

In a Message to His Slovenian Counterpart Borut Pahor, President Rouhani Congratulated the Statehood Day of Slovenia to the People and Government of the Country

# IRAN NEWS

Austrian President Alexander Van der Bellen in a Message on Thursday Felicitated Hojjatoleslam Seyed Ebrahim Raisi Over Winning the Presidential Election in Iran and Called For Continuing Bilateral Cooperation

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## Foreign Forces Must Leave Middle East

TEHRAN (IFP) - Brigadier General Mehdi Rabbani added the Takfiri ISIS terrorist group was the handiwork of an approach adopted by domineering powers to serve their own interests and "commercialize security."

"Many of the elements which contributed to the emergence of instability and extremist ideologies in recent years are now impeding the trend of establishing security and reconstructing crisis-hit countries, too," said general Rabbani, the deputy chief of the General Staff of the Iranian Forces for operations in a speech at the Moscow International Security Conference.

"It is time for foreign forces, including the US, which have the blood of thousands of innocent people on their hands, ... to leave the West Asia region, so that the regional countries can ensure lasting security on their own," he said.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the top general said Iran favors "the best of relations" with world countries, and that "neighboring countries take priority in our foreign policy."

"Today, given the rapid developments in the world and given that traditional and new threats are intertwined, it is necessary that independent countries help boost stability in the world through cooperating with one another," said the top general.

"In this regard, the Islamic Republic of Iran stands ready to work with other countries to solve problems and create stability and security in the region and in the world," he added.

## Tehran, Caracas Seek Closer Cooperation in Fight Against Imperial Aggression

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Following talks with Iran's president-elect, Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro says the two countries seek to further expand their cooperation in the fight against the campaign of aggression being waged against their nations by imperial powers.

In a tweet on Wednesday, Maduro said he held a phone conversation with Iranian President-elect Ebrahim Raisi.

"We agreed to strengthen our brotherly ties and cooperation to advance in the joint fight against imperial aggression against our peoples," Maduro said.

Raisi was elected Iran's eighth president after he garnered almost 62 percent of the votes in the June 18 election. He will succeed President Hassan Rouhani, who has served two four-year terms in office.

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## Leader Receives Iranian-Made COVID-19 Vaccine



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Seyed Ali Khamenei received the Iranian-made CovIran Barekat vaccine on Friday morning.

The vaccine has recently received the injection permit and made Iran the sixth producer of the coronavirus vaccines.

After the injection, Ayatollah Khamenei thanked the minister of health and all the medical staff of the country for their efforts.

He said that he had waited for the Iranian vaccine to be produced and also for his turn to receive his injection. He said "as long as there is the chance for prevention and treatment inside the county, why should we not use it?"

Thanking the Iranian scientists for producing the vaccine, he added that it is OK to use the foreign-made vaccines, but we should respect the Iranian ones.

The Supreme Leader also said that he insisted that he receive the dose in his turn, adding that thank God, most of the people above 80 have already received their doses.

On Thursday the official website of Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei said the Leader was to receive a first dose of the domestically-produced CovIran Barekat vaccine in the coming days.

Khamenei.ir carried the report, citing Dr. Alireza Marandi, president of the Academy of Medical Sciences of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

"The Leader lays especial emphasis on the use of Iranian vaccine. This vaccine is the result of young Iranian scientists' endeavor and enjoys a high immunization level," Marandi said.

The official said Ayatollah Khamenei did not have any objection to receiving vaccination from the onset of the outbreak of the coronavirus crisis.

The Leader had, however, set two prior conditions, insisting not to receive the remedy outside the schedule that had been devised for the rest of Iranians in the first place, Marandi noted. Secondly, Ayatollah Khamenei had required to receive only Iranian remedy, he added.

"Therefore, once the vaccination process involving the Iranian countrymen above 80 years of age began, the Leader refused to receive foreign vaccine and waited for the Iranian one," the official stated.

Marandi pointed out that Ayatollah Khamenei was to have a first dose of the Iranian vaccine administered, while the Iranians fitting within the age bracket had already received their first dosage from the country's imported vaccine reserves.

The website hailed that the scientists, who had produced CovIran Bareket, were all among those, who had studied at domestic academic institutes. It added that production of the cure had made Iran the sixth country across the world to score the achievement after India, China, the UK, the U.S., and Russia, and the first West Asian nation to triumph in the area.

The Iranian vaccine was approved for emergency mass application by the country's Health Ministry earlier this month. Simultaneously, the Shafa Pharmed pharmaceutical complex that has been working on the cure as part of a project led by the Headquarters for the Execution of Imam Khomeini's Order, a charitable organization, released an official report, verifying its high level of effectiveness.

## Tehran Slams U.S. Sanctions

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's deputy permanent representative to the United Nations has warned of the adverse effects that unilateral American sanctions have on international peace as the world body's General Assembly adopts a resolution against the nearly 60-year-old U.S. economic embargo on Cuba.

Zahra Ershadi said that the U.S. embargo inflicts hardship and suffering on Cubans, especially women and children, leading to harmful consequences for the country's financial, banking, commercial, investment, tourism, health, educational and cultural sectors.

"Unilateral and coercive U.S. sanctions have adverse effects on the promotion of regional and international peace. They are also a fundamental obstacle to the establishment of world peace, prosperity and an international justice system, which are vital preconditions for sustainable development," she said.

"For many years, the General Assembly has decisively voted in favor of resolutions calling for the lifting of U.S. sanctions against Cuba. It has expressed its solidarity with the Cuban government and people, but the United States has over the past six decades slapped economic, trade, and financial bans that violate international law as well as its obligations under the UN Charter."

In the meeting held in-person on Wednesday at the UN headquarters in New York, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution calling for an end to the U.S. embargo on Cuba. The motion was approved for the 29th year in a row with 184 votes in favor, three abstentions and two no votes cast by the U.S. and Israel.

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## ViewPoint U.S., the Major Violator of Freedom of Expression

The Western world and especially the U.S. and some of its European allies have always meddled in the domestic affairs of other countries under the pretext of human rights and freedom of expression while they themselves are major violators of the human rights and freedom of expression.

On last Tuesday, the U.S. authorities seized a range of Iran's state-linked news website domains they accused of spreading disinformation. The move appeared to be a far-reaching crackdown on Iranian media amid heightened tensions between the two countries while the U.S. officials have announced their will to rejoin the JCPOA.

This move comes at a time that even American people and politicians are unhappy with the policies of the U.S. Administration and even major tech companies dealing with social media platforms because of imposing restrictions.

The U.S. as the so-called torch-bearer of freedom of expression cannot tolerate any criticism against the country while it pokes its nose in the domestic affairs of other countries through their media outlets especially by the social media platforms.

We have not yet forgotten what former U.S. President Donald Trump has said about the freedom of expression in the U.S. by attacking the big technological companies which serve the system in suppressing any opposition voice and criticism and even his accounts have been suspended by some social media platforms only because he is critical of the current system.

The U.S. Justice Department said 33 of the seized websites were used by the Iranian Islamic Radio and Television Union, which was singled out by the U.S. government last October for what officials described as efforts to spread disinformation and sow discord among American voters ahead of the 2020 presidential election.

The U.S. says three other seized websites were operated by the Iraqi Shiite paramilitary group, Kata'ib Hizballah, which more than a decade ago was designated a foreign terrorist organization. The group is separate from the Lebanese militant Hezbollah group whose news websites remained operational.

We see that any website belonging to the resistance groups and freedom-seeking countries has been seized by the U.S.

The U.S. expects all the media outlets and the countries obey it with closed-eyes but it should know this fact that the era of slavery and blindly obeying the world arrogance has ended and the world people is waking up and soon the Americans may be forced to shut down many media outlets or restricting them because of their criticism against the U.S. despotic manner.

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## Iran May React Even Tougher If U.S. Leaves JCPOA Again

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia's permanent representative to the international organizations in Vienna says Iran may react even tougher than before if the United States makes the mistake of leaving the 2015 Iran nuclear agreement again after the agreement's revival.

"Many followers ask if there is a guarantee that US wouldn't leave #JCPOA after its restoration," Mikhail Ulyanov wrote in a tweet on Thursday, referring to the nuclear deal by its official acronym.

Ulyanov added, "To my mind the best guarantee is extremely negative experience of the past. If #US repeats the previous mistake #Iran may decide to reciprocate even tougher. Nobody would like it."

The U.S. nixed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action in May 2018 under former U.S. President Donald Trump's administration, followed by the harshest rounds of sanctions intended to destroy Iran's economy.

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## Iran Ready to Host ECO Clean Energy Center

TEHRAN (IP)- Minister of Energy announced the readiness of his country to host the Economic Cooperation Organization's (ECO) Center for Clean Energy.

Delivering a speech in the fourth meeting of the ECO energy ministers, Reza Ardakanian stated the programs for the development of energy exchange with the countries of the region were on the agenda of the Ministry of Energy so that the country's geopolitical capacity was maximally used in global energy markets.

Ardakanian said the ECO region enjoyed the rich and valuable potential of human and natural resources, energy reserves, capable private sector, and privileged advantages of regional connectivity.

## Raisi Stresses Need for End to Foreign Meddling In Regional Ties

**TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iranian President-elect Ebrahim Raisi has underlined the need for an end to foreign interference in regional affairs, stating that collective security and stability will be ensured once such an ideal realizes.**

Speaking in a telephone conversation with Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani on Thursday night, Raisi called for further promotion of Tehran-Doha bilateral ties.

He said collective security constitutes a key part of his incoming administration's regional foreign policy doctrine, which can bring about peace and stability to the regional states and tranquility and prosperity for the nations.

The Iranian president-elect added that the next Iranian administration will attach paramount significance to neighboring countries in its economic diplomacy, describing strong connection between political ties and economic interactions in Iran-Qatar relation as a good model for regional trade convergence.

Raisi also emphasized that collective stability and security can be achieved once foreign interference in regional affairs comes to an end.

The Qatari emir, for his part, congratulated Raisi on winning the Iranian presidential election. He lauded Doha-Tehran relations as distinct and excellent and hoped for



further promotion of ties between the two countries.

Al Thani also praised Iran's strong support during the rancorous Saudi-led embargo against his country, especially the effective role played by Raisi as the Chief of Iran's Judiciary.

"We have overcome difficult conditions, and must now stand together and help each other out," the Qatari monarch pointed out.

In early January, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt signed a declaration on the eve of the PGCC leaders' summit in the ancient desert city of Al-Ula, to ease a rift with Qatar, signaling the end of a three and a half year embargo of the energy-rich Persian Gulf country.

In June 2017, the four countries accused Qatar, among other things, of supporting "terrorism" and having close ties to Iran, and severed economic and diplomatic ties. A blockade was also imposed by the four countries by land, air and sea.

Qatar repeatedly denied the claims and said there was no justification for severing relations.

## Tehran, Helsinki Stress Cooperation On Geological Sciences

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Heads of geological agencies of Iran and Denmark, in a virtual meeting on Wednesday, underlined the need for bilateral cooperation on geological and mine sciences.

The meeting was also attended by Iran's ambassador to Finland Forouzandeh Vadiati.

Alireza Shahidi, the head of the Iranian agency and the deputy minister of industry, mine and trade, said that Iran is grappling with various problems such as providing the water needed for drinking and agriculture.

He also referred to drought, flash floods, landslides and dust storms as other problems the country is facing.

Shahidi expressed hope that Iran will be able to go through these problems via scientific cooperation both regionally and internationally.

The Iranian ambassador, for her part, expressed happiness to be present in the meeting.

Vadiati said that Iran seeks to promote bilateral cooperation with Finland in all areas.

## Two Journalists Killed, 21 Injured in Bus Crash

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Two Iranian journalists have been killed and 21 others injured when a bus overturned in northwestern Iran.

The bus, carrying 25 journalists from the capital, Tehran, to West Azarbaijan Province, overturned near the province's Naqadeh county on Wednesday.

They were planning to report on revitalization projects at Urmiah Lake.

The deceased journalists were identified as Mahshad Karimi and Reihaneh Yasini, who worked for ISNA and IRNA news agencies, respectively.

The injured were also transferred to a hospital in Naqadeh.

Tributes from top Iranian officials poured in after the demise of the two female journalists. President Hassan Rouhani condoled with the bereaved families of the two deceased journalists and their colleagues in their loss, saying the incident caused deep sorrow and grief.

"While honoring the invaluable services of these hard-working journalists of the country's media outlets, who had no other concern but to serve the Islamic homeland, I express my condolences to the bereaved families and members of the country's media, and I ask God Almighty to bestow the highest of ranks [in heaven] to the deceased and grant immediate recovery and health to the injured," Rouhani said in a message.

The president also ordered relevant officials to immediately identify the cause of the incident and produce a report on it.

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif condoled with the bereaved families of the victims and voiced his deep sorrow via Twitter.

## Tehran Strongly Protests British Police

LONDON (Dispatches) - Iran's Embassy in London has vehemently criticized the British police's shortcomings in providing security for the Islamic Republic's polling stations across the UK in the 18 June presidential election.

"The embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in London wrote a note to the British Foreign Secretary to strongly protest the failure of the British police to secure polling stations in the presidential election on Friday, [28 June,] and the absence of support and actions to prevent violence perpetrated against Iranian voters in some cities, including Birmingham," Seyyed Mahdi Hosseini Matin, the deputy head of Iran's mission to the UK, wrote in a tweet on Thursday.

Hosseini Matin added that the Iranian mission asked the British Foreign Secretary to identify and bring charges against the perpetrators and compensate for the harm inflicted on the injured and the loss imposed on Iran's diplomatic missions.

Last Friday, Hosseini Matin announced that a woman was injured in Birmingham when attackers targeted her merely for trying to exercise her right to vote in the Iranian presidential election.

He also posted a video of the assault, blaming the attack on "false claimants of democracy who have a history of conducting terrorist attacks and links to foreigners."

Later, Iran's Foreign Ministry summoned the British ambassador to strongly protest the "riotous and terrorist" acts against Iranian expatriates in the UK who wanted to cast their ballots.

## National Vaccination Against COVID-19 Will Be Accelerated



TEHRAN (IRNA) - President Hassan Rouhani said on Thursday that once the import problems are solved and the necessary permits for domestically developed vaccines are issued, the national vaccination against the coronavirus disease will be accelerated.

The president made the remarks speaking during a meeting of the heads of the specialized committees of the national headquarters for the fight against COVID-19.

Rouhani vowed that the Ministry of Health and other relevant organizations will make every effort to prevent a fifth wave of the pandemic.

During the meeting, the head of the health and treatment committee delivered a report which stressed that Iran has some difficulty receiving the already bought vaccines from some other countries and COVAX due to restrictions for transfer of money and the shortage of vaccine in the global markets as well.

The report said that because of the above mentioned problems, the country have had a delay in the national vaccination which is being carried out based on a national plan.

With the arrival of new vaccines over the past few days and with new cargos being on the way, the country is due to resume vaccination, the report said, adding that injection of the second doses for those people who have received the first dose would be the country's first priority.

## 69% Surge in Iran Non-Oil Exports

TEHRAN (PressTV) - June quarter figures by Iran's customs office IRICA shows that the country raised its exports of non-oil goods over the period by over two thirds compared to the same quarter in 2020.

IRICA chief Mehdi Mir Ashrafi said on Thursday that non-crude exports from Iran had surged by 69% in the quarter to June 21 to a total of \$10.7 billion in value terms.

Mir Ashrafi said that the weight of cargoes sent from Iran over the same quarter had risen by 38% year on year. China remained the top destination for Iranian exports over the period as customers in the East Asian country bought \$3.1 billion worth of goods and products from Iran, said Mir Ashrafi, adding that Iraq came second on the list on \$2.3 billion worth of purchases followed by the United Arab Emirates at \$1.3 billion.

IRICA chief said Iran had a trade surplus of \$476 million in the first quarter of the current fiscal year. He added that the total trade for the quarter had amounted to \$20.9 billion, up \$7 billion against last year. However, Mir Ashrafi said that imports into Iran also had increased by 34% year on year for the same period to a total of \$10.2 billion.

The UAE was the top exporter to Iran over the quarter with some \$3.2 billion worth of supplies, followed by China at \$2.2 billion and Turkey at \$1 billion, he said, according to remarks covered in the official IRNA news agency.

Germany and Switzerland came fourth and fifth on the list of top exporters into Iran over the same period as they supplied \$414 million and \$384 million worth of goods to Iranian customers, respectively, he said.

## Iran Envoy Meets Pakistani FM

ISLAMABAD (IRNA) - Iran's Special Representative for Afghanistan on Thursday met with the Foreign Minister of Pakistan in Islamabad to discuss issues of mutual interest, including bilateral relations, Afghan peace process, and regional security.

Ambassador Mohammad Ebrahim Taherian Fard, who is in Pakistan on an official visit met with FM Shah Mehmood Qureshi at the foreign ministry.

Ambassador of Iran to Pakistan Mohammad Ali Hosseini was also present on the occasion.

According to an official statement, both sides during the meeting discussed issues of mutual interest, including bilateral relations, the Afghan peace process and the law and order situation in the region.

The Foreign Minister congratulated Iranian leadership and Iranian people on the successful conduct of presidential election in Iran.

He conveyed his best wishes to the newly elected President of Iran, Ebrahim Raisi.

"Deep fraternal ties between Pakistan and Iran have been further strengthened in the last few years," noted Qureshi.

He added the role of Iranian Foreign Minister



Mohammad Javad Zarif in boosting ties with Pakistan is commendable.

"Pakistan considers peace in Afghanistan essential for peace in the region," he pointed out.

The foreign minister went on to say Pakistan has been insisting that there is no military solution to the Afghan problem.

"There is a need for a lasting political solution to the Afghan problem through Afghan-led, Afghan owned dialogue," said Qureshi.

He strongly believed that unrest in Afghanistan has affected both Pakistan and Iran.

The Foreign Minister praised Iran's efforts for peace in Afghanistan.

He warned that rising violence in Afghanistan could strengthen spoilers.

Recognizing the support of the international community, Qureshi said that Afghan factions must take immediate steps to make the peace process fruitful through dialogue.

He added peace in Afghanistan will help boost ties in the region, increase trade activity, repatriate Afghan refugees and help regional stability.

## Canada Not Qualified to Present Report on Ukrainian Plane Crash in Iran

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Canada is not qualified to present reports or to voice opinion on the issue of the crash of a Ukrainian airliner, said Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Mohsen Baharvand on Friday.

A Ukrainian airliner was downed in January 2020 by a misfiring of Iran's defensive missile system amid the rising tensions in the Middle East region as a result of U.S. assassination of Iran's top IRGC Commander Lieutenant General Qasem Soleimani.

Baharvand said that if such illegal behaviors of Canada become common, all countries, even civilian aviation, will be hurt.

He went on to say that the part of the Canadian report which criticizes Iran's report on the issue in the technical aspect is baseless and unacceptable.

He added that before publishing the report, Iran had sent the draft to the countries involved and they had provided their opinions on that within the legal time.

Everyone should know that experts from the UK, the U.S., and France have admitted that the report was professional and appreciated it and even the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) has put Iran's suggestions on their agenda to



improve aviation, he said.

He also noted that Canada, as the advisor to Ukraine, had sent its opinions, most of which concerned strengthening the text and helped the technical research, which were used in the final report.

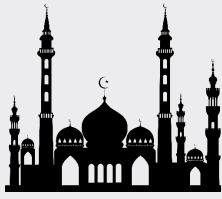
The full-text of the Canadian-Ukrainian reports was annexed to the Iranian report and published for the public opinion and experts to be aware of, he said.

Just imagine in every aviation incident, other countries ignore the regulations and protocols of inspecting the incident and try to politically pressure the country in which the incident has happened, he warned.

Instead of creating a media and political hype, according to Chicago Convention on International Civil Aviation, if they had had any new information, they should have given it to the Iranian team, the diplomat added.

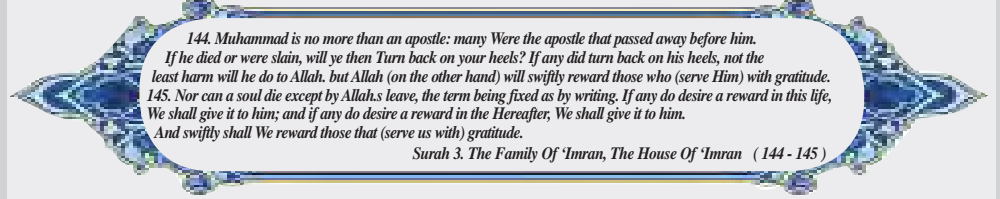
Iran gives constructive response to any country that follows the law and respects Iran; but if any country goes out of the laws and diplomatic norms and uses illegal language and threats against Iran, Tehran will stand against it, he added.





PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:08
■ Evening (Maghreb)	20:44
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:05
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	05:51



# Iran Ranks First in Gas Supply Network

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

**TEHRAN - President Hassan Rouhani, boasting about achievements in providing the Iranians with gas network, has said the Islamic Republic stands first in terms of gas supply throughout the country.**

On Thursday, President Rouhani supervised inauguration of thousands of gas projects across the country via video conference, saying that the number of villages with gas supply network increased 25 times in comparison to the number eight years ago.

The figure of providing industrial sector with gas supply network also increased 10 times during the mentioned period, the chief executive added.

Rouhani expressed gratitude for the efforts have been done by Iranian experts, who have played key role in implementing gas projects throughout the country, noting that the great Iranian nation could overcome different hardships such as economic war imposed by the United States and COVID-19 pandemic in last three years.

Speaking on the occasion of 75th Thursday of inaugurating construction projects in his administration, Rouhani argued that the Iranian managers, engineers and workers could abide by their commitments despite the economic difficulties and finalize national projects.

Today, the gas supply network covers 95 percent of Iran, which is a unique figure at international level, he said, adding that this is a great source of pride for the 11th and 12th administration to go ahead with such big projects in the current situation.

He further pointed to the fact that gas supply projects have been implemented in 21 cities, 2,809 villages and 4,664 industrial units in Iran. The Iranian government allocated more than 567 million dollars for the gas projects. Meanwhile in the ceremony, Oil Minister Bijan Zanganeh emphasized that the gas supply coverage of the entire country reached 95%.

He said that Iran's gas supply coverage had reached 95.1%; calling the figure unique in the world. Speaking in the inauguration of the national projects of the Ministry of Oil, Zanganeh added: "The Ministry of Oil of Iran since 8 years ago (2013) has succeeded in increasing the number of villages benefiting from natural gas



from 14,000 to about 35,000 villages, ie 2.5 times."

In six provinces of Iran, gas supply projects were inaugurated by order of Iranian President Hassan Rouhani via videoconferencing on Thursday.

The inauguration ceremony of supplying gas to 21 cities, 2,809 villages and 4,664 industrial units in Iran was kicked off by the order of President Rouhani via video conference.

The gas projects conducted by the National Iranian Oil Company are being inaugurated on Thursday on the occasion of 75th program of production leap of the Ministry of Oil.

It is worth mentioning that gas supply to every point in Iran will help develop infrastructure and create supplementary industries in villages and remote areas. In fact, the Iranian experts and workers have carried out the whole gas supply projects including construction of gas pipelines as well as gas transmission and distribution networks.

The implementation of gas supply projects by the use of Iranian workforce and technical know-how has helped the domestic industry to substitute consumption of gas instead of Liquid fuel, which is another precious achievement of gas production in the South Pars Gas Field.

The president also ordered inauguration of four gas booster facilities in Khuzestan and Fars provinces and another gas project in Imam Khomeini port also in Khuzestan province.

## National Gas Co. Not After Restricting Gas Supply of MSC

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

ISFAHAN – The CEO of National Gas Company of Isfahan Province (NGC) says Mobarakeh Steel Company (MSC) is one of the biggest customers of the company, adding that the company is not after restricting the gas consumption of MSC in case MSC improves its consumption and fortunately the company is doing on right path of efficient energy consumption.

During his visit of MSC, the CEO of National Gas Company of Isfahan Province Mr. Seyed Mostafa Alavi hailed the measures of the MSC for improving its gas consumption and said NGC does not want to set any restrictions for MSC over gas consumption and fortunately this big steel-making company has optimized its gas consumption by taking necessary measures.

Alavi added that MSC accounts for 45 percent of the national steel production and it is a very valuable and active industrial unit. He said he paid a visit to the galvanized sheet production line of MSC and felicitated the company for this



achievement which has started since 20 years ago.

On problems regarding the restrictions for provision of energy, Alavi said that these restrictions have existed for years but it has been seen more since last year and with the beginning of the cold season, the province may face with more restrictions for gas supply or even it may face outage.

He noted that MSC as one of the biggest customers of the National Gas Company of Isfahan needs supply of 10 million cubic meters of gas per day and NGS does not want to restrict the gas consumption of MSC because the country needs the products of the company.

Alavi noted that one of the solutions for getting rid of outage or restriction of gas supply is efficient consumption of the energy in the households and the industrial units and all should move in direction of efficient energy consumption and fortunately MSC has taken good measures for optimizing the energy consumption in its production units and it can help saving gas consumption.

## KSC Sets 3 New Records in One Month

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The CEO of Khorasan Steel Complex Company (KSC) announced another achievement of the company which was set in the third month of the Iranian calendar year.

Kasra Ghafoori said that the company finished the spring season with setting three valuable production records. Hailing the round-the-clock efforts of his colleagues and personnel of the company in all sections, he said the company set three records for production in month of Khordad and it continued its successes following the successes of the first two months of the year. He noted that the new success is good news for continuing to achieve more successes in the upcoming years.

He said considerable growth in providing the raw material as well as good maintenance and high incentives among the personnel of the company are accountable for such successes of the recent months.

Meanwhile head of exploitation unit of the company delved into details of this achievement and said KSC set its highest record for production of pellet in the month of Khordad and produced 195,762 tons of iron pellet which improved previous record by 1,187 tons which had been set in the second month of the current year.

Farshid Fazilati also hailed the staff of the pelletizing unit of the company who set a new record for storing and unloading on concentrate in the month of Khordad as they stored 9,833 tons of concentrate on May 24 which is the best record of the company for daily production.

He added that the third record set by his colleague was in the steel-making unit of the company which was set on June 11 when the company unloaded 40 meltings which improved the previous record with one more melting as the previous record had been set early April.



## IME Sets New Record For Monthly Trade

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Within the last Iranian month of Khordad month ending on 21 June, Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) witnessed trade of more than 3,623,000 tons of commodities with a total trading value of almost \$1,880m, showing 22% and 8% of growth in volume and value of trades respectively.

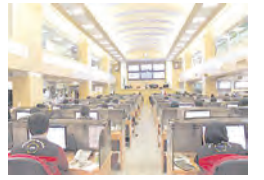
According to a report by the IME's international affairs and PR, the IME sold on its metal and mineral trading floor 1,816,000 of commodities worth almost \$1,076m.

Commodities traded on this floor included 979,170 tons of various types of steel, 550, 280 tons of cement, 26,060 tons of copper, 690 tons of molybdenum concentrate, 129 tons of precious metals concentrate, 31,245 tons of aluminum, 165,000 tons of iron ore, 33,705 tons of zinc, 400 tons of metallurgical coke, 60,000 tons of sponge iron, 250 tons of lead and 13 kg of gold bars.

Furthermore, the exchange played host to trading of 1,740,000 tons of commodities on both domestic and export pits of its oil and petrochemical trading floor valued at more than \$795m.

The IME's customers purchased on this floor 492,393 tons of various grades of bitumen, 319,550 tons of polymeric vacuum, 159,480 tons of chemicals, 19,834 tons of oil, 540,400 tons of vacuum bottom, 42,630 tons of sulfur, 450 tons of argon, 550 tons of insulation and 157,000 tons of lube cut.

There were also 6,316 tons of commodities traded on the IME's side market.



## Removing Export Restrictions With Offering on IME

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

ISFAHAN – The CEO of Esfahan Steel Company (ESCO) says tying the steel exports on the condition of observing the offering base to prevent any tension in the market will have positive effect provided that it is observed by all units.

Mansour Yazdizadeh said that currently ESCO, Mobarakeh Steel Company (MSC), Khuzestan Steel Company (KSC) and some major steel companies observe the base for offering products on the mercantile exchange but unfortunately the others disregard it.

He said that ministry of industry, mine and trade emphasizes offering steel products both on the mercantile exchange and avoiding sales in the free market in order that other units come to the scene and protect the stability in the domestic market by the formula of increasing the offer.

Yazdizadeh added that if all companies offer their products on the mercantile exchange, the government will sigh of relief and there will be no reason for it to tie the exports to observing the base for offer.

He said in such a condition there is no reason any longer for government to interfere in the market, and regulation of the market will be handed over to the mercantile exchange which controls the market based on the demand-and-supply policy. He added so, all units from the big to the small ones should accept the mercantile exchange as a place for offer and demand and the mercantile exchange should pave the ground for all units for offering their products there.



## Another Honor Registered For Chadormalu Co.

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The manager of mineral complex of Chadormalu Mining and Industrial Company announced another achievement of the company which was set last month as the complex produced 1.139m tons of iron concentrate.

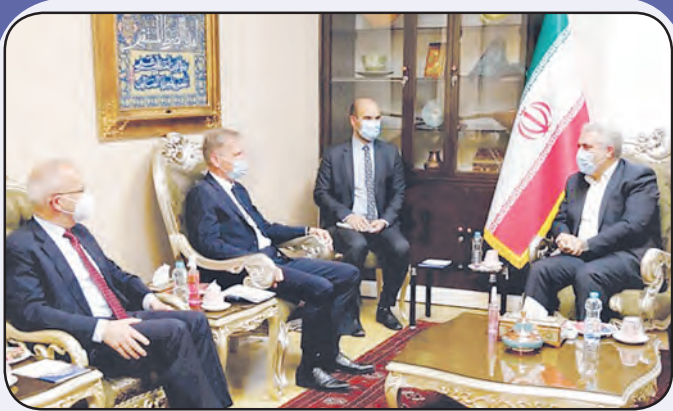
Eng. Hamid Jahani said that in line with the Supreme Leader's remarks and naming the year as Year of Production, Support and Removing Hurdles, the company due to the encouraging measures and administration of its ECO registered another success and set another record for monthly production. He said the mining complex of the company produced 1,139,406 tons of iron concentrate which is an unprecedented record that was set last month.

Jahani added that in the first quarter of this year, the company also set a new record for production of 3,107,372 tons of iron concentrate which shows over 17 percent growth comparing to the production of the company in the same period last year and 28.94 percent more than the planned schedule. He added that the company also could decrease considerably the water consumption in this period. On the loading and transporting of concentrate to the national steel industries, Jahani said that in the first quarter of the year, over 3,204 tons of concentrate has been loaded and shipped which shows more than 38 percent growth.

It is noteworthy to say that the highest record of production of the company had been set in November 2020 with production of 1,104,538 tons of concentrate.



## Iran, Germany Favor Broader Cooperation In Tourism, Cultural Heritage Fields



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Minister of cultural heritage, tourism and handicrafts said here that Iran enjoys a good level of cooperation with Germany, including joint projects in cultural heritage field, and we are ready for further expanding continuous cooperation with Germany.

Hans-Udo Muzel, the German Ambassador to Tehran met and conferred with the Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Minister Ali Asghar Munesan at the ministry.

Minister Munesan said at the meeting: Germany is among the top three European countries whose tourists choose Iran as their destination and the Iranians, too, love the German people.

"Iran is eager for broader cooperation with Germany in every possible field, especially in cultural heritage, tourism, and handicrafts field, and our two countries have fortunately always enjoyed excellent relations," he added.

The minister of cultural heritage, tourism and handicrafts further reiterated: In the field of handicrafts, which is one of the great privileges of our country, we are ready to cosponsor joint exhibitions with Germany. Also, in tourism field, after the Coronal pandemic, we hope the situation will get back to normal so that the two countries tourism industries get full benefit.

"Our tourism is manly in cultural and historical fields, but just like the previous years in addition to those fields the other tourism fields of our country such as ecotourism, and agricultural tourism, too, are available for the enthusiasts. Meanwhile, in addition to hotels, we have provided special tourist residence centers, including many historical homes, which I believe has been a wise move that has provided both attractive atmospheres and cost us minimally to fumish.

He added that although during President Rouhani's two governments 400 new hotels have been made, turning those historical homes into luxuries traditional residences has attracted the broad attention of Iranian and foreign tourists.

He went on to say that the Iranian ancient caravansaries, too, some of which date back to thousands of years ago and were on the verge of destruction, were reconstructed by the people themselves and turned into hotel-caravansaries at the service of the national tourism industry.

German Ambassador Hans-Udo Muzel, too, said in the meeting: Cosponsoring joint cultural events is of great importance for Germany, since they are like bridges that bring the nations closer together.

"We are also ready for broader expert level cooperation in cultural heritage field, so that the experts of both countries will get chances to benefit from each other's experience and also after the Coronal pandemic the ground will be prepared for greater presence of both countries' tourists in the two countries," he added. The German diplomat Muzel also had some proposals for holding joint cultural exhibitions with Iran, asking for elimination of obstacles and facilitating the process of holding them.



## EU Imposes Broad Economic Sanctions on Belarus

BRUSSELS (Reuters) - The European Union imposed wide-ranging economic sanctions on Belarus for the first time on Thursday, targeting its main export industries and access to finance a month after it forced a Ryanair flight to land in Minsk.

The measures include banning EU businesses from importing goods or doing business with Belarusian companies in sectors including banking, petroleum products and potash, a salt used in fertiliser that is the country's main export.

The sanctions are far stricter than measures imposed in the past, which mainly consisted of blacklists of Belarusian officials and had little or no impact on the behaviour of President Alexander Lukashenko, in power since 1994.



## 230,000 Displaced By Myanmar Fighting

YANGON (Reuters) - An estimated 230,000 people have been displaced by fighting in Myanmar and need assistance, the United Nations said on Thursday, as a major armed ethnic group expressed concern about military force, civilian deaths and a widening of the conflict.

Myanmar has been in crisis since a Feb. 1 coup ousted an elected government, prompting nationwide anger that has led to protests, killings and bombings, and battles on several fronts between troops and newly formed civilian armies.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), said relief operations were ongoing but were being hindered by armed clashes, violence and insecurity in the country.



## Russia Warns Britain It Will Bomb Ships Next Time



LONDON (Reuters) - Russia warned Britain on Thursday that it would bomb British naval vessels in the Black Sea if there were any further provocative actions by the British navy off the coast of Russia-annexed Crimea.

Russia summoned the British ambassador in Moscow for a formal diplomatic scolding after the warship breached what the Kremlin says are its territorial waters but which Britain and most of the world say belong to Ukraine.

Britain said Russia was giving an inaccurate account of the incident. No warning shots had been fired and no bombs had been dropped in the path of the Royal Navy destroyer Defender, it said.

In Moscow, Russia summoned Ambassador Deborah Bronnert for a reprimand over what it said was Britain's "dangerous" action in the Black Sea - while foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova accused London of "barefaced lies".

"We can appeal to common sense, demand respect for international law, and if that doesn't work, we can bomb," Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov told Russian news agencies. Ryabkov, referring to Moscow's version of events in which a Russian aircraft bombed the path of the British destroyer, said that in future bombs would be sent "not only in its path, but also on target."

The Black Sea, which Russia uses to project its power in the Mediterranean, has for centuries been a flashpoint between Russia and its competitors such as Turkey, France, Britain and the United States. Russia seized and annexed the Crimea peninsula from Ukraine in 2014 and considers areas around its coast to be Russian waters. Western countries deem the Crimea to be part of Ukraine and reject Russia's claim to the seas around it.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said the British warship, which was travelling from the Ukrainian port of Odessa to the Georgian port of Batumi, was acting in accordance with the law and had been in international waters.

"These are Ukrainian waters and it was entirely right to use them to go from A to B," Johnson said. British Defence Minister Ben Wallace accused Russian pilots of conducting unsafe aircraft maneuvers 500 feet (152 m) above the warship.

"The Royal Navy will always uphold international law and will not accept unlawful interference with innocent passage," Wallace said.

Under international law of the sea, innocent passage permits a vessel to pass through another state's territorial waters so long as this does not affect its security.

Britain disputed the Russian version of events, with Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab calling it "predictably inaccurate". During its 2008 war with Georgia, Russia bristled at U.S. warships operating in the Black Sea, and in April the United States cancelled the deployment of two warships to the area.

Ties between London and Moscow have been on ice since the 2018 poisoning with a Soviet-developed nerve agent known as Novichok of ex-double agent Sergei Skripal, a mole who betrayed hundreds of Russian agents to Britain's MI6 foreign spy service.

## Franco-German Call for Russia Summit Meets EU Resistance

BRUSSELS (Reuters) - France and Germany called on Thursday for a European Union summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin but met firm resistance from Poland and Baltic countries who distrust the Kremlin.

French President Emmanuel Macron said the first EU summit with Putin since January 2014 would be a chance for dialogue and won support from Austria's chancellor as EU leaders arrived for their regular summer meeting in Brussels to discuss a new strategy to improve ties with Moscow.

"We need a dialogue to defend our interests... it is a dialogue necessary for the stability of the European continent," Macron said.

"We cannot remain in a purely reactive logic when it comes to Russia," he said. "I hope that we can, with real European unity and coordination, have this ...dialogue."

EU leaders are also set to ask the European Commission and the EU's top diplomat Josep Borrell for "options for additional restrictive measures, including economic sanctions" against Russia, according to a draft of the summit statement seen by Reuters.

## Thai Democracy Protesters Rally Against Gov't

BANGKOK (Dispatches) - Hundreds of pro-democracy protesters rallied in Bangkok Thursday to call for the government's resignation, defying warnings from authorities about the kingdom's soaring coronavirus cases.

The marches came on the 89th anniversary of the Siamese Revolution -- the uprising that transformed Thailand from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy.

Bangkok was rocked by near-daily protests against Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha's government in the second half of 2020, but the pro-democracy movement has lost steam after virus outbreaks and the jailing of student leaders.

Authorities have clamped down on public gatherings as the kingdom grapples with a third wave of infections, with its daily case toll hovering around the 3,000 mark.

Despite police warnings, hundreds gathered at Democracy Monument, a major intersection in Bangkok, and marched in the direction of Parliament House to protest against the rule of Prayut, the former military chief who came to power in a 2014 coup.

Early-bird protesters gathered at the intersection before dawn for a candlelight ceremony. Som, a 16-year-old student protester, said she wasn't worried about the coronavirus risk.

"We have never had any real democracy," Som told AFP. "The country is not going anywhere."

Student leader Parit "Penguin" Chiwarak -- who is facing royal defamation charges and was released on bail last month -- marched to a drum beat wearing a plastic golden crown and carrying a flag. One protester was dressed like the US Statue of Liberty and demonstrators burned a fake constitution -- the same week the Thai parliament debated changes to the country's charter.

"Our demands won't be lowered... The constitution must come from the people," Jatupat 'Pai' Boonpattaraksa said over a loudspeaker.

Some demonstrators carried signs that read "abolish 112," a reference to the kingdom's harsh royal defamation laws that carry a 15-year jail term for those convicted of insulting the monarchy.

## Ortega Calls Arrested Opponents Criminals, U.S. Agents

MANAGUA (AFP) - Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega said that 19 of his opponents who have been arrested just five months before his country's presidential election are not candidates or politicians, but rather "criminals" who want to "overthrow the government."

"That is what we are pursuing, that is what is being investigated and that is what will be punished in due course," Ortega said in an official televised ceremony, while accusing the imprisoned of being "agents of the Yankee empire" who "conspire against Nicaragua to overthrow the government."

Pro-government security and paramilitary forces have arrested 19 people, including five opposition presidential challengers as well as journalists, businessmen and a banker.

All face charges of "inciting foreign interference" under a new law initiated by Ortega's government and approved by the legislature in December to defend Nicaragua's sovereignty. The law has been widely criticized as a means of freezing out challengers and silencing opponents.

"We are not dealing with pre-candidates, but criminals

who have attacked the country," Ortega said.

The arrests have increased international condemnation.

At a session of the UN's Human Rights Council in Geneva on Tuesday, 59 nations issued a statement saying they were "deeply concerned that recently enacted laws unduly restrict political participation, freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association" in Nicaragua.

And the Organization of American States' human rights council on Wednesday denounced a "new phase of repression" in Nicaragua and urged the body's judicial arm to protect four of the detained opposition politicians.

Amid the international community's outcry and insistence on the release of the detainees, Ortega insisted that "there is no going back, only forward."

A firebrand Marxist in his younger days, Ortega and his Sandinistas toppled a corrupt autocratic regime to popular applause and seized control of the country in 1979.

He ruled until 1990, returned to power in 2007 and has won two successive reelections.

Ortega, 75, is widely expected to run again in the November election, though he has not said so.



## Mexico President Turns On Middle Class

MEXICO CITY (Dispatches) - Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador has lashed out at middle-class voters he calls selfish and unscrupulous after losing support in the capital -- traditionally a bastion of his party.

Lopez Obrador's Morena party lost its absolute majority in the lower house of Congress in June 6 legislative elections, as well as mayoralties in four of the 11 districts it controlled in Mexico City.

It was a bitter blow for the leftist leader, who had built up strong support in the megacity that he ran as mayor from 2000 to 2005. Lopez Obrador has blamed the setback on "the dirty war and bombardment of lies" by his opponents.

"Part of the middle class has always been very individualistic, turns its back on others, is aspirational, wants to be like those above and climb as high as possible, with no scruples," he said. Unsurprisingly his comments have not gone down well with their intended targets.

Bashing people for having aspirations is "stupid," said Manuel Silva, a 46-year-old former civil servant turned independent consultant.

"All Mexicans have the right and the desire to make more of themselves," he said. Silva lost his job after 13 years as a public servant as a result of Lopez Obrador's austerity drive targeting what the president has called a "golden bureaucracy."

Analysts estimate it will eliminate 226,000 government jobs. Although he did not vote for Lopez Obrador in the 2018 elections that brought him to power, Silva said that some former colleagues and relatives who supported him now regret it. His government has faced criticism from opponents for its handling of the pandemic and public anger over a metro rail disaster that killed 26 people in the capital in May. But the 67-year-old remains popular with many Mexicans, particularly working-class voters. Lopez Obrador enjoys a public approval rating of more than 60 percent, according to polling firm Oraculus.

Even so, the president cannot turn his back on his traditional support base in the capital because "Obradorism was born from it," said prominent political columnist Julio Hernandez Lopez, better known by his pen name Julio Astillero.





**Shanon**  
(adviser)

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S/pool, S, J  
marble fl  
fireplace  
Fully Furn

**pasdaran Villa (\$4000)**  
1000sq.m  
5bdrs, S/p  
S, J, & pkg  
green yard  
Fully Furn

**Parsian**

<p><b>Niavaran Apts</b> (\$1500) 2bdrs, S/p (\$1900) 3bdrs, S/p (\$2600) 4bdrs, S/p</p>	<p><b>Elahieh Apts</b> (\$1700) 2bdrs, F.F (\$2000) 3bdrs, F.F (\$2400) 4bdrs, F.F</p>	<p><b>Sa'adat abad Apts</b> (\$1200) 3bdrs, S/p, F.F (\$1500) 3bdrs, S/p, F.F (\$2000) 4bdrs, S/p, F.F</p>
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## Bitcoin Trading Above \$32,000

LONDON (Dispatches) - Major cryptocurrencies ticked lower on Thursday morning as they remain under pressure from a sell-off triggered by regulatory action in China.

Bitcoin was down 2.7%, trading at \$32,974 (£23,620). Ethereum - the second biggest crypto by market cap - fell 3.5% to trade at 1,929.

Over the past few days, action in China had caused a sell-off: the People's Bank of China encouraged Alipay and other large institutions to crack down on cryptocurrency trading, while the country extended the clampdown on the bitcoin mining industry to its biggest bitcoin producing provinces, including the southwest province of Sichuan.



## U.S. Bans Imports of Solar Panel Material From Chinese Company

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The Biden administration ordered a ban on U.S. imports of a key solar panel material from Chinese-based Hoshine Silicon Industry Co over forced labor allegations, two sources briefed on the matter said.

The U.S. Commerce Department separately restricted exports to Hoshine, three other Chinese companies and the paramilitary Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC), saying they were involved with the forced labor of Uyghurs and other Muslim minority groups in Xinjiang.

Reacting on Thursday, China's foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said China will take "all necessary measures" to protect its companies' rights and interests. Beijing has dismissed accusations of genocide and forced labor in Xinjiang as lies.

The three other companies added to the U.S. economic blacklist include Xinjiang Daqo New Energy Co, a unit of Daqo New Energy Corp; Xinjiang East Hope Nonferrous Metals Co, a subsidiary of Shanghai-based manufacturing giant East Hope Group; and Xinjiang GCL New Energy Material Co, part of GCL New Energy Holdings Ltd. The Commerce Department said the companies and a paramilitary force, XPCC, "have been implicated in human rights violations and abuses in the implementation of China's campaign of repression, mass arbitrary detention, forced labor and high-technology surveillance against Uyghurs, Kazakhs, and other members of Muslim minority groups in" Xinjiang.

At least some of the companies listed by the Commerce Department are major manufacturers of monocrystalline silicon and polysilicon that are used in solar panel production.

Hoshine Silicon Industry said on an interactive investor platform that it backed the Chinese foreign ministry's reaction, adding that the firm does not export industrial silicon to the United States directly and the impact on its business would be limited.

Xinjiang Daqo New Energy Co responded Reuters' request for comment with an email saying the company has "zero tolerance" towards forced labor, and that it does not sell directly to U.S. companies, or purchase from the United States and there would not be "a significant impact on the company's business."

The other companies or their parent firms did not immediately respond to requests for comment, or could not immediately be reached. XPCC could not immediately be reached for comment.

The "Withhold Release Order" by U.S. Customs and Border Protection only blocks imports of the material from Hoshine. A source familiar with the order said it does not impact the majority of U.S. imports of polysilicon and other silica-based products.

Dennis Ip, Regional Head of Power, Utilities, Renewables & Environment (PURE) Research at Daiwa said in a note to clients the immediate effect of the restrictions would be limited as the companies named do not have "vast contracts" with U.S. based wafer companies, but foresaw more action to come. "However, we see possibility for the ban to gradually extend to include restrictions on all solar modules which contain Xinjiang-produced polysilicon," he said.

Chinese module producers could still use polysilicon from Inner Mongolia and Yunnan for their U.S.-bound module shipments, he added.

About 45% of all polysilicon used in solar module production is produced in Xinjiang, with 35% produced in other parts of China. The remainder comes from outside China. The global solar energy supply chain has been squeezed by record high costs for polysilicon, labour and freight.

A second source said the move does not conflict with President Joe Biden's climate goals and support for the domestic solar industry.

## Kuwait's \$134b Pension Fund Has Record Gain in Turnaround

KUWAIT CITY (Dispatches) - Kuwait's Public Institution for Social Security (PIFSS) had its best ever annual performance, emerging as a new regional investment powerhouse despite political deadlock in the country.

The \$134 billion pension fund, which owns a quarter of U.S. private equity firm Stone Point Capital LLC, recorded 20.9 percent growth in assets in the year ended March 31, according to a statement on Wednesday.

A new management team was brought into the fund in 2017 to transform the state-owned institution after its former head was found guilty of personally profiting from the organisation over decades. Cash now accounts for 4 percent of its investments, down from about 11.5 percent a year ago.

The performance reflects the fund's "robust" investment policy and the record performance of capital markets, said director general Meshal Al-Othman. "The management follows a conservative investment strategy well positioned to absorb and overcome expected fluctuations in international markets in the medium-term," he said.

PIFSS, as the fund is known, also owns 25 percent of Oak Hill Advisors and 10 percent of TowerBrook Capital Partners LP.

For all the latest banking and finance news from the UAE and Persian Gulf countries, follow us on Twitter and LinkedIn, like us on Facebook and subscribe to our YouTube page, which is updated daily.



## China to Use More Natural Gas in Energy Mix to 2035

BEIJING (Reuters) - China National Petroleum Corp (CNPC) expects China to cut its coal use to 44% of energy consumption by 2030 and 8% by 2060 as the country aims to use more natural gas to achieve its climate change goals.

China, the world's biggest coal consumer, is expected to increase the use of natural gas in its primary energy mix to 12% in 2030 from 8.7% in 2020, said Zhu Xingshan, senior director, Planning Department CNPC at a conference on Thursday.

He added that the share of natural gas in energy consumption is expected to increase "significantly" from 2030 to 2035.

China, the world's largest energy consumer and biggest emitter of climate warming greenhouse gases, has vowed to bring its total carbon emissions to a peak before 2030 and to be carbon neutral by 2060.

Natural gas is expected to be a key bridge fuel over the next two decades, CNPC has said. The energy giant expects coal to make up 44%, petroleum at 18%, natural gas at 12% and non-fossil fuel to make up 26% of the total energy mix in 2030.

The estimates for 2060 were coal at 8%, petroleum at 6%, natural gas at 11% and non-fossil fuel at 75% of the total energy mix.

China lowered the share of coal use in its primary energy mix to 56.8% in 2020, from around 68% at the beginning of the previous decade and expects this share to fall to below 56% in 2021.



## Spike in Infections Raising Concerns for Malaysia's Economic Growth

KUALA LUMPUR (Dispatches) - Malaysia's economy is projected to grow by 4.5 percent in 2021 amid a dramatic resurgence of the COVID-19 virus beginning in mid-April 2021. This recent spike in infections is raising concerns about the overall capacity of Malaysia's health system and the effects of the ongoing cycle of opening and closing the economy on households and firms, according to the World Bank Malaysia Economic Monitor: Weathering the Surge, launched today. This latest projection is lower than earlier forecasts of 6.0 percent growth, reflecting a slower pathway toward suppressing the pandemic and a slower-than-expected vaccine rollout.

According to the report, Malaysia's immediate priority must focus on the efficient and sustained management of the ongoing pandemic and its effects on individuals, households, and firms. Protecting the lives and health of citizens - and thereby preventing further strains on the country's health system - is vital to ensure a safe resumption of economic activities and prevention of a more protracted economic downturn.

"The Special Committee on COVID-19 Vaccine Supply is putting all its resources toward achieving the country's vaccination goal," says Khairy Jamaluddin, Minister for Science, Technology and Innovation and Coordinating Minister for the Covid-19 National Immunisation Programme. "The panacea to break the painful tradeoff between lives and livelihoods is quite simply; vaccinations. Immunisation works."

Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, external economic conditions are improving - helping to facilitate economic recovery in the country. Exports are expected to jump to 11.2 percent in 2021, a significant rebound from the -8.9 percent seen in 2020, as global demand stabilizes and investments in export-related activities continue to improve.

"While the government's main focus now is on managing the pandemic, it will not let up in supporting the more medium-to-longer term priority of promoting the emergence of a resilient and sustainable private sector. A better understanding of the COVID19 shock in terms of its severity and distribution; and what adjustment mechanisms firms have adopted in the face of this shock, are necessary components in our recovery efforts," said Datuk Seri Mustapa Mohamed, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Economy).

## Bank of Korea Highlights Risks to COVID-19 Economic Recovery

SOUTH KOREA (Dispatches) - South Korea has weathered the pandemic better than nearly every other advanced economy, but financial risks have grown significantly over the past year, according to a new report issued by the country's central bank. Stressing that the financial market remains stable, the Bank of Korea (BOK) on Tuesday pointed out concerning recent developments that could be the impetus for an interest rate hike in the coming months.

Though it does not come as a shock that many put themselves in a more precarious situation to get through the difficulties of the pandemic, the latest Financially Stability Report importantly provides a clearer picture of South Korea's overall financial health. One of its key metrics is the BOK's Financial Vulnerability Index, a composite index ranging from 0 to 100 calculated from 39 indicators. The index increased from 41.9 before the outbreak of COVID-19 to 58.9 through the first quarter of this year. This jump hastens a climb in the index, which started after the Global Financial Crisis, but is below the 73.6 reached during that crisis and the 100 of the Asian Financial Crisis. Still, the BOK claimed that if the index continued to rise to a projected 68.1 by 2024 it could cause the economy to contract by as much as 2.2 percent in the case of a crisis.

Driving this worsening financial vulnerability is a rising private credit-to-GDP ratio, indicative of how leveraged the private sector is. From the same period last year, the ratio grew by nearly 16 percent in the first quarter of 2021, reaching an estimated 216 percent. Although this figure was already relatively high for South Korea before the pandemic - its ratio of 197 percent in 2019 was above the 165 percent average among advanced economies reporting to the Bank of International Settlements (BIS) that year - the pace of the increase stands out. The latest available data from the BIS shows that among 43 reporting countries, South Korea's nearly 18 percentage point growth in the private credit-to-GDP ratio from the last quarter of 2019 to the same period in 2020 was higher than the group's average increase of 11 percentage points.

Tracking a year of headlines about dramatically rising home prices in Seoul and corporate borrowing to power through the pandemic, households and businesses were both major contributors to the growth in private debt. Overall household debt increased by 9.5 percent year on year in the first quarter of 2021, with the ratio against disposable income ratio growing by 11.4 percent. Lending to businesses was up by even more at 14.1 percent, but the total size of this debt - 1,402 trillion won (\$1.23 trillion) - remains smaller than the country's 1,765 trillion won (\$1.55 trillion) in household debt. By comparison, over the same period South Korean GDP only increased by 3 percent.

## Oman Introduces Long-Term Residencies for Foreign Investors



MUSCAT (Dispatches) - Oman will start granting long-term residence visas to foreign investors, state media said on Wednesday, as the debt-burdened Persian Gulf state pursues wide-ranging reforms to fix its shaky finances.

The move to offer renewable 5 or 10-year residency visas echoes moves by neighbor the United Arab Emirates in recent years to offer longer-term residencies and recently, even citizenships, to investors and certain professionals.

Non-citizens in (Persian) Gulf Cooperation Countries usually have renewable visas valid for only a few years tied to employment. In the era of lower oil prices and economic diversification away from hydrocarbons, states are looking to retain residents and their families who can contribute to the economy.

Oman's initiative, effective from September, grants foreign investors and retirees the right to reside for long periods in the sultanate, the ministry added.

Oman is among the weakest countries financially in the oil-rich PGCC region.

Since the oil price crash in 2014, its debt to GDP ratio has leapt from about 15 percent in 2015 to 80 percent last year, while Oman's plans to diversify revenue away from oil and to reduce spending on its bloated public sector have lagged.

Austerity measures unveiled last year are seen as crucial for maintaining the cash-strapped country's ability to access international debt markets.

A month ago groups of Omanis demanding jobs held protests across the country in the biggest challenge yet to the new ruler of Oman, a country of around 5 million people.

In response, Sultan Haitham, who acceded to power in January 2020, ordered the government to accelerate plans to create thousands of jobs.



## TSE's Main Index Gains 66,000 Points in a Week

TEHRAN (MNA) - TEDPIX, the main index of Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), rose 66,000 points in the past Iranian calendar week.

The index closed at 1.213 million points on Wednesday (the last working day of the week). TEDPIX returned to the uptrend after a long period of fluctuation and continuation of the downward trend. During the past week, the indices of Iran Khodro Company, Saipa Company, Esfahan Oil Refining Company, Kourosh Food Industry Company, and Zarmakarun Industrial Company were the most widely followed indices.



## WHO Concerned About Easing COVID Restrictions

GENEVA (Dispatches) - The World Health Organization has said it was concerned about the easing of COVID-19 restrictions by nations hosting Euro 2020 matches, noting that some were already seeing rising cases.

"WHO is concerned about easing of restrictions in some of the host countries," Robb Butler, an executive director at WHO's Regional Office for Europe, said in an emailed statement to the AFP news agency.

"A few of the stadiums hosting the tournament are now increasing the number of spectators allowed," Butler said.

The UN health agency did not single out any cities, but the United Kingdom announced on Tuesday that more than 60,000 spectators will be allowed at the Wembley Stadium in London for the semi-finals and final of the tournament. Originally, it was intended to limit the crowd to 40,000, some 50 percent capacity.

The new levels mean the stadium will be at 75 percent capacity for the final three games, which conclude with the final on July 11.

All ticket holders will need to have either a negative COVID-19 test or proof of full vaccination - two doses received 14 days before the fixture.

The announcement came after Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi called for the final to be moved from England due to rising COVID-19 cases in the country.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel has urged UEFA to act responsibly regarding plans to hold the final in London due to safety concerns over the spread of the virus there.

The European Union's top lawmaker on health issues echoed the chancellor's comments. "Our health is priority. The spread of the Delta variant makes it impossible for 40,000 spectators to view the final match in London's stadium," Peter Liese said.

UEFA said it had "no plans" to change the venues for the semi-finals and finals.

"UEFA, the English FA and the English authorities are working closely together successfully to stage the semi-finals and final of EURO in Wembley and there are no plans to change the venue for those games," a UEFA spokesperson said in a statement to Reuters news agency on Tuesday.

UEFA has also been in talks with the UK government to ease virus-related travel restrictions to allow up to 2,500 VIPs to attend the final.

In some "host cities, COVID-19 cases are already on the rise in the area where matches will be held", said WHO's Butler.

In areas where infection rates are on the rise, WHO Europe called on the cities concerned to act quickly.

"Learning from experience, we must act fast on signals showing increasing cases. Expanding testing and sequencing; stepping up contact tracing; and building very high vaccine uptake fast among those vulnerable and most at risk," he added.

In Denmark, 29 cases have been detected in connection with the Euro 2020 games



taking place in Copenhagen.

The reported infections involved people who were either already ill during the match or were infected during the game, Anette Lykke Petri, a health official, said.

"In theory, there could be more people infected," she added.

In Denmark, the permitted audience capacity has also been increased recently to 25,000 from 16,000. The higher number was first applied for last Thursday's game between Denmark and Belgium.

In Budapest, games at the Puskas Arena, which has a capacity of 68,000, have been played to a full stadium.

UEFA had also stripped two cities, Dublin and Bilbao, from hosting games in the tournament because the capacities allowed were too low.

Among the host cities, Russia's St Petersburg in particular has reported an increase in the number of cases in recent days.

Meanwhile, the trend has been downward in Spain's Seville and in Rome, Italian authorities assure that no cases of COVID-19 linked to the competition have been detected.

While the situation across Europe has improved over the past two months, the WHO has nevertheless urged continued caution.

"Although we have come far, we have not come far enough," Hans Kluge, WHO's regional director for Europe, warned in early June.

Vaccine uptake was still too low to protect the region from a resurgence, he said.

## Norway Expands Arctic Oil Exploration



OSLO (Dispatches) - Norway has awarded four new exploration licenses in frontier Arctic areas as it looks to support its oil and gas industry, as well as value and job creation, the Ministry of Petroleum and Energy said.

The ministry has offered seven companies stakes or operatorship in four production licenses, one in the Norwegian Sea and three in the Barents Sea, as part of its 25th licensing round. The so-called numbered licensing round typically includes frontier parts of the Norwegian Continental Shelf (NCS).

According to Norway's oil ministry, it will be the frontier regions that are most likely to host large new discoveries.

Norway needs new discoveries to maintain employment in one of its most important industries and its supply chain, especially after the last few challenging months, Energy Minister Tina Bru said last year when the ministry proposed the expansion of areas for oil and gas exploration.

In the 25th licensing round, announced in November 2020, companies could apply for licenses in nine different areas—eight in the Barents Sea and one in the Norwegian Sea.

After evaluating the bids, Norway awarded stakes and/or operatorship to Shell, Equinor, Idemitsu Petroleum Norway, INEOS E&P Norway, Lundin, OMV (Norway), and Vår Energi, the ministry said today. Of the four licenses, Equinor will operate two, while Vår Energi—majority held by Italy's Eni—and INEOS will each operate one license.

Earlier this month, Norway's government said that it 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.

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.

"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," minister Bru said.

## Iran, Syria to Expand Port, Maritime Cooperation

TEHRAN (IP) - A member of Iran-Syria Joint Chamber of Commerce announced the expansion of port and maritime cooperation between the two countries.

A member of Iran-Syria Joint Chamber of commerce, Shahla Amouri said: "The development of cooperation requires the continuation of interactions and the increase of related investments in the field of port infrastructure."

Regarding the need to develop maritime and port cooperation between Iran and the countries of the region, Shahla Amouri added: "There is good capacity in the country's ports, especially in south of Iran to cooperate and develop maritime transport with other countries in the region."

### Tehran, Caracas...

FROM PAGE 1

The election was held amid an ear-splitting political and media campaign by the United States as well as its Western and regional allies trying to portray the vote as "undemocratic."

Many world leaders, senior foreign officials, prominent figures, and regional resistance leaders have so far offered congratulations on Raesi's victory in the presidential election.

On Saturday, Maduro and Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza welcomed the election of Raesi as the next Iranian president during the "impeccable and democratic development," referring to the election.

In a post on his Twitter account, Maduro said,

"I extend my congratulations to the Iranian people and to Seyyed Ebrahim Raesi, the newly elected President of the Islamic Republic of Iran. We will continue united, working for peace and the strengthening of our cooperation and brotherhood."

Areaza also released a statement in support of the Iranian government and nation. Iran and Venezuela have been the target of harsh economic sanctions imposed by the US, which frowns upon the independence-seeking policies pursued by the governments in Tehran and Caracas.

Braving the American sanctions and threats, however, the two nations have kept up their trans-continental trade ties, much to the dismay of the U.S.

### Iran May React...

FROM PAGE 1

Many followers ask if there is a guarantee that US wouldn't leave #JCPOA after its restoration. To my mind the best guarantee is extremely negative experience of the past. If #US repeats the previous mistake #Iran may decide to reciprocate even tougher. Nobody would like it.

Reminded by a user that the plan to prevent such a move didn't work the first time, Ulyanov gave an affirmative response, but added that the international community is now aware of the "catastrophic results" of Washington's so-called maximum pressure against Tehran, which persuaded the Islamic Republic to advance its nuclear program beyond JCPOA limits.

He further noted that the June session of the International Atomic Energy Agency's Board of Governors showed that the international community, including the U.S., is extremely unhappy with the current situation.

"This is the best (not absolute, of course) guarantee against its repetition," added Ulyanov, who heads Russia's delegation in the ongoing Vienna talks aimed at reviving the JCPOA.

Ulyanov's remarks come days after the sixth round of the talks concluded on Sunday, as negotiators for Iran and the P4+1 group of countries — Britain, France, Russia, China and Germany — decided to return to their respective capitals for consultations to overcome the remaining differences.

The sides to the talks have voiced optimism to reach an agreement in the near future on how to bring all original parties to the JCPOA — first and foremost the U.S. — back into compliance with the deal.

Iran says if the efforts fail to secure an agreement by the end of President Hassan Rouhani's term in August, the new Iranian administration will be in charge of deciding the future of the negotiations.

"In case the other parties are ready, the [Rouhani] administration has no problem with concluding the talks, but if no deal is finalized for any reason by the end of the 12th administration's legal term, then the 13th administration [of Ebrahim Raisi] will be in charge of the negotiations and taking a decision about their details," Ali Rabiee, the spokesman for the outgoing Rouhani administration, told reporters at his weekly press briefing on Tuesday.

Asked on Twitter whether his remarks were "backroom advice" to Iran to take bolder measures in case of another US withdrawal from the nuclear pact, Ulyanov responded in the negative, asserting that his prediction of Iran's action was, rather, "an advice and a reminder to #U.S. hardliners."

### U.S., the Major...

FROM PAGE 1

Reacting to measure of the U.S. Department of Justice to block the website of Press TV, Al-Alam, Al-Kawthar and Al-Masira with irrational and false excuses, Islamic Radios and Television Union in a statement while condemning the move, called it as the sign of U.S. inability to fight against the spread of truth.

Condemning the move, the statement said: "Being present in the forefront against U.S. terrorist policies is source of pride and honor."

The statement continued to say that this all dedicated the best active and at the same time effective role of the member media of the Union to support the oppressed nations, Palestinian issue and raising awareness of the nations despite having limited financial resources.

Elsewhere the statement also called the seizure of websites used by the Iranian Islamic Radio and Television Union the sign of the U.S. administration's inability to fight and tolerate the spread of the truth by the websites and the networks which are trying to reflect their real mischievous face around the globe and cutting their hands off the region.

"The United States of America have always provided justification for its intervention in the world under the pretext of so-called- human rights. It is also trying to shut the mouths of freedom-seeking people and suppressing their voices, so that it tries to legitimize its crimes," it added.

The statement also stressed that U.S. unilateral dominance over the world of technology would not last for long and the U.S. policy to suppress the media and filtering the truth would fail.

The statement concluded that the immoral measure by U.S. would be dealt with properly and all of the blocked websites would be restored and back to their normal activity through rich experience in this regard.

The U.S. Administration should take into consideration this saying "Truth Will Prevail" and it should also know that it will not be able suppress freedom of expression or silence the criticisms forever and it should stop taking such cheap measures for distracting the public opinion about the events in the Western countries and especially in the U.S. where people are suffering from racism, discrimination and above all the injustice.

The U.S. officials accuse the Islamic Republic of Iran of suppressing freedom of expression while they are themselves the main violator of human rights and freedom of expression.

The blocking of web domains is not only a flagrant violation of international laws, but also shows that the world's so-called 'superpower' has faced crushing defeat in its information war against Iran and Iran and other freedom-loving countries and groups will keep on fighting to expose the true nature of the West and their so-called claim of defending human rights and freedom of expression.

### Tehran Slams...

FROM PAGE 1

Ershadi said that the Islamic Republic has, over the past four decades, experienced illegal U.S. sanctions, which have even targeted the imports of medicines and medical equipment into the country.

Through sanctions, the U.S. not only violates the UN Charter and UN Security Council Resolution 2231 that endorsed the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, but also punishes other countries which honor their own commitments, she added.

At a time when all nations are mobilizing their efforts to overcome the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S. coercive measures have severely hampered the fight against the disease.

"The international community must work to find solutions to counter such destructive and unilateral interventions. The Islamic Republic of Iran believes in cooperation with friendly countries such as Cuba to meet this challenge," the Iranian diplomat said. "The U.S. should immediately and fully comply with its international obligations and cease all its coercive unilateral measures."

Additionally on Wednesday, Ershadi told a UN Security Council meeting on the humanitarian situation in Syria that Iran, which has been subject to cruel bans for decades, condemns food and medicine sanctions.

She further noted that the restrictive measures on the import of food and medicines to Syria are "irresponsible, immoral and illegal" as they are prolonging the suffering of the Syrian people, she said.

"These inhumane sanctions have delayed the return of refugees and hindered efforts to rebuild Syria," she added. "Therefore, the complete lifting of unilateral sanctions should be one of the main subjects of any discussion regarding the humanitarian aspects of the Syria crisis."



## Gonzalez Joins Fiorentina On Five-Year Deal

LONDON (Dispatches) - Striker Nicolas Gonzalez has signed for Fiorentina after three seasons with Stuttgart, the Serie A club confirmed on Wednesday.

The 23-year-old, currently playing in the Copa America with Argentina for whom he has eight caps and two goals, has signed a five-year deal until June 2026.

Fiorentina reportedly paid 23-million euros (\$27.5 million) plus bonuses for the player whose season at Stuttgart was hampered by a muscular injury.

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## Gauff Beaten by Sevastova in Eastbourne

LONDON (Reuters) - American teenager Coco Gauff's Wimbledon preparations suffered a blip as she bowed out of the Eastbourne tournament on Wednesday, losing to Latvian Anastasija Sevastova 4-6 7-5 6-2.

Third seed Bianca Andreescu also went out on the Devonshire Park grass but top seed Aryana Sabalenka had no trouble in beating American Alison Riske 6-1 6-4.

# Record-Equalling Ronaldo Saves Portugal

BUDAPEST (Dispatches) - Cristiano Ronaldo equalled the all-time international scoring record with his 109th goal for Portugal as the reigning champions scraped into the last 16 of Euro 2020 along with Germany and Spain.

The Portugal captain netted a pair of penalties in a 2-2 draw with world champions France in Budapest to send his team through as one of the four best third-placed sides on a dramatic night in Group F.

Germany needed an 84th-minute equaliser from Leon Goretzka to rescue a nervy 2-2 draw with Hungary in Munich, setting up a heavyweight showdown with England at Wembley next week.

The 36-year-old Ronaldo gave Portugal the lead just after the half-hour mark with his first spot-kick, before France hit back through Karim Benzema's two goals either side of half-time.

But, with Portugal heading out as it stood with Hungary leading Germany, Ronaldo converted another penalty on the hour to help send Portugal through to a clash with top-ranked Belgium.

"We did everything I wanted us to do (in the 4-2 defeat) against Germany," Portuguese coach Fernando Santos told RTP. "The result was clearly fair."

His fifth goal of the group stage extended his record tally of Euro goals to 14 and drew him level with former Iran striker Ali Daei, in his 178th international match.

France finished top of the group on five points and will take on Switzerland in the first knockout round.

"It was a fight, it wasn't easy," France coach Didier Deschamps told TF1.

"I know very well that a new competition will be starting from the last 16."

Germany narrowly avoided a repeat of their group stage exit at the 2018 World Cup, twice coming from behind against Hungary to advance as runners-up.

Adam Szalai gave Hungary a shock early lead and although Germany drew level through Kai Havertz in the second half, Andras Schaefer soon put the visitors back in front, only to be eliminated by Goretzka's late goal.



"We made mistakes but fought and showed superb morale," said Germany coach Joachim Loew.

"It was not for the faint-hearted. Now it will be a real highlight to play against England at Wembley."

Just minutes before kick-off at Munich's Allianz Arena, a fan wearing a Germany shirt and waving a large rainbow flag evaded security to invade the pitch, running in front of the lined-up teams before being tackled by stewards and led away.

The build-up to the match had been overshadowed by the fallout from UEFA's decision to block plans by Munich authorities to light the stadium in rainbow colors.

Spain found their form at the right time, crushing Slovakia 5-0 in Seville to qualify for the last 16 as runners-up of Group E behind Sweden.

Spain benefited from two own goals as they swept through to a tie against Croatia, while Ukraine progressed without playing and will face Sweden.

Having already qualified, Sweden secured top spot only after scoring late to win 3-2 against Poland, for whom a Robert Lewandowski double was not enough in Saint Petersburg.

Spain had drawn their first two matches in the competition despite having home advantage in Seville, but coach Luis Enrique warned on the eve of facing Slovakia that his team were "like a bottle of cava that is about to be uncorked".

## Djokovic Returns to Wimbledon With Stranglehold



LONDON (Reuters) - It is almost two years since Novak Djokovic left Roger Federer crestfallen by edging a momentous Wimbledon final but as the tournament prepares to return after last year's cancellation, the men's game remains in the Serb's stranglehold.

Since that epic five-set victory, in which he saved two match points and won the first fifth-set tiebreak in a Wimbledon final, Djokovic has claimed three of the next six majors with Rafa Nadal bagging two and Dominic Thiem one.

It would likely have been four for Djokovic had he not been defaulted from last year's U.S. Open -- allowing Thiem to sneak in and finally add a new name to the Grand Slam winners' club which has been ruled by Roger Federer, Djokovic and Nadal for over 15 years.

That proved a mere bump in the road for Djokovic, however, and he will arrive at Wimbledon bidding for a sixth title to match Federer and Nadal's men's Grand Slam record haul of 20.

Should he triumph he would also be three quarters of the way to completing the first men's calendar-year Slam since Rod Laver scooped up all four in 1969.

## Young Powers Hawks Over Bucks In NBA Playoffs

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Atlanta's Trae Young scored a career playoff high 48 points and the Hawks edged host Milwaukee 116-113 in Wednesday's opening game of the NBA Eastern Conference finals.

Young, who also contributed 11 assists and seven rebounds, scored 12 points in the fourth quarter to spark a rally that baffled the Bucks.

"We just keep fighting until the end, no matter what the score is," Young said. "That's what we're going to do. We're going to keep fighting."

Young had the most points by any player making his conference finals debut since the NBA adopted the conference format 50 years ago.

The best-of-seven series continues Friday at Milwaukee with the winner advancing to an NBA Finals matchup against either the Phoenix Suns or the Los Angeles Clippers.

John Collins scored 23 points and grabbed 15 rebounds while Clint Capela had 12 points and 19 rebounds.

"People overlook this team, take us for granted, so for us to come out here and get a win is big time," Collins said.

Greek star big man Giannis Antetokounmpo had 34 points, 12 rebounds and nine assists while Jrue Holiday had 33 points and 10 assists for the Bucks in a losing cause.

"We'll get better," Bucks coach Mike Budenholzer said. "We'll get smarter game after game."

It was Milwaukee's first home playoff loss this season.

"Young's a great player," Budenholzer said. "He had a great night. We feel like we can play better."

Collins scored eight points, six on dunks, and Young added seven in a 21-8 Atlanta run that gave the Hawks a 79-73 lead late in the third quarter before the Bucks rallied.

Antetokounmpo scored six points to lead a 13-2 Bucks' run for a 105-98 lead, but Collins hit a jumper and Young, who hit 17-of-34 shots from the floor, added a 3-point play to lift the Hawks back within two points.



## Nakashima on Cusp Of Wimbledon Main Draw

LONDON (Dispatches) - American Brandon Nakashima is one win away from reaching the main draw at Wimbledon for the first time after a three-set win. Playing qualifying at The Championships for the first time, the 19-year-old sent Serbian Viktor Troicki into retirement with a 6-2, 5-7, 6-3 victory.

"It definitely feels pretty good coming back here," Nakashima, who won the Grade 1 junior tournament in Roehampton in 2018, told Wimbledon.com. "I feel comfortable with the courts but obviously pro is a lot different than the juniors."

San Diego native Nakashima, who is just five places below his career-high FedEx ATP Ranking of No. 133, will play Latvian veteran Ernests Gulbis for a place in the main draw.

The 32-year-old defeated Slovakian Andrej Martin 6-1, 6-2.

Gulbis is chasing a 13th appearance in the main draw. In 2018 he advanced through qualifying and stunned World No. 3 Alexander Zverev in the third round before falling to Kei Nishikori in four sets.

China's Zhang Zhizhen, ranked No. 178, is one win away from making his Grand Slam debut after staring down Chile's Alejandro Tabilo 7-6(5), 7-6(5). Zhang will play 22-year-old Argentine Francisco Cerundolo, who made his Grand Slam debut earlier this month at Roland Garros. Cerundolo, a finalist in Buenos Aires on clay this year, defeated Italian veteran Roberto Marcora 3-6, 6-3, 6-2.

Qualifying top seed Kamil Majchrzak, chasing his second Wimbledon main draw appearance, survived a tough battle with veteran Dutchman Robin Haase 6-7(5), 7-6(4), 6-4 to reach the final round, where he will play Chile's World No. 232 Marcelo Tomas Barrios Vera.

After surviving the first round in two tie-breaks, Barrios Vera also held his nerve Wednesday to beat Frenchman Enzo Coucaud 7-6(5), 7-6(4).

## Japan Emperor Appears Concerned About COVID-19 Spread by Games

TOKYO (Reuters) - Japanese Emperor Naruhito appears concerned about the possibility the Olympic Games could cause the coronavirus to spread as feared by many in the public, Kyodo News quoted an official at the Imperial Household Agency (IHA) as saying.

"The emperor is extremely worried about the current status of coronavirus infections," IHA Grand Steward Yasuhiko Nishimura told a regular news conference on Thursday, according to Kyodo.

"Given the public's worries, he appears to be concerned about whether the event would cause infections to spread."

Emperor Naruhito is Honorary Patron for the Tokyo 2020 Games, which are due to start on July 23 after being delayed for a year by the coronavirus pandemic.

The emperor has no political power but is widely respected as a figurehead, although it is rare for him to make public statements.

Many Japanese remain sceptical about the possibility of holding even a scaled-down Games safely during the pandemic. Organisers have excluded foreign spectators and limited the number of domestic ones. Alcohol, high-fives and talking loudly will also be banned.

Japan has largely avoided the kind of explosive coronavirus outbreaks that have devastated other countries, but its vaccine roll-out was initially slow and the medical system has been pushed to the brink in some places.



## Verstappen Ready to Pounce

Max Verstappen will seek to extend his lead over Lewis Hamilton in the world championship at this weekend's Styrian Grand Prix as the cracks in Mercedes' armoury widen.

The 23-year-old Dutchman heads the defending seven time champion by 12 points after beating him at last Sunday's French Grand Prix as the Formula One circus prepares for the second part of a triple-header of three consecutive races, two in Austria following the closely-fought encounter at Le Castellet.

Hamilton, 36, and his Mercedes team were unable to find an answer to Red Bull's competitiveness, speed and superior tactical acumen in France and their hopes of retaining their titles could be badly damaged if they cannot recapture form and fortunes.

But after licking their wounds, they are determined to bounce back with an attacking response to prevent their rivals claiming a fourth straight win for the first time since 2014.

Last year, when the sweeping circuit in the Styrian Alps also hosted two successive season-opening events, Mercedes won both with Hamilton and Valtteri Bottas claiming one apiece.

However, Verstappen won in 2018 and 2019 and he has been the dominant force since Hamilton's last win in early May.

If he can triumph again in the Styrian race, he will be well-placed for a repeat seven days later in the Austrian Grand Prix and might then have a comfortable cushion in points advantage before Hamilton's home British Grand Prix at Silverstone in July.

