

Health Ministry Announced on Sunday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic in Iran Increased to 83,845 With 134 More Iranians Killed by the Deadly Virus Over the Past 24 Hours

IRAN NEWS

The Permanent Representative of The Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations Warned of the Consequences of the Israeli Regime's Actions and the Presence Of Terrorists on Syrian Soil

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Vienna Deal Still Possible

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman says Tehran and the remaining signatories to a 2015 nuclear deal can still reach an agreement during the ongoing talks in the Austrian capital of Vienna only if the United States stops pursuing failed legacy of former president Donald Trump.

The U.S., under former president Trump, left the nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), in 2018 and initiated a "maximum pressure" policy against Iran, prompting Tehran to take remedial measures by gradually reducing its nuclear commitments under the deal.

Since April, representatives from Iran and the P4+1 group of countries - France, Britain, Germany, Russia and China -- have been holding talks in Vienna aimed at revitalizing the JCPOA and bringing the US back to compliance.

In a tweet on Saturday, Saeed Khatibzadeh said out of a steadfast commitment to salvage the JCPOA during Vienna talks, Iran has been the "most active party" by proposing the most drafts.

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Iran Only Agreed to IAEA Demand Out of Good Will

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's permanent representative to Vienna-based international organizations again retorts to the UN nuclear agency chief's unprofessional remarks concerning the Islamic Republic and its intentions.

Kazim Gharibabadi was speaking in a televised program in reaction to an earlier report by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)'s Secretary-General Rafael Grossi.

Grossi had reported to members of the IAEA's Board of Governors that Iran had been unresponsive to the agency's demand from it to keep the data recorded by its cameras at some of the country's nuclear sites.

In February, Iran stopped providing the data to the IAEA, acting on a parliamentary law that has obliged the country to retaliate to the United States and its Western allies' non-commitment to a 2015 nuclear agreement. It, however, reached an understanding with the IAEA to retain the footage and trust it with the agency only after the Western allies resumed their cooperation with the nuclear deal.

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IRGC Unveils Homegrown COVID-19 Vaccine "Noora"



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps of Iran says the time has come for the U.S. to get coronavirus vaccines from Iran.

Major General Hossein Salami made the comment as the IRGC began the first phase of the clinical trial of its Noora vaccine. "I think now it is time for us to tell the Americans that we will give you vaccines. If you face any shortage we are ready to help you," Salami said.

"This will happen in all areas. I promise the Americans and I promise the Iranians, too.

Everything they sanctioned to prevent us from accessing it, rest assured we will achieve it.

But we are ready to share those advancements with all of them. They should rest assured that the Iranian nation will stop at no advancement. We will never stop making new steps.

I give this promise to the entire Iranian nation that the fruit of all these difficulties is the great progress they see we're making and these advancements will continue."

The U.S. re-imposed punishing anti-Iran sanctions, removed under the 2015 nuclear deal, back in 2018. Washington has refrained from easing the portion of the sanctions that prevent Iran from accessing the international banking system amid the coronavirus pandemic. The sanctions have made it almost impossible for Iran to buy coronavirus vaccines and medical equipment needed to curb the spread of COVID-19.

In response, Iran has developed its own vaccines. These include the Noora jab, which was unveiled by Baghiyyatollah Medical University of the IRGC on Sunday.

Meanwhile Salami yesterday hailed Iran's achievements in different fields, saying the country is in possession of drones that have a range of 7,000 kilometers.

He said Iran has decided to be among the best in all fields, from science to technology and today it is among the pioneer and leading countries in many fields.

"By the grace of God, we launch satellites now; we are a pioneer in nanotechnology; we have large unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) that travel 7,000 kilometers.... We are a pioneer not only in military technologies but in many other fields," he said.

Iranian military experts and technicians have in recent years made great progress in indigenously developing and manufacturing a broad range of equipment, making the armed forces self-sufficient in this regard.

Iranian officials have repeatedly underscored that the Islamic Republic will not hesitate to build up its defense capabilities, emphasizing that such abilities are entirely meant for the purpose of defense and will be never subject to negotiations.

The IRGC chief praised Iranian medical personnel for successfully fighting the deadly coronavirus outbreak despite an economic terrorism campaign launched by the self-proclaimed advocates of democracy against Iran.

"A nation that has been able to create such great honors at the height of the scientific, technical, economic and financial siege is certainly a marvelous and exceptional nation," he said.

Iran Main Country Dealing With Burden of Fighting Narcotics

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran is the main country that is dealing with the burden of the fight against drug trafficking and the western destination countries do not care about the issue, Iran's representative to the IAEA said.

Iran's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to International Organizations in Vienna made the remarks while delivering a speech in a ceremony on the occasion of International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking.

Despite international actions, unfortunately, illegal cultivation, production, trafficking, and consumption of narcotics have increased in recent years, Kazem Gharibabadi said.

He went on to say, "Increasing trend of narcotics cultivation and production show that drug traffickers have become more active, and this will have dangerous consequences for the region and the world, especially developing countries."

Saying that drug seizure in Iran has increased by 41% in 2020 compared to the previous year, he noted, "On the one hand, this shows the effectiveness of Iran's countermeasures, and on the other hand, it warns of an unprecedented increase in narcotics in the region."

The fight against drugs must take place within the framework of international cooperation, Iran's envoy to International Organizations stressed, criticizing that Iran is the main country that is dealing with the burden of the fight against drug trafficking and the western destination countries do not care about the issue.

ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

Iraqi Resistance Groups Vs Aliens

People in most countries have realized the best way to push aliens from their lands and their lives is resistance and many countries several resistance groups have been formed to help the nation in defending their countries against the foreign forces' presence and influence.

Iraq's anti-terror resistance group Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), also known as Hashd al-Sha'abi, held a military parade in the eastern Diyala province to mark the seventh anniversary of its formation.

The parade began on Saturday morning at the Abu Montazer al-Muhammadavi base, northeast of provincial capital Baqubah, with PMU commanders, government officials and martyrs' families as well as religious, cultural and social figures in attendance.

It is the first military parade by the resistance group involving infantry, combat and support units.

Speaking before the parade, Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi said, "I salute the children of Iraq, the hero children of Hashd al-Sha'abi, on the anniversary of its establishment. The children of Hashd al-Sha'abi are the children of the government, and they continue any efforts that serve our nation and homeland."

"You and security forces defeated terrorism, and there are many things ahead of you. Hashd al-Sha'abi will be preserved with your vigilance, order and expertise. Alongside you, we will restore Iraq's historical role in the region. I salute you for your courage and the sacrifices of the martyrs and their families," he added.

The newly-elected prime minister of Iraq has visited the command center of the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) in Baghdad, wearing their uniform and calling the counter-terrorism forces a source of honor for the Iraqi nation.

In a TV program on Friday, PMU chief Fali al-Fayyadh stressed that the parade will strengthen the group's power and discipline.

Hashd al-Sha'abi is a military institution affiliated to the commander-in-chief of the Iraqi Armed Forces and operates under the Joint Operations Command, he said, noting that the Iraqi nation comprises the core of the pro-government group, which is supported by a fatwa (religious decree) issued by the Iraqi religious authority.

Hashd al-Sha'abi is a government-sponsored umbrella organization composed of around 40 factions of volunteer counter-terrorism forces, including mostly Shia Muslims besides Sunni Muslims, Christians and Kurds.

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Lebanon Rejects Claim Planning Iran Oil Imports

BEIRUT (Dispatches) - Lebanese authorities have rejected suggestions that the country is planning to import oil from Iran amid a worsening energy and currency crisis.

Lebanon's energy ministry on Saturday said that it had received no requests for a "permit, either from an official or private party, to import oil from Iran."

The official Lebanese response followed a tweet by the Iranian Embassy in Beirut saying that "the arrival of Iranian oil tankers does not need the attention of the U.S. ambassador."

The embassy warned the U.S. envoy not to intervene "in the brotherly relations between the Iranian and Lebanese peoples."

The tweet heightened speculation about the imminent arrival of an Iranian tanker in Beirut port following a proposal by Hezbollah that Lebanon look to oil imports from Iran.

On Friday, the U.S. envoy in Lebanon, Dorothy Shea, told a local television station that importing fuel oil from Iran "is not a practical solution." She added: "What Iran is looking for is a sort of dependent state that it can use to carry out its agenda. There are much better solutions than turning to Iran."

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U.S., Israel Terrified by Iranian Navy's Atlantic Mission

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – The naval flotilla that the Iranian Navy has dispatched to the Atlantic Ocean has frightened the US and the Zionist regime, Iran's Army Commander Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi said.

In a meeting with military commanders and cadets on Sunday, Major General Mousavi said the Army has turned into the symbol of self-sufficiency in the ground, aerial, naval and air

defense sectors under the auspices of the Defense Ministry.

The Army has made such advances that a fully homegrown flotilla of the Navy, serving as the symbol of self-reliance and self-sufficiency, has broken the record of navigation on a mission to the Atlantic Ocean thousands of miles away from the country's territorial waters and in accordance with international law, he added.

AEOI's Recorded Videos Not to Be Provided to IAEA

TEHRAN (MNA) – Stating that the IAEA quarterly deadline has not been extended, the Iranian Parliament Speaker said that recorded videos will not be provided to Agency.

"Regarding the Law on "Strategic Action Plan to Counter Sanctions and Protect Rights of the People", the Parliament gave the International Atomic Energy Agency three months, which was extended for another month. However, this opportunity has expired three days ago, and now we have to defend the parliament's enactment," said MP Alireza Salimi said in a note at the open session of the Parliament on Sunday.

"I have already mentioned about the Agency, and now I say that after the quarter that has expired, nothing has been renewed and after that none of the items recorded in Iran will ever be given to the Agency and are in the possession of the Islamic Republic of Iran," Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf said in response.

"The law is exactly being enforced," he stressed.

Previously, a total of 200 lawmakers in the Iranian Parliament issued a statement on ongoing nuclear talks in Vienna, saying, "The Parliament resolutely resists any damage to the nuclear industry and emphasizes the advancement of the nuclear program in accordance with the legal duties of the Parliament."

"The Law on "Strategic Action Plan to Counter Sanctions" has revolutionized the nuclear program and played an important role in the negotiation process to lift sanctions. Therefore, it is necessary for the government to take immediate action in implementing all the technical provisions of this law, including the operation of the metal uranium plant, the legal deadline for which has expired in accordance with Article 4, and not to compromise the technical achievements of the nuclear industry with its political goals and objectives," the Iranian lawmakers said in a statement.

Meanwhile Baqeri also said the Leader of the Islamic Revolution's support for



homemade COVID vaccine will undoubtedly increase self-confidence and motivation of young Iranian scientists and elites.

He also stated that as the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei emphasized, scientific documents on the results of various stages of Iranian COVID-19 vaccine studies are expected to be published transparently and accurately and in accordance with international standards to make the world more aware of the scientific potential of Iran's youth and to provide the grounds for increasing Iran's share in the market of injectable and pharmaceutical products in the region and the world.

He noted that according to popular reports, long queues had been formed in some centers for the second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine and urged the executive authorities to take action and regulate the situation as soon as possible.

"In addition to speeding up the vaccination process, preventing next COVID-19 waves in Iran is a matter of public expectation from the authorities," he pointed.

Qalibaf also marked the 40th anniversary of the martyrdom of Ayatollah Mohammad Beheshti and his companions and the anniversary of the failed assassination of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Khamenei, by the MKO and celebrated the Judiciary Week.

He added that Martyr Beheshti was a symbol of a real politician.

Deterrence Is Iran's Defense Policy



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iranian Army Navy Commander Rear Admiral Hossein Khanzadi on Sunday termed Iran's defense policy as "deterrence", saying that if any forces have a military strike, they need to know that with this great power, "what they gain is far less than what they lose."

Rear Admiral Khanzadi in an interview on Sunday, termed Iran's maritime history and Iran's presence in the seas as long-standing, saying Iran has been navigating on the seas long before many countries that are considered marine powers, such as the United States, come to existence.

"According to the available documents, the Iranians were sailors one hundred years before Christ," he said.

"The digging of the Suez Canal was first done by the Iranians, so our maritime history is rich; but for various reasons, including the weakness of the previous kings, we had distance ourselves from the sea, and this distance was intensified by the conspiracies of the British colonizers and those who did not want Iran to appear as a naval power."

Iranian Army Navy Commander added that after the Islamic Revolution, in the first phase, the Iran took up internal construction path to strengthen itself. It used a lot of capacities and brought knowledge and technology so that what is happening today takes place.

"In the second phase of the Islamic Revolution, which is according to the Supreme Leader the step of civilization-making, we are thinking of a new Islamic civilization, a part of which is maritime civilization.

Tehran Not Happy With Moscow Supplies of Vaccines

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iran Ambassador to Moscow expressed his dissatisfaction with Russia's supplies of anti-Covid 19 vaccines to Iran, saying that he will follow up on Sputnik V vaccines exports to Iran amid the ongoing pandemic in Iran.

Iran's envoy to Russia Kazem Jalali made the comments on the sidelines of the unveiling ceremony of the Iranian-made version of Russian Sputnik V vaccines in the Iranian city of Karaj on Saturday.

Jalali said that "previously, contracts were signed to import two million doses of Sputnik V while Iran sought to sign more contracts."

He said that "finally Iran signed contracts to import 60 million doses."

The Iranian ambassador pointed out that "we are not satisfied with the number of vaccines sent from Russia."

He added as Iran's ambassador he will follow up on Sputnik V vaccine exports to Iran as the people of Iran are still in danger and given the close relationship between Iran and Russia.

"Fortunately, Sputnik V has now found its place in Iran," he said, adding that "I told the Russian officials, unfortunately, in the perspective of some Iranians the Russians do not keep their words. In the current situation which people are suffering, any delay in sending the vaccines can reinforce their [negative] mentalities [of Russia]."

Judiciary Launches New Technological Systems to Facilitate People's Access to Justice



TEHRAN (IFP) - Iran's Judiciary has unveiled new achievements in technological fields to improve people's access to justice.

In a ceremony on Saturday, Iran's Judiciary Chief Ayatollah Seyed Ebrahim Raisi offered congratulations to all those involved in the technological leap and transformation in the judiciary.

The president-elect of Iran said that the status quo has been identified and the desirable situation has been mapped and the judiciary is to take action and reduce the gap between these two situations as much as possible to facilitate people's access to justice.

"As a result of launching these technological projects in the judiciary, the number of referrals to the judiciary has been reduced by four million, and this, in addition to facilitating and accelerating people's access to justice, also preserves their dignity, and this is one of the main goals of moving towards smart judiciary," added Raisi.

He further noted that the use of artificial intelligence has been very effective in speeding up the trials. Online trials and e-trials that are taking place across the country today have also facilitated the people's affairs, reiterated Raisi.

Ayatollah Raisi stressed that one of the important benefits of smart judiciary is to create a basis for transparency of actions.

"Transparency can certainly prevent corruption and unhealthy relationships. We think that the more transparency exists, the less unhealthy relationships will be formed and the more it prevents corruption. This approach has been very effective in the judiciary, and may its effects and blessings be for both the judiciary and the government in the future," he underlined.

At this meeting, Issa Zarepour, head of the Statistics and Information Technology Centre of the Judiciary, said facilitating people's access to judicial services, increasing the pace and accuracy of proceedings, increasing the pace and accuracy of implementation of rulings, clarifying processes and decisions and combating corruption, as well as maximum prevention of crime, are the five basic strategies for making the judiciary smarter.

U.S. Blow to Iran's Oil Income Foiled

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The outgoing president of Iran said his administration has managed to thwart the serious harm that the U.S. has been seeking to do to the country's oil revenues.

In comments on Sunday, President Hassan Rouhani said his administration has fought against the intense pressure of the sanctions by carrying out the Resistance Economy strategy.

"Though great pressures and difficulties have been inflicted on people, we have been able to maintain the (value) of the country's (annual) exports above \$40 billion under the worst conditions," he said at a meeting of the Administration's Economic Coordination Headquarters.

Rouhani also said his administration has managed to relatively thwart the U.S. harsh blow to Iran's currency income from the oil exports.

The achievements of the administration are especially valuable since they have occurred under the pressure of the toughest sanctions and the economic war, the president stated.

Iran has been under a series of illegal sanctions imposed by the U.S. since 2018, when ex-president Donald Trump withdrew Washington from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

Over 2,500 Elite Iranians Return Home in 4 Year

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's vice president for scientific and technological affairs said here on Saturday that more than 2,500 elite Iranian scientific personalities have returned to their homeland from 100 foreign universities during the past four years, most of whom are now working at country's technology parks.

Sorena Sattari who was speaking at a ceremony on the occasion of signing a contract for establishment of two new technology park at Pardis New City and Prand City at the Road Ministry said that the Pardis Technology Park will be the largest of its kind in the Middle East, adding that the project will be implemented with 130,000-billion-rial investment of the private sector.

Pardis Technology Park was initially constructed at a 90-hectare land, but last year 280 more land was added to its premises. The significant special feature of this



park is that there is no pollutant industry in Pardis Park, and this is thanks to the science-based green economy that is strongly opposed to polluting the nature, he further reiterated.

Sattari said that another contract was signed for construction of the Pardis Residential-Technology Park and that these projects have been contributing to the return of over 2,500 Iranian elite researchers to the country from 100 foreign universities, most of who are now working at these technology parks.

The vice president for scientific and technological affairs gave the example of the technology park at China's Sun Chun fishing port city, which turned that weak city into a strong technological pole of that country within 40 years which contributes to the blossoming of the Chinese economy.

Iran Has No Problem Producing COVID Vaccine

TEHRAN (IP) - Minister of health, treatment, and medical education says Iran has no problem in producing COVID vaccines and is ready to export them.

At the unveiling ceremony of the recombinant COVID vaccine of Baqiyatallah University of Medical Sciences, dubbed as 'Noora' on Sunday, Saeed Namaki stated: "In fighting coronavirus, today, what we have at our disposal is more than what we lack."

He has stressed that those who imposed sanctions on Iran did not know that the Iranian nation is stronger and more steadfast than before since it had undergone 8 years of imposed war and left a brilliant record. He pointed out: "Today Iran has as many beds in hospitals as needed, and there is no shortage of ventilators for COVID patients."

He said the Iranian knowledge-based companies created an epic to meet medical needs during the pandemic. Namaki stated that 470 ventilators had been installed in hospitals, noting that more than 160 CT scans were sent to medical centers and hospitals across the country amid sanctions.

Iran Economic Growth Nearly 7% in Winter 2020

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - In its latest seasonal report, the Statistical Center of Iran claimed that the rate of economic growth in the winter of 2020 was about 6.8% compared to the same season a year ago.

Details of the official body's statistics show that the mining and oil and gas extraction sector grew by "a third" in the winter of 2019 compared to the same period in 2019. The figures mentioned in the statistics center calculations are calculated based on the fixed price of 2011 so that the unbridled inflation of the country does not affect the estimation of the actual growth of the value of the products produced and the services performed.

In the winter of 2018, the value of the oil and gas extraction sector was about 27.6 trillion Tomans, which reached the winter level of 2018 with a small difference. The Statistics Center did not explain how the value of the oil and gas extraction sector might reach the level of winter 2018 in the winter of 2018.

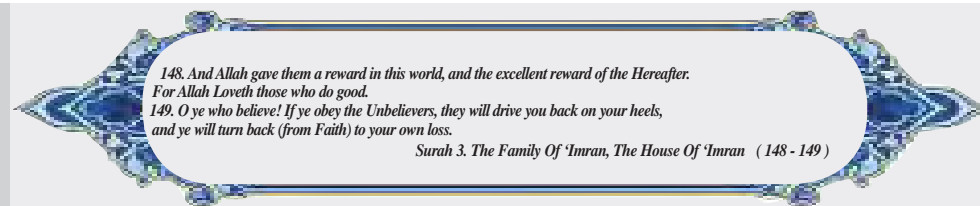
Also, the details of the statistics center report show that the value of agricultural production in the winter of 2019 has grown by about 5.4% compared to the same season in 2019.

This comes after a recent report by the Statistical Center and even the Parliamentary Research Center show that more than one million people lost their job in the country in the winter of 2019 compared to the winter of 2019, a quarter of whom were active in agriculture.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:08
■ Evening (Maghreb)	20:45
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:06
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	05:52



Transit From Iran Soars by 29%

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Deputy Minister of Roads and Urban Development and Head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Railways (RAI) refuted some allegations on the decline of the transit from Iran and said the transit from Iran has grown by 29 percent despite the pandemic.

Speaking to ILNA, Rasouli said several corridors are active in Iran like the Caspian Sea's north, middle and south corridors as each and Iran can have a slice of China's 4b tons of imports and exports and therefore reports on elimination of Iran from these corridors are either because of lack of information or it is part of painting a black picture policy for injecting hopelessness into the country.

On the rise in the country's railroad borders and connection of Armenia to Iran's railroad, he said the issue of transit in all spheres of transportation due to Iran's strategic location in the world map and its access to the free waters in the southern and northern ports is considered a strategic bridge in the region and east-west and south-north corridors which connect northern neighbors of Iran to Europe and to the Persian Gulf.

On the rise in the number of railroad links to the neighboring countries, he said fortunately Iran has several rail borders with its neighboring countries in the east, west and north and soon with connection of Shalamchah to Basra a new rail border towards Iraq will be shaped.



He added that by the way connection of Iran via Soraya Spring to Turkey is another important project of RAI and the studies for this project are underway and the Turkish side has voiced its readiness and Iran-Turkey border via Soraya Spring will be Iran's the second rail border with Turkey.

On the importance of transporting goods via the Armenia rail route to Russia, Rasouli said in the north of the country, three rail links have been launched and currently Iran's trade exchange with Turkmenistan and the Central Asian countries and China are done via the eastern connection from the Incheboroon to Sarakhs borders.

He also pointed to the rail exchanges between Iran and Turkey, he said that the rail exchanges between Iran and Turkey was over 650,000 tons last year and this volume of exchanges has been the highest in the past 10 years and since last year and despite COVID-19 restrictions and closure of the borders for almost 4 months, the amount of rail transit of Iran grew 29 percent last year comparing to its preceding year.

Domestic Manufacturers Supply 80% Of Equipment of Goreh-Jask Pipeline

TEHRAN (MNA) - More than 80 percent of the equipment, machinery, and technical parts used in the strategic Goreh-Jask pipeline project have been supplied by domestic companies, the former Acting Industry, Mining, and Trade Minister Hossein Modarres Khiabani has said.

As Shana reported, the mentioned pipeline project is going to provide Iran with an alternative route for the country's crude oil exports that are currently carried out through the Strait of Hormuz. The pipeline will open a new gate for Iranian oil to the Indian Ocean by transferring it from Goreh in Bushehr Province to Jask on the shores of Oman Gulf.

"With the launch of this huge project, the density of Iran's trade will be transferred from the Persian Gulf to the Sea of Oman, the country's trade plan will change geopolitically," Modarres Khiabani said.

Implementation of the Goreh-Jask pipeline is in line with the country's programs for the integrated development of Makran shores in the southeast, which has been one of the major policies of the country considering the significance of the trade with the South Asian countries.

"We have been planning for years to use Makran coast and the Oman Sea as one of the country's trading hubs, and now with the launch of the Goreh-Jask project we will witness an economic boom in southeastern Iran and especially in the Jask region," Khiabani said.

The pipeline project has currently reached nearly 80 percent of physical progress and is nearing completion based on the schedule.

According to the Managing Director of Iran's Petroleum Engineering and Development Company (PEDEC) Touraj Dehqani, Goreh-Jask pipeline consists of 1,000 kilometers (km) of 42-inch acid-compatible pipes, five pumping stations, two pigging stations, and a metering station at the end of the line.

Iran First State to Produce Sputnik V in Region

TEHRAN (MNA) – "Iran became the first country in the region to locally produce the Sputnik V vaccine," said the director-general of the Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) Karyl Dimitrov.

Karyl Dimitrov made the remarks a day after Iran started local manufacturing of Russian Sputnik V on Saturday.

RDIF director-general said the Sputnik V vaccines produced by the Iranian pharmaceutical company will be used in the general vaccination of the population in Iran.

He added that the Russian RDIF and one of the leading Iranian pharmaceutical companies called Actover Co. announced in a statement the joint production of the Sputnik vaccine on Saturday.

Dimitrov explained more that the RDIF and Actover Co. are actively cooperating in the field of "technology transfer".

He further said that the local manufacturing of Russian Sputnik V in Iran accelerates the pace of general vaccination of the Iranian population, adding that the Sputnik V vaccines currently play an important role in protecting the country's population against the coronavirus.

Sputnik V is registered in 67 countries with a population of more than 3.5 billion people. Data obtained during vaccinations of the population of Russia and other countries show that Sputnik is one of the safest and most effective vaccines against the Covid-19.

Sputnik V vaccine produced in Iran was unveiled on Saturday during a ceremony at the complex of the Iranian drug maker Actover Co. located in Alborz province near the capital Tehran. The unveiling ceremony was attended by the Iranian health official including health minister Namaki and other health officials.

Economic Growth Without Oil Hits 3.3% Last Year

TEHRAN (MNA) – The details of economic situation in the last quarter of the previous Iranian calendar year (from Jan. 21 to March 20, 2021) showed that country's economy with oil excluded hit a 3.3 percent growth.

According to the Statistical Center of Iran (SCI), the inflation rate from Jan. 21 to March 20, 2021 reached 36.4 percent.

In this regard, total liquidity of the country in this period registered a 40.6 percent hike as compared to the last year's corresponding period.

The report put the value of non-oil products exported from customs offices of the country from Jan. 21 to March 20, 2021, at \$9,806 million, showing a 2.7 percent growth as compared to the same period of last year.

SCI reiterated that Iran's economic growth without oil and inflation rate in the last three months of the previous Iranian calendar year (from Jan. 21 to Mar. 20, 2021) hit 3.3 and 36.4 percent respectively.

Iran to Become Exporter of COVID-19 Vaccine

TEHRAN (MNA) – Head of Pasteur Institute of Iran (PII) said that Islamic Republic of Iran will be turned into the exporter of coronavirus, COVID-19, vaccine in very near future.

Dr. Alireza Biglari stated that not only Iran will be able to meet the domestic demand for the COVID-19 vaccine, but also it will be turned into one of the chief exporters of this vaccine which is a great achievement and national pride for the Islamic Iran.

Considering the proper activities of domestic producers of COVID-19 vaccine, it is predicted that the general vaccination of COVID-19 will be carried out within the next months in the country, he added.

He went on to say that Iranian-made COVID-19 vaccine will get a considerable portion of the global market and this issue is a great honor for the country.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Dr. Biglari pointed to the production and export of other vaccines in this research center and added, "In addition to saving life of fellow countrymen, a number of vaccines produced in the country have also saved the life of other people especially regional countries."

"BCG, Bacillus Calmette Guerin" vaccine is of the vaccines produced in Pasteur Institute of Iran (PII) that millions of non-Iranians in other countries have been vaccinated against it, he continued.

AQR Ramps Up Support For Science Startups

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's second largest charitable trust the Astan Quds Razavi (AQR) has increased its financial support for startups and science-based initiatives in the country, says a senior official in the trust.

Malek Rahmati, who serves as the deputy chief of the AQR, said the trust has been providing financial support to a total of 66 scientific projects launched by startup companies in recent years.

Rahamti made the announcement at the start of an exhibition to display AQR's achievements in the field of science-based economy.

Based in the northeastern city of Mashhad, the AQR is in charge of running the holy shrine of Imam Reza (AS) and its affiliated organizations. The charitable trust, which controls massive sources of endowments, has in recent years redirected many of its funds to science and research projects, especially those in the field of pharmaceuticals.

Experts say AQR companies have successfully developed solutions to help Iran overcome shortages caused by US sanctions in the field of medicines and medical equipment.

Rahamti said AQR companies have become more active in agricultural development by investing in the production of seeds and saplings that used to be supplied to the Iranian farmers from abroad.

He also said the AQR aims to expand its digital economy activities by creating financial technology companies.

AQR startups unveiled their latest achievements in the event held on Saturday, which was attended by the trust's chief Ahmad Marvi. Those on display included several new drugs, varieties of seeds, software developed for business purposes and innovative solutions for construction industry, according to a report on the trust's website.

Turkey Is Top Destination For Iranian Tourists

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Head of Association of Iranian Travel Agencies says the price of foreign tours is facing downward trend and Turkey is the top destination for Iranian tourists.

Speaking to ILNA, Mr. Hormatollah Rafiei said in recent days and with the change of the government, the country is facing changes of managers and officials and some of the hurdles in the past have been removed. He noted that currently officials are busy with their own businesses and they have left the private sector alone and this has helped the ground for activities of the private sector to pick up.

He went on to say that tours for destinations of Turkey, Dubai, Armenia and Russia are underway and Turkey tops the list of demands for foreign tours by Iranians and if there is no unnecessary meddling, Armenia can top the list and currently the demand for visiting Russia is on the rise.

On the price of the foreign tours, Rafiei said although the foreign tour market has not picked up yet, one can say the prices are logical because the tour operators act cautiously in order not to lose their customers, and even in some cases the prices are facing the downward trend because the customers are not significant. He expressed hope the market would pick up soon.

On travel to Russia or vice versa, Rafiei said although revoking group visa for Iranian tourists to Russia has not come into effect yet and it is said it will come into effect on July 6, some of Iranians visit Russia with having fan IDs in order to watch to EURO2020 matches. He reiterated that fan ID is not a visa and it is just a license to watch the match and the fan ID holders should get visas first.

He said that if Iran is to host Russian tours and tourists, it should pave the ground, adding that currently 80 percent of Russian tourists go to Turkey and they need to get familiar with Iran through promotional programs in order to attract them.



In the name of God

FIRST ANNOUNCEMENT



Brief Notice of International Tender No. 9904016

It is hereby respectfully notified that Esfahan Steel Co.

intends to purchase 1125 Items Bearing through international two-stage Tender. Prospective bidders specialized and experienced in the said area may visit Esfahan Steel Co.'s Website at www.esfahansteel.ir – Tenders & Bids – Suppliers Comprehensive System to get the tender documents and participate in the tender no later than 17.07.2021 and submit their offer not later than 18.07.2021.

Public Relation of Esfahan Steel Co.

Russia Launches Mediterranean Drills

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - The Russian military has launched sweeping maneuvers in the Mediterranean Sea featuring warplanes capable of carrying hypersonic missiles, a show of force amid a surge in tensions following an incident with a British destroyer in the Black Sea.

Moscow said one of its warships fired warning shots and a warplane dropped bombs in the path of HMS Defender, a British ship, on Wednesday to force it out of an area near Crimea that Russia claims as its territorial waters. Britain denied that account, insisting its ship was not fired upon and said it was sailing in Ukrainian waters. The Russian drills that began on Friday in the Eastern Mediterranean come as a British carrier strike group is in the area.



Helicopter Carrying Colombia's President Struck by Bullets in Attack

BOGOTA (Reuters) - A helicopter carrying Colombia's President Ivan Duque and others was struck by multiple bullets in an attack, he said in a video message.

The incident took place while the president's helicopter was flying through Colombia's Catatumbo region toward the city of Cucuta, capital of the country's Norte de Santander province, Duque said.

"What's clear is that this is a cowardly attack where bullet holes can be seen in the presidential aircraft," Duque said.

As well as Duque, the helicopter was carrying other officials including Defense Minister Diego Molano, Interior Minister Daniel Palacios, and governor of Norte de Santander Silvano Serrano.



Iraq Paramilitaries Show Off Weaponry in Big, Anniversary Parade



BAGHDAD (Reuters) - Thousands of Iraqi paramilitary fighters, including powerful pro-Iran factions, marched at a military base in eastern Iraq on Saturday showcasing tanks and rocket launchers in their biggest formal parade to date.

The event, attended by Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi, marked seven years since the Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF) were formed to fight the Sunni Muslim extremist Islamic State group.

"I esteem your sacrifices, and the sacrifices of the Iraqi armed forces" in fighting Islamic State, Kadhimi said, warning against any "sedition" within the PMF, but without elaborating. The PMF's establishment created a state-sanctioned umbrella organisation of mostly Shi'ite militias backed by Iran. The pro-Iran-aligned, which are the most powerful in the PMF, have since Islamic State's defeat in 2017 expanded their military, political and economic power and attacked bases housing the 2,500 remaining U.S. forces in Iraq.

They have allies in parliament and government and a grip over some state bodies, including security institutions.

Those factions are also accused of killing protesters who took to the streets in late 2019 demanding the removal of Iraq's ruling elite. The groups deny involvement in activist killings. Kadhimi, a U.S.-friendly interim premier, has tried to crack down on the most powerful Iran-backed factions but without success because of their military strength and political influence.

The membership of pro-Iran groups in the PMF has made it difficult for Kadhimi and state security forces to check the power of the militias, since they are effectively part of the state itself.

On Saturday Kadhimi watched, flanked by militia commanders while hundreds of armored vehicles drove past a banner of the late PMF military chief Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, an pro-Iran commander who was killed in a U.S. drone strike last year. The parade, a demonstration of military might, took place at a base once occupied by U.S. troops near the border with Iran.

The PMF was formed in 2014 after Iraq's top Shi'ite cleric Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani urged all able-bodied Iraqis to take up arms against Islamic State, which had taken over a third of Iraq.

Thousands Displaced by Fighting Around Northern Afghan City

KUNDUZ (AFP) - About 5,000 Afghan families have fled their homes in Kunduz after days of fighting between the Taliban and government forces, officials said Saturday, with the insurgents continuing to surround the key northern city.

The Taliban briefly seized the city twice in recent years but have now captured the surrounding districts and a nearby border crossing with Tajikistan. "About 5,000 families have been displaced by the fighting," Ghulam Sakhi Rasouli, director of the Kunduz Refugees and Repatriation Department, told AFP.

He said up to 2,000 of those families had fled to Kabul and other provinces.

British Naval Destroyer That Angered Russia Docks in Georgia

BATUMI (Reuters) - The British destroyer Defender, which angered Russia by sailing through waters off Crimea, docked at the Georgian Black Sea port of Batumi on Saturday.

Russia said it had fired warning shots at the Defender, and later threatened to bomb British naval vessels in the Black Sea if there were further "provocative" actions off Crimea, which Russia annexed from Ukraine in 2014. The peninsula is still recognised internationally as part of Ukraine.

The Defender's commander, Vince Owen, said the British navy was committed to "providing reassurances and security in the region, and incredible deterrence to those who seek to undermine global security".

The ship has visited Istanbul in Turkey and Odessa in

Ukraine as part of a tour of duty that will take its carrier group through the Suez Canal and on to East Asia.

Owen said Britain and its allies and partners such as Georgia, which hopes one day to join the Western NATO alliance, were committed to ensuring "Black Sea regional security, stability and prosperity and Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty".

Russia said it had dropped bombs in the path of the Defender on Wednesday as it was passing by Crimea, in what Moscow considered an incursion into Russian waters.

Britain said the Defender had sailed through waters belonging to Ukraine, and that any shots fired had been part of a pre-announced Russian gunnery exercise. It said no bombs had been dropped.



Taliban Has Right to React If U.S. Troops Stay in Afghanistan

KABUL (Dispatches) - Taliban spokesman Suhail Shaheen has told Al Jazeera in an exclusive interview that the armed group has the "right to react" if the United States still keeps troops in Afghanistan after September 11, when the withdrawal is due to complete.

U.S. officials told The Associated Press news agency on Thursday that roughly 650 U.S. soldiers were expected to remain in Afghanistan to provide security for diplomats after Washington pulled its forces out to end its 20-year military presence in the country.

Reacting to the report, Shaheen told Al Jazeera's Osama Bin Javaid in Doha that if the U.S. did so, it would be in breach of an agreement aimed at ending the US's longest war that was struck between Washington and the Taliban in the Qatari capital in February 2020. "We have signed the Doha agreement and that was negotiated with the American side for 18 months. They have agreed and committed themselves that they will withdraw from Afghanistan all their

military forces, advisers and contractors," Shaheen said.

"I think it is a clear violation of that agreement," he added.

"If they stay here, then I think it is a kind of continuation of the occupation. They have violated and we fully have the right to react," Shaheen said.

U.S. President Joe Biden in mid-April announced plans to withdraw the US troops from Afghanistan by September 11, adding several months to the May 1 deadline reached in the agreement between the administration of his predecessor, Donald Trump, and the Taliban after talks that excluded the Afghan government.

The final pullout of soldiers ordered by Biden began on May 1 when the number of US soldiers was between 2,500 and 3,500, and could be completed as soon as July 4. All international troops, including 7,000 NATO soldiers, are set to leave by September 11.

Shaheen told Al Jazeera that the Taliban had committed to providing secure passage to US forces as they withdraw from Afghanistan and that the armed group would not attack them.



Germany Knife Attack Victims Were All Women

WUERZBURG (Reuters) - Authorities in Germany were investigating on Saturday what prompted a man to go on the rampage with a knife in the town of Wuerzburg on Friday, killing three women and seriously injuring five other women.

Officials said the suspect, whose rampage was halted when police arrested him, was a 24-year-old Somali immigrant who had had mental health problems in the past. As is the practice in Germany, they did not name him.

Officials assume the suspect was acting alone, but are still investigating whether there was any Islamist motive for the attack, regional Interior Minister Joachim Herrmann told a news conference.

Herrmann cited one witness as saying that before starting his spree the suspect had shouted "Allahu akbar", an Arabic phrase that means "God is great" and that is often associated with acts of Islamist militancy when used by attackers.

"The indications of radicalization, in this case Islamism, and of psychological problems do not necessarily rule one another out ... this must be the subject of further investigation," Herrmann said. The man went into the kitchen department of a store and asked an assistant where the knives were, regional police President Gerhard Kallert said. He seized a knife and stabbed and killed the saleswoman and two more women in the shop.

He then injured five other women seriously, as well as wounding a child, in a bank and on the street.

He was cornered by passers-by before the police shot him in the thigh, Kallert said.

Police found the man's phone and pamphlets with hateful messages during a search of the homeless shelter, but were still evaluating them, Kallert said, adding that it was not yet clear whether the suspect had purposefully targeted women.

One of the injured was still fighting for her life, while two had been released from hospital, police president Martin Wilhelm told the news conference. Residents laid

flowers and candles outside the store. The suspect had lived in Wuerzburg since 2015, the year Germany opened its borders to more than a million migrants and refugees fleeing war and poverty.

Countries Impose New Lockdowns Amid Struggle to Contain Delta



LONDON (Dispatches) - Authorities in several countries – from Bangladesh and Indonesia to Australia and Israel – are racing to contain the spread of the highly contagious Delta variant of the coronavirus, while Russia's Saint Petersburg announced a record death toll, laying bare the challenges faced by nations worldwide in their efforts to return to pre-pandemic life.

While vaccination campaigns have brought down infections in mostly wealthy nations, the rise of the Delta variant has stoked fears of new waves of a virus that has already killed nearly four million people.

"There is currently a lot of concern about the Delta variant," World Health Organization (WHO) chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told a news briefing.

"Delta is the most transmissible of the variants identified so far, has been identified in at least 85 countries and is spreading rapidly among unvaccinated populations."

In Bangladesh, authorities announced they would impose a new national lockdown from Monday over the variant, with offices shut for a week and only medical-related transport allowed.

Australia's largest city Sydney, meanwhile, entered a two-week lockdown, with people ordered to stay home except for essential trips.

Sydney's new restrictions apply to some five million people, along with hundreds of thousands of others living in nearby towns.

New Zealand, citing "multiple outbreaks" in Australia, announced a three-day suspension of its quarantine-free travel arrangement with its larger neighbor.

Australia's COVID-19 Response Minister Chris Hipkins said the suspension would give officials time to consider measures "to make the bubble safer, such as pre-departure testing for all flights" between the two countries.

In Indonesia, President Joko Widodo said the country of 270 million people was facing an "extraordinary situation" and pledged to respond with "quick and appropriate policies". The country recorded more than 21,000 new infections on Saturday, the highest daily tally yet.



Shanon
(adviser)

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J, balcony
pkg, yard
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Fully Furn

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

Jordan (\$1900)
200sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p
S, J, balcony, & F.F

Farmanieh Apts
(\$1800) 2bdrs, F.F
(\$2300) 3bdrs, F.F
(\$3000) 4bdrs, F.F
All with S/p, S, & J

Darrous Villa (\$3000)
800sq.m, 5bdrs, S/pool
green yard, & pkg lots

Velenjak (\$2200)
200sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p

Elahieh bldg (\$6000)
4storey, 12bdrs, & pkgs

Niavaran (\$1700)
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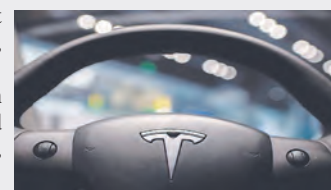
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Tesla to Recall Over 285,000 Cars in China

BEIJING (Dispatches) - Electric car giant Tesla will “recall” over 285,000 cars from the Chinese market after an investigation found issues with its assisted driving software that could cause road collisions, a government regulator announced late Friday.

Tesla would contact affected users to upgrade their vehicle’s software remotely for free, a State Administration of Market Regulation (SAMR) notice said, adding that it affects some imported and domestically manufactured Model 3 and Model Y vehicles. “The recall plan was filed with the State Administration of Market Regulation, and it was decided to recall the following vehicles from today,” SAMR said.



Spain, Italy Get Biggest Slice of EU Fund

MADRID (Dispatches) - Spain and Italy will receive the lion’s share of the 750billioneuro EU rescue fund but opinions vary over whether it will help their economies roar back to life or go to waste.

In Rome, analysts are confident the funds will be put to good use in the plan outlined by Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi whereas in Spain, the same issue raises many questions. The two countries will receive almost half of the 750 billion euros (\$900 billion) earmarked by Brussels to relaunch Europe’s economies that have been devastated by the Covid epidemic, funded through an unprecedented joint borrowing mechanism.

Italy will receive just over 191 billion euros in the form of grants and loans while Spain will get up to 140 billion.

‘We are aware that the EU is staking its future on the successful use of these funds,’ said Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez.

Italian counterpart Mario Draghi had a similar message.

‘We all have a responsibility to Europe’s taxpayers who are funding our national plan,’ he said.

Both countries have put forward recovery plans that have been approved by Brussels and which pledge to invest the funds into the green transition, digitalization and infrastructure projects.

But in Spain, there has been a lot of criticism.

Experts say that the deep-seated problems within Spain’s economy lie elsewhere: in job insecurity, youth unemployment, a fragile pension scheme and an education system in need of an overhaul.

‘These funds have been oversold: it is not that much money, nor are they going to have a big impact on the economy,’ said Fernando Fernandez, an economist at the IE Business School.

The first payments are expected in July but the bulk of the funds for 2021 aren’t likely to arrive until the end of the year when the economic recovery will already be under way.

Despite Sanchez’s repeated claims that Spain’s recovery plan includes 100 structural reforms, these are ‘marginal’ in essence, said Toni Roldan, director of EsadeEcPol, which specialises in economic policy research. ‘While they are certainly good enough to get the European Commission’s green light, they are not enough to stimulate a real change in competitiveness in Spain.’

Spain is planning to channel the investment into housing rehabilitation, electric cars and 5G.

‘That’s all well and good, but it only creates jobs in the short term, not in the long term,’ said Fernandez. Critics also point to the lack of political consultation around the plan, which was put together by Sanchez and his economy minister with virtually no input from other political forces.

In Italy, however, experts have taken a completely different view.

Draghi, who is known as ‘Super Mario’ for helping save the euro during the debt crisis, was called in earlier this year to help Italy implement a recovery plan that sparked political tensions and brought down the previous government in January. He has promised to reform Italy’s stifling bureaucracy, its labyrinthine tax code and snail-paced justice system, as well as focusing on education, female employment and fighting climate change.

If Rome had previously been inefficient in its management of EU funds, Draghi’s arrival could change that, experts say.

‘Draghi’s strong political commitment and leadership, coupled with the EU’s generous grants and loans, may give Italy a better chance of implementing its plan than before,’ said Lorenzo Codogno, former head economist at the Italian treasury. Since taking over, Draghi has appointed some 30 officials with special powers to revive 57 infrastructure projects that have been tangled up in Italy’s legendary bureaucracy and issued a series of decrees to simplify and speed up procedures.

For Carlo Altomonte of Bocconi University in Milan, it’s a step ‘in the right direction, to free up projects and get investments going’.

The pressure on Rome is enormous, Altomonte noted.

‘If the Italian plan were to fail, it would call into question the entire European common debt policy.’

China Seen as Top U.S. Partner In Asia, Japan More Reliable

TOKYO (Dispatches) - More American opinion leaders view China as the United States’ most important partner in Asia given the countries’ trade relations, but Japan is considered most trustworthy, a survey by the Japanese Foreign Ministry shows.

Asked to choose “the most important partner of the United States” among Asian and nearby countries, 35 percent of 200 opinion leaders from a range of fields picked China, 33 percent chose Japan and 9 percent Australia. South Korea ranked fourth at 7 percent in the annual survey.

The percentage of respondents selecting China was up significantly from 18 percent in the survey a year earlier, while those picking Japan slipped from 42 percent.

Of those who saw China as the most important partner, almost four out of five cited economic factors, with 56 percent picking trade ties and 23 percent the country’s economic strength, according to the survey conducted between December 2020 and January 2021.

Japan topped the list of countries in the region seen as reliable for the United States with 36 percent of the respondents naming the country, followed by Australia selected by 30 percent. China gained just 3 percent of the votes, trailing South Korea which ranked third, picked by 17 percent.

Asked why they selected Japan, 41 percent pointed to trade ties and 33 percent cited good relations and the bilateral alliance.

Economic ties between the world’s two largest economies deepened significantly after China’s accession to the World Trade Organization in 2001, with their goods trade totaling \$558.1 billion in 2019, about three times larger than that between Japan and the United States.

U.S.-China tensions became a major concern for the global economy after former U.S. President Donald Trump instigated a tariff war to reduce the trade deficit with China, accusing the Asian country of unfair trade practices and intellectual property theft.

Globally, Canada was picked as the most important partner for the United States, followed by Britain, Japan and Germany.

Britain was named the most trustworthy among the world’s countries and regions, followed by Canada, Japan and the European Union.

Swiss National Bank Has No Plans for a Digital Currency

ZURICH (Dispatches) - The Swiss National Bank (SNB) is not planning to introduce a central bank digital currency (CBDC), according to a report in the Swiss weekly business publication Handelszeitung.

At a recent press conference hosted by the Swiss Bankers Association, SNB’s chief economist Carlos Lenz announced that there is no need for a digital franc because the current payment system works well without one. Lenz also criticized blockchain technology, calling it “very inefficient.” “I don’t think a decentralized solution is ideal,” he said.

Switzerland has been researching central bank digital currencies since at least 2019, when the Swiss parliament asked the government to examine the potential of creating a CBDC. In December 2019, the government concluded that a digital franc would be too risky. The country has created a friendly environment for blockchain startups with the Zug Valley among the world’s hotbeds of innovation. Diem, the Facebook-backed stablecoin project formerly known as Libra, is also based in Switzerland.

Despite the Swiss government’s negative stance on central bank digital currencies, Swiss CBDC research has continued. In 2020, the Bank of International Settlements (BIS) wrapped a trial testing the feasibility of a CBDC used among financial institutions, and earlier this month the SNB and the Bank of France started a cross-border bank-to-bank CBDC experiment called “Project Jura.” But during the press comments, Lenz emphasized that these studies are just that – studies, not implementations. “This is not about implementation on a productive level,” Lenz stated. “There are currently no plans to introduce digital bank money. This also applies to the wholesale area.”

Japan Ratifies World’s Biggest Free Trade Deal

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japan ratified the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, a mega trade agreement also involving China, Australia and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the Foreign Ministry said.

Tokyo deposited its ratification instrument with the ASEAN Secretariat, making it the third member to do so toward the possible enforcement of the 15-nation RCEP by the end of the year. The ASEAN Secretariat processes operating procedures on behalf of the pact whose members account for about 30 percent of the world’s output, trade and population.

“The deal will strengthen the link between Japan and the (Asia-Pacific) region, which is the world’s growth center, and will contribute to Japan’s economic growth when it comes into force,” Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Hiroshi Kajiyama said at a press conference. The pact will be Japan’s first trade deal involving both China and South Korea, its biggest and third-biggest trade partners, respectively.

The Japanese government estimated earlier this year that the trade treaty could lift the gross domestic product of the world’s third-largest economy by about 2.7 percent. The trade deal is designed to remove tariffs on 91 percent of goods, and standardize rules on investment, intellectual property and e-commerce among other trade practices. It also aims to promote optimization of the supply chains within the free trade zone.

The pact, signed by 15 countries last November, will enter into effect 60 days after it is ratified by at least six ASEAN members and three other signatory countries. Among the signatories, Singapore and China have completed ratification procedures.

The RCEP groups the 10 ASEAN states -- Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam -- as well as Australia, China, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea. Most Viewed Majority of schools have reopened limited classes, says survey ‘New type of early human’ found in Israel Hospitals ‘collapse’ as second wave engulfs Indonesia ‘Out there forever’: Canadian sex assault victim haunted by online video Garuda faces bankruptcy, weighs options Indonesia, US set up \$3.5m maritime training center England’s Euro 2020 stars given private Ed Sheeran gig How digital transformation enables broader sustainability performance Facing bankruptcy, Garuda weighs options Bali vaccine tourism plan meets skepticism amid COVID-19 surge

“The deal will strengthen the link between Japan and the (Asia-Pacific) region, which is the world’s growth center, and will contribute to Japan’s economic growth when it comes into force,” Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Hiroshi Kajiyama said at a press conference. The pact will be Japan’s first trade deal involving both China and South Korea, its biggest and third-biggest trade partners, respectively. The Japanese government estimated earlier this year that the trade treaty could lift the gross domestic product of the world’s third-largest economy by about 2.7 percent.

U.S. Economy Grows 6.4% in Q1



WASHINGTON (AP) - The U.S. economy grew at a solid 6.4% rate in the first three months of the year, setting the stage for what economists believe may be the strongest year for the economy in about seven decades.

Growth in the gross domestic product, the country’s total output of goods and services, was unchanged from two previous estimates, the Commerce Department said Thursday, an acceleration from the 4.3% pace of the fourth quarter.

Economists believe that economic growth has continued to accelerate in the current quarter, which ends this month, as vaccinations become widespread and Americans eager to get outside are being welcomed by newly re-opened businesses. Surging activity from consumers is being fueled in part by nearly \$3 trillion in financial support that the government has approved since December.

Additional economic data that emerged Thursday also points to a nation that has regained its footing quickly after being thracked by a global pandemic, though jobless claims remain stubbornly above 400,000.

“This summer will be hot for the U.S. economy,” said Lydia Boussour, lead U.S. economist for Oxford Economics. “As the health situation continues to improve, consumers sitting on piles of savings will give into the urge to splurge on services and experiences they felt deprived of during the pandemic.”

Boussour forecast that GDP growth in the current April-June quarter will surge to an annual rate of 12% and growth for the entire year will come in at 7.5%. That would be the best annual performance since 1951.

Even economists whose forecasts for 2021 growth range from 6% to 7% believe growth this year will be the best since a 7.2% gain in 1984, when the U.S. was emerging from an extended and painful recession.

Economists believe growth this quarter will be enough to push GDP output above the previous peak reached at the end of 2019 before the pandemic struck and cut off the longest economic expansion in U.S. history.

The data released Thursday was government’s third and final look at first-quarter GDP, and arrived along side a separate report from the Commerce Department that showed May orders from U.S. factories for big-ticket manufactured goods rose for the 12th time in the last 13 months.

VW to End Sales of Combustion Engines in Europe by 2035

BERLIN (Reuters) - German carmaker Volkswagen will stop selling combustion engines cars in Europe by 2035 as it shifts to electric vehicles, but later in the United States and China, a board member was quoted as saying on Saturday.

“In Europe, we will exit the business with internal combustion vehicles between 2033 and 2035, in the United States and China somewhat later,” Klaus Zellmer, Volkswagen board member for sales, told the Muenchner Merkur newspaper.

“In South America and Africa, it will take a good deal longer due to the fact that the political and infrastructure framework conditions are still missing.” By 2050 at the latest, the entire Volkswagen fleet should be CO2-neutral, Zellmer told the newspaper.

In Europe, he is aiming for electric cars to account for 70% of total sales by 2030. This would prepare the company for a possible tightening of the European Union’s climate targets and even go beyond them.

EU policymakers have clamped down on exhaust emissions, forcing carmakers to spur development of low-emission technology or face penalties if they exceed limits on CO2 emissions.



4 Drug-Trafficking Bands Dismantled in Tehran

TEHRAN (MNA) – Tehran Police chief announced the dismantling of four drug-trafficking bands in the Iranian capital in the last week.

Tehran Police Chief Brigadier General Hossein Rahimi said on Sunday that the police forces of Tehran confiscated 2.431 tons of different kinds of illicit drugs during various operations in the last week.

Four drug-trafficking gangs were dismantled and 63 major smugglers were arrested, he added.

7 drug sales centers were sealed and 32 vehicles and motorcycles seized by police forces, Rahimi said.



Italian Confidence Recovery Continues Unabated in June

ROME (Dispatches) - Italian statistical agency, Istat's confidence data, published earlier today, continues to paint a rosier picture of Italian economic developments.

Manufacturing seems to be running on all cylinders, but lagging sectors such as services and retail reflect the combined impact of vaccination successes and of the ensuing accelerated re-openings.

The manufacturing sector, where confidence reached the highest level since the year 2000, seems scarcely affected by supply chain bottlenecks and by cost pressures.

The order book subcomponent continued improving strongly, in particular in the intermediate and capital goods domains, where also production expectations grew faster given depleting inventories. With the Italian recovery plan now approved by the EU Commission and the relevant money looking set to start flowing in since August, the investment good bias looks set to stay for some time.

Crucially, the recovery in confidence is strengthening also in the services and retail sectors, most affected in the recent past by containment measures. In services, confidence reached back to the June 2018 level, while in the retail domain it almost filled the gap with pre-Covid levels for both large and small retailers.

Another comforting confirmation comes from the consumer realm.

In June confidence made another relevant leap, posting the highest reading since August 2018. The five-point monthly increase was driven by the current and economic climate components. With expectations about future unemployment almost stable since May, consumers showed sharply higher intentions to purchase durable goods: an encouraging signal for 3Q21 private consumption.

When trying to draw conclusions about the implications for 2Q21 GDP growth, we need to confront the scarcity of available hard data. Data for April shows that industrial production started the quarter on a strong footing, while retail sales were soft-ish, suggesting that the existing restrictions were still weighing on contact-intensive sectors. Labour market data was also mixed, with a very small increase in employment, which remained some 800K units lower than in pre-Covid times and



the unemployment rate on the rise. The cross-sector acceleration in confidence seen in May and June suggests that the re-openings should have done more than bringing higher spirits inducing a clear acceleration in value-added generation also in services over the second half of the quarter.

Looking further out into 2H21, with the vaccination campaign running at target cruising speed and barring a new round of widespread restrictions due to the Covid-19 delta variant, the macroeconomic picture looks set to improve further. All good, but we will have to keep an eye on labour market developments: starting from July, the redundancy ban currently in place will be lifted for many sectors, potentially adding some cautiousness in consumers spirits.

The confidence data release adds upside risks to our current forecast of a 4.3% GDP growth in 2021.

Sluggish Jet Demand To Cap European Crude Refinery Runs



LONDON (Reuters) - A recovery in European jet fuel demand to pre-pandemic levels is years away, forcing regional refiners to continue blending the aviation fuel into diesel, and keeping a lid on their crude runs, consultancy FGE Energy said.

FGE sees jet/kerosene demand in Europe at the end of 2022 reaching 75% of 2018-2019 levels only, meaning European refiners will continue to blend a large volume of jet into diesel to soak up the surplus.

“Such blending tends to limit overall refinery crude throughput because maximum distillate hydrotreating capacity is reached at lower crude throughputs,” FGE says.

Hydrotreating is a chemical process used in refining petroleum products to remove sulphur.

“At this point, incremental crude runs would produce only naphtha, high sulphur gasoil and fuel oil – not a recipe for positive margins,” FGE added.

The consultancy forecasts European jet demand not fully returning to pre-COVID-19 levels until 2030, but it will be very close to it from 2024-25 onwards.

The collapse in fuel demand after major European economies went into lockdown to slow the spread of the coronavirus forced refineries that could no longer profitably run into capacity rationalisation.

FGE estimates that European refining capacity will shrink by 700,000 barrels per day (bpd) due to the closures announced for 2020 and 2021, with hydrotreating capacity falling by 200,000 bpd.

This means European refiners will not return to their pre-COVID-19 annual crude run levels of 12.5 million bpd, FGE says, and forecasting runs to average 11.1 million bpd this year and 11.7 million bpd next year.

“The more jet that can be pulled out of the diesel pool (thus freeing-up diesel hydrotreating capacity) the more scope there is for refiners to increase throughput,” FGE said.

European diesel refining margins have remained under pressure, even as economies around the continent ease movement restrictions, to a large extent due to jet fuel blending, traders say.

Barge diesel margins in northwest Europe are trading at about \$5 a barrel, according to Reuters calculations, compared with over \$23 a barrel in March 2020.

UN Says 400,000 Are Approaching Starvation in Madagascar

GENEVA (Dispatches) - The U.N. World Food Program says southern Madagascar is in the throes of back-to-back droughts that are pushing 400,000 people toward starvation, and have already caused deaths from severe hunger.

Lola Castro, WFP's regional director in southern Africa, told a news conference Friday that she witnessed “a very dramatic and desperate situation” during her recent visit with WFP chief David Beasley to the Indian Ocean island nation of 26 million people.

Hundreds of adults and children were “wasted,” and hundreds of kids were skin and bones and receiving nutritional support, she said.

In 28 years working for WFP on four continents, Castro said she had “never seen anything this bad” except in 1998 in Bahr el-Gazal in what is now South Sudan.

The U.N. and Madagascar's government are launching an appeal for about \$155 million in a few days to provide life-saving food and prevent a major famine, she said. Thousands of people have left their homes in rural areas and moved to more urban environments in search of food, she added.

Beasley tweeted Friday that 400,000 people are “marching towards starvation,” 14,000 are “in famine-like conditions,” and “if we do not act ASAP, the number of people facing starvation will reach 500,000 in a few short months.”

“Families have been living on raw red cactus fruits, wild leaves and locusts for months now,” he said Wednesday. “This is not because of war or conflict, this is because of climate change,” Beasley stressed. “This is an area of the world that has contributed nothing to climate change, but now, they're the ones paying the highest price.”

According to WFP, 1.14 million people in southern Madagascar don't have enough food including 14,000 in “catastrophic” conditions, and this will double to 28,000 by October.

Madagascar is the only country that isn't in conflict but still has people facing “Famine-Humanitarian Catastrophe” in the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification known as the IPC, which is a global partnership of 15 U.N. agencies and international humanitarian organizations that uses five categories to measure food security, Castro said.

Indian Economic Growth May Touch 10.1% in 2021-22

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - The second wave of Covid-19 in India was four times worse than the first wave in terms of infections and deaths seen in the country, the report said. The second wave disrupted the already battered growth process from the first wave, it added.

The Indian economy is likely to grow 8.4-10.1% for the current financial year as against a contraction of 7.3% in the last fiscal, the economic think-tank National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) said on Friday.

The research council has pitched for strong fiscal support to push India's economic growth in its quarter

review report, reported news agency PTI.

“We estimate that gross domestic product (GDP) will grow 11.5% in Q1 (first quarter) and 8.4-10.1% for the whole year 2021-22,” the think-tank said.

The Indian economy turned a corner this month and began regaining momentum in June, ultra-high frequency data indicate, though subdued consumer sentiment is expected to limit the pace of recovery in Asia's third largest economy. This comes as states gradually ease curbs on business activity, keeping in mind the decline in the number of fresh Covid cases.

Lebanon...

FROM PAGE 1

She added: “The U.S. has always been by the side of the Lebanese people, but Iran looks at Lebanon as being a state that could help it implement its agenda.”

Traffic cut off at Habbush Triangle, Nabatiyeh, Iqlim Al-Tuffah. (Supplied)

Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah said that his party is “working in the background to implement a plan to buy oil from Tehran and pay for it in Lebanese pounds.”

He proposed that two oil refineries be built in north and south Lebanon.

The Hezbollah proposal provoked widespread anger, with former MP Ahmad Fattat claiming that “Iran wants to keep Lebanon as a card in its hand to use later.” He said that Lebanon's economic collapse has allowed Hezbollah to “get its hands on all sectors,” while its ally the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) “has handed the party all the cards in return for getting power.”

Political analyst Assaad Bechara told Arab News that Nasrallah's insistence on importing oil from Iran “is a populist step that aims to suggest Iran is helping Lebanon while the rest of the world is doing nothing.” However, he questioned whether Lebanon's private sector companies would be willing to risk sanctions by importing Iranian oil.

“The queues at gas stations in Tehran are longer than the queues in Lebanon,” he added.

Attempts to strengthen Iranian influence over Lebanon are unfolding amid a worsening financial collapse, with the exchange rate late on Saturday reaching 18,000 Lebanese pounds to the dollar. Meanwhile, sparring between Hezbollah allies the FPM and Amal Movement continued over the formation of the government. As the exchange rate plunged further, demonstrators took to the streets in protest against “the sleeping state that kills its own people.”

Roads were blocked in all regions and shops in popular markets closed down, with their owners saying they no longer know how to price their goods. Later, the Lebanese army reopened some blocked roads.

Iraqi Resistance Groups...

FROM PAGE 1

Its formation goes back to the summer of 2014, shortly after Daesh, the world's most notorious terror group, managed to occupy swathes of territory in Iraq.

The lightning gains made by the terrorists caught the national army of Iraq off guard, pushing government forces to the verge of collapse and leaving the Arab state in disarray.

On June 15 that year, Iraq's prominent Shia cleric Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani intervened to help rebuild the national army, and issued a fatwa that called on all Iraqi people to join forces with the army in the face of the Daesh threat.

The historic fatwa led to a mass mobilization of popular volunteer forces under the banner of Hashd al-Sha'abi. The force then rushed to the aid of the army and took the lead in many of the successful anti-terror operations, which ultimately led to the collapse of Daesh's territorial rule and the liberation of the entire Iraqi land in December 2017.

In November 2016, the Iraqi parliament recognized Hashd al-Sha'abi as an official force with similar rights as those of the regular army, therefore legally establishing it as part of the National Armed Forces.

The chairman of Iraq's anti-terror Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) denounces the destabilizing role of American troops in the Arab country, saying they are targeting Iraqi forces instead of supporting them

However, the West and especially the U.S., which is occupying parts of Iraq, has long been seeking to dissolve Hashd al-Sha'abi and constrain its role. It has also targeted resistance fighters in a bid to resuscitate Daesh.

Formation of such resistance groups in any country can help it to expel foreign forces as the Iraqi have done and American forces now have to leave Iraq or face the tough response from these groups.

The occupiers only understand the language of force and only resistance against them will pay otherwise the countries have to suffer under the boost of the occupiers.

Hashd al-Sha'abi has proved like Hezbollah forces and Hams that only resistance can bring down the occupiers and aliens and as the group has strengthened Iraq government's stand against the West and has asked the foreign troops to leave the country because the resistance groups all support the government on this issue and the Western forces have no way but to leave the country or they pay for their illegal presence.

The Americans or Europeans may call Hashd al-Sha'abi a terrorist group but everybody knows that this is the West's habit to designate freedom fighters as terrorists while they themselves have been creator of the terrorist groups like Daesh.

History has shown that resistance groups have been behind independence of countries in any part of the world from South America to Africa and groups like Hashd al-Shabi are formed only to save countries from occupation and they only seek independence of their countries from the occupation and meddling of occupiers.

Vienna...

FROM PAGE 1

Out of a steadfast commitment to salvage a deal that the US tried to torpedo, Iran has been the most active party in Vienna, proposing most drafts.

“Still believe a deal is possible, if the US decides to abandon Trump's failed legacy,” the Iranian spokesperson added. He once again reiterated the Islamic Republic's opposition to protracted negotiations and emphasized that Iran “will not negotiate forever.”

Following a year of strategic patience, Iran resorted to its legal rights stipulated in Article 26 of the JCPOA, which grants a party the right to suspend its contractual commitments in case of non-compliance by other signatories, and let go of some of the restrictions imposed on its nuclear energy program.

Iran Only Agreed to...

FROM PAGE 1

Gharibabadi reminded that Iran had been retaining the data from the cameras “solely based on good will, and not as part of its obligations towards the agency.”

The Islamic Republic took the decision to keep the data only out of “political considerations” and in line with its commitment to international safeguards, he said. “Iran is not bound by any commitment to implement the agency's demand,” the envoy noted. In that sense, “the agency had no duty to report on the expired [understanding] agreement” to the Board of Governors, Gharibabadi said.

No earlier than on Friday, the Iranian diplomat had similarly laid into the UN agency for making excessive demands on the Islamic Republic. “Such remarks are pregnant with political messages,” the envoy said, referring to Grossi's report.

He was repeating the Islamic Republic's grievance about the agency's submitting to the anti-Iran political pressure that is applied to it by the U.S. and others. “We have said this repeatedly that there would be no agreement until our demands were met,” Gharibabadi concluded, reiterating the country's assertion that Tehran's cooperation was conditioned on Washington and others' resumption of their duties towards the nuclear accord.



Tierney Signs New Long-Term Arsenal Deal

LONDON (Dispatches) - Scottish left-back Kieran Tierney has signed a new long-term contract at Arsenal, the Premier League club announced.

Tierney, 24, whose new deal reportedly takes him up to 2026, was a rare bright spark in a desperately disappointing season for Mikel Arteta's men, who finished eighth in the English top-flight.

Since joining from Celtic for £25 million (\$35 million) in 2019, Tierney has consistently been one of the Gunners' best performers and has earned his status as a fans' favourite.

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Ostapenko Storms To Eastbourne Title

LONDON (Dispatches) - Latvia's Jelena Ostapenko claimed her first title for nearly two years with a dominant 6-3, 6-3 win over Anett Kontaveit to win the Eastbourne International on Saturday.

Ranked 43 in the world, former French Open champion Ostapenko was handed a wildcard to the Wimbledon warm-up event and could be a contender on the grass at SW19, where she was a semi-finalist in 2018. Kontaveit had won the two previous clashes between the pair, but Ostapenko never looked back after racing into an early 5-1 lead in the first set.

Italy, Denmark Cruise Into Quarters of Euro 2020

LONDON (Dispatches) - Substitutes Federico Chiesa and Matteo Pessina struck in extra-time as Italy beat battling Austria 2-1 to reach the quarter-finals of Euro 2020 at Wembley on Saturday.

The two teams were locked at 0-0 after 90 minutes in London, with Italy enjoying the better of the first half and Austria coming back strongly in the second period.

But Chiesa made the crucial breakthrough early in extra-time and another goal from Pessina set up a quarter-final against the winners of Sunday's tie between Belgium and holders Portugal, despite late drama.

"We knew we had to suffer because Austria are the typical side who do not allow (you) to play well," said Italy boss Roberto Mancini.

"The substitutes made the difference for us, but everybody gave their best tonight. I'm happy because the lads gave everything to win even when we were tired."

Having emerged as Group A winners with a 100 percent record after playing all three of their games in Rome, Italy were on the road for the first time in the tournament.

Mancini made seven changes from the side that beat Wales as Marco Verratti started instead of Manuel Locatelli in midfield, while Giorgio Chiellini again missed out with a hamstring injury.

After belting out a rousing rendition of their national anthem with ample backing from the largely Italian crowd, the Azzurri made a lively start.

Leonardo Spinazzola's buccaneering bursts from left-back were a constant threat and he had Italy's first sight of goal with a blast wide from an acute angle.

Nicolo Barella's low volley from Spinazzola's cross forced Daniel Bachmann to save with his legs.

Ciro Immobile was inches away from putting Italy ahead when the Lazio forward whipped an audacious 20-yard strike against the woodwork with Bachmann rooted to the spot.

For all their possession, Italy lacked the cutting edge to kill off the Austrians.

Meanwhile Denmark eased into the



quarter-finals of Euro 2020 on Saturday with a 4-0 win over Wales and now they will face Italy in the quarter-finals.

The neutrals' favourites after overcoming the trauma of Christian Eriksen's cardiac arrest in their opening game, Denmark beat Wales in Amsterdam thanks to Kasper Dolberg's brace and late goals from Joakim Maehle and Martin Braithwaite.

"It's completely crazy. I actually don't know how I feel. This is total madness. It's surreal. It was here it all started for me, and to play here again in this setting was insane," former Ajax striker Dolberg told Danish broadcaster DR.

The Danes will go on to face the Netherlands or Czech Republic having won a knockout tie at the European Championship for the first time since they stunned the continent to win the tournament in 1992.

It is exactly 29 years since Denmark defeated Germany in the final in Gothenburg having famously only qualified because war-torn Yugoslavia disintegrated.

Surprise semi-finalists at the last edition, Wales found the majority of the Johan Cruyff Arena filled by Danish supporters, with fans barred from entering the Netherlands from the United Kingdom due to Covid-19 restrictions.

Robert Page's side made a promising start as Gareth Bale drilled just wide from distance, but Dolberg curled Denmark ahead with a sumptuous strike on 27 minutes.

Kerber Wins Bad Homburg Title



HAMBURG (Dispatches) - Angelique Kerber gave herself a confidence boost ahead of Wimbledon, which starts Monday, by winning her first tournament in three years to take the WTA Bad Homburg grass-court title.

Kerber, a former world number one, beat Katerina Siniakova of the Czech Republic 6-3, 6-2 in Saturday's final to win her first title since victory at Wimbledon in 2018.

After losing two finals in 2019, this is Kerber's first tournament win since beating Serena Williams to win Wimbledon, when she claimed her third Grand Slam title.

"It means a lot to me today. This is my surface, I felt very comfortable on grass and I'm just happy to have finally won a tournament again," said Kerber, whose family was watching in the stands.

"To be able to do all this in front of my friends and family is even nicer."

This was Kerber's third grass-court title, alongside Wimbledon in 2018 and the WTA Birmingham tournament in 2015, and the 13th tournament win of her career.

The 33-year-old had struggled this season and slipped down to a world ranking of 28, but proved her form this week in Bad Homburg, near Frankfurt.

Kuwait's Mutawa Becomes World's Most Capped Player

KUWAIT CITY (Dispatches) - Veteran Kuwaiti footballer Bader al-Mutawa became the world's most capped international player when he ran out against Bahrain in an Arab Cup qualifier in Doha on Friday.

For the 36-year-old striker, who scored two goals on his international debut in 2003, it was his 185th appearance with the national team, beating a record long held by retired Egyptian star Ahmed Hassan.

But many top players are well placed in the race to break Mutawa's record.

Cristiano Ronaldo, 36, is set to mark his 179th international appearance this Sunday when he skips Portugal against Belgium, the world's top-ranked team, in the Euro 2020 round of 16.

Portugal scraped through after a 2-2 draw with France in Budapest on Wednesday, with Ronaldo scoring two penalties that allowed him to equal the all-time international record of 109 goals set by Iran's Ali Daei.

Another competitor is Spain's veteran defender Sergio Ramos, who has played 180 internationals but was excluded from the national squad for Euro 2020.

Mutawa started his international career on September 4, 2003, in an AFC Asian Cup qualifier at the age of 18 and 237 days.

Since his debut with the Gulf "Blues", the Kuwaiti captain has faced 44 different national teams and scored 54 goals.

The 2021 Arab Cup is scheduled to run between November 30 and December 18 in Doha, a year before it plays host to the 2022 World Cup.

Verstappen Takes Pole Position for Styrian GP

VIENNA (Dispatches) - World Championship leader Max Verstappen of Red Bull produced the quickest lap in qualifying to claim pole position for the Styrian Grand Prix.

Mercedes' Valtteri Bottas was second quickest but drops to fifth on the grid because of a three-place penalty imposed on Friday, leaving teammate Lewis Hamilton to start on the front row with Verstappen.

McLaren's Lando Norris produced the performance of the day, pushing the front runners all the way and finishing fourth, meaning he will start from third.

Mueller Declares Himself Fit for England Showdown



Germany's Euro 2020 base camp in Bavaria.

"The capsular injury does not hold me back and I am experienced enough to deal with it.

"I'm convinced it won't be a problem for Tuesday."

Mueller is expected to start against England having been left out of the line-up for Wednesday's 2-2 draw with Hungary, in which he came on as a second-half replacement.

LONDON (Dispatches) - Germany forward Thomas Mueller insists his knee injury will not stop him facing England in Tuesday's blockbuster Euro 2020 last 16 clash at Wembley.

"If I it was a problem, I wouldn't have trained today," Mueller said Saturday at

Alaphilippe Leads Tour de France

PARIS (Dispatches) - Frenchman Julian Alaphilippe dusted himself off from a fall to claim the first yellow jersey of the Tour de France on Saturday, winning stage one by a clear margin on a crash-marred opening day.

The peloton embarked on the 2021 Tour from the industrial shipyards of this fortified naval stronghold at the western tip of the country to the sound of bagpipes, with hordes of unmasked fans decked out in red-and-white polka dot caps to accompany the black-and-white flag of this fiercely independent region.

World champion Alaphilippe was a pre-race favourite due to the final climb and he shot up the ascent to take 10 bonus seconds at the finish line and also end another 12 seconds ahead of his nearest challenger.

"I was in a great position at the bottom of the last hill, and I accelerated to drop all the sprinters who wanted to win, and then see who was left," Alaphilippe explained.

"We had been planning it and I've been thinking about it since we got to Brittany."

Australia's Michael Matthews was second at 16 seconds while Slovenia's Primož Roglic came third and is in the same position in the overall standings 20sec down on the leader.

Crossing the line in his world champion's rainbow jersey Alaphilippe put his thumb in his mouth in honor of his newborn son with his partner Marion Rousse, a former professional cyclist and now commentator.

Asked if he would give the toy lion offered to winners to his son, Alaphilippe laughed: "He prefers something else, but if I left home to come on the Tour with a newborn at home, then this win was a good reason."



Federer Unsure About Competing At Tokyo Olympics

LONDON (Dispatches) - With less than a month to go before the start of the Tokyo Olympics, tennis star Roger Federer isn't sure he'll take part in the event. Federer said he will "reassess the situation" once Wimbledon is over, according to the Associated Press.

Wimbledon, which is set to begin Monday, June 28, will finish July 11. The Tokyo Olympics will start July 23, giving Federer only a few weeks to rest and prepare if he does well at Wimbledon.

Federer said he would love to take part in the Olympics, but his performance at Wimbledon will impact his decision.

"Obviously, if I play really good here or really bad, I think it has an impact on how everything might look for the summer," he said. "Still, my feeling is I would like to go to the Olympics. I would like to play as many tournaments as possible. But I think we decided now let's just get through Wimbledon, sit down as a team, and then decide where we go from there."

In addition to that, Federer will be 40 in August and dealt with a knee injury last year. Those factors could influence whether Federer participates in the Olympics. Federer pulled out of the French Open to rest his surgically-repaired knee.

Federer admitted his age played a role that decision, saying, "You can't play it all."

Federer has participated in the Olympics in the past. He won a gold medal in doubles at the 2008 games and a silver medal in singles in 2012. Federer did not compete at the 2016 Olympics due to a knee injury. Federer has experienced plenty of success at Wimbledon over the years, winning the tournament eight times. He's currently tied with Rafael Nadal for the most Grand Slam men's singles titles with 20. Novak Djokovic could tie that record if he wins Wimbledon. Djokovic enters the event as the top seed on the men's side.

