

Health Ministry Announced on Tuesday That the Number of Deaths From the COVID-19 Pandemic in Iran Increased to 82,351 With 134 More Iranians Killed by the Virus Over the Past 24 Hours

IRAN NEWS

Vice-President for Science and Technology Sorena Sattari Informed That Knowledge-Based Firms Received 250 Trillion Rials (Over \$1b) of Facilities in the Previous Iranian Calendar Year

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Saudi-Iranian Dialogue Shifted to Oman in 2nd After Baghdad

MUSCAT (Dispatches) - Omani political sources linked the visit of Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan to the sultanate of Oman to reports about an impending transfer of dialogue sessions between Riyadh and Tehran from Baghdad to Muscat.

However, they stressed that the exchange of visits and delegations could also provide Muscat and Riyadh with an opportunity to build new relations free of the contentious legacies of past conflicts. Sources told The Arab Weekly that the sultanate is endeavoring to bring the Saudi-Iranian views closer at the same time that it is undertaking a mediation for a settlement in Yemen.

They say that Muscat will host the second phase of the dialogue between the two countries after Iraq hosted the first phase, which consisted of introductory sessions in which each side presented its demands and also exchanged words of courtesy while working at building mutual trust.

Sources indicated that Oman is exploiting the greater warmth in its relationship with Saudi Arabia to achieve a new breakthrough that will be an additional feather in the cap of its active diplomacy, which in the past succeeded in laying the ground for the 2015 nuclear agreement between Iran and the five +1 countries.

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Zarif's Audio File Releases Facing Charges, Travel Bans

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - GholamHossein Esmaili, a spokesman for Iran's judiciary, says that in the case involving the release of the secret audio file of Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, "individuals" have been banned from leaving and some have been "charged."

On Tuesday, Esmaili said that "several individuals connected to the case were investigated as informed," according to The Fars News Agency. "Some of the accused were banned from leaving."

"Some of the individuals who were in charge were also charged, and they were issued a supply order and are free on bail," he said. The judicial official did not mention the details of the case, including the number of people charged and their government posts.

Earlier, Ali Rabiei, a spokesman for President Hassan Rouhani's government, had announced the formation of a case at the Tehran Prosecutor's Office and the investigation of "specialized judicial, security and intelligence teams" to the release of Mohammad Javad Zarif's audio file.

The release of the audio file of Mohammad Javad Zarif's interview with Saeed Laylaz was a wide reflection on Iranian politics.

Tehran, Islamabad Discuss Border Security



CHAGAI (Dispatches) - Iranian border authorities on Monday urged their Pakistani counterparts at Taftan border to enhance security measures along the border to avoid any untoward situation during the Iranian presidential election scheduled to be held on June 18.

Official sources said that a joint meeting called by the Iranian authorities was held between the officials of both countries at Raahdari Gate in Taftan on Monday night.

Taftan Assistant Commissioner Asmatullah Achakzai, along with Naib Rasaldar Ilahi Bakhsh Notezai, participated in the meeting, which was also attended by Mir Javeh Marzabn, Mohammad Raza Akhwan and Agha-e-Hameed.

The officials discussed border-related issues and it was decided that security would be further beefed up on the Pak-Iran border between Taftan and Mir Javeh, a Levies Force officer told Dawn.

He said Mr Asmatullah Achakzai raised the issue of the prolonged closure of Zero Point Gate, which is used for local tax-free trade between Pakistan and Iran.

The Iranian officials assured their Pakistani counterparts that Zero Point would be reopened once the presidential election concluded in Iran.

Blood donors: A ceremony for distribution of awards among blood donors was held in Dalbandin on Monday to mark the World Blood Donation Day by the Bolan Blood Bank (BBB), a non-governmental organization.

Speaking on the occasion, Chagai Deputy Commissioner Agha Sher Zaman, District Support Manager of the Peoples Primary Healthcare Initiative Wahab Baloch, BBB Chairman Mohammad Bakhsh Baloch and others speakers said that volunteers donating blood were playing a vital role in saving people's lives.

They said donating blood during a specific gap would help improve health conditions of the donor. They urged the participants to promote awareness among the masses about the importance of blood donation.

The participants and speakers lauded the services of BBB and its Chairman Mohammad Bakhsh Baloch who have been providing free of cost blood to the needy people, particularly thalassemia patients, for the past several years.

Top Republicans Urge Blinken to Ensure Congressional Review of JCPOA

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - U.S. Representative Michael McCaul, the top-ranking Republican on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, has led the committee Republicans in a letter to Secretary of State Antony Blinken, calling on President Joe Biden's administration to provide Congress with an opportunity to assess any "nuclear agreement" with Iran.

The lawmakers said, "Any prospective agreement related to the nuclear program of Iran that commits the United States to action clearly constitutes a new agreement that must be transmitted to Congress for review pursuant to 42 U.S.C. 2160e."

"We look forward to the opportunity to review any such agreement, to ensure that it addresses the nuclear and other threats that Iran poses to the United States and our allies and partners," read the letter.

Envoys from Iran and the P4+1 group of countries — Britain, France, Russia, and China plus Germany — have held the sixth round of the talks in Vienna aimed at lifting US sanctions, revitalizing the 2015 nuclear deal, known as the JCPOA, and bringing the US back to compliance.

An American delegation is also in the Austrian capital, however, it is not attending the negotiations because the United States is not a party to the landmark nuclear agreement.

The top Republicans told the Biden administration that, "As U.S. negotiators continue discussions in Vienna regarding Iran's nuclear program, we are writing to remind you of the Administration's statutory obligations to provide Congress with an opportunity to review and assess any nuclear agreement that you reach with Iran."

The Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act of 2015 ("INARA"), codified at 42 U.S.C. 2160e, requires the US president to submit to Congress within five days any nuclear agreement reached with Iran, as well as a detailed verification assessment report and certification, they said. The law was enacted with bipartisan support to ensure congressional oversight of US policy regarding Iran's nuclear program.

The Republicans also brought up what they called Iran's "violations" of the nuclear deal, saying Iran's nuclear program has been "galloping forward" since US withdrawal from the JCPOA in May 2018.

Tehran took some remedial measures in retaliation for Washington's unilateral withdrawal from the 2015 Iran nuclear deal and re-imposition of sanctions. Iran, however, stressed that it will stop the measures only after the removal of all the US sanctions imposed, re-imposed or re-labeled and its full and prompt verification of the [removal].

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ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

Stronger Than Ever In the Waters

Iran since the Islamic Revolution has considerably experienced progresses in different fields and it is getting self-sufficiency in different sectors and especially in the military and manufacturing military equipment.

Iranian experts and talents have indigenized manufacturing several equipment and even manufactured better version of some foreign-made equipment.

The progresses have been more considerable in the military sector and many weapons have been indigenized and even their sophisticated versions have been made in the country.

On Monday, one of these achievements in a ceremony was officially unveiled and a destroyer joined Iranian naval fleet to make Iran much stronger in the sea and international waters to defend its territories. This is the most advanced destroyer Iran has ever built. It's called Dena.

The warship joined the Iranian naval fleet in the country's southern port city of Bandar Abbas on Monday, during a ceremony attended by senior army commanders. President Hassan Rouhani inaugurated the ceremony through a video conference.

The domestically-made frigate is the latest of the Moudge-class destroyers, which is an upgraded version of Jamaran frigate.

It has both combat and defense capabilities and is equipped with a helicopter deck and a radar system that can detect and destroy any aerial or marine threats.

The Iranian navy also put into service its latest minesweeper, Shahin.

The mine countermeasures vessel is 33 meters long and 11 meters wide and can detect and destroy a variety of naval mines.

Iran's maritime forces turned into a blue-water navy 13 years ago by setting sail as far as the Gulf of Aden and east of the Indian Ocean.

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Oil Gains as Risk of Iran Supply Resumption Recedes

LONDON (Dispatches) - Oil prices rose on Tuesday, with Brent gaining for a fourth consecutive session, as the prospect of extra supply coming to the market soon from Iran faded with talks dragging on over the United States rejoining a nuclear agreement with Tehran.

Brent crude was up by 38 cents, or 0.5%, at \$73.24 a barrel, having risen 0.2% on Monday. U.S. oil gained 33 cents, or 0.5%, to \$71.21 a barrel, having slipped 3 cents in the previous session.

Indirect discussions between the United States and Iran, along with other parties to the 2015 deal on Tehran's nuclear program, resumed on Saturday in Vienna and were described as "intense" by the European Union.

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AUCTION SJSCO 140010



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System Based on Invasion, Occupation Not to Last Long

TEHRAN (IRNA)- Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said that a system that has been based on aggression and occupation will not last long.

After a long period of wars and aggression against the Palestinians and threats to the Islamic Republic, the tyrant has fallen, and here is Gaza raising the sign of victory, and Iran continues the march of glory, Zarif wrote on his Twitter account on Monday.

He added that perhaps those who come after him will learn that the system that was founded on aggression and occupation will not last long.

Entire World Needs to Know About Trump's Crimes Against Iran

TEHRAN (MNA) – President Hassan Rouhani said Tuesday that the world must know what crimes the previous U.S. president committed against Iran by waging the Maximum Pressure Campaign.

Speaking on Tuesday during the 233rd session of the Cabinet's Economic Coordination Board, the Iranian President presented a report on the country's economic situation as well as the impact of the US "economic terrorism" in the form of Trump-era Maximum Economic Campaign as well as the Covid-19 pandemic on the economy.

President Rouhani said that in the few years after he took office in 2013 the economy was doing well as there was single-digit inflation and increasing employment in the country, but, he said, Trump's Maximum Pressure Campaign against the Iranian nation had a negative impact on the country's economic indexes such as the GDP, inflation, employment rate as well as the ordinary people's livelihood.

He stressed that the entire world must know about the Trump administration's inhumane crimes against the Iranian nation.

Referring to the effects of the economic war and its impact on the country's economic development and the lives and livelihoods of the people, Rouhani said that people usually consider crimes against humanity to be happening in the war and military conflicts, but sanctions and economic warfare should be considered a "silent" crime.



"As a victim of this inhumane act, Iran will present the evidence of the sanctions to the world," the president said.

He further referred to the Iranian people's resistance against the US unprecedented sanctions, saying that alongside showing the world the impact of Trump's administration's crimes against the Iranian nation which has impacted even the health of the Iranian nation, the world needs to know about the nation's resistance and successful handling of the economic war.

Rouhani further noted that after three and a half years, those who imposed the sanctions admit to the failure of their imposed war as a result of the Iranian nation's resistance.

Iran's Sky; Safe, Secure for Airliners

TEHRAN (IP) - The Commander of Iran's Joint Air Defense Headquarters says the country's sky is safe and secure for all planes passing its air route according to international standards.

Visiting one of the country's air defense bases on Tuesday, Brigadier General Ghader Rahimzadeh emphasized the development of the air defense control systems all across the country and the careful observation of Iran's sky.

General Rahimzadeh said Iran's air defense systems were equipped according to the latest technologies while the staff was being trained non-stop.

He went on to say that through the efforts, human mistakes were decreased to a minimum in Iran's air defense system.

The commander pointed to two responsibilities that the staff must burden: First, the full observation of Iran's sky; and second, creating a safe and secure sky according to international standards for all planes.

The Commander of Iran's Joint Air Defense Headquarters then pointed to the presidential election calling for people's participation as one of the national power factors.

Raisi Emphasizes Women's Role in Economy, Culture



TEHRAN (IP) - The candidate for the 13th presidential election says women's role in the economy and culture should be taken seriously.

Speaking at a meeting with Iranian girls, which was held on the occasion of Girls' Day, Ebrahim Raisi said: "The presence of girls in society brings divine mercy. Half of our society is made up of girls and they play an important role in the country."

He added: "Today, millions of girls in society are improving themselves and they contribute to building the community, and the government must work for them."

He stressed: "Today, talking about the economy and culture without the presence of women is incomplete, and all must pay attention to women and girls without partisan views."

"The role of women in different parts of the country could make people happy and we must pay attention to this productive role of women," the candidate of the 13th presidential election concluded.

People Urged to Have Maximum Turnout in Elections

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Speaking at the weekly news conference on Tuesday, the Government Spokesman stressed the maximum public turnout in the upcoming presidential elections.

Ali Rabiei went on to explain that Iran's future and position depend on people's participation in the presidential elections.

The Iranian presidential election will be held on June 18, 2021.

Rabiei stressed the maximum public turnout in the upcoming presidential elections would secure Iran's future and status.

"I want to invite the people to participate as much as possible at the ballot box," he added.



The government spokesman added: "There are many reasons to invite people to the ballot box and we have to tell people why we should have maximum participation. Today we need to know who will benefit the most from this situation."

Rabiei stated: "The fact that some people did not consider the expediency and did not understand it will not undermine the political and social responsibility of all Iranians."

He added: "On the other hand, there is no denying the fact that only a government formed with high turnout will be accountable to the people."

Rabiei concluded: "I sincerely hope that on Friday, we would prove once again that we will not allow some people to close the windows of our hope."

Iran to Be Big Producer of COVID-19 Vaccine

TEHRAN (IP) - Minister of Health, Treatment, and Medical Education said that Iran would become one of the largest producers of the coronavirus vaccine in the world by the end of this summer.

Addressing the reporters on Tuesday on the sidelines of the inauguration of Samen Al-Hojaj (AS) Hospital and the first phase of Imam Hassan (AS) Hospital of Aran o Bidgol, Saeed Namaki said: "With diligent efforts since of the last year ... from today we domestically produce vaccines."

He noted: "From next week, the second group of Iranian vaccines will be licensed for distribution, and the next groups of Iranian vaccines will be licensed and distributed one by one."

The Minister of Health, Treatment and Medical Education stated: "Regarding the foreign vaccines, in which we had a problem in supplying due to the disloyalty of foreign countries that are parties to the contract with Iran, the problem has been solved and from this week on, we will not have any problem for distribution."

Samen Al-Hojaj (AS) Hospital and the first phase of Imam Hassan (AS) Hospital in Aran o Bidgol were put into operation on Tuesday in a ceremony attended by Saeed Namaki, Minister of Health, Treatment and Medical Education, and a group of provincial and city officials.

On four floors with a base of 7,800 square meters, Samen Al-Hojaj Hospital (AS) is built and is ready to serve the people with 64 beds in the departments of obstetrics and gynecology, radiology and imaging, outpatient emergency, specialized clinic and laboratory.

Also, the first phase of Imam Hassan (AS) Hospital in Aran o Bidgol includes 20 beds in an area of 2,400 square meters.

Located at a distance of 6 km from Kashan and 215 km north of Isfahan, Aran o Bidgol city with a population of more than 103,000 people has three hospitals, 9 health centers, 6 municipal service centers and seven health centers.



Seoul Appoints New Ambassador to Tehran

TEHRAN (MNA) – South Korea appointed Yun Kang-hyeon, a career diplomat known for his expertise in bilateral, multilateral, political, and economic affairs, as the new ambassador to Tehran.

The foreign ministry announced Yun's appointment Monday, highlighting the time he served as deputy minister for economic affairs from 2017 to 2020, TBS news reported.

He also led negotiations with Tehran over Iranian funds frozen in South Korean banks due to US sanctions.

"We expect that Yun will play a key role in stably managing and enhancing bilateral relations with Iran at a time when the South Korea-Iran relationship has become more important than ever," a ministry official said.

Yun entered the foreign service in 1987 and has worked at missions to the United Nations, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Laos, Myanmar, and Uzbekistan.



JCPOA Most Damaging Agreement in Iran History

TEHRAN (IFP) - Saeed Mohammad, the former commander of the IRGC's Khatam al-Anbia Construction Headquarters, has slammed the Rouhani administration's negotiation with world powers over the revival of the JCPOA, saying the solution to people's problems lies here within Iran's borders and not in the west.

Mohammad told a presidential election campaign rally for Ebrahim Raisi that those who championed talks with the west "signed the most damaging contract in the history of the country and destroyed people's livelihoods".

He made the remarks in a reference to the 2015 nuclear agreement between Iran and the P5+1 group of countries. The comments come

as the government is holding talks with the remaining signatories to the 2015 nuclear deal to revive the accord.

"Idleness, inactivity and inaction has disillusioned people. People like the revolution but they are disillusioned with government officials. The solution is being self-confident and not trusting in foreigners," he said.

Mohammad, who ran for president but was disqualified by the Guardian Council, also strongly criticized the ongoing talks on the 2015 nuclear deal in Vienna. He warned people not to be misguided by a possible breakthrough in the negotiations, which he described as a "souvenir from Vienna" in the run-up to the Friday elections.

Compensation for Families of Ukrainian Plane Crash Victims to Be Paid in Full

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – The spokesperson for the Iranian Judiciary unveiled plans to pay the families of victims of a Ukrainian jetliner that crashed near Tehran in January 2020 the whole amount of the allocated compensation prior to a court verdict.

Speaking at a press conference on Tuesday, Gholamhossein Esmaeili said "a hundred percent of the compensation" allotted to the families of victims of the doomed Ukrainian plane crash will be paid.

Making those payments before the final court ruling is an advantage and positive point, the Judiciary spokesman added.

He also noted that detailed investigations have been conducted into all aspects of the crash case, which has come to court.

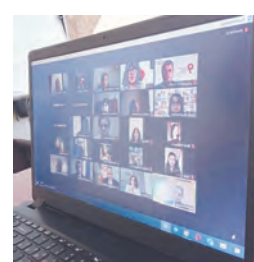
It is not appropriate for other countries to comment on the case as the judicial process is under way in Iran, Esmaeili added.

The competent body allowed to deal with the case is the Iranian court, he emphasized.

In December 2020, the Iranian administration agreed to pay the families of every victim of the Ukrainian plane \$150,000 in compensation.

9th Int'l Conference on Iranian Studies in Tbilisi

BAKU (IRNA) - Ninth international scientific conference on Iranian studies was held online at Tbilisi with the aim of strengthening cultural and historical ties between Iran Georgia and promoting bilateral relations with the participation of the university and cultural consultation of the Islamic Republic of Iran.



According to Iran's cultural attaché in Georgia, in this conference 24 articles were presented by students of the universities of Georgia, Iran, Russia and Bangladesh.

In the opening ceremony of this conference, Kakhaver Kordzaia, the rector of the International University of Caucasus, said that the presentations in international conferences would enhance interaction and relations with pundits and intellectuals active in different scientific fields and students.

He hailed the continuous cooperation of Iranian cultural consultations.

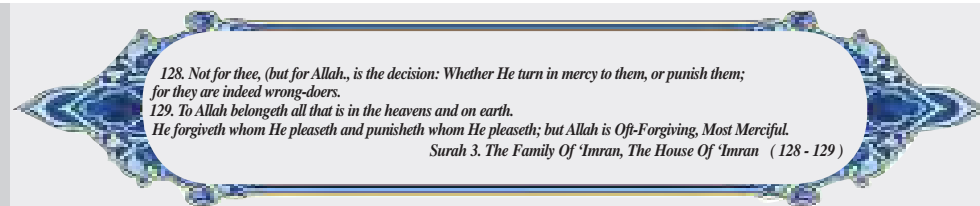
Iran's ambassador to the Caucasus Akbar Qasemi said in the conference that the geopolitical position of Iran and Georgia and a long history of political-cultural relations is so important, emphasizing the necessity of using the elites, students, and university teachers in the region of bilateral and regional relations. The current level of relations between Iran and Georgia is not satisfactory and should be upgraded to both countries' scientific and research centers, Iran's Ambassador added.

Activation of transportation is one of the main foundations for developing countries' economies, he said.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:05
■ Evening (Maghreb)	20:43
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:01
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	05:48



30% of the People Living Under Poverty Line

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Head of Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mine and Agriculture (TCCIMA) believes the number of people who are living under poverty line has increased from 15 percent to 30 percent, admitting that the social gap has increased.

Speaking at the meeting of the board of representatives of the TCCIMA, Masoud Khansari said that in the Iranian calendar month of Ordibehesht last year, the inflation rate reached 41 percent and the social gap increased in a way that the number of people who are living under poverty line increased from 15 percent to 30 percent.

He added that there is insignificant investment in the country and fewer economic enterprises start working and the growth of investment comparing to the depreciation has become negative.

Khansari went on to say that today the most important issue is presidential election and the most important issue ahead of the next government is the economic issues but unfortunately during the election campaign debates, the candidates mostly express their dreams by giving dreamy promises.

He noted that this year's budget has increased 140 percent comparing to the past year, reiterating that the government is expected to face 81 percent of budget deficit. He noted that the budget deficit will lead to the growth in the liquidity and monetary base.



Khansari went on to say that the chamber has conducted a research wherein the challenges ahead of Iran's economy have been identified and the report has been delivered to the presidential candidates and it will continue its cooperation with the next government. He expressed hope that the next government would have a coordinated economic team for good planning to resolve the problems.

He also pointed to the IMF's recent report and forecast regarding Iran's economic growth and said Iran's economic growth will be over 2 percent in 2021, adding that Iran has slipped 28 places in the IMF's resilience indices rankings from 100th to 128th while Turkey ranks 60th.

On job creation in the past year, he said that one million people lost their jobs or left their jobs last year mostly because of the pandemic. He noted that in terms of devaluation of the national currency in the last year's rankings in the world, Iran ranked first and it had the worst devaluation of its currency.

Consumption Management the Only Solution to Overcome Water Shortage Crisis



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

ISFAHAN – The CEO of Isfahan Province Water and Wastewater Province says the only solution for overcoming the current water shortage crisis is consumption management, adding that efficient consumption and saving of up to 10 to 20 percent in water consumption can help the province to pass this tough summer.

Addressing the beginning of the great maneuver of promoters of culture of efficient water consumption in 98 cities and towns as well as thousand villages of Isfahan Province, Mr. Hashem Amini referred to the water shortage crisis that the province is challenging with it, and said that although some 13,400 liters per second of water are currently being distributed in the network, the company faces shortage for supplying water for its subscribers.

He went on to say that although in the past 53 years the province has challenged with water shortage, this year the province has witnessed the lowest level of rainfalls. He then stipulated that the decline in the rainfalls and the drought has created problems for water and electricity supply in the country and the only solution to tackle this problem is to save water consumption and to have efficient consumption.

Amini also pointed to the COVID-19 pandemic and the rise in water consumption for observing individual sanitary protocols, and said the pandemic led to the rise in the water consumption and it put his colleagues in the company in more difficult condition comparing to the past years in a way that despite planning and managing the distribution system, the company is facing extreme drop in the pressure of water in some areas in the province.

Amini further referred to this point that water supply for some 6 million people in three provinces is done via Zayandehrud Dam and expressed hope by completing the second water supply system and its joining to the network, the company can resolve some part of existing problems in water distribution.

He once again said that consumption management by the subscribers is the only solution for this problem, adding that constant education to the citizens is continuously on the agenda.

Crescent Case Still Alive



TEHRAN (IP) – Oil Minister said that the Crescent case is still alive; so far the country has preferred not to discuss it; otherwise, there are many things that, if disclosed, things will be reversed.

In 2001, Crescent Petroleum signed a deal to import natural gas from Iran's offshore Salman field through a pipeline jointly built by Iran and Crescent.

In 2005, Crescent became the cornerstone investor in Dh6 billion Dana Gas, the region's first private-sector gas processing and distribution firm, listed on the Abu Dhabi Stock Market.

According to Shana, the Iranian Oil Ministry had a contract with Crescent Petroleum Co. in 2010 to export natural gas to the UAE, but the agreement was abruptly canceled after disclosing the corruption involved in the deal.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of the opening ceremony of the Oil Industry Innovation and Technology Park on Monday, Bijan Namdar Zangeneh responded to a question about the comments of some presidential candidates on the issue of increasing gasoline prices, saying: "Gasoline prices increase in line with the decision of the leaders of the three powers."

The Iranian oil minister further mentioned the inauguration of the Oil Industry Innovation and Technology Park and the signing of several agreements with the Ministry of Science and universities, adding: "There is a great capacity to develop knowledge-based activities in the oil industry, which I hope will be used well in the future."

Gov't Allocates 417m for Rental Assistance Amid Pandemic

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The government has released some \$417 million in rental assistance under the country's coronavirus rescue package.

The allocation of the fund was finalized on Monday during a meeting of Iran's National Headquarters for Battling Coronavirus. It was decided during the meeting chaired by President Hassan Rouhani that a total sum of 100 trillion rials be allocated as assistance to renters who have been struggling economically because of measures imposed to curb the spread of the disease.

Renters in the capital Tehran, where housing prices have soared in recent months, will be able to use loans worth 750 million rials (\$3,125) as direct payment to their landlords. The figure will reduce to 400 million rials and 250 million rials for tenants in two groups of smaller cities.

Banks will continue to process rental assistance requests until late September 2021, said an announcement by the Iranian housing and transportation ministry.

The ministry said that it will insist on its decision to impose an eviction moratorium on rent contracts that expire during the time of the pandemic.

That comes as courts in Iran have mostly refused to enforce the moratorium which aims to help millions in large cities who have fallen behind their rent payments.

The rental relief program in Iran was launched last year during the initial months of the spread of the pandemic in the country. The Monday announcement showed that loans granted under the scheme would increase by 50% this year.

Iran has introduced an array of rescue measures to tackle the economic impacts of the pandemic. Those include grants to millions of households and cheap loans to businesses hit by the disease.

Iran's Flights at Airports Doubled in Current Year

TEHRAN (MNA) – Chief Executive of Iran Airports and Air Navigation Company (IAC) said that total flights of airports running under IAC in first two months of current year (March-May) registered a 100% hike.

Siavash Amir-Makri broke the news on Tuesday and reiterated that flights of the country recorded a 100 percent growth in the first two months of the current year as compared to the months of the previous year.

He put the total number of flights launched in the first two months of the current year at 48,735.



In this period, about 3,637,000 passengers were transported at airports of the country, showing a considerable 75 percent hike as compared to the last year in terms of dispatching and admitting passengers.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Amir-Makri pointed to the transport of passengers in foreign and international flights and stated, "Statistics on flight and transportation of passengers in foreign and international flights

show 100 percent hike in the first two months of the current year."

Iranian Filmmaker Awarded by UNESCO

SHIRAZ (IRNA) - Mehdi Falamarzi from Shiraz, southern Iran, received an award from UNESCO office in Iran for making the movie '3cc' in the First Regional 100-Second Water and Energy Film Festival.

The First Regional 100-Second Water and Energy Film Festival was held online by the Ministry of Energy of Iran in cooperation with the UNESCO Tehran Cluster Office to commemorate World Environment Day 2021 in Tehran.

Short movies from Iran, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan in the categories documentary, drama and animation were shown in the festival.

Falamarzi won the honorable mention and cash prize for his film '3cc'.

The pivotal slogan of the Festival was "100 Seconds for Water and Energy" to demonstrate the importance of energy under the global status quo and with respect to the environment.

The five themes of the Festival were (1) the environmental value of water and energy, (2) the economic, social, and cultural values of water and energy, (3) climate change, water, and energy, (4) the role of the media in promoting optimal water and energy consumption management, and (5) access to safe drinking water and sustainable energy.

Iran Joins COVID-19 Vaccine Manufacturing Club

TEHRAN (MNA) – The Spokesman of the Iran Food and Drug Administration (IFDA) said that Islamic Republic of Iran joined the club of manufacturers of coronavirus, COVID-19, vaccine.

In a tweet on Monday, Kianoush Jahanpour wrote, "Islamic Republic of Iran joined the coronavirus, COVID-19, vaccine manufacturers' club by issuing a license for emergency use of COV-Iran Barakat; Iran, Russia, United States, China, UK and India." COV-Iran Barakat is a COVID-19 vaccine candidate developed by Iranian state-owned Shifa Pharmad Industrial Group.

The clinical trial of coronavirus vaccine, jointly produced by Iran and Cuba, which will be offered under the name of Soberana 02 in Cuba and Pasto-COVO in Iran, has begun on children and adolescents in Cuba, he said, adding that candidates in a heterogeneous vaccination scheme will receive two doses of Soberana -02 in addition to one Soberana Plus vaccine.

Int'l Ties Necessary to Achieve Proper Economic Growth

TEHRAN (MNA) – An Iranian presidential candidate attached great importance to the role of interaction with the world, saying that it is necessary to achieve proper economic growth and development.

On Tuesday, a press conference was held with the presence of Abdol-Nasser Hemmati, one of the seven candidates for the 13th presidential election, in Tehran university, Faculty of Economy.

JCPOA is an important deal approved by the establishment of the Islamic Republic and its implementation also is emphasized by the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, said Hemmati in this presser while explaining his plans.

Expressing hope that the United States will return the table of JCPOA and fulfill its obligations, he said that the Americans' measures will be verified, and in return, Iran will also abide by its obligations.

If the current government manages to achieve results in terms of lifting all US sanctions, that would be great, he said, adding, "I hope this happens as soon as possible, even if it does not happen in this government, it is definitely one of my first priorities to pursue the issue."

Hemmati also attached great importance to the role of interaction with the world, saying that such ties are necessary to achieve proper economic growth and development.

The candidate also referred to the maximum pressure against the country, saying, "The enemies sought to put economic pressure on the country, however, we adopted Resistance policy and managed to nullify the sanctions."

NATO Approaches Qatar to Seek Training Base for Afghan Forces

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - Security officials under NATO command have approached Qatar to secure a base that can be used to train Afghan special forces as part of a strategic commitment after foreign forces withdraw from Afghanistan, three senior Western officials said.

After two decades of war, forces from 36 countries involved in NATO's Resolute Support mission in Afghanistan are set to pull out of the country in coordination with a U.S. troop withdrawal by Sept. 11.

"We are holding talks to earmark a base in Qatar to create an exclusive training ground for senior members of the Afghan forces," said a senior Western security official in Kabul.



NZ to Apologize for Discriminatory Police Raids Against Pacific Community

WELLINGTON (Dispatches) - New Zealand is to make a formal apology to the Pacific community which felt "targeted and terrorized" during police raids searching for overstayers in the 1970s, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said on Monday.

The so-called "Dawn Raids", carried out between 1974 and 1976 to find, convict and deport overstayers, often took place very early in the morning or late at night and were routinely severe with demeaning verbal and physical treatment, Ardern said in a statement. The raids were racist as they targeted people from neighboring Pacific islands suspected of overstaying, but never those from Britain or the United States, even though about 40% of overstayers at the time were British or American.



NATO Designates China as A Systemic Challenge



BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - NATO leaders designated China as presenting "systemic challenges" in a summit communique on Monday that marked a forceful stance for the Western military alliance, declared a priority for U.S. President Joe Biden after the Trump years.

In a diplomatic victory for Biden, who has urged his fellow NATO leaders to stand up to China's authoritarianism and growing military might, the final statement branded China a security risk to the Western alliance.

The language, which will now set the path for alliance policy, comes a day after the Group of Seven rich nations issued a statement on human rights in China and Taiwan that Beijing said slandered its reputation.

"China's stated ambitions and assertive behavior present systemic challenges to the rules-based international order and to areas relevant to alliance security," NATO leaders said in a communique after their summit.

Biden also told European allies the alliance's mutual defense pact was a "sacred obligation" for the United States -- a marked shift in tone from his predecessor Donald Trump, who had threatened to withdraw from the alliance and accused Europeans of contributing too little.

"I want all Europe to know that the United States is there," said Biden. "NATO is critically important to us."

Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel, at her last summit of the alliance before she steps down in September, described Biden's arrival as the opening of a new chapter.

Biden said both Russia and China were not acting "in a way that is consistent with what we had hoped", referring to Western efforts since the mid-1990s to bring both countries into the fold of liberal democracies.

In a sign of a common position emerging on China, no longer seen as a benign trading partner, the European Union has already designated Beijing a "systemic rival".

Allied leaders are also concerned about Russia's military build-up near Ukraine, as well as its covert and cyber attacks to undermine Western states.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said China's growing military presence from the Baltics to Africa meant nuclear-armed NATO had to be prepared.

Belgium's Prime Minister Alexander De Croo welcomes U.S. President Joe Biden as he arrives ahead of a NATO summit, at Brussels Military Airport in Melsbroek, Belgium June 13, 2021. Didier Lebrun/Pool via REUTERS

"China is coming closer to us. We see them in cyberspace, we see China in Africa, but we also see China investing heavily in our own critical infrastructure," he said, a reference to ports and telecoms networks. "We need to respond together as an alliance."

G7 nations meeting in Britain over the weekend scolded China over human rights in its Xinjiang region, called for Hong Kong to keep a high degree of autonomy and demanded a full investigation of the origins of the coronavirus in China.

Putin Denies Russia Cyberattacks on U.S.

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - President Vladimir Putin dismissed accusations that Russia was behind cyberattacks against the United States as "farcical" in an interview with NBC broadcast on Monday ahead of his summit with President Joe Biden.

The Russian leader also said he was open to a prison swap with the United States -- the fate of prisoners is set to be on the agenda when the two meet in Geneva on Wednesday -- and said that jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny would "not be treated any worse than anybody else."

Biden will attend the summit after a week of meeting allies from the G7, European Union and NATO, with tensions between Moscow and Washington at their highest in years over a long list of disputes.



Novavax COVID-19 Vaccine More Than 90% Effective in U.S. Trial

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Novavax Inc on Monday said its COVID-19 vaccine was more than 90% effective, including against a variety of concerning variants of the coronavirus in a large, late-stage U.S.-based clinical trial.

The study of nearly 30,000 volunteers in the United States and Mexico puts Novavax on track to file for emergency authorization in the United States and elsewhere in the third quarter of 2021, the company said.

The protein-based vaccine was more than 93% effective against the more easily transmissible predominant coronavirus variants that have caused concern among scientists and public health officials, Novavax said.

Protein-based vaccines are a conventional approach that use purified pieces of the virus to spur an immune response, such as those used against whooping cough and shingles. While the trial was being conducted, the virus variant first discovered in the United Kingdom and now known as the Alpha variant was the most common circulating in the United States, the company said.

The concerning variants first identified in Brazil, South Africa and India were also detected among the trial's participants, Novavax's head of research and development, Dr. Gregory Glenn, told Reuters.

The vaccine was 91% effective among volunteers at high risk of severe infection and 100% effective in preventing moderate and severe cases of COVID-19. It was roughly 70% effective against virus variants that Novavax was unable to identify, Glenn said.

"Practically speaking, it's very important that the vaccine can protect against a virus that is wildly swinging around" in terms of new variants, Glenn said.

Novavax said the vaccine was generally well tolerated. Side effects included headache, fatigue and muscle pain and were generally mild. A small number of participants experienced side effects described as severe.

Novavax remains on track to produce 100 million doses per month by the end of the third quarter of 2021 and 150 million doses per month in the fourth quarter of 2021, the company said.

Swiss Reject Law to Help Country Meet Paris Carbon Emissions Goal

ZURICH (Dispatches) - Swiss voters rejected a trio of environmental proposals on Sunday, including a new law intended to help the country meet its goal for cutting carbon emissions under the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

A new CO2 law was narrowly rejected, with 51.6% of voters opposing it in a nationwide referendum conducted under the country's system of direct democracy.

The result was a defeat for the Swiss government which supported the new law that included measures such as increasing a surcharge on car fuel and imposing a levy on flight tickets.

The rejection meant it would now be "very difficult" for Switzerland to reach its 2030 goal of cutting carbon emissions to half of their 1990 levels and to become net neutral on emissions by 2050, Environment Minister Simonetta Sommaruga said.

"Today's no is not a no to climate protection, it is a no to the law on which we have voted," Sommaruga told a news conference.

"Debates in the last few weeks have shown that many people want to strengthen the climate protection but not with this law," she said.

The government would now seek to extend uncontroversial measures like a duty for fuel importers to invest in climate protection projects, and attempt to forge a new consensus with the population on climate policies, she added.

Also rejected was a proposal which would have made Switzerland only the second country in the world to ban artificial pesticides outright, and another proposal to reduce their use by redirecting subsidies to farmers who no longer used the chemicals.

Supporters had argued that pesticides were linked to health risks, while opponents had claimed a ban on pesticides would have led to more expensive food, job losses for the Swiss food processing industry, and greater dependence on imports.

Antoinette Gilson, one of the authors of the artificial pesticides initiative, said the results did not mean the Swiss were unconcerned about the environment, but were more worried about immediate problems at present.

"People find it very hard to think about problems in the future, and don't see the urgency of these problems," she said. "When they are having a difficult time during the COVID-19 pandemic they are thinking about immediate concerns more."



Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi Goes on Trial

YANGON (Dispatches) - Myanmar's ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi went on trial on Monday, appearing unwell as the first witnesses took the stand in cases against her of illegally possessing walkie-talkie radios and breaking coronavirus protocols, her lawyer said.

Suu Kyi, 75, faces a slew of charges since being overthrown by the army in a Feb. 1 coup that cut short a decade of tentative democratic reforms and has plunged the Southeast Asian country into chaos.

"Daw Aung San Suu Kyi seemed not very well but throughout the hearing she seemed quite interested and paid keen attention," the head of her legal team, Khin Maung Zaw, said in a statement after the day of hearings.

Suu Kyi's supporters say the charges are politically motivated and designed to end the political life of a woman who championed democracy for decades under previous military administrations, much of the time under house arrest.

The Nobel Peace Prize laureate faced three cases on Monday at the specially built court in the capital Naypyidaw, where she had already appeared at preliminary hearings.

Two of Monday's cases were linked to the possession of the radios and one under the Natural Disaster Management Law for breaching coronavirus regulations while campaigning for the election she won last November.

She also faces charges of incitement - with hearings set for Tuesday - and more serious charges of violating the Official Secrets Act and under the Anti-Corruption Law.

Former President Win Myint also faces charges of violating the coronavirus measures. Police Major Myint Naing took the stand against him and Suu Kyi. Police Major Kyi Lin then testified in the cases over the radios.

Monday's hearings lasted more than five hours.

Her legal team have denied any wrongdoing by Suu Kyi and her chief lawyer, Khin Maung Zaw, called the most recent corruption charges "absurd".





Zaferanieh Apt (\$2400)
220sq.m, 3bdrs
S/pool, S, J
balcony, pkg
marble fl
Fully Furn

Shanon (adviser)

Elahieh Villa (\$4000)
1400sq.m
6bdrs, S/p
green yard
marble floor
Nicely Furn

Parsian

Kamranieh (\$2000)
200sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p
S, J, balcony, & F.F

Niavaran (\$8000)
3storey, Total 15bdrs
green yard, & pkgs

(\$1800)
Sa'adat abad Apt
2bdrs, 150sq.m, F.F

+989121907875
Shanon_tari@yahoo.com
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(\$5000)
Darrous Villa
1000sq.m, 5bdrs, yard



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Bitcoin Rises Above \$40,000

LONDON (Dispatches) - Bitcoin soared past the \$40,000 (£28,328) mark again on Monday afternoon in London as American hedge fund magnate Paul Tudor Jones and Tesla (TSLA) boss Elon Musk threw their weight behind the cryptocurrency. Tudor Jones compared bitcoin to gold, in remarks, saying that it would be a good way to protect his wealth and diversify his portfolio.

"I like bitcoin as a portfolio diversifier. Everybody asks me what should I do with my bitcoin? The only thing I know for certain, I want 5% in gold, 5% in bitcoin, 5% in cash, 5% in commodities. At this point in time, I don't know what I want to do with the other 80% until I see what the Fed is going to do," Jones told CNBC's Squawk Box.



Turkish Housing Market Grows in May

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkey's housing market grew 16.2% year-on-year in May, data showed Monday, due to a sharp downturn in the same month last year caused by the initial measures to curb the coronavirus outbreak.

Home sales still marked the lowest level in a year, mostly due to a strict nationwide lockdown in May to curb the rise in daily cases. Some 59,166 residential properties were sold last month, according to the Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat) data. Month on-month sales were down 38.2%.

Sales surged on high demand from foreign buyers, who purchased 1,776 homes in May, a 106.5% year-on-year increase, the data showed. The rise in borrowing costs from a summer low has continued to weigh in on mortgage sales, which fell 42.9% in May from a year earlier to 10,560 units. They accounted for 17.8% of the total sales in the month.

Istanbul, the country's largest city by population and one of its top tourist centers, took the largest share of house sales with 19.2%, or 11,356 units.

The capital Ankara and the Aegean province of Izmir racked up 5,653 and 3,298 of total home sales, respectively.

More than half of the residential properties, or 818 houses, bought by foreigners in the month were in Istanbul, followed by the Mediterranean resort city of Antalya with 341 and Ankara with 106.

Iraqi citizens topped the list as they purchased 239 houses. They were followed by Iranians with 231 and Russians with 119 units.

A total of 18,204 homes were sold for the first time, up 8% versus the same month last year. The first house sales had a 30.8% share of all purchases in the month.

Residential properties sold from January through May were down 3.8% year-on-year to 418,079, the data showed.

Cheap loans extended to ease economic fallout from the pandemic drove the 11.2% year-on-year rise in the overall house sales in the country in 2020, when nearly 1.5 million houses, an all-time high, changed hands.

Mortgaged sales in the January-May period were down 54.3% to 75,290 units. Houses sold for the first time decreased by 8.2% to 127,786. Secondhand house sales fell 1.8% to 290,293.

Foreign buyers purchased 15,740 houses in the five-month period, increasing 24.9% from a year ago.

They had purchased around 40,812 houses throughout 2020, a 10.3% year-on-year decrease from 45,483 units in 2019. It still marked the second-highest annual figure ever.

Turkey imposed curfews, weekend lockdowns and restaurant closures in December. Some of the restrictions were eased in March before a full lockdown was reimposed at the end of April due to surging COVID-19 cases. The country has been gradually easing measures since mid-May. Sector representatives say sales could maintain the upward trend along with the summer season.

Özyurtlar Holding Chairperson Tamer Özyurt said the volatility in the exchange rate brought disadvantages and advantages to the real estate sector.

He dubbed an increase in costs as a disadvantage but said home prices were attractive to foreigners.

House price index surged nearly 32% year-on-year in March, an all-time high, data by the country's central bank showed Friday.

Saudi First Quarter GDP Shrinks 3%, Hit by Oil Sector Decline

RIYADH (Dispatches) - Saudi Arabia's gross domestic product fell 3% in the first quarter, slightly less than official estimates and compared with a 1% contraction last year, as a sharp fall in the oil sector pulled back the economy, data showed.

The kingdom's economy has been hit hard by the twin shock of last year's historic oil price crash and the COVID-19 pandemic. The non-oil sector grew 2.9%, from 1.6% growth a year earlier, while the oil sector declined by 11.7% which was a much sharper fall than the 4.6% contraction a year earlier, the General Authority for Statistics said in a statement on Monday.

In flash estimates in May the authority said the economy shrank 3.3% in the first quarter and the non-oil sector grew for the first since the first quarter of 2020.

The non-oil and private sectors are at the centre of Vision 2030, de facto ruler Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's transformation plan to wean the Saudi economy off oil.

Real GDP, an inflation-adjusted measure, shrank 4.1% last year. The International Monetary Fund expects the Saudi economy to grow 2.1% this year. Saudi Arabia's private sector expanded by 4.4% in the first quarter and the government sector declined slightly, by 0.4%, the official data showed.



Euro Zone at a Turning Point

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - The euro zone economy is at a turning point but its recovery must be firm and sustainable before the European Central Bank can debate clawing back emergency support, ECB President Christine Lagarde told Politico in an interview.

The ECB last week agreed to maintain an elevated pace of bond purchases to keep borrowing costs ultra low and policymakers did not even entertain questions about tapering support, even as growth rebounds faster than earlier predicted.

"I am not suggesting that the pandemic emergency purchase program (PEPP) is going to stop on 31 March," Lagarde was quoted on Monday as saying. "We have plenty of flexibility, but in terms of economic outlook we are heading in the right direction."

"It is far too early to debate these issues," she said about winding down the 1.85 trillion euro PEPP, which is scheduled to last at least until March 31 or until the crisis phase of the pandemic is over.

Economists expect the ECB to start discussing the end of PEPP at their September meeting and the vast majority of ECB watchers polled by Reuters do not expect PEPP to be enlarged and extended again.

Instead, the ECB is more likely to shift policy support to an older and more rigid Asset Purchase Program, which is likely to remain in place indefinitely as inflation is due to undershoot the ECB's target for years to come.

"We are at a turning point where, bearing in mind alternative (virus) variants, we are on that recovery path, heading firmly towards a return to the pre-COVID-19 level," Lagarde added.

Virus Outbreaks at Thai Factories Threaten Export Sector, Recovery

LONDON (Dispatches) - A series of coronavirus outbreaks in Thai factories is raising concerns that the export sector could be hit hard, threatening to further undermine an economy as it struggles to recover from the pandemic's crippling blow to the crucial tourism industry.

The virus has swept through over 130 factories, including those supplying international brands, with more than 7,100 cases across 11 provinces, making manufacturing one of the top sources of infections along with prisons and construction camps.

The affected plants are just a fraction of about 63,000 factories in Thailand that employ 3.4 million, government data shows, but officials worry about the impact on exports that have kept the struggling economy

moving as income from tourism has collapsed.

In 2020, exports accounted for 45% of gross domestic product. The tourism-reliant economy, a global trade hub, suffered a steep 6.1% contraction last year, and last month the government trimmed GDP growth forecast for this year to 1.5%-2.5% from 2.5%-3.5% previously.

Electronics, rubber gloves, and food are among the export sectors hit by infections, Federation of Thai Industries vice chairman Kriengkrai Thiennukul told Reuters, but he said it was too early to assess the overall impact.

"If it continues the damage will increase so factories have to be fully vaccinated," he said.

Already, some of the manufacturers affected by the outbreak have had to curtail production.

Charoen Pokphand foods Pcl, which exports to 40 countries from Thailand, said a factory that was closed due to infections accounted for 10% broiler chicken production. Instant noodle maker, Thai President Foods Pcl closed a factory that produces rice vermicelli and rice noodle. Overseas sales accounted for about a third of the company's semi-finished food sales.

Some factories continued partial operations while others have temporarily closed and quarantined their workers. The outbreak has sent industry sentiment tumbling to an 11-month low. Thailand has recorded a total of 199,264 COVID-19 infections and 1,466 deaths so far, with over 80% of the new cases and 90% of the fatalities reported after April. As of now, only 1.6 million people out of a population of over 66 million have been fully vaccinated.

The government has been trying to contain the outbreak with a "bubble and seal" policy, which takes effect when 10% of factory workers are infected. The confirmed cases are then sent for treatment while the remainder are kept at the factory for 28 days.

Workers at factories and in construction camps who live on site - many of them low-wage migrant workers - have been unable to leave their workplace, even if they are not infected. The policy differs from other workplaces affected by the coronavirus.

Northern Ireland Sees Fastest Economic Output Rise Since 2014



LONDON (BBC) - Lockdown easing in May caused economic output in Northern Ireland to rise at its fastest rate since 2014, according to an Ulster Bank survey.

However, inflationary pressures are also at a record high.

Every month the bank asks firms across the private sector about things such as staffing levels, exports and new orders.

The survey is considered a reliable indicator of economic performance across the region. Services, which is the largest sector in the Northern Ireland economy, reported growth for the first time since the Covid-19 pandemic hit.

In May, growth was reported across all four sectors - manufacturing, retail, services and construction - for the first time since January 2019.

Inflationary pressures were also rising at a record rate with firms in Northern Ireland continuing to deal with a rise in their input costs.

That means manufacturers, retailers and construction firms raised their prices last month at the fastest pace in the survey's 19-year history.

"Across the UK, Northern Ireland firms continue to experience the most severe rates of inflation with firms invariably linking the increased costs and lengthening delivery times to Brexit paperwork," said Ulster Bank Chief Economist Richard Ramsey.

While optimistic about growth in the next month or two, Mr Ramsey said significant challenges remain. He said: "Global supply chain disruption and inflationary pressures, though expected to be transitory, will act as a headwind to the rapid recovery."

"Meanwhile as we saw last week, the continuing saga that is Brexit and the Northern Ireland Protocol, will be a source of political and economic turbulence for the foreseeable future," he added.

South Korea's Financial System at Risk



SEOUL (Dispatches) - South Korea's household debt is inviting concerns about the country's economic resilience as its accumulated debt has grown more, relative to income, than that of any other economy.

Asia's fourth-largest economy continues to see a rapid rise in household debt, largely due to increased borrowing to make ends meet in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and to fund real estate purchases and stock investments amid record-low interest rates.

As of the end of March, outstanding debt held by Korean households reached 1,765 trillion won (\$1.58 trillion), up 9.53 percent from a year ago, according to the Bank of Korea.

The latest figure is a letdown for the government, which vowed to bring the annual increase in household debt to between 5 percent and 6 percent this year. The rate stood at 7.9 percent last year.

Experts voiced concern over the high degree of household indebtedness, saying it could lead to systemic risks.

According to a survey released by the central bank on Friday, 46 percent of financial experts identified the rise in household debt as the biggest risk factor for the country's financial system, followed by a resurgence of COVID-19 and a delay in the vaccine rollout with 37 percent.

"Currently, South Korea's household debt is the highest in the world in terms of both size and rate of increase relative to nominal gross domestic product," said Shin Yong-sang, a research fellow at the Korea Institute of Finance.

The country's household debt-to-GDP ratio increased from 62.7 percent at the end of 2008 to 90.3 percent as of the end of March. The figure is much higher than the global average of 76.1 percent and 81.0 percent for advanced economies.

Behind the surge in household debt is the ultralow key interest rate, which has been left unchanged at an all-time low of 0.50 percent since May last year, resulting in excess liquidity.

"If the country gets closer to achieving over 4 percent economic growth as expected by the government and the BOK, it will be possible to preemptively raise the benchmark rate at least once in the second half of this year," Shin said.

On the back of strong export growth and expansionary macroeconomic policy, the authorities have recently turned more upbeat about the economic rebound from a contraction of 1.0 percent last year.

Talker to Vie at Spanish Film Festival

TEHRAN (MNA) – Directed by Mehrshad Ranjbar, the Iranian short film “Talker” has managed to participate in a Spanish festival.

Cinema Jove International Film Festival will be held in Valencia from June 18 to 26, 2021.

The Iranian short film Talker directed by Mehrshad Ranjbar and produced by Mojgan Raygan and Reza Fateh Elahipour will compete in the 36th edition of this Spanish cinematic event.

Cinema Jove is now among the top most important international film festivals held in Spain.



G7 Pandemic Pledges Not Nearly Enough

GENEVA (AFP) - The G7's vow to share a billion Covid vaccine doses with poorer nations is too little too late, according to the WHO and global health leaders, as experts warned Monday more than 11 billion shots are needed.

Faced with outrage over disparities in access to jabs, the Group of Seven industrialized powers pledged during a weekend summit in Britain to increase dose donations to over one billion.

“We welcome the generous announcements about donations of vaccines and thank leaders... but we need more, and we need them faster,” World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus in a statement Sunday.

While people in many wealthy nations are enjoying a return to a sense of normalcy thanks to high vaccination rates, the shots remain scarce in less well-off parts of the world.

In terms of doses administered, the imbalance between the G7 and low-income countries, as defined by the World Bank, is 73 to one.

Many of the donated doses will be filtered through Covax, a global body charged with ensuring equitable vaccine distribution.

Run by the WHO, the Gavi vaccine alliance and CEPI, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, it has to date shipped 85 million vaccine doses to 131 countries -- far fewer than anticipated.

Carl Bildt, the WHO's special envoy for the ACT Accelerator programme to speed up production and access to diagnostics, treatments and vaccines, said one billion doses was far from enough.

“To truly end the pandemic, our goal must be to vaccinate at least 70 percent of the world's population by the time G7 meet again in Germany next year,” the former Swedish prime minister said on Twitter.

“This can be done with the support of the G7 and G20, together. To do that, we need 11 billion doses.”

As well as dose sharing the G7 anti-pandemic battle plan includes a series of engagements to avert future pandemics -- slashing time taken to develop and licence vaccines, to under 100 days, reinforcing global surveillance and strengthening the WHO.

Observers voiced scepticism at the willingness to follow through on the last point especially.

“I will believe (that) point when the contributions to WHO are increased,” tweeted Ilona Kickbusch, founding director and chair of the Global Health Centre in Geneva.

Others stressed the need to quickly resolve the issue of Covid vaccine patent



protections, to boost production.

Full-fledged negotiations towards a possible suspension of intellectual property protections for Covid vaccines, as well as other medical tools needed to battle the pandemic, have just begun at the World Trade Organization after months of contentious debate.

G7 leaders “say they want to vaccinate the world by the end of next year, but their actions show they care more about protecting the monopolies and patents of pharmaceutical giants,” lamented Max Lawson, Oxfam's head of inequity policy.

Human Rights Watch agreed.

“Focusing on vaccines and making charitable donations are not enough,” Aruna Kashyap, HRW senior counsel for business and human rights, told AFP.

“The G7's failure to unequivocally support a temporary waiver of global intellectual property rules is deadly status quo.”

More than \$16 billion (13.2 billion euros) is still needed to fully finance the ACT Accelerator this year alone.

“There is still a significant funding gap that must be closed,” Bildt said. “The time to act is now.”

Russia's Population Decline More Than Doubles in 2020



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia's population decline more than doubled in 2020, the latest sign of the coronavirus pandemic's impact on the country, according to dispatch figures from Russia's federal statistics agency seen by The Moscow Times.

Russia's population totaled 146.05 million as of Jan. 1, 2021, down from 146.75 million at the start of 2020 — a decrease of 702,072 people.

The more than 700,000-person decline exceeds Rosstat's previous estimates and marks the largest drop since 2005, when Russia's population decreased by 564,500.

According to calculations by the RBC news website, some of the worst-hit places were Russia's second city St. Petersburg, where the population declined by a record 58 times, while the republic of Tatarstan saw a 72-fold decline.

Russia has recorded some 475,000 excess fatalities between the start of the pandemic and the end of April, the latest month for which data is available, according to calculations by The Moscow Times. That is one of the world's highest tallies both in overall terms and adjusted for population.

Rosstat earlier attributed the decline in the sharp slowdown in migration spurred by the pandemic. Russia is currently experiencing unprecedented labor shortages with many migrant workers unable to enter Russia due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Rosstat also said the decline was due to a decreasing birthrate linked to economic uncertainty as Russian's real disposable incomes have fallen to an eight-year low.

According to government forecasts, the country will be able to achieve population growth rates no earlier than 2030. Rosstat predicted that the country's population could drop by more than 12 million by 2035.

“Unique” Boat Built by Homeless Poles Prepares to Set Sail

WARSAW (AFP) - Docked in a river harbor in Warsaw next to coal storage and a rubbish tip, a steel-hulled sailing boat built by a group of homeless Poles is preparing for its maiden voyage.

The boat was christened on Saturday with the name “Father Boguslaw” after the priest who initiated the improbable project in 2006 with the aim of reintegrating homeless people back into society. “The boat is finally alive!” its captain, Waldemar Rzeznicki, who has headed up the project, said as he hoisted a flag up the mast of the 17.8-metre (58-foot) long schooner.

“Every boat has its soul, every boat is different. This one is really unique,” he said.

One of the project participants, Slawomir Michalski, 64, who is homeless and also spoke to AFP on a previous visit in 2017, said the result was all the more remarkable for the lack of tools available.

“We didn't have the technical means normally used on shipyards like cranes or forklifts,” he said.

“We had simple DIY tools: a cutting torch for the steel, some hammers, sheet metal shears, some grinders,” he said. A lot of the material -- like the wood for the masts, the sheet metal or the eight tons of lead for the keel -- was donated. The diesel motor comes from an old fishing boat and still needs to be repaired. Father Boguslaw Paleczny, who started out as a naval engineer before becoming a priest, did not live to see the project completed.

But the work continued after his death in 2009.

A total of some 300 people -- residents of a homeless hostel in Warsaw but also Scouts and volunteers -- took part in the construction.

Some worked only a day or two, others several weeks or even years.

“We have completed his testament. It is as if this was his child,” Michalski said.

There is still work to do before the boat sets off on a planned 418-kilometre (260-mile) journey down the Vistula River to the port of Gdansk.

The boat needs a navigations system, electrics and safety equipment.

But for Marek Metrak, one of the homeless people involved in the project from the start, the aim has already been achieved.

“The project changed my life in a radical way -- 180 degrees. I learned that when I start something, I can finish it. Before it was the opposite,” he said. “I have gained a new life. Like this boat which has been put in the water and can sail, I too have become independent,” the 74-year-old said.

“Just two weeks ago, I got the keys of my new house from the council. I'm writing books. I don't drink or smoke any more. I feel younger,” he said, proudly holding out his house keys.

Spanish Economy Will Rebound by 5.9% in 2021

MADRID (Dispatches) - Spain's GDP will grow by 5.9% in 2021, after the historic decline of 10.8% in 2020, thanks to increased domestic demand, which will benefit largely from the aid of European funds, according to estimates by the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and the Central Bank.

Thus, domestic demand will rebound by 5.7% this year, driven first by business investment and then household and household consumption. Regarding the external balance, exports of goods and consumption will rise by 9.8%, while imports will grow at a rate of 9.6%, resulting in a net positive balance of 0.2%.

The projected GDP of Spain in 2022 is 6.3%, driven by the increase in demand, the recovery and transformation plan, resilience and the recovery of tourism. Moreover, greater



certainty would increase private consumption and investment in the second half of the year, as EU funds are deployed.

The “New Deal” announced by US President Joe Biden will contribute 1.4 percentage points to the global economic recovery, according to estimates by the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the European Central Bank and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, which predicts an economic phenomenon by 5.8% this year compared to 4.4% initially estimated.

“The burgeoning North American economy translates into an increase in demand for goods and services in the rest of the world,” explains Managing Partner of Advice Strategic Consultants, Jorge Diaz Cardel, in his latest book, The Biden-Harris New Deal: Economic Policy for the Twenty-first Century and American Leadership.

Top Republicans...

FROM PAGE 1

“Even if Iran were to relinquish all of the physical fruits of its violations – such as noncompliant centrifuges and nuclear materials – it cannot unlearn the technical capacity and knowledge that it has gleaned from the prohibited nuclear activities it has undertaken,” the Republicans' letter added.

“Given these material changes in the strategic context, any prospective agreement related to the nuclear program of Iran that commits the United States to action clearly constitutes a new agreement that must be transmitted to Congress for review pursuant to 42 U.S.C. 2160e.”

Stronger Than Ever...

FROM PAGE 1

Currently, the Iranian navy is sailing toward the North Atlantic Ocean using two homegrown vessels to mark the country's longest naval navigation in the high seas ever.

In the ceremony on Monday, the commander of the Iranian Navy says enemies of the Islamic Republic are deeply concerned about the presence of the country's naval fleet in the Atlantic Ocean.

Rear Admiral Hossein Khanzadi said, “The presence of the naval fleet of the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy in the Atlantic Ocean has greatly worried the enemies of the country.” He added, “This is while the presence of the strategic naval forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran is aimed at [promoting] cooperation with [littoral] countries in the Atlantic Ocean.”

The Iranian commander noted that the American media and the country's statesmen have been preoccupied over recent weeks with the arrival of an Iranian naval fleet, including the Makran port ship and the domestically-built Sahand destroyer, in the Atlantic Ocean for the first time.

Makran is a ship that has been manufactured to carry out long-distance operations in remote areas and has equipment enabling it to conduct missions anywhere, the Iranian Navy commander said. Earlier Deputy Chief of Army for Coordination Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari said that the Iranian naval fleet has managed to reach the Atlantic Ocean without calling 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 on this path with strength,” Sayyari added.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the Iranian Navy commander said as stipulated by Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei, “high seas belong to all nations and we are now sailing in high seas of the world and this is our first presence in the Atlantic Ocean.”

The senior commander emphasized that the Iranian naval forces are bent on boosting friendly ties with other countries under the flag of the Islamic Republic.

So Iranian navy is now getting stronger in repelling the threats via sea against the country especially in the Persian Gulf and free waters, and enemies cannot dare to attack at it by sea. By the way, Iran can expand its power and trade by sea and restore security in the waters of the region.

Such achievements lead to more concerns for the enemies of the country and put them in a weaker stand against Iran and now the world can gradually realize this point that Iranian experts can materialize any wish and the country will soon be fully self-sufficient in providing its needs in any sector.

Now it is the nation's turn to show the progress and maturity in the upcoming presidential election by massive turnout because it will strengthen the country's position in the world and will encourage the domestic scientists and experts for making more achievement for the better of the country and its future in facing the threats and problems.

Saudi-Iranian...

FROM PAGE 1

It is also currently working to achieve a breakthrough in the Yemen crisis after an Omani security delegation visited Houthi leadership in Sana'a. An Omani political source who talked to The Arab Weekly, was optimistic about his country's ability to solve the Yemeni conflict despite all remaining hurdles, even if the matter will take some time.

The Omani news agency ONA reported that Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan had arrived in the Sultanate for a short visit, Monday. The agency added that the Saudi minister “carried a verbal message from Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz to Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, related to relations between the two countries and prospects for strengthening them.”

Oil Gains as...

FROM PAGE 1

A U.S. return to the deal would pave the way for the lifting of sanctions on Iran that would allow the OPEC member to resume exports of crude. It is “looking increasingly unlikely that we will see the U.S. rejoin the Iranian nuclear deal before the Iranian presidential elections later this week,” ING Economics said in a note.

Other members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) along with major producers including Russia - a group known as OPEC+ - have been withholding output to support prices amid the pandemic.

“Additional supply from OPEC+ will be needed over the second half of this year, with demand expected to continue its recovery,” ING said. Still, prices were off their highs earlier in the day, with U.S. crude briefly dipping into negative territory.

“Daily technical indicators are currently pointing to crude oil in overbought territory and a pullback may be due,” said Avtar Sandu, senior manager commodities at Phillip Futures.

Investors and traders are also watching the outcome of a two-day U.S. Federal Reserve meeting that starts later on Tuesday for signals on when it will start to scale back monetary stimulus, he said. The Fed is getting ready to starting debating how and when to start tapering a massive asset-purchase program that helped support the U.S. economy during the pandemic. read more

Iran Flights From/to Pakistan, France Resume

TEHRAN (MNA) – The spokesman of Iran's Civil Aviation Organization has said that the flights from and to the two countries of France and Pakistan have resumed.

Mohammad Hassan Zibakhsh, Iran's Civil Aviation Organization spokesman said that France and Pakistan have been removed from the list of blacklisted countries based on decisions by the Ministry of Health as the Covid-19 related restrictions ease.

He said that the travelers from France need to present a valid certificate that they have received both doses of the anti-Covid-19 vaccines, adding “From today, flights from/to France and Pakistan have resumed.”

Farah to Make Last-Gasp Effort To Qualify for Olympics

LONDON (Dispatches) - Two-time Olympic 10,000m champion Mo Farah will make a last-gasp attempt to qualify for the Tokyo Games at the British Athletics Championships in Manchester on June 25.

The British runner, 38, is yet to hit the qualifying standard for the distance after a failed attempt earlier this month in Birmingham, where he was hampered by an ankle injury. He needs to beat a time of 27 minutes, 28 seconds to stand a chance of defending his crown at the Olympics, which start in Japan next month.

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Titmus Narrowly Misses 200m Free World Record

DELAIDE (AFP) - A sizzling Ariarne Titmus clocked the second fastest 200m freestyle in history on Monday, narrowly missing the 12-year-old world record, while Kaylee McKeown swam the year's quickest 200m medley as they ramped up Olympic preparations.

It was an incredible effort by Titmus, who touched in 1min 53.09sec, more than a second better than American superstar Katie Ledecky this season and just outside Federica Pellegrini's world record 1:52.98.

Morata Jeered as Wasteful Spain Frustrated by Sweden

MADRID (Dispatches) - Spain's new team struggled with the familiar problems on Monday as a string of missed chances allowed Sweden to hang on for a goalless draw in their Euro 2020 opener in Seville.

Alvaro Morata wasted the best opportunity of a dominant first half, in which Spain churned out 419 passes, the most of any team on record in the opening 45 minutes of a European Championship fixture. Morata was whistled by his own fans when substituted with 25 minutes left, with Luis Enrique now facing questions over his decision to leave out Gerard Moreno, the Villarreal striker who scored 23 goals last season.

Spain lost their rhythm after the interval and Sweden might even have won it, the excellent Alexander Isak hitting the post before his strike partner Marcus Berg missed a sitter from two yards out.

"They decided to defend, defend and defend. It was a very unfair result," said Luis Enrique, who also complained about the pitch. "The players struggled to control the ball," he said.

A goalless draw leaves Spain playing catch-up in Group E after Slovakia earlier pulled off a shock 2-1 victory over Poland, raising the stakes for the game between Spain and Poland on Saturday, when a loser would be left struggling to qualify.

Another failure to convert possession into chances was reminiscent of recent disappointments for Spain, most notably when they were frustrated by Russia at the 2018 World Cup, before going out on penalties.

In the wake of that defeat, Luis Enrique was tasked with launching a new era as coach, a project that involved promoting a fresh crop of players but also a more direct, penetrative style.

His team were impressive in the first half, a far cry from some of the ponderous passing displays that made Spain look out of date in recent major tournaments.

But the second half drifted, perhaps through a lack of confidence or even sharpness, given the team were unable to train together for most of last week, separated according to protocol after Sergio Busquets, still absent, and Diego Llorente tested positive for Covid-19.

Indonesian Doubles Star Kido Dies of Heart Attack at 36

JAKARTA (Dispatches) - Indonesian badminton player Markis Kido, an Olympic doubles gold medallist, has died aged 36 from a heart attack, the Badminton World Federation (BWF) said in a tweet on Monday.

The doubles specialist won gold at the 2008 Beijing Olympics partnering Hendra Setiawan, a year after the pair won the men's doubles title at the world championship in Kuala Lumpur.

He also won the World Cup title in 2006 and Asian Games gold four years later, also partnering Setiawan.

The BWF and the Indonesian Badminton Association did not provide further details.

Nuggets Center Jokic Apologizes After Being Ejected Against Suns

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Denver Nuggets center Nikola Jokic has apologized after the NBA's MVP was ejected after taking a swing at Phoenix Suns guard Cameron Payne in Sunday's Western Conference semi-final exit.

Jokic caught Payne across the face as the Serbian attempted to steal the ball with 3:52 remaining in the third quarter.

Suns guard Devin Booker confronted Jokic after the foul and the teams briefly scuffled before being separated.

Jokic was ejected following a review. He finished with 22 points and 11 rebounds as Denver lost Game Four 118-125 and were swept 4-0 in the best-of-seven series.

"I thought honestly they would not eject me," Jokic said.

"I wanted to change the rhythm of the game, I wanted to give us some energy, maybe change the whistle a little bit, so I wanted to make a hard foul.

"Did I hit him, did I not hit him? We don't know. So I say sorry if I did because I did not want to injure him or hit him in the head on purpose."

Booker, who was given a technical foul for the confrontation, said Jokic's foul was an "emotional play".



on 18 minutes, but Karol Linetty equalised for Poland right at the start of the second half.

Poland were reduced to 10 men on the hour when midfielder Grzegorz Krychowiak picked up a second yellow card, and Slovakia made their advantage count as Skrinariar drove in a well-taken winner at a corner. "We're delighted to start the competition with a win. It was a difficult game, Poland are a quality team," said Skrinariar.

Poland striker Robert Lewandowski found his opportunities limited by Slovakia after a prolific season with Bayern Munich that saw him set a Bundesliga record with 41 goals.

"Skriniar put in a great performance. I think the whole team played very well," said Slovakia coach Stefan Tarkovic.

"I'm really happy we managed to neutralise a great player such as Lewandowski."

Slovakia, who reached the last 16 on their European Championship debut five years ago, play Sweden next in Group E on Friday while Poland go to Seville to face Spain the following day. Poland coach Paulo Sousa opted to start Lewandowski as the lone striker, with his attacking options limited by injuries that ruled both Arkadiusz Milik and Krzysztof Piatek out of the tournament.

Buffon Not the Retiring Type Just Yet

ROME (Dispatches) - Gianluigi Buffon may have ended his near two-decade career at Juventus but retirement is the last thing on the mind of the Italian football colossus.

"I'm in the middle of important discussions which will ultimately lead me abroad to play as a first team regular in the Champions League, or in Italy," the 43-year-old said on Monday.

Reports in the Italian media suggest Buffon could well end up in Serie B, back at Parma, the club where he began his decorated career aged 17 in 1995.

"In any case it will be something I'm not going to regret," Buffon told Mediaset television.

At Parma he won the precursor to the Europa League, the UEFA Cup, and the Italian Cup in 1999 before joining Juventus in 2001. Since then Buffon and Juve have been inseparable aside from a season-long spell at Paris Saint-Germain in 2018-19.

One of the stars of Italy's 2006 World Cup triumph with a record 176 caps for his country, he also holds the Serie A record of the number of games played - 657.



Federer Eases Into Second Round at Halle

HALLE (Dispatches) - Roger Federer eased into the second round of the ATP grass court tournament in Halle on Monday with a straight sets win over qualifier Ilya Ivashka.

Federer, who turns 40 in August, had few problems in his first match this season on grass to seal a 7-6 (7/4), 7-5 first-round win over Belarusian Ivashka, ranked 90th in the world.

Federer, the fifth seed in Halle, will meet Canada's Felix Auger-Aliassime or Hubert Hurkacz of Poland in the second round.

"There is room for improvement, but I am happy with my first game here on grass. I feel good," said Federer, currently ranked eighth in the world, who is bidding to win the Halle tournament for the 11th time.

Murray Downbeat On Chances of Return to Top

LONDON (Dispatches) - Injury-plagued Andy Murray admitted on Monday it might not be realistic to expect him to recapture the golden days when he won three Grand Slam titles.

Murray is on the comeback trail again at Queen's Club in London this week after another round of the fitness issues that have troubled him for several years.

The 34 year-old Scot faces Benoit Paire on Tuesday at the Wimbledon warm-up event, which he has won five times. It will be his first singles match on grass for three years.

Asked on Monday if he felt capable of getting close to the form that took him to the world number one ranking in 2016, Murray struck a downbeat tone.

"I feel OK. I don't feel perfect, but I've been practising well over the last month or so, pretty consistently," he said. "The question mark is obviously whether the body holds up and I can't say with any great certainty right now whether that's going to happen or not."

"I have been feeling good at different points throughout the last nine months or so, practised really well, felt good going into tournaments. Then, you know, something's happened."

Murray, currently ranked 124th in the world, won the US Open in 2012 and lifted the Wimbledon trophy in 2013 and 2016. But, beset by hip problems and other issues, he has competed in just two of the past eight Grand Slams. While Murray's hopes of returning to the top are fading, his old rivals Novak Djokovic and Rafael Nadal are still at their best.

Djokovic saw off Nadal in four sets in a thrilling French Open semi-final last week before claiming his 19th Grand Slam title against Stefanos Tsitsipas on Sunday.



Djokovic Eyes Golden Grand Slam

PARIS (Dispatches) - Novak Djokovic has set his sights on the Golden Grand Slam of all four majors and the Olympic title, insisting: "Everything is possible".

The world number one captured a second French Open and 19th Slam with a 6-7 (6/8), 2-6, 6-3, 6-2, 6-4 win over Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas on Sunday.

It allowed him to become the first man in the Open era, and only third in history, to claim all four Grand Slam titles on multiple occasions. Now he has targeted being the third man to complete a calendar Grand Slam after Don Budge in 1937 and Rod Laver in 1962 and 1969.

On top of that, he also wants the Olympic gold medal to complete the Golden Grand Slam. "Everything is possible. Definitely in my case I can say that what I've been through in my career, in my life, this journey has been terrific so far," said Djokovic.

"I've achieved some things that a lot of people thought it would be not possible for me to achieve. "So everything is possible, and I did put myself in a good position to go for the Golden Slam."

The Golden Slam has never been achieved by a man while, in the women's game, only Steffi Graf in 1988 has swept all four majors and Olympic gold in the same year.

In Graf's case, Olympic gold came in Seoul. For Djokovic, the opportunity will come in Tokyo later this summer. "Obviously his goal and our goal is to win the Olympics and then win the Grand Slam. That would be the absolutely top of this year," said Djokovic's longtime coach Marian Vajda. "But it's still far away from us. We have to still focus on the next one. But overall he's set up for this year."

