíková dedicated her victory to her mentor, the former Wimbledon champion Jana Novotná who died of cancer at the age of 49 in 2017.
 "It's hard to put into words. I cannot believe I have just won a Grand Slam," said Krejčíková who was still outside the top 100 when the 2020 French Open took place last October.
 "I spent a lot of time with Jana before she died. Her last words to me were 'enjoy tennis and try and win a Grand Slam'.
 "I know she's looking after me. All this is pretty much because she is looking after me."
 "It was amazing that I got the chance to meet her. She was such an inspiration. I miss her and I hope she's really happy."
 In a nervy start to the final, Krejčíková was broken in the first game, serving up two double faults.

Cilic Faces Auger-Aliassime In Stuttgart Final

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Former U.S. Open winner Marin Cilic will face Canada's Felix Auger-Aliassime in the final of the ATP grass court tournament in Stuttgart.
 Croatia's Cilic, the 2014 U.S. Open champion who is bidding for his 19th ATP title, was 6-3, 1-0 up in Saturday's semi-final when Austrian wild-card Jurij Rodionov retired injured.
 After losing his seven previous finals on the ATP tour, the 20-year-old Auger-Aliassime, who has not dropped a set in Stuttgart this week, won his semi-final with a 6-4, 7-5 win over Sam Querrey of the USA.
 This is the second time the Canadian has reached the final in Stuttgart, losing to Italy's Matteo Berrettini in 2019 before the 2020 tournament was cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Moyes Signs New Contract With West Ham

LONDON (Dispatches) - David Moyes has been rewarded for guiding West Ham to sixth place in the Premier League with a new three year contract and says he is "really excited by the ambition" at the club.
 The 58-year-old Scot surpassed expectations in his second spell at the Hammers securing them a place in next season's Europa League with 65 points, their highest Premier League tally.
 The previous season after replacing the sacked Manuel Pellegrini in December 2019 he had saved them from relegation.
 "We have made tremendous progress in the past 15 months and that has been a collective effort from everyone at the club," said Moyes in a statement on the club website.
 "We must keep pushing boundaries for consistent improvement as we all aim to continue the growing of the club. "I am really excited by the ambition that we have at the club and we are going to work as hard as we possibly can to keep moving forward and hopefully give our supporters many a great memory." Moyes is closing in on 100 matches in charge at West Ham and 1,000 competitive games as a manager.

Sterling Honored by Queen for Racial Equality Fight



Sterling, a Premier League and League Cup winner with City this season, has been subjected to racial slurs in stadiums and online during his career.

LONDON (Dispatches) - Manchester City and England forward Raheem Sterling was on Friday named in Queen Elizabeth II's Birthday Honours list in recognition of his work to promote racial equality in sport.
 The 26-year-old, who has been heavily involved in anti-racism and anti-discrimination campaigns, has been made an MBE (Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire).

In 2019, he took part in an anti-racism campaign, "No Room For Racism" and spoke out last year as the Black Lives Matter movement gained traction following the murder of George Floyd in the United States.
 The award comes just days after England players were booed by fans for taking the knee to protest against racial injustice before friendly matches ahead of Euro 2020.
 Almost a quarter, or 262 people, on the main honors list, which rewards individuals' bravery, service or achievement in their fields, have been recommended for coronavirus-related activities.
 Liverpool and England midfielder Jordan Henderson received an MBE for services to football and charity, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic.
 Former Liverpool and England manager Roy Hodgson received a CBE in recognition of his long and distinguished career in football.

Murray Faces Paire in Tough Queen's Opener

LONDON (AFP) - Former world number one Andy Murray has been given a tough draw as he bids to get match-fit for Wimbledon with a first round clash against France's enfant terrible Benoit Paire at key warm-up tournament Queen's.
 Murray has won Queen's a record five times and the 34-year-old Scot will be playing his first singles tournament since March.
 It gets underway on Monday.
 The two-time Wimbledon champion suffered a groin injury ahead of the Miami Open in March and pulled out of the French Open after experiencing further discomfort.
 Paire will be a tough first round opponent for Murray, who was given a wild card entry, though how much of a challenge may depend on what mood the Frenchman is in.
 Paire has upset the authorities to such an extent with his outspoken behaviour that in April the French Tennis Federation took the extraordinary step of barring him from the Tokyo Olympics.
 Should Murray beat him he is likely to play top seed Italy's Matteo Berrettini in the second round.
 Murray enjoyed a rousing return to Queen's two years ago after hip surgery winning the doubles with Spanish veteran Feliciano Lopez.
 However, injuries have dogged him since then.
 He has only played three tour-level singles matches since October.



Nearly Two-Thirds Of Brazilians Oppose Hosting Copa America

BRASILIA (Dispatches) - Nearly two thirds of Brazilians oppose the country hosting the upcoming Copa America soccer tournament, a poll showed on Friday, amid concerns over the country's dire COVID-19 outbreak.
 The South American Football Confederation last week unexpectedly relocated the tournament, which kicks off on Sunday, with Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro's backing.
 Brazil stepped up after co-hosts Colombia were dropped because of civil unrest and Argentina withdrew after a surge in coronavirus infections.
 Bolsonaro has played down the severity of the pandemic and fought against lockdowns to control an outbreak that has killed more than 480,000 Brazilians. Public health experts, Supreme Court justices and footballers questioned the wisdom of hosting the tournament with a pandemic raging, while high-profile sponsors have pulled out. According to an XP/Ipespe poll, 64% of respondents were against hosting the cup, while 29% were in favor. Among Bolsonaro's critics, 83% were against the tournament in Brazil, while 35% of his supporters also did not support the competition.
 Ahead of next year's elections, former leftist President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva appears to be strengthening his lead over Bolsonaro, the poll showed. Although neither men have announced their candidacy, the 2022 election is widely expected to be a run-off between the two polarizing figures.
 In the first round vote, Lula saw his share rise to 32%, up three percentage points from a May poll. Bolsonaro's first-round support slipped one percentage point to 28%. In a simulated second-round matchup, Lula's support rose to 45% from 42% in the previous survey, while Bolsonaro's fell to 36% from 40%.

