

Health Ministry Announced on Thursday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic in Iran Increased to 86,791 With 199 More Iranians Killed by the Deadly Virus Over the Past 24 Hours

# IRAN NEWS

Austrian Foreign Minister Called the JCPOA as One of the Most Important Structural Elements of The World Non-Proliferation System And Stressed That the Agreement Must Be Maintained With All Might

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Bucks Defeat Suns to Pull Level in NBA Finals



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## Conspiracies Against Iran Have Not Worked

ILAM (IP) - Referring to the conditions created as a result of the oppressive sanctions by enemies against Iran, the Chief of the Judiciary said the conspiracies of the last 43 years have not worked with national determination.

The Judiciary Chief Gholamhossein Mohseni-Ejeie, called on all executive and judicial directors to complete the semi-finished projects in cooperation with each other.

Mohseni-Ejeie said on Thursday in the administrative council of Ilam province: "A large part of the country's capital in different provinces has been spent to complete construction and infrastructure projects, but some of these goals, despite the passage of more than one decade are still not completed."

He added: "These national assets should not be allowed to be delayed and wasted, because if completed, they will lead to many jobs along with added value."

The judiciary chief addressed the relevant authorities that by identifying these projects, they must find solutions to complete them and complete them.

The chief of the judiciary called on the authorities in various agencies to identify ways to neutralize the sanctions against Iran by planning and to work.

## Countering World Drug Problem Requires Collective, Shared Responsibility

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's permanent representative to Vienna-based international organizations has underlined that Tehran bears the brunt of fighting narcotics trafficking without much help from the rest of the world, saying that confronting the world's drug problem requires shared responsibility by all countries.

"Yesterday, 3 police officers were martyred in Iran in a clash with drug traffickers," Kazem Gharibabadi tweeted on Thursday, a day after the three police officers were killed and two others were injured in a clash with drug traffickers in Kahnuj County, in southeastern Kerman Province.

"In the absence of [such] dedicated effort, the Europeans have to go after every gram of narcotics on their streets. Countering world drug problem requires shared responsibility by all," Gharibabadi added.

On Wednesday, 3 police officers were martyred in Iran in a clash with drug traffickers. In the absence of these dedicated effort, the Europeans have to go after every gram of narcotics on their streets. Countering world drug problem requires shared responsibility by all.

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## Iranian Funds in South Korea Used To Settle Debts to 40 Companies



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iranian funds in South Korea are used to settle Tehran's debts to 40 companies in the country.

A South Korean newspaper report says funds belonging to Iran and frozen in two bank accounts in the country have been used to pay back debts to dozens of companies who had exported goods and services to Iran before the country came under U.S. sanctions in 2018.

The Thursday report by the Korea JoongAng Daily said that the funds had been distributed between a total of 40 South Korean companies as of last month to settle some \$70 million of their claims related to exports to Iran.

"We understand there were 40 companies in total who were paid back some outstanding accounts," the report quoted an unnamed diplomatic source as saying.

The source said that total Iranian outstanding debts to South Korean companies had amounted to \$90 million of which the \$70 million are now settled.

The payments had been made from accounts in the Industrial Bank of Korea (IBK) and Woori Bank where Iran holds around \$7 billion worth of funds for sales of crude and energy products to South Korea before May 2019.

US waives Iran oil trade sanctions, gives Tehran access to frozen funds to pay off Japanese, Korean exporters  
U.S. waives Iran oil trade sanctions, gives Tehran access to frozen funds to pay off Japanese, Korean exporters  
The U.S. State Department reportedly waives sanctions on Iran's oil trade, giving Tehran limited access to its frozen funds.

Iran came under U.S. sanctions in May 2018 after a former government in Washington pulled out of a 2015 international agreement on the Tehran's nuclear program known as the JCPOA.

The news of debt payments in South Korea comes exactly a day after U.S. authorities announced they had allowed Seoul to use the funds for the sole purpose of settling Iran's outstanding debts to South Korean businesses.

U.S. State Department authorities said the move was meant to appease South Korea rather than to give a positive signal to Tehran amid ongoing international talks aimed at reviving the JCPOA.

Iran has been unhappy with South Korea's lack of independence in dealing with the issue of frozen funds. Iranian authorities have warned the case could negatively impact bilateral ties even after a potential revival of the JCPOA in future.

## Kenyan Minister Terms Bomet-Iran Tea Export Deal "Fake"

NAIROBI (Dispatches) - Kenya's Ministry of Agriculture has weighed in on a Memorandum of Understanding between Bomet County and the Islamic State of Iran to sell tea directly.

Agriculture Cabinet Secretary Peter Munya termed the deal as fake, saying the national government does not recognise the agreement between Bomet Governor Hilary Barchok and Iranian ambassador to Kenya Jafar Barmaki.

Munya said despite Dr Barchok and Dr Barmaki flagging off a consignment of 84 tonnes of tea sourced from private companies three weeks ago, the same had not reached the port of Mombasa by Wednesday, July 14.

Bomet Governor Hillary Barchok and Iran Ambassador Jafar Barmaki during the flagging off of the first consignment. He questioned where the county had sourced the tea from without engaging the Kenya Tea Development Agency (KTDA) factories which are dominant processors.

"Where did they get the tea when KTDA was not involved?" said Munya.

The CS said while the deal was good, the county had neither exercised caution nor engaged experts. He accused the county of disregarding US sanctions facing Iran. "Iran is faced with sanctions on trade and nobody can purport to overlook such serious issues," added Munya.

Bomet Governor Hilary Barchok and Iran Ambassador Jafar Barmaki. [Gilbert Kimutai, Standard] However, Barchok has come out guns blazing to defend the deal.

Speaking to the press in his office, Barchok termed the statement by the CS as "very unfortunate and reckless".

"I believe that the Agriculture CS is speaking from a point of ignorance to think that all the tea belongs to KTDA and are the only processors within our region," he said.

## Iran to Boost Palm Oil Imports From Malaysia

PETALING JAYA (Dispatches) - Iran is looking to import one million tons of palm oil from Malaysia in the near future, following a significant boost in imports in the first half of this year.

In a statement today, the Iran embassy said the country imported a total of 309,704 tons of palm oil from Malaysia between January and May this year, which marked a five-fold increase over the same period last year. It now targets an additional 650,000 tons this year.

"Iran is poised to continue increasing palm oil imports from Malaysia to reach one million tons and above annually in a bid to address the growing demand over the next few years," the embassy said.

"This, however, requires better coordination and cooperation from the relevant ministries, government-linked companies, and agencies to further strengthen the bilateral ties towards a mutual goal."

The embassy said that Iran is currently the largest importer of palm oil among countries in the Middle East.

It added that Iran aims to become Malaysia's hub for the distribution of palm oil and palm oil-related products into the lucrative markets of West Asian and Central Asian nations bordering its country.

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## Iran-Pakistan Rail Service Suspended After Heavy Rains

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - The Pak-Iran railway service was suspended after heavy rains in Chaghi, Balochistan on Thursday.

According to the Pakistan Railways officials, the track has been submerged in rainwater and the 10-km long track has been badly affected.

The officials say that it will take 3 to 4 days to restore the rain-affected railway track for the Pakistan-Iran rail service.

It is to be noted that heavy rains and floods have badly affected Balochistan's Chaghi, people are trapped in several localities. The PDMA has dispatched 75,000 ration bags for the rain affectees of Chaghi.

Last month, the Pak-Iran rail service was suspended, when six wagons of a Quetta-bound freight train overturned near Dalbandin tehsil of Chaghi.

## Russia Criticizes U.S. Over Pause in Vienna Talks

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Reacting to the almost one-month pause in the Vienna talks aimed at reviving the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, Russia's permanent representative to the international organizations in the Austrian capital says the course of the talks proves that the US overestimated the impact of its so-called maximum pressure campaign on Iran.

"The course of the #ViennaTalks proves once again that U.S. overestimated the influence of maximum pressure on #Iran. Pressure continues but Iran isn't in the rush although it knows that the sooner the talks are completed the sooner sanctions are lifted," Mikhail Ulyanov, who is also Russia's lead negotiator to the Vienna talks, said via Twitter on Thursday.

Ulyanov underlined that sanctions are not the only factor being taken into consideration by the Islamic Republic, which has been negotiating the restoration of the nuclear deal, called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), with the remaining signatories of the deal since early April, three years after the agreement was ditched by the previous US administration in pursuit of the "maximum pressure" policy.

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## Raisi in Message to Aliyev Stresses Need for Broadening Ties

TEHRAN (IRNA) - President-elect Ebrahim Raisi in a message to Azerbaijan Republic President Ilham Aliyev emphasized the need for further expansion and deepening of the two countries' relations.

Raisi thanked President Aliyev for his sincere congratulation message on the occasion of his election as Iran's next president.

The relations of the two brother and neighborly countries have roots in the shared history and culture, and brotherly ties of the two nations, and this is a precious capital inclusive of broad potentials for expansion and deepening of our two countries' ties more than ever before, added President-elect Raisi in his message.

## Tehran Stresses Support for Neighboring Iraq on All Fronts

**TEHRAN (PressTV) - Intelligence Minister Mahmoud Alavi has reaffirmed Iran's full support for Iraq on all fronts, particularly the neighboring country's security and stability.**

The Iranian intelligence chief, who is in Iraq on an official visit, made the remarks in a meeting with Parliament Speaker Mohammed al-Halbusi.

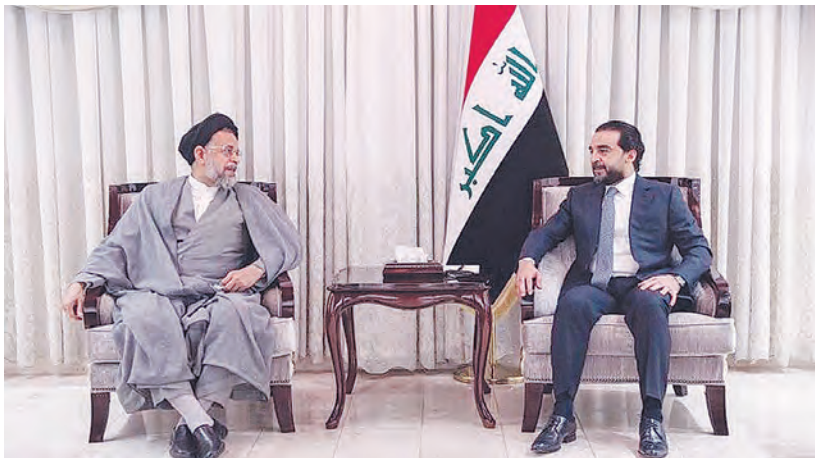
He expressed his condolences over a deadly fire incident that tore through a coronavirus hospital in southern Iraq early this week.

Late on Monday, a fast-spreading blaze hit the new isolation ward at the Imam Hussein Teaching Hospital in the Iraqi city of Nasiriya. The fire continued until early Tuesday, marking the second such tragedy in the Arab country in less than three months.

So far, 124 people have been confirmed dead, according to the Iraqi Civil Defense Center. Iraqi officials also said that more than 100 people were injured in the blaze.

Halbusi, for his part, said it is imperative to help Iraq promote security and stability in the war-ravaged country.

He added that a stable Iraq would have positive impacts on the entire region's stability. During the meeting, Alavi and Halbusi discussed possible ways to further strengthen cooperation.



Separately, Alavi sat down with Iraq's National Security Adviser Qassem al-Araji for talks on the latest security and political developments in the Arab country.

They stressed the importance of broadening bilateral cooperation to advance the interests of the two friendly nations.

In an earlier meeting with Iraqi President Barham Saleh, the intelligence minister underlined "the importance of strong relations between the two countries and their peoples."

He also relayed Ayatollah Khamenei's supportive stance in favor of "reinforcement of the bilateral cooperation and coordination towards confronting terrorism, extremism, and establishment of peace in the region."

## Jahangiri Says Iran Did Not Expect Friends to Follow U.S. Sanctions

**IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK**

TEHRAN – First Vice Presidet Eshaq Jahangiri, said in a "tribute" ceremony on Wednesday that even Russia has not cooperated with Iran to ease U.S. sanctions pressure.

"The United States did something in the economic war against the Iranian people that we could not persuade our neighbors and friendly countries to pay back even our blocked money, and explicitly stated that this was not possible because the United States is everywhere and they are harassing our country if they give us money," Jahangiri said.

"We didn't think that even India would buy oil from



Iran and not give us a price, and even Russia and some neighboring countries that passed through the blood of their children for the independence of their country did the same, and we were alone in this economic war and we didn't confront the same," he added.

Earlier in the day, former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who has repeatedly spoken of his government's "friendly" relations with Russia, criticized it in June 2010, saying that "the Iranian people do not know whether the Russians are friends with us or against us..." "We must not see that our neighbor is with those who have been hostile to the Iranian people for 30 years at critical times."

## Power Plant Investment Growth Strategy



The electricity industry is mostly in the spotlight on summer days. This year, too, the number and volume of power outages is greater than ever. So this is more obvious than ever. The fact is that there are problems such as the sick economy of the electricity industry, the accumulation of demands of the activists of this industry and the lack of attraction of new investments for the development of its infrastructure. Therefore, the occurrence of power outages was a predictable thing that today has marked a large phase of power outages. In the meantime, a large part of the power supply pressure, especially at peak consumption, is borne by power plants. These problems are mainly due to the lack of timely receipt of claims and also the pricing of electricity orders by the Ministry of Energy. Therefore, the power plants are in a very difficult situation, but despite all these problems, they are trying to play their part in supplying the electricity needed by the country properly.

Hassan Ali Taghizadeh Landeh pointed to the company's 1.5 percent share of the country's nominal power plant capacity. "Over the past two years, we have pursued two major strategies focusing on energy economics and power outage management," he said. In fact, we were confident of power outages in recent years due to the prevailing conditions in the electrical industry. We tried to expand the company's activities with two strategies and manage the problems caused by the inefficient electricity economy. These two strategies included increasing investment in renewables and investing in BOT-type power plants for large industries, relying on electricity currency pricing.

Cheap sale of electricity from non-governmental power plants to the Ministry of Energy through the electricity market is known as the mainstay of the country's power industry. He added: "The important thing is that we do not receive our demands from the same cheap and expensive place of sale on time. In addition, the Ministry of Energy is not willing to pay compensation for the delay. It seems that the only way forward for power plants to deal with the unfair conditions that exist in the supply of electricity to the Ministry of Energy is to conclude BOT contracts with industries. This is the only way we can supply electricity independently of the Ministry of Energy and sell electricity directly to industry.

Taghizadeh pointed to the possibility of concluding bilateral contracts with large industries by the Ministry of Energy during the past years and added: "Our proposed method is to conclude a foreign exchange BOT contract between industries and non-governmental power plants." In this regard, the first private sector BOT contract has been concluded between Tabanhor and Gohar Energy companies.

Regarding the framework of BOT contracts, the CEO of Tabanhor Company stated: In this type of contracts, an investor is responsible for the construction of a power plant for a specific industry and provides all the capital required for this important. The payback period is usually between 15 and 20 years, depending on the terms of the contract, and the investor hands over the power plant to the investor after the end of this waiting period. He added: "One of the most important advantages of this type of contract is its currency." Since the main investments are in the field of foreign exchange power plant construction, Rial contracts that are paid with long delays in the unstable environment of the country's economy lead to irreparable damage to power plants, so concluding BOT foreign exchange contracts can prevent Provided cumulative damage to non-governmental power plants. Taghizadeh referred to the damage done to non-governmental power plants by the sudden jump in the exchange rate in recent years. He said: "The fact is that if the contract for the sale of electricity to the Ministry of Energy was concluded in foreign currency, today we would not face this level of reduction in investment and infrastructure decline in the electricity industry and as a result of widespread power outages. Such contracts could pave the way for the return of investors to the country's electricity industry. He considered the independence of BOT contracts from electricity exchanges with the Ministry of Energy as another important advantage of such contracts. "This way we can supply the electricity generated to the investment company instead of the Ministry of Energy," he said. Such a company operates in the field of production and creates added value and wealth for the country. In this way, a secure and sustainable energy supply chain is provided for these industries. In addition, such contracts are subject to late payment damages. Since the major large industries in Iran are large exporters and have access to sufficient foreign exchange resources, they prioritize the payment of electricity consumption to avoid imposing late losses. The economic activist said that the construction of new power plants for large industries in the form of BOT contracts is also a significant benefit for this industry. He noted that with the approval of the 2021 budget, these contracts became a win-win deal for the investor and the investee. Under the law, large industries are required to supply their electricity at the average rate of ECA contracts by the Ministry of Energy. This rate is currently set at approximately 400 Tomans and increases annually in proportion to the rate of inflation and currency. However, these companies can own a power plant that supplies them with electricity after a 15 to 20-year process and the end of the waiting period and return on investment for the investor.

In the end, the CEO of Tabanhor said: "By setting the ECA rate for electricity for large and energy-intensive industries in the 2020 budget law, these industries have to think fundamentally about their electricity supply in the long run." The best way seems to be to rely on BOT contracts. We hope that by facilitating the possibility of concluding such contracts between non-governmental power plants and large industries, the ground will be prepared for the development of investments in the field of power plants in the country. In this way, we can act with the help of these power plants to supply the electricity needed by the country, even during peak consumption. Therefore, we can allocate the benefits to the same industries.

## U.S. Sanctions Will Never "Cripple Iran or Its Centrifuges"

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Wednesday that the US sanctions will never be able to "cripple Iran or its centrifuges".

Zarif made the remarks on his official Twitter account on the occasion of the sixth anniversary of UN Security Council decision to remove Iran from the Chapter VII of the UN Charter.

"6 years ago today, #JCPOA resolved a UNSC Chapter VII issue without resorting to war," Zarif said. "Obama realized his 'crippling sanctions' would not cripple Iran or its centrifuges," he said, adding, "Trump ineptly thought 'maximum pressure' would. Never will."

Zarif also published a chart about Iran's centrifuges. He tagged the US President Joe Biden, saying he should look closely at these figures.

## Iran Urges Resolving Afghan Crisis Through Talks

KABUL (IRNA) - Director General of Iranian Foreign Ministry's West Asia Department Seyyed Rasoul Mousavi on Thursday said that Iran favors resolving the ongoing crisis in Afghanistan through negotiations.

Mousavi made the remarks in a meeting with Afghanistan's Chairman of the High Council for National Reconciliation Abdullah Abdullah, adding that Iran supports putting an end to the situation in Afghanistan and resolving the crisis through dialogue.

The Iranian people and government support ending the long war in Afghanistan, he underlined.

Abdullah, for his part, appreciated Iran for supporting the Afghan peace process, terming regional states' cooperation in peace and stability as significant.

War is not the solution, he said, adding that no side can benefit from the continuation of the conflicts in the country. We have always called for a peaceful solution to our differences and abide by our commitment, but we do not allow anyone to force their will on us, he further noted.

## Tehran Calls on Tbilisi to Sign Judicial Assistance Agreement

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The Iranian Ambassador to Georgia called for a discussion on the signing of a mutual legal assistance treaty (MLAT) with Georgia and the extradition of prisoners.

At a meeting with Georgia's Minister of Justice Rati Bregadze, Iran's envoy to Tbilisi Akbar Qasemi, discussed the humanitarian issues, accommodation, and investment of the Iranians in Georgia and the ways to reinforce the judicial cooperation between the two countries, including the fight against organized crimes.

Qasemi pointed out the Iranian residents wanted to get ensured about their assets and families; therefore, they needed to take the necessary legal approaches within the framework of the Georgian law to secure their properties and seek satisfactory ways to protect their assets.

Rati Bregadze, for his part, highlighted the importance of Tehran-Tbilisi relations and said: «We value Georgia's relations with Iran and are ready to work together to overcome some of the problems by forming a joint working group and finding a mutually acceptable solution.»

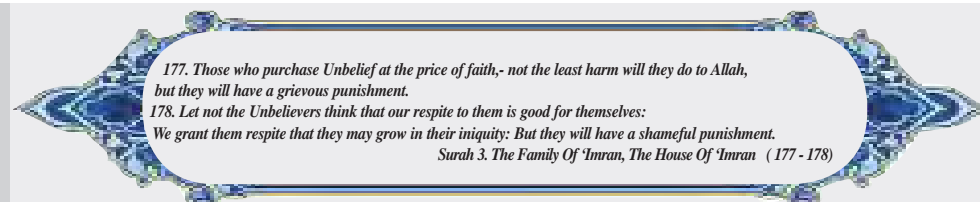
The Georgian Minister of Justice called for increased consultations to strengthen bilateral ties to expand interactions and public, tourist, and economic exchanges and deepen friendship, peace, and tranquility in Tehran and Tbilisi. 219





## PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:10
■ Evening (Maghreb)	20:40
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:20
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:02



## 31 Hectares Added to Terminal Yard Area of Shahid Rajaei Port

**IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK**

**TEHRAN - Iran's Shahid Rajaei Port on the Persian Gulf coast has been expanded to include 31 hectares of new container terminal yard.**

The expansion scheme was part of six new development projects opened at Rajaei Port earlier on Thursday by Iranian President Hassan Rouhani.

Rouhani used a video call from his office in Tehran to inaugurate the projects which have cost the government some 31.97 trillion rials (over \$133 million), according to a report by the official IRNA agency.

The projects included the rollout of two modern massive dredgers, a new container wharf and three new crude berths, said the report.

The projects had kicked off in 2017 when Rouhani vowed during a visit to the Shahid Rajaei Port Complex that his government would modernize the facility to improve its competitiveness with large ports in the Persian Gulf and around the world.

Head of Iran's ports authority (PMO) Mohammad Rastad said on Thursday that the new wharf opened at Rajaei port would be able to accommodate large ships with capacities of up to 18,400 twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs).

Rastad said the port is now capable of simultaneously processing three 400-meter ocean-liners with a draft of 17.5 meters.



The President said that under this government, Iran's highways have increased from 12,000 to 20,000 kilometers, adding: "In the field of railways, very good measures have been taken in the last 8 years and the connection of the country's railways and its role in transit is very important."

Rouhani also referred to the measures taken by the government for the development of the country's ports and said: "Development of Makran Coasts is one of the important measures and honors of this government. The national projects of the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development were inaugurated via video conferencing in the presence of Iran's President Hassan Rouhani on Thursday.

A project worth about 29,000 billion Tomans was inaugurated, including 321 km of main roads and highways, together with 16 port projects and a number of road improvement projects and flood reconstruction, the Minister of Roads and Urban Development said.

Roads Minister Mohammad Eslami said: "In discussing the development of Iran's transport infrastructure, we could build about 11,000 kilometers of main roads, highways, and freeways under the 11th and 12th governments, many of which were inaugurated and some will be opened in these few days."

He stressed: "About 50% of the country's freeway capacity has increased and the length of the country's highways has increased by 60% and also the length of railways has increased by 40%.

The Minister of Roads and Urban Development continued: "We have connected 5 provinces to the railway network and the other 3 provinces will be completed soon."

## Talks for Boosting Iran-Kazakhstan Trade Volume

**IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK**

TEHRAN - Director of Bureau for the Central Asian Affairs of Iran Trade Promotion organization says due to gradual lifting of pandemic-related restriction and continuation of holding trade events between Iran and Kazakhstan as well as expansion of marine and rail transportation, the trade volume of Iran with the EAEU states and especially with Kazakhstan will enhance this year.



In a joint meeting of Iranian and Kazakh traders, Rahmatollah Khormali said that the meeting was held for exploring ways for increasing trade volumes between the two states as well as acquaintance of business activists of the two countries.

He added holding such business meetings either in-person or online is a good opportunity for more acquaintance of Iranian business activists and EAEU state members with each other especially with the neighboring Caspian Sea littoral states.

Khormali went on to say with easing the pandemic-related restrictions and continuation of holding trade events between Iran and Kazakhstan as well as expansion of marine and rail transportation between the two states, it is expected the trade volume of Iran with the EAEU states and especially with Kazakhstan to rise.

In this business meeting, traders exchanged views in different fields like transportation, creak, agro, oil and gas, petrochemical, chemical and communications.

## EC Voices Readiness to Remove Developmental Hurdles of Free Zones

**IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK**

TEHRAN - Advisor to the President and Secretary of the Supreme Council of Free Zones Mr. Hamid Reza Momeni met the Secretary of Expediency Council Mr. Mohsen Rezaee to brief him on the launch of new free trade-industrial and especial economy zones.



In the meeting, Mr. Rezaee recommended the council to identify mega projects and the capacities for the launch of the mega projects in the current free zones and especially in the new free zones.

He also announced the readiness of the council to resolves problems of the current and the new free zones for development and materializing the goals of the zones through the Expediency Council and the general policies of the establishment, and in case it is needed, the EC reviews and approves required laws.

Meanwhile Mr. Momeni, for his part, said that for the launch of the new free zones, the capacities of the current zones have been used and each zone has been introduced as the helper to the new free zones.

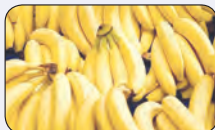
He went on to say that according to the communiqué of the secretariat of the council for the CEO of the free trade zone organizations, each one of the free zones due to the closeness and similarity to the new zones has been introduced as the helper of the new zones.

Momeni added that it was decided that in the comprehensive plan of free trade zones, all capacities of these mega projects in the current free zones and especially in the new zones to be identified.

He also pointed to the colorful role of the free zones in the field of the logistics and its effect on the national economy, adding that major part of the logistic process is in the free zones and some 74 land and sea border crossings as well as 30 crossings in the free zones or special economic zones are deployed and due to the legal capacity and existing logistic infrastructures, major trade exchanges in the country are done via these zones and this field will earn considerable forex for the country as well as creating jibes in these areas.

## Apple for Banana Trade Leaves Iran With \$71.3m in Surplus

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's customs office IRICA says the country had a surplus of 71.3 million from a trade program last calendar year that conditioned banana imports on exports of apple.



An IRICA spokesman said that apple exports from Iran in the year to March 20, 2021 had reached over \$326.6 million in value terms for nearly 885,000 metric tons of shipments sent from the country.

Rouhollah Latifi said that Iran had imported over 375,000 tons of banana worth \$255.3 million over the same period.

Facing an oversupply of apple last calendar year, Iran's ministry of agriculture proposed a system under which banana importers had to sell three kilograms of grade 1 or grade 2 apples to foreign customers in return for permission to import one kilogram of banana into the country.

The program helped Iran export more than a fifth of its apple harvest last calendar year.

Latifi said Iranian apple had found its way to markets in 27 countries over the past calendar year with Iraq, Russia and Afghanistan being the main exports destinations with a collective purchase of \$251 million.

He said Turkey had been the main supplier of banana to Iran with nearly \$130 million worth of import shipments registered at IRICA in the year to March. Iran took delivery of banana cargoes from India, at \$54.3 million, and six other countries over the same period, said the official. The apple for banana trade program has not been implemented since March, allowing a surge in banana shipments arriving in Iran.

Latifi said IRICA had registered over 136,000 tons of banana imports into Iran for a value of nearly \$93 million in the quarter to late June against some \$62.5 million worth of apple exports for 207,000 tons of shipments sent to other countries over the same period.

Including its older facilities at the nearby port of Bandar Abbas, the Shahid Rajaei Port Complex is considered Iran's largest trade gateway.

Government figures show that the port is currently responsible for 60% of Iran's imports and exports.

Addressing the inaugural ceremony, President Rouhani on Thursday called the transportation sector one of the pillars of Iran's progress and improvement of people's living conditions.

Rouhani said: "Strengthening and paying particular attention to the transportation sector is one of the honors of this government, and during the last eight years in the field of transportation and especially transit, lots of work has been done." He said on Thursday that despite all the hardship faced by Iran during the economic war and COVID-19 outbreak, the country has moved on the path of success through divine support.

Rouhani on Thursday in the virtual inauguration of national projects of the Ministries of Roads and Urban Development and Sports and Youth in different provinces of Iran, said: "We are proud that in the conditions during the hard economic war and the coronavirus outbreak, God helped us in continuing the path of creating a surge in production, as well as supporting and removing the obstacles of production with strength."

Referring to the inauguration of important plans and projects in the field of roads, urban planning, sports and youth in different cities of the country, Rouhani said: "The inauguration of about 21,000 billion tomans of plans and projects in one day, despite the difficult conditions of economic war, is very important."

## Unemployment Rate Hits 8.8% in Spring

**IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK**

TEHRAN - Iran's Statistical Center issued a report claiming that the country's unemployment rate fell about 1 percent this spring to 8.8 percent.

The Statistical Center reported last July that almost 1.5 million jobs were lost in the country from spring 2019 to the same season in 2019, but the unemployment rate dropped 1.1 percent to 9.8 percent.

Last year, the Parliamentary Research Center rejected the Statistical Center's report saying that the unemployment rate for spring 2020, announced by the government at 9.8 percent, was not real and that the real unemployment rate was 24 percent, 2.5 times the government's figures.

In the equations of calculating the unemployment rate, unemployment people who are not looking for work are not considered, and that's why the Parliamentary Research Center said that a large number of those who were looking for jobs have given up looking for work because of their failure to find a job, and if we include them in the statistics, the real unemployment rate is 24 percent.

Recently, the International Financial Institute also assessed Iran's unemployment rate at 23 percent.

This report does not explain how the growth of employed people was much higher than the growth of active people (working and looking for work).

## Rial Loans to Economic Sectors Soared 71.3% in Q1

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Central Bank of Iran (CBI) says new loans to businesses surged by 71.3% in the quarter to June 21 this year compared to the similar period in 2020.

A CBI statement carried in the official IRNA agency said that rial loans issued to economic actors in the country had reached a total of 4,976.9 trillion rials (\$20.7 billion) in the first three months of the current calendar year.

The bank said that working capital loans accounted for 69.6% of the credits provided to businesses in the quarter to June as they topped 3,466.4 trillion rials (\$14.44 billion).

More than a third of the working capital loans, some 1,269.7 trillion rials (\$5.29 billion), went to the metals

and mining sector, said the CBI, which insisted that increased financing extended to the mining and metals production activities was a sign of government's special attention to the sector.

Iran has rolled out a raft of economic measures to support businesses that have been struggling under U.S. sanctions and the spread of the coronavirus pandemic in recent years.

CBI's monetary policy, which mostly follows guidelines set by the administrative governments in Iran, has focused on providing support to local businesses that could contribute more to the economic growth in Iran by creating jobs and increasing their share in the country's non-crude exports.

That comes as experts point to an inflationary growth in the Iranian credit market in recent years while insisting that lenders tend to extend loans to businesses that enjoy indirect government support rather than providing credit to private businesses and entrepreneurs.

Total rial loans issued to economic sectors in the last Iranian calendar year ending March 20 topped 18,989 trillion rials (\$79.1 billion), up 94.8% against the previous year.

## Joint Iran-Azerbaijan Car Production Unveiled in Baku

BAKU (IRNA) - The sedan jointly manufactured car by Iran and Azerbaijan has been unveiled in Baku on Thursday.

During the meeting with a group of family members of the victims of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev unveiled the joint manufactured car, called "Khazar", in Baku.

Iran Khodro and AzerMash joint automobile factory was launched in 2016 in the Azerbaijan Republic.

Khazar joint car manufacturing factory of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan was opened in a ceremony in the presence of President Hassan Rouhani and President Ilham Aliyev in March 2018.



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**Development and Construction periods:** 30 Months  
**Authorization period:** 12 years and 6 Months after calculated

Commercial Operation Date of the Block

**Construction Security:** Five percent (5%) of The EPC Contract  
**Transfer Security:** 90 % of Last 24 Monthly Invoices

Interested applicants are hereby invited to obtain prequalification documents, within seven (7) calendar days after the first posting of this invitation notice till fourteen (14) calendar days after the last (second) posting of this invitation notice, in the following way:

A representative of the applicant, carrying a valid proxy letter, may refer in person to Chadormalu Mining & Industrial Co. (PJS), No. 28 Shabnam Dd., Rafiea Alley, East Atefi St., Nelson Mandela Avenue, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

**Tel.: +98-21-2620-8045, +98-21-7946-3122 (Mrs Salehi),**  
**Fax: +98-21-2620-8051**

Deadline for submitting the completed Prequalification Documents is fifteen (15) calendar days after the deadline of obtaining the Prequalification Questionnaire based on second posting of this invitation notice.



## Hariri Gives Up on Forming New Gov't

BEIRUT (Dispatches) - Lebanese politician Saad al-Hariri abandoned his effort to form a new government on Thursday, saying it was clear he would not be able to reach an agreement with President Michel Aoun, plunging the country deeper into crisis.

Lebanon is suffering an economic depression the World Bank has described as one of the most severe in modern history. Its currency has lost more than 90% of its value in less than two years, leading to spiraling poverty and crippling shortages.

"It is clear we will not be able to agree with his Excellency the president," Hariri told reporters after meeting Aoun for barely 20 minutes. "That is why I excuse myself from government formation."



## Bolsonaro Spends Night in Hospital for Obstructed Intestine

SAO PAULO (Reuters) - Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro spent the night in a Sao Paulo hospital after being hospitalized for an obstructed intestine, the latest health scare for the right-wing leader since he was stabbed on the campaign trail in 2018.

Local news outlet G1 reported Bolsonaro passed the night well and was scheduled to undergo further tests on Thursday.

The president's office had said Bolsonaro, 66, could require emergency surgery after he was transferred from a hospital in Brasilia. But after he arrived in Sao Paulo on Wednesday night, doctors at the Vila Nova Star hospital said the president would initially remain "under conservative management."



## Iraqi Cleric Sadr Not to Take Part in October Election



BAGHDAD (Reuters) - The Iraqi Shi'ite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr said on Thursday he will not take part in elections in October and withdrew his support from the government, distancing himself from the state at a time when deadly hospital fires have angered Iraqis.

One of the most influential figures in Iraq, Sadr led a political bloc that emerged as the biggest in the 2018 parliamentary election, with 54 seats in the 329 seat legislature, and his movement has big sway.

The impact of his announcement was difficult to assess. Sadr, a long-time adversary of the United States who also opposes Iranian influence in Iraq, typically wields power without holding elected office. He has withdrawn from frontline politics before, without dismantling his powerful movement.

Even if he does not run, candidates loyal to him could stand, allowing him to retain his influence.

Dozens of people were killed this week by a fire at a COVID-19 hospital in the southern Iraqi city of Nassiriya, the second such fire in Iraq in three months, and many Iraqis blame the government for both. The results of an investigation will be announced within a week, the prime minister's office said on Tuesday.

Sadr's move appeared aimed at deflecting popular discontent over the hospital fires, and over power and water cuts which have sparked protests, said Hamdi Malik, an associate fellow at the Washington Institute.

"Sadr is trying to distance himself from the terrible management of Iraqi officials," said Malik, predicting Sadr's party would take part and do well in the election, despite his promise not to stand personally.

Sadr's main rivals are Shi'ite groups, which have blamed his party over state failings. Sadr has millions of followers and, like his rivals, an armed militia.

"I inform you that I will not participate in these elections. The nation is more important than all of that," Sadr said, adding that he was "withdrawing his hand from those who belong to this current government and the following one".

In a televised speech, Sadr said Iraq was being subjected to a "satanic regional scheme to humiliate the country and to bring it to its knees".

"Watch out before Iraq's fate becomes like that of Syria, Afghanistan or other states that have fallen victim to internal, regional and international policies," he said.

A source close to Sadr told Reuters the decision followed a campaign by Shi'ite groups to sully the reputation of Sadr's movement, worried that it would sweep the vote.

In reference to his rivals, Sadr had told followers at a recent meeting there were "factions ready to burn Iraq to prevent the Sadrists from forming the next government", the source said.

## At Least 44 Dead in Floods In Western Europe

BERLIN (Dispatches) - At least 42 people have died in Germany and dozens were missing on Thursday as record rainfall in western Europe caused rivers to burst their banks, swept away homes and flooded cellars.

Eighteen people died and dozens were missing around the wine-growing region of Ahrweiler, in Rhineland-Palatinate state, police said, after the Ahr river that flows into the Rhine rose and brought down half a dozen houses.

Another 15 people died in the Euskirchen region south of the city of Bonn, authorities said. In Belgium, two men died due to the torrential rain and a 15-year-old girl was missing after being swept away by a swollen river.

Hundreds of soldiers were helping police with the rescue efforts in Germany, using tanks to clear roads of landslides and fallen trees, while helicopters winched those stranded on rooftops to safety.

In Ahrweiler, two wrecked cars leant steeply against either side of the town's stone gate and locals used snow shovels and brooms to sweep mud from their homes and shops after the floodwaters receded.



## South Africa Calls Up Army Reserves in Bid to Crush Looting

JOHANNESBURG (Dispatches) - South Africa mustered its army reserves on Thursday in a bid to quell looting that has stoked fears of shortages and dealt a crippling blow to its already battered economy.

"All reserve members are to report for duty at first light tomorrow morning 15 July 2021 at their respective units," army chief Lieutenant-General Lawrence Mbatia said in orders issued overnight as the unrest entered its sixth day.

Soldiers should "report ready with their necessary equipment," the defence ministry said in a statement.

On Wednesday, the government said it would call out around 25,000 troops to tackle the emergency -- 10 times the number that it initially deployed.

As relative calm returned to Johannesburg, Police Minister Bheki Cele hailed the boost from the military, saying he was confident it would "turn around the volatile situation in parts of KwaZulu-Natal" province, the epicentre of the unrest.

Stores and warehouses in the two provinces have been ransacked, devastating supply chains on which food, fuel and medicines depend in Africa's most industrialized economy. According to official figures, 72 people have died and more than 1,200 people have been arrested, while South Africa's consumer goods regulatory body estimates that more than 800 shops have been plundered.

Looting continued on Thursday in KZN, but the situation was quieter in Johannesburg, where volunteers in the city's townships took part in cleanup operations, one of which was led by Environment Minister Barbara Creecy.

At a cleanup at the Jabulani shopping centre in Soweto, community leader Musa Mbele-Radebe, 30, told AFP, "The use of the army is quite good, because our people are quite scared of the army compared to the police."

"It only took four soldiers to control a situation of a thousand (people) that was gathering in this mall." The unrest began a day after former president

Jacob Zuma -- who commands support from some of the country's poor -- began a 15-month jail term on July 8 for refusing to testify to a commission probing corruption under his tenure.

## Cuba Lifts Food, Medicine Customs Restrictions Amid Protests

HAVANA (Dispatches) - Travellers arriving in Cuba will be able to bring in food, medicine and other essential items without having to pay a customs fee, the government has announced, its first apparent concession after days of rare protests in the Caribbean island nation.

Prime Minister Manuel Marrero made the announcement in a televised address alongside President Miguel Diaz-Canel on Wednesday night, days after demonstrators first took to the streets on Sunday.

"It was a demand made by many travelers and it was necessary to take this decision," Marrero said of the easing of customs restrictions on food, medicine and hygiene products. It was not immediately clear how much immediate difference the move would make given that there are very few flights at the moment into Cuba which is going through its worst coronavirus outbreak since the start of the pandemic.

Under Cuban law, travelers arriving in the country can bring up to 10kg (22 pounds) of medicine tax-free. They can also bring in limited amounts of food and personal hygiene goods but must pay customs duties.

Those limits and duties will be lifted starting on Monday, Marrero said. Anger has grown in the country over shortages of basic goods, electricity outages, curbs on civil liberties and the government's handling of

a surge in COVID-19 infections.

The hardships have been exacerbated by a decades-old United States trade embargo tightened amid the pandemic under former President Donald Trump. Those policies remain under review by the administration of President Joe Biden.

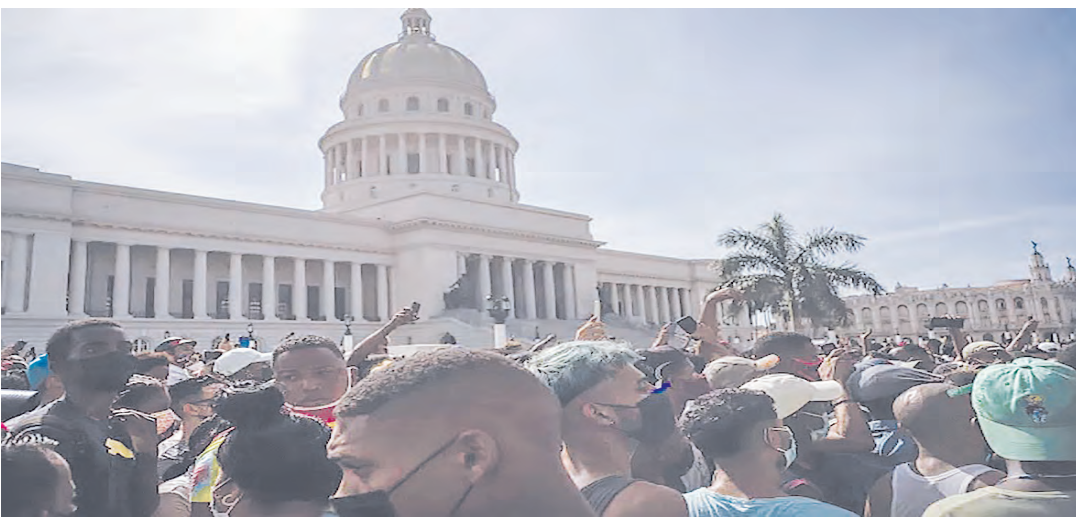
Cuban leaders have blamed the protests on U.S.-financed "counter revolutionaries" and a social media campaign that exploits the dire situation created by Washington's embargo.

Pro-government demonstrations have also occurred amid the unrest. For his part, Diaz-Canel on Wednesday again blamed the US for the unrest, but for the first time acknowledged that government shortcomings played a role.

"We have to gain experience from the disturbances," he said. "We also have to carry out a critical analysis of our problems in order to act and overcome, and avoid their repetition."

He called for "peace, harmony among Cubans and respect", adding: "Also perhaps it will be necessary to apologize to someone who, in the midst of the confusion that arises in events like this, may have been confused, has been mistreated."

More than 200 people were detained during or following the protests, according to exiled rights group Cubalex, and only a handful have been released so far.



## Afghan Neighbors Wary of New Refugee Crisis as Violence Surges

ISLAMABAD (Reuters) -

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani meets regional leaders for talks in Uzbekistan on Thursday as deteriorating security in his country raises fears of a new Afghan refugee crisis with neighboring Pakistan already ruling out taking any more.

Several million Afghans have been displaced within their country over years of war, 270,000 of them in fighting since January as U.S.-led foreign forces have been withdrawing, according to the U.N. refugee agency.

With Taliban insurgents apparently intent on defeating Ghani's Western-backed government, Afghanistan's neighbors are on alert for refugees crossing borders as the fighting intensifies and living conditions deteriorate.

"The meetings in Tashkent will focus on Afghanistan's future and involve intense diplomacy," a diplomat briefed on the matter said of the two-day gathering.

Decades of war have driven Afghans out of their country, most into Pakistan to the east and Iran to the west.

Pakistan is home to 1.4 million Afghan refugees while Iran hosts nearly a million, according to U.N. refugee agency data from the beginning of the year. The number of undocumented Afghans in both countries is estimated to be much higher.

Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi, visiting Dushanbe, capital of Tajikistan, on Tuesday said his country, with limited resources, could not be expected to do any more. "It cannot afford to welcome more refugees if the situation within Afghanistan deteriorates again," Qureshi said.

Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan and top government officials from countries across the region are expected at the meeting in Tashkent.

Foreign ministers from the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation met in Dushanbe this week and called for an end to violence against Afghan civilians and urged the government to strengthen its position for the sake of stability.

Last week, Tajikistan said it took in more than 1,000 civilians fleeing violence in northern Afghanistan's Badakhshan province.

Tajik President Emomali Rakhmonov early last week though, also ordered the mobilisation of 20,000 military reservists to secure its border with Afghanistan.

Rakhmonov also called on his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin, whose country has a sizable military presence in Tajikistan, to help stabilise the border with Afghanistan.







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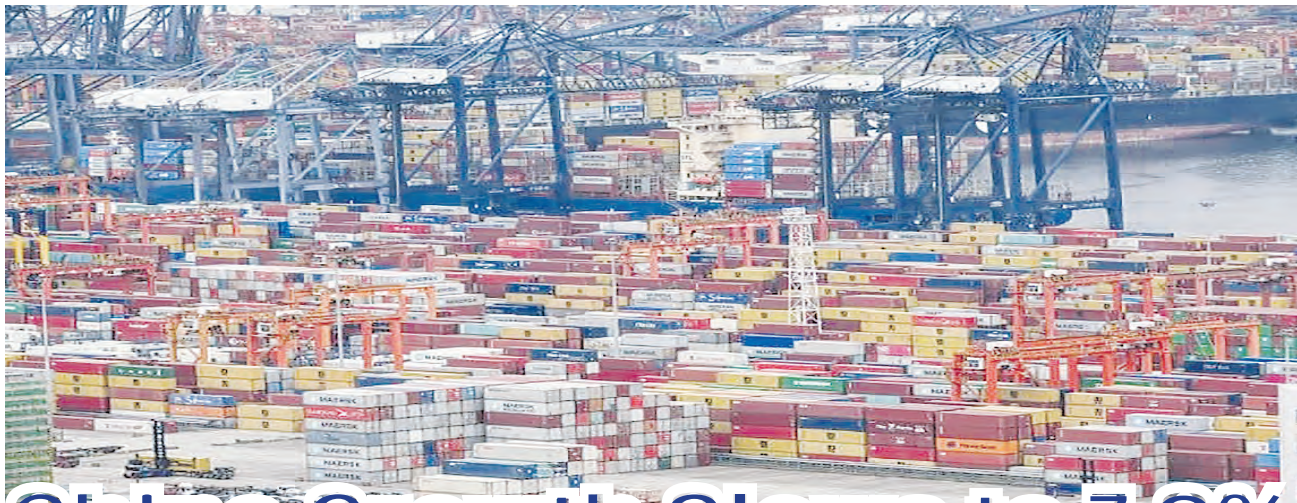
## Kyrgyz Economy Contracts by 1.7% in H1

BISHKEK (Dispatches) - Kyrgyzstan's economy shrank by 1.7% y/y in the first half of 2021, significantly improving from the 5.3% y/y contraction recorded in the same period last year, according to latest data released by the country's National Statistical Committee.

The coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak in Kyrgyzstan and the government's measures to contain it led to a surge in joblessness

and the country's GDP contracted by 8.6% in 2020 overall.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Kyrgyz Economic Policy Research Institute have predicted a 25% decline in much needed remittance inflows will have to be pencilled in, with an unemployment level of 21%. Income from tourism and travel services was expected to drop by 90% y/y in 2020.



## China Growth Slows to 7.9% In Second Quarter

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China's sharp economic rebound from last year's pandemic slowdown lost steam in the second quarter, official data showed Thursday, with consumers lacking the confidence to splurge.

The world's second-largest economy has staged a rapid recovery from last year's slump caused by the coronavirus pandemic, but its pace is easing with manufacturing slowing and consumer demand not picking up as quickly as expected.

China's GDP growth came in at 7.9 percent on-year in the April to June period, said the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) -- a significant drop from the 18.3 percent surge in the first three months. An AFP poll of analysts tipped gross domestic product growth at 7.7 percent, with economists noting that China's economy has been expanding more slowly since the start of the year as the pandemic drags on globally.

China's economy continued to "recover steadily" in the first half of 2021, said NBS spokeswoman Liu Aihua, although she cautioned that "there are many external uncertainties, and domestic economic recovery is uneven".

"Efforts are still needed to consolidate the foundation for stable recovery and development," she added.

The earlier spike was largely skewed by the low base of comparison with last year, owing to large parts of the country being locked down to prevent the virus spread.

But the latest figures suggest China should still be on track to meet its growth target of more than 6 percent for the year.

On a quarterly basis, China's growth grew by 1.3 percent, up from 0.4 percent in the previous quarter.

But this is among the weakest quarterly growth since rates were first published in 2010, noted Capital Economics.

Surging raw material costs and shipping disruptions are weighing on manufacturers, with factory activity also bogged down by supply shortages of semiconductors -- used to make a range of goods from electronics to vehicles.

In June, industrial output rose 8.3 percent and retail sales grew 12.1 percent on-year, both edging down from the month before.

Domestic demand "remained muted" in the second quarter, said Louis Kuijs, head of Asia economics at Oxford Economics.

But he predicted "household consumption should be supported by rising vaccination and corporate investment by the recovery in profits."

The urban unemployment rate was 5 percent, unchanged from May, authorities said. There are fears unemployment might be much higher due to large numbers of people working in the informal economy.

China was the only major economy to expand in all of 2020, and it is expected to enter a new phase of post-pandemic recovery.

It has largely controlled its domestic coronavirus outbreaks with a mix of strict border controls, rapid lockdowns when cases are detected, and contact tracing.

But these strict and inflexible measures have also created challenges, including a shipping container backlog caused by a coronavirus outbreak among port workers earlier this year.

## Lebanon to Get \$860m From IMF Soon

BEIRUT (Dispatches) - The International Monetary fund will give \$860 million to Lebanon over the coming two months, a statement from the president's office said, in a boost for the cash-strapped government as the economic crisis brings misery to the country.

President Michel Aoun Wednesday morning met with the Lebanon director of the IMF, Mahmoud Mohieldin, to discuss the IMF's financial support to Lebanon along with an economic recovery plan.

"Mohieldin informed President Aoun that the International Monetary Fund would allocate to Lebanon the equivalent of \$860 million," the statement said. The pay package comes within a wider IMF program "Special Drawing Rights" which will see a total of \$650 billion distributed among 190 member states during the next two months.

The news will be met with relief from government officials who have been desperately turning to foreign donors for financial support as Lebanon's economic crisis rages on and diminishes state finances, with no solution in sight. Ghazi Wazni, caretaker finance minister, told The Daily Star in June that the IMF funds were going to be checked by a board of governors before distribution. Wazni also said that the money would be channeled to the Central Bank to boost its foreign currency reserves with the aim of improving the country's economic recovery, "and not to subsidize basic items."

Aoun thanked Mohieldin for the fund's "keenness to provide assistance to Lebanon in several areas to revitalize the economy by updating the financial recovery plan in light of the developments that occurred after the explosion of the port of Beirut."

During the meeting, Aoun also said that Lebanon would implement an economic recovery plan "after the formation of a new government." According to the statement, the plan "includes legislative reforms that achieve transparency, in addition to adopting a fair and equitable distribution of losses, with the aim of restoring the national economy."

## Philippine Central Bank to Remain Supportive of Growth

MANILA (Reuters) - The Philippine central bank's monetary policy will remain supportive of the economy until recovery is "firmly underway", its governor said on Thursday, while assuring markets it will clearly communicate its exit strategy from easy policy.

While the Federal Reserve's stimulus

withdrawal could exert pressure on emerging central banks to follow suit, the decision by the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas' (BSP) to unwind rate cuts will depend on the domestic inflation outlook, Governor Benjamin Diokno said.

Inflation is forecast to remain manageable and that would allow the central bank to continue to provide monetary stimulus to the real sector, Diokno told a media briefing.

The BSP would continue to be "data dependent in policymaking", said Diokno, adding "this prudent practice will help us avoid the premature withdrawal of policy support."

The BSP kept interest rates at a record low of 2.0% for a fifth straight meeting on June 24, and economists expect rates to stay at that level to ensure the economy bounces back from the impact of pandemic-induced lockdowns.

The Philippines has been battling one of Asia's worst and longest-running COVID-19 outbreaks. It lowered its economic growth targets for this year and next after a deeper-than-expected contraction in gross domestic product in the first quarter.

It has gradually eased COVID-19 curbs to encourage business activity and allow greater mobility, but the speed at which it can fully reopen depends on its vaccination rollout.

As of Tuesday, 3.89 million people, or 3.5% of the country's 110 million population, had been fully vaccinated.

President Rodrigo Duterte extended on Thursday coronavirus restrictions on economic activities and movement of people in the capital region and nearby provinces until the end of July. Some provinces and cities in central and southern Philippines were placed under looser curbs.

With more than 1.49 million infections and 26,314 deaths, the Philippines has the second-highest number of COVID-19 cases and deaths in Southeast Asia, next to Indonesia.

## UK Jobs Leap as Economy Bounces Back, pay jumps too

LONDON (Reuters) - The number of employees on British company payrolls surged in June by the most since the start of the coronavirus pandemic, according to data which painted a picture of a roaring jobs market and growing inflationary pressure from rising wages.

A day after a top Bank of England official said the time for the BoE to think about taking action on inflation might be approaching sooner than he had expected, tax data showed a 356,000 leap in employment in June from May.

The increase was driven by 94,000 more accommodation and food jobs, which were hit by lockdowns that have now been largely lifted, and a 72,000 rise in jobs in administration and support services, including temporary staff at recruitment agencies.

The headline unemployment rate for the three months to May stood at 4.8%, the Office for National Statistics said. Economists polled by Reuters had mostly expected it to hold at 4.7% seen in the three months to April.

But the ONS said the population estimates used to calculate the unemployment rate had changed and the figure for the three months to April would have been 4.8% under the new system.

Britain's labor market has been propped up by finance minister Rishi Sunak's job subsidies which paid the wages on 8.9 million jobs at its peak in May 2020, during the first COVID-19 lockdown, and supported 2.4 million jobs at the end of May 2021.

The scheme is being phased out by the end of September which could push unemployment back up.

"We anticipate the unemployment rate to rise to around 5.5% in winter this year as the furlough scheme ends, with around one in 10 furloughed workers potentially unable to return to their original job," Yael Selfin, chief economist at KPMG UK, said.



Thursday's figures showed the fastest headline wage growth in the year to May since records began in 2000, although the comparisons have been skewed by greater job losses among low-paid workers and comparison with depressed wages a year ago.

Average weekly earnings in the three months to the end of May rose by 7.3% compared with a year earlier.

The ONS estimated underlying wage growth, excluding distortions caused by the pandemic, was between 3.9% and 5.1% for average weekly earnings. For average earnings excluding bonuses it was between 3.2% and 4.4%.

The pick-up in hiring and in pay added to signs of how fast Britain's economy is bouncing back from its nearly 10% crash last year when it was hit by one of the world's heaviest COVID death tolls and long lockdowns.

The number of job vacancies in the three months to June rose by 241,000 to 862,000, the biggest quarterly increase since records began in 2001 and just short of the record-high total number of vacancies seen in late 2018.

## Pakistan, Uzbekistan Agree to Finalize Preferential Trade Agreement



ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Pakistan and Uzbekistan agreed to finalize bilateral Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) within three months to further boost bilateral trade volume.

At the 6th meeting of the Uzbek-Pakistani Intergovernmental Commission on Trade-Economic and Scientific-Technical Cooperation (IGC) held in Tashkent, both sides agreed to form joint working groups on agriculture, information technology, education and mineral sectors to boost cooperation, said a news release issued here.

The meeting was co-chaired by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Investments and Foreign Trade Sardor Umurzakov and Commerce Adviser Abdul Razak Dawood.

Mr Umarzakov thanked Pakistan for taking the relationship with Uzbekistan to a strategic partnership level.

They both agreed that trans-Afghan corridor which connected Uzbekistan and Pakistan would play an important role in enhancing bilateral trade between the two countries.

The parties agreed to deepen partnership in the field of industrial cooperation, including by organising joint ventures in the field of textile industry, assembly of agricultural machinery, processing and packaging of fruit and vegetable products.

It was settled to deepen cooperation in energy and mineral sector, agriculture, transportation and communication, labor, education, tourism, science and technology, technology parks, housing and communal services, intercity collaborations, standards, meteorology, culture and youth affairs.

They recognised the importance of closer collaboration for post-Covid recovery to sustainably recover through technology, innovation and economic partnership, aiming at increased economic diversification, sustainable growth, building supply chain resilience, and robust regulatory environments. It was also agreed to develop banking links to create favourable conditions for the further development of bilateral trade.

## U.S. Senate Passes Bill to Ban All Products From China's Xinjiang

WASHINGTON, July 14 (Reuters) - The U.S. Senate passed legislation on Wednesday to ban the import of products from China's Xinjiang region, the latest effort in Washington to punish Beijing for what U.S. officials say is an ongoing genocide against Uyghurs and other Muslim groups.

The Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act would create a "rebuttable presumption" assuming goods manufactured in Xinjiang are made with forced labor and therefore banned under the 1930 Tariff Act, unless otherwise certified by U.S. authorities.

Passed by unanimous consent, the bipartisan measure would shift the burden of proof to importers. The current rule bans goods if there is reasonable evidence of forced labor.

The bill must also pass the House of Representatives before it can be sent to the White House for President Joe Biden to sign into law. It was not immediately clear when that might take place.

Republican Senator Marco Rubio, who introduced the legislation with Democrat Jeff Merkley, called on the House to act quickly.

"We will not turn a blind eye to the CCP's ongoing crimes against humanity, and we will not allow corporations a free pass to profit from those horrific abuses," Rubio said in a statement.

"No American corporation should profit from these abuses. No American consumers should be inadvertently purchasing products from slave labor," Merkley said.

Democratic and Republican aides said they expected the measure would get strong support in the House, noting the House approved a similar measure nearly unanimously last year.

The bill would go beyond steps already taken to secure U.S. supply chains in the face of allegations of rights abuses in China, including existing bans on Xinjiang tomatoes, cotton and some solar products.

The Biden administration has increased sanctions, and on Tuesday issued an advisory warning businesses they could be in violation of U.S. law if operations are linked even indirectly to surveillance networks in Xinjiang.

Rights groups, researchers, former residents and some Western lawmakers and officials say Xinjiang authorities have facilitated forced labor by detaining around a million Uyghurs and other primarily Muslim minorities since 2016.





## Germany, Iran Start Exchanging Students

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Germany and Iran have provided their students with the opportunity to study in one German university and two Iranian universities in Tehran and Kurdistan provinces.

The Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD), the world’s largest funding organization for the international exchange of students and researchers, has paved the way for three universities of Cologne, Tehran and Kurdistan to

exchange students within the framework of a project called “Multilingualism in Iran, a social look into grammatical diversity” aimed at promoting intra-university exchanges with a 100,000 euro fund. The first phase of this plan is underway and it is possible that the project will be extended for more than two years. The aim of the project is to make students acquainted with the cultural, social and educational situations in both countries.



## Russia Races to Build Giant Ice-Breakers for Arctic Dominance

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - At Saint Petersburg’s historic Baltic Shipyard, cranes hover over the shining Neva River as hundreds of workers build four nuclear-powered ice-breakers.

Fronted by a Russian flag and named after the country’s northern regions, the giant vessels are meant to ensure Moscow’s dominance over the melting Arctic.

Russia has scrambled to become a leading power in the region, where receding ice cover has allowed Moscow to develop a new shipping route.

President Vladimir Putin has made the warming region a priority, heavily investing in the so-called Northern Sea Route that allows ships to reach Asian ports up to 15 days faster than via the traditional Suez Canal route.

Transit in the eastern Arctic usually ends in November but Moscow is hoping the ice-breakers will help it make use of the route -- becoming more accessible due to climate change -- year-round.

The vessels begin their journey at the imperial-era Baltic Shipyard, the birthplace of all Soviet nuclear-powered ice-breakers apart from one -- the Lenin, now transformed into a museum and docked in the Arctic port of Murmansk.

That is where the four new ships -- “Sibir”, “Ural”, “Yakutia” and “Chukhotka” -- will eventually be based.

Kirill Myadzyuta, the shipyard’s chief of construction, said the vessels are a “huge step forward” towards Arctic development.

The ships are designed to resist extreme weather conditions in the Far North, towering 52 metres (170-feet) high with a length of 173 metres (568 feet) and able to smash through ice up to 2.8 metres (9.2 feet) thick.

Russia has not skimped to reap Arctic benefits.

Each ship commissioned by state atomic energy corporation Rosatom costs more than 340 million euros (\$400 million).

Construction requires more than 1,000 people and lasts five to seven years.

With a view of the city’s historic skyline, workers bustle up and down the “Sibir” (Siberia), which is due to leave the shipyard at the end of the year.

The other ships are expected to join the Rosatom fleet in Murmansk in 2022, 2024 and 2026.

“It’s a very good ship,” said the Sibir’s future captain, Oleg Shapov, who has been based in Saint Petersburg to follow the last stage of the vessel’s construction.

Shapov said the Sibir will be an improved version of its predecessor -- the Arktika, which was inaugurated with great pomp last year.



“We really need these ships in the Arctic,” said Shapov, who is preparing to hire crew for the Sibir.

The ice-breakers will be a game changer for Russia’s use of the Arctic, according to Leonid Grigoriyev of the world economy department at Moscow’s Higher School of Economics.

While Russia is already “intensively” using the Northern Sea Route, Grigoriyev said the eastern Arctic still “freezes completely and would be impossible to use year-round without the ice-breakers.”

The development of the Northern Sea Route should in particular simplify the delivery of oil and gas to Southeast Asia by connecting the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans via the Arctic in record time.

Global competition for the Arctic’s navigation routes has ballooned, exacerbating tensions, particularly between the U.S., Russia and China.

At the inauguration of the Arktika last year, Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin said the ice-breaker fleet will “ensure Russian superiority in the Arctic.”

## Lower Economic Growth Does Not Mean Less Human Happiness



LONDON (FT) - As pandemic restrictions come down, growth projections are looking up. Thanks to its high vaccination rates, the UK’s outlook has been especially favorable, with growth now estimated by the OECD at 7.2 per cent for 2021. These numbers will continue to be tweaked, but one thing is certain: the recovery, when it comes, will be driven by consumer spending.

It has long been so: ours is an economy fuelled by private domestic consumption, which represents about 65 per cent of the UK economy, and a greater portion still of the US one. As in all affluent societies, the greater part of this spending no longer serves to procure the basics of life, such as food and shelter and physical comfort. Instead, it is directed at a range of social functions, from gaining the esteem and consideration of others to expressing one’s own identity. Even the organic watercress bought at the farmers’ market serves more as signal than salad.

That is why, when the social aspect of our lives was suddenly relegated to square images on our computer screens, private consumption fell as sharply as it did. It is also why the category of goods that will have the greatest surge of demand this year, after the greatest plunge in the past 18 months, is apparel and beauty products.

Looking beyond the coming bout of post-pandemic euphoria, however, it is unclear whether consumer spending will remain the engine of growth it has been since at least the industrial revolution. A number of clues suggest it will not. The implication is that post-industrial nations such as the UK may be headed for much lower rates of growth for the foreseeable future.

Yet such a slowdown need not spell doom. It might be, instead, the byproduct of social progress: a plateau of high economic achievement where people can afford to devote themselves more to activities not primarily designed to contribute to increased output.

It was by adopting growth as our shared objective that we achieved such unprecedented prosperity in the first place. Even in the middle of a devastating pandemic, our societies remain the wealthiest, healthiest and safest that have ever existed on Earth. It is becoming more apparent, however, that further advances in wellbeing will not be gained by creating more output.

Unexpectedly, this evolution is already reflected in changing tastes. In a trend that the pandemic has only accelerated, the conspicuous consumer is now looked down on by a rising entrepreneurial class which cuts across traditional income divides.

## Iran, Spain Highlight Media Cooperation

MADRID (IRNA) - Iran’s Ambassador in Spain Hassan Qashqavi paid a visit to the Spanish state news agency EFE on Wednesday and met the new president of the agency Gabriela Cañas, discussing boosting cooperation on the media area.

Pointing to the good relations between Iran and Spain during different periods in history and the long-lasting friendly ties between Iran’s Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) and Spain’s EFE, Qashqavi highlighted the role of the media in explaining developments in international arena and directing the public opinion.

He opined that the Western media general aren’t willing to analyze the international realities and developments.

The Ambassador emphasized the necessity of revising and updating the memorandum of understanding signed between IRNA and EFE to boost cooperation and interaction. In her turn, Ms. Cañas praised the efforts to facilitate establishment of EFE’s office in Tehran, expressing preparedness to update the MoU. She also criticized the Western politicians and media for the ignoring of some regional developments, including the situation in Afghanistan.

## Iran, Syria Officials Stress Boosting Strategic Relations

TEHRAN (IP) - Syrian Foreign and Expatriates Minister received a delegation from the Foreign Ministry of the Islamic Republic of Iran headed by the country’s Deputy Foreign Minister.

Talks during the meeting between Syrian Foreign Minister Fayssal Mikdad and Iran’s Deputy Foreign Minister Reza Najafi tackled the relations between the foreign ministries of both countries, as well as laying the necessary bases for strengthening coordination and consultation in various fields of mutual interest, especially working to confront terrorism to which both countries are exposed, including economic terrorism.

During the meeting, the Foreign and Expatriates Minister expressed the Syrian leadership, government, and people’s high appreciation for the important role played by Iran in all political, military, and economic fields to support Syria in its war on terrorism, stressing the depth of the strategic relations between Syria and Iran and that Syria looks with satisfaction at the high level which the relations between the two countries have reached in various fields, Sana reported.

Minister Mikdad stressed that the mutual visits help in consolidating and strengthening relations between the two countries, activating coordination, consultation, and exchanging views between the two ministries of foreign affairs, and finding ways to uplift them due to the serious and fruitful cooperation required by the current stage in various international forums.

Mikdad reiterated Syria’s support for Iran in the negotiations on the Iranian nuclear file in Vienna.

In turn, the Deputy Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran indicated that the visit includes many meetings to activate cooperation and coordination with the Foreign and Expatriates Ministry of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Najafi stressed that the relations between Syria and Iran are deep and significant, and they meet the aspirations of the peoples of the two countries. He also affirmed Iran’s continued support for the just Syrian stance at various international organizations, especially in combating terrorism to restore security and stability on all Syrian lands.

## Release of Iran’s Blocked Assets Underway

TEHRAN (IP) - Chief of Staff of Iran’s President confirmed the news about the lifting of a part of the U.S. trade sanctions on Iran, so to give Iran access to its blocked assets in Japan and South Korea.

Mahmoud Vaezi said that Iran had been seeking to release its blocked assets in Japan and South Korea from the very beginning. Chief of Staff of Presidential Office stated: “To release Iran’s blocked assets in Japan and South Korea, necessary steps have been taken.”

The U.S. Department of State has declared that it has lifted some of its trade sanctions against Iran in order to give Iran access to its blocked assets in Japan and South Korea.

## Removing Yemen Blockade Positive Step in Confidence Building

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Advisor to Iranian Parliament Speaker Hossein Amir-Abdollahian Hossein Amir Abdollahian said in a meeting with Swedish envoy on Yemen that removing blockade on Yemen would be a positive step in confidence building.

Abdollahian and Sweden’s Special Envoy for Yemen Peter Semneby met on Wednesday in Tehran to discuss Yemen developments.

Abdollahian emphasized that Iran has always been seeking solving Yemen issues through political solution.

Hailing Sweden’s humanitarian efforts to help Yemen in the midst of crisis, the senior advisor said that he hoped the new UN Special Envoy for Yemen who is a Swedish diplomat would focus his efforts on removing blockade, establishing ceasefire and the political process based on realities and taking into consideration all Yemeni sides.

He also criticized the United States and some European countries for intensifying the war and crisis in Yemen by their arms sales.

Elsewhere in the meeting, Semneby praised Iran’s constructive stances on peace and stability in the region and said that Yemen needed considerable joint efforts.

The groups involved in Yemeni crisis should be more participating in solving the crisis, the Swedish diplomat said, adding that dialog and interaction between involving groups would lead to peace and stability in the country.

He reaffirmed the responsibility of the international community in the crisis in Yemen.

### Countering World Drug...

FROM PAGE 1

Iran, sitting on a major drug trafficking route between Afghanistan on the one side and Europe and the Persian Gulf Arab states on the other side, has been a pioneer in fighting drug trafficking despite losing thousands of its security forces in clashes with drug traffickers as well as the heavy costs of the fight against narcotics.

Last month, Tehran announced that narcotics seizure at Iranian border crossings and airport gateways had increased by 523% in the quarter to May 21 against the same quarter in 2020.

Iran’s embassy in Austria, in marking the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, which falls on June 26, strongly criticized Western countries, as the main destination of narcotics seized by Iran, for their little support for the costly fight.

“Iran is at the forefront of the fight against illicit drug trafficking, which mainly enters Europe, while Iran receives little support for this costly fight,” the Iranian mission said in a tweet.

During a speech on the occasion, Gharibabadi said Western countries are not serious enough in confronting drug trafficking despite being the main destinations for the narcotics passing through Iran.

Back in March, the Iranian envoy said the unilateral sanctions imposed on Iran by Western countries, especially the United States, are hampering the Islamic Republic’s fight against drug trafficking.

The imposition of unilateral sanctions, according to Gharibabadi, has proved an obstacle to Iran’s fight against narcotics and the country’s efforts to boost its capabilities and its anti-narcotics campaign.

Iranian officials have time and again censured Western states over their antagonistic policies toward the Islamic Republic, whereas Iran protects them by halting the flow of narcotics into their territories.

### Iran to Boost...

FROM PAGE 1

Iran noted that this would pave the way for more strategic bilateral trade ties between both nations.

In June, Malaysia overtook Indonesia to become the biggest crude palm oil exporter to India, the world’s largest importer of vegetable oil, with exports climbing to 2.42 million tons since November. Between November and March 2021, India bought 1.68 million tons of crude palm oil from Malaysia.

Last year, China was the largest importer of Malaysian palm oil at 2.731 million tons, followed by India (2.727 million tons), Netherlands (1.073 million tons) and Pakistan (1.004 million tons).

### Russia Criticizes U.S...

FROM PAGE 1

So far, six rounds of negotiations have been held in the Austrian capital, as a result of which, according to participants, “significant progress” has been made in the course of the “constructive” and “businesslike” talks.

However, disagreements have persisted over a number of issues, including how to sequence the US sanctions removal, with Tehran arguing that since Washington was the party that violated the terms of the agreement, it should take the first step back into compliance with the deal by removing its unilateral sanctions.

Tehran has also asked for guarantees that the US won’t again leave the JCPOA under a new administration. This comes as the other hand, the administration of President Joe Biden says it cannot give such guarantees.

Iran is also dissatisfied with the scope of sanctions that the US is willing to remove, saying the US sanctions removal must cover all the sanctions that were slapped on the Islamic Republic after the JCPOA went into force in January 2016.

The U.S., for its part, has asked for follow-on talks about other issues, such as Iran’s missile program, which Tehran has strongly rejected.

In another tweet later on Thursday, Ulyanov pointed to the latest reports on the possible continuation of the talks under the next Iranian administration and urged Iran not to let the talks get protracted for a long time.

“According to the latest reports #Iran will be ready to resume the #ViennaTalks on #JCPOA only after August 5. The question is when exactly,” he said.

If the break in the talks lasts too long, the Russian diplomat continued, the negotiators “can lose the momentum and the process would take much longer time than expected.”

The long break between the sixth round of the Vienna talks and the expected seventh has given rise to the assumption that Tehran might be waiting for the incoming administration of Ebrahim Raeisi to take office before resuming the talks.

This comes as last Thursday, Ulyanov said Tehran “needs more time for preparations” following its June 18 presidential election. The sixth round was concluded two days after the election.



## Maldini Confirms Giroud's Milan Arrival

MILAN (Dispatches) - AC Milan director Paolo Maldini confirmed that Chelsea's French centre-forward Olivier Giroud was set to arrive in Italy while regretting the loss of goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma to Paris Saint Germain. "Olivier should arrive in Milan tomorrow," Maldini said at the unveiling of the Serie A calendar for the 2021-2022 season. The 34-year-old World Cup winner is reported to be set to sign a two-year contract worth three million euros per season with the Serie A runners-up, who open next season at Sampdoria.

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## Italy Goalkeeper Donnarumma Joins PSG

PARIS (Dispatches) - Paris Saint-Germain said that they had completed the signing of Italy's Euro 2020 goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma on a five-year deal. The 22-year-old, who saved two penalties in the Euro 2020 final and was named player of the tournament, heads to France on a free transfer from AC Milan. Donnarumma will be in competition with the experienced Keylor Navas for the goalkeeper's jersey. "I am delighted to be part of this huge club," said Donnarumma in a statement released by PSG.

# Bucks Defeat Suns to Pull Level in NBA Finals

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Khris Middleton scored 40 points, 10 of them in the final crucial minutes, and the Milwaukee Bucks rallied past Phoenix 109-103 on Wednesday to pull level in the NBA Finals.

Greek star Giannis Antetokounmpo added 26 points, 14 rebounds and eight assists for the Bucks, who improved to an NBA-best 9-1 at home in the playoffs.

Milwaukee equalized at 2-2 in the best-of-seven championship series with game five Saturday in Phoenix and game six Tuesday at Milwaukee.

"The only way we're going to win this series is to get one on the road," said Middleton. "It would be nice to get this next one."

The Bucks seek their first crown since 1971 while the Suns seek the first title in the club's 53-year history.

Phoenix's Devin Booker, coming off a playoffs-worst 10-point performance in a game three loss, scored 42 points in a losing cause. The Suns made 17 turnovers to five for the Bucks.

"He could have gone for 50-plus," Suns coach Monty Williams said. "We managed it well. A lot of our problems were self-inflicted. As a team we've got to take better care of the ball."

Jae Crowder made two free throws to put the Suns ahead but Middleton answered with back-to-back jumpers to put the Bucks ahead 101-99.

Phoenix's Chris Paul made his fourth turnover of the game and Middleton finished a fast break with a layup to give the Bucks a 103-99 edge with 27.2 seconds remaining.

Middleton added four late free throws to seal the triumph.

"We just stayed with it, doing what we do," Middleton said. "I hit some tough shots against a tight defense."

Antetokounmpo made key defensive plays late to disrupt the Suns and help spark a 15-0 fast break edge for the Bucks.

"Giannis, that's what he has been doing all year. He's amazing," said Middleton. "He didn't have the dominant performance,



but he did it with other things."

Phoenix guard Paul, a 16-year veteran in his first NBA Finals at age 36, managed only 10 points on 5-of-13 shooting.

Only Stephen Curry with 40 points had scored more in the first three quarters of a finals game in the past 25 years than Booker's 38.

But Booker picked up his fifth foul only 70 seconds into the fourth quarter and went to the bench with the Suns ahead 85-79.

With the Suns clinging to a 95-92 lead, Jrue Holiday drove for a breakaway and appeared to be fouled by Booker -- which would have seen the Suns star fouled out of the game with six.

Instead, referees made no call and it took Antetokounmpo's grabbing the ball and making a layup to lift the Bucks within 95-94 with 3:33 remaining.

Milwaukee's Pat Connaughton sank a 3-pointer to put the Bucks ahead but Booker answered with a jumper to level the contest at 97-97 with 2:52 to play, setting up the final drama.

Booker scored 20 in the first half to pull the Suns level with the Bucks at 52-52 at halftime, then added 18 in a 7-for-7 shooting performance in the third quarter despite picking up his fourth foul.

Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and Oscar Robertson, who sparked Milwaukee's championship run half a century ago, were among more than 16,000 fans in attendance.

## Mori Brace Fuels Mexico in Gold Cup Win Over Guatemala

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Two goals from Rogelio Funes Mori helped Mexico get their CONCACAF Gold Cup title defense back on track Wednesday with a 3-0 victory over Guatemala at the Cotton Bowl in Dallas, Texas.

Held to a goalless draw by Trinidad and Tobago in their tournament opener, Mexico bounced back on the same night that Group A rivals El Salvador became the first team into the quarter-finals with a 2-0 victory over Trinidad. Argentina-born Monterrey striker Funes Mori in the 29th and 55th minutes, and Orbelin Pineda with a 79th-minute header, were plenty for Mexico, who will take on El Salvador on Sunday in a Group A showdown in the 16-nation championship for teams from North and Central America and the Caribbean.

It was a vindication for Funes Mori, the 30-year-old whose selection by Mexico manager Gerardo "Tata" Martino had sparked criticism from former coach Tuca Ferretti and legendary striker Luis Hernandez because of his Argentinian roots.

In a match delayed more than half an hour by a sudden thunderstorm, Funes Mori opened the scoring in spectacular style, falling on a long ball from Hector Herrera and eluding Guatemalan defender Kervin Garcia as he turned to bend a shot past goalkeeper Nicholas Hagen for Mexico's first goal of the tournament.

Funes Mori struck again in the second half with a precise finish off a pass from Pineda -- who put the finishing touches on El Tri's victory when he leapt to head home a cross from Luis Rodriguez.

Earlier in nearby Frisco, Texas, at the ground of Major League Soccer's FC Dallas, goals from Jairo Henriquez and Walmer Martinez lifted El Salvador to a second straight victory to ensure they will move on from Group A. Midfielder Henriquez opened the scoring on the half-hour mark with an outstanding solo effort, making a crisp turn and firing a shot from outside the area that skimmed the far post on its way into the net.

Trinidad and Tobago pressed for the equalizer in the second half but could not find it and a minute into second-half injury time Martinez sealed it when he slotted in a rebound.



He will only be able to have the operation at the end of July due to the surgeon's availability. Rashford played five times for England in Euro 2020 and missed a penalty in the

# Rashford Faces 12 Weeks Out

LONDON (Dispatches) - Manchester United forward Marcus Rashford could be sidelined for up to three months after deciding to have surgery on a shoulder issue following Euro 2020, according to reports.

Rashford, 23, had a scan earlier in the day on the issue which has hampered the England striker since the end of the club season, the Daily Telegraph and the BBC reported.

shootout loss to Italy in the final.

Earlier in the day, anti-racism demonstrators gathered at a mural of Rashford in Manchester after it was vandalized amid a deluge of abuse against England players.

Throughout the day, hundreds gathered at the wall painting which had been defaced with racist abuse as Rashford and his black teammates Jadon Sancho and Bukayo Saka were targeted online over the side's defeat to the Azzurri.

Before he was attacked by trolls after the game, Rashford had become a hero to many inside and outside football by successfully lobbying British Prime Minister Boris Johnson to provide free school meals for under-privileged children during the coronavirus pandemic.

United begin their pre-season preparations at Derby on Sunday before starting their Premier League campaign at home to Leeds on August 14.

## Barca, Messi Agree Deal in Principle

MADRID (Dispatches) - Barcelona have reached a deal on principle with Leo Messi for the Argentine veteran to remain with the Catalan club for another five years, but on a reduced wage, Spanish media reported.

Messi, who earlier this month finally landed a major international trophy with Argentina when they beat rivals Brazil to win the Copa America, "will sign a five-season contract with a release clause of 600 million euros (\$709 million)," according to Catalan sports daily L'Esportiu.

"The player will reduce his wage by 50 percent. Now it just remains for the lawyers to look over the agreement and give it the OK. Once that happens (his) continuation will be official," said Madrid-based sports daily Marca which confirmed L'Esportiu's initial story.

According to the latter, Messi, 34, will earn in the region of 20 million euros basic next season with the Catalan club, which he has led to ten league crowns as well as four Champions Leagues.

Last season was a comparative disappointment as the club could only land the Spanish Cup and exited in the last 16 of the Champions League.

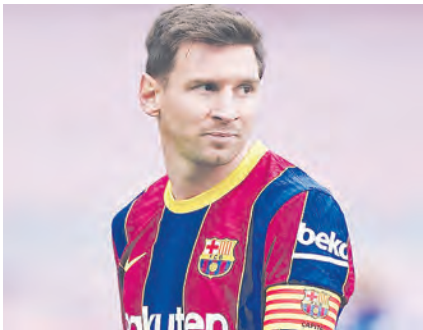
Last summer Messi sought to leave Barca as a free agent via a clause in his contract before agreeing to see out the final year as the club threatened to go to court.

There had been speculation that Messi would sign on for two years and then potentially head to Major League Soccer, although friend and former Barca teammate Neymar has said he would love to team up with him again at Paris Saint Germain.

"Finally, both parties saw fit to extend their link for a longer period of time," reported Barcelona-based sports daily Sport. Another Barcelona sports paper Mundo Deportivo suggested the longer contract length was part of a quid pro quo taking into account a curtailed salary structure as Barcelona battle crippling debts.

Several of the papers said an official announcement on the deal would follow within days.

With Barcelona labouring under debts of several hundred million euros, Spanish media made much earlier this year of the reported 555 million euros paid Messi over four seasons from November 2017 to the end of last month.



## "No Sign" Ronaldo Wants to Leave Juventus

ROME (Dispatches) - Cristiano Ronaldo has given no indication he wants to leave Juventus and is expected back in Turin later this month, club director Pavel Nedved said. "Cristiano is on holiday. We have no signal from his entourage that he wants to leave. We're waiting for him and he will return around July 25 as scheduled," Nedved said at the unveiling of the calendar for the 2021-2022 season.

The 36-year-old Portuguese international has one year left in his contract.

His future had been in doubt after a difficult campaign during which Juventus lost their Serie A crown after nine years, exited the Champions League in the last 16 and only sealed fourth place and elite European football on the final day.

Juventus open next season at Udinese with Massimiliano Allegri fired up as he returns as coach two years after being sacked despite winning five consecutive league titles with the Turin club.

"There was a certain routine with (Allegri) for five years," said Nedved. "Then he went for two years to take a little holiday but now he's back with great motivation."

Former Czech Republic international Nedved agreed that Juventus had probably celebrated more at finishing fourth at the end of last season than winning the 'Scudetto' in 2020 with Maurizio Sarri.

"I think it's true when Sarri says we didn't celebrate that Scudetto very much, because perhaps it came naturally as we had already won so much.

"We tried again with Andrea Pirlo (coach last season), but we ended in fourth. We celebrated that achievement after a complicated season perhaps more for the many sufferings."

Nedved confirmed that the club were interested in Sassuolo midfielder Manuel Locatelli after his performance with Italy in winning Euro 2020.

"We left the boy quiet during the European Championship. He is a Sassuolo player and there will be time to address the issue."

