

Health Ministry Announced on Friday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic In Iran Increased to 96,742 With 527 More Iranians Killed by the Deadly Virus Over the Past 24 Hours

IRAN NEWS

First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber Underscored The Need to Supply More Vaccines Through Import and Homemade Production, Adding Some 20m Doses of Vaccines To Be Imported By September

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Iran Calls in Russia, UK Envoys Over Controversial Pic
 IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran called in the Russian and British ambassadors to Tehran over the release by Moscow's Embassy of a controversial picture, which was taken to bring to mind a World War II-era conference in Tehran that lives in infamy in the historical memory of the Iranian nation.

Russian Ambassador Levan Dzhagaryan was called in by the Iranian Foreign Ministry to receive representations over the release of the picture on Twitter, which shows him and his UK counterpart meeting on the veranda of the Russian Embassy in Tehran, the site of a 1943 strategy meeting of the then ex-Soviet,...

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President Calls for Accelerating COVID-19 Vaccine Imports



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - President Ebrahim Raisi has called on Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif to accelerate the import of foreign-made COVID-19 vaccines.

Speaking in a cabinet meeting, Ebrahim Raisi said, "The situation and the victims of COVID-19 require that we do not delay the measures needed

to contain the situation, even for an hour."

"I call on the Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr Zarif to take the necessary measures to accelerate and increase the import of vaccines into the country, and the officials of the Ministry of Health and institutions such as the Red Crescent to do their utmost to expand and accelerate public vaccination," he added.

The President called the management of coronavirus the most important issue in the country today and added, "Controlling the outbreak of coronavirus, which has intensified these days, requires the cooperation of all officials like all other acute problems."

He stressed that if all the country's capacities are not used to curb the outbreak of coronavirus, it will be difficult to get out of the current situation.

"Another very important point is to persuade public opinion to participate in helping the government in this regard," he went on to say.

"We respect all the steps that have been taken so far to contain coronavirus, but we must work actively and in more effective ways to overcome the problem," he said.

Raisi stressed that no one should exclude themselves from observing health protocols and that everyone should feel that they must first follow the instructions themselves.

"Another important point is to pay attention to the families and individuals who have been affected by the outbreak of coronavirus for any reason," the president said, adding, "As the Supreme Leader emphasized, we must not allow this part of society to suffer any more."

Raisi added that using positive methods to encourage people to follow the protocols is definitely a priority, adding, "Apart from this issue, measures should be taken so that those who harm the people and society by not following the instructions know that observing the protocols is a must."

Meanwhile yesterday, President Raisi noted that there is no problem with allocating currency to import Corona vaccines and stressed that the import and production of domestic vaccines accelerated.

Raisi on Friday in a meeting of specialized committees of the National Task Force for Combating Coronavirus stressed the importance of people in observing health principles to control the Coronavirus, and said: "By complying fully with health guidelines and applying more controls and restrictions, we will have good conditions in controlling and overcoming this disease, and I call on the people to help the administration in this direction."

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Keep the Hero as Chelsea Win European Super Cup

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ViewPoint
 By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

No Trespasser Allowed

The Islamic Republic of Iran has reportedly said its air defense system warned off a U.S. unmanned military drone near the strategic Strait of Hormuz in early hours of Thursday and it is a clear sign for readiness of Iran's defense system for any wrong doing from alien forces.

The report on the website of the state-run Arabic-language Al-Alam channel identified the drone as an MQ-9 belonging to the U.S. military without elaborating.

Video posted by Al-Alam showed blurred out images of a surveillance room with commanders and radar operators at work warning an "unknown aircraft" not to get close to Iranian borders.

Meanwhile on Thursday Commander of Iran's Air Defense Force Brigadier General Alireza Sabahi-Fard said the force's radar and missile systems are at the ready at the mouth of the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman to protect those vital waterways against any hostile act.

The commander made the remarks in an inspection of Persian Gulf Security Operations Center (SOC), which is responsible for identification and steering of regional flights as well as interception of targets.

"All radar and missile systems of [Iran's] Air Defense [Force] are at the ready at the mouth of the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman," Sabahi-Fard said, adding that Iran's Air Defense Force has evolved from air protection phase into the higher stage of air superiority.

"The security of the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman is provided by Iran and the neighboring countries, and the Iranian Army's Air Defense Force today has the ability to deal decisively and firmly with any mischief causing disturbance to this security," he noted.

Despite various sanctions and restrictions, as Sabahi-Fard said, the progress of the country's defense force in the field of design and construction of various radar and missile systems will be further reinforced, and certainly this strength and authority will not diminish.

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Germany Calls on Reviving JCPOA as Soon as Possible

BERLIN (Dispatches) - German Foreign Minister has urged Iran to return to the Vienna negotiations on reviving a nuclear deal.

"If we don't want to jeopardize what we have achieved so far in Vienna we cannot stretch out the negotiations into eternity," Heiko Maas told journalists in Berlin, without mentioning the U.S. withdrawal from the nuclear deal.

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), signed on July 14, 2015, between Iran and five permanent members of the Security Council plus China and Iran and faced with problems after the U.S. President Donald Trump administration took office in the United States.

U.S. former President Donald Trump announced the withdrawal of the United States from the agreement. Following the U.S. unilateral withdrawal from the legally binding agreement, France, Germany, and Britain, known as E3, also failed to abide by their commitments.

The E3 officially set up a European mechanism, called INSTEX, to facilitate non-dollar trade with Iran, but it was not realized. "We expect Iran to return to the negotiating table in Vienna as soon as possible, and to do so with the necessary flexibility and readiness for compromise to strike a deal," the German Foreign Minister said.



Engineer Maroofkhani ,CEO of Hormozgan Steel ,was honored as a valuable manager in the transformation and development of Iranian business



The national meeting honoring the valuable managers in the transformation and development of Iranian business was held at the conference hall .The meeting was attended by Dr. Tabesh ,Deputy Minister of SAMT and CEO of Consumer and Producer Protection .Also present were Dr .Omrani ,the Deputy Attorney General ,and a group of members of the Islamic Consultative Assembly .Ataullah Maroofkhani ,CEO of Hormozgan Steel Company ,was honored as a valuable manager in the transformation and development of Iranian business.In this ceremony, Engineer Maroofkhani said " :In Hormozgan Steel ,special attention is paid to the issue of value creation in all fields ".He pointed to the importance of value creation in the field of business and said: "In the field of human resources ,efforts have been made to increase productivity according to the different needs of employees ,including scientific and personal needs ".The goal is to create value. The CEO of Hormozgan Steel Company pointed to the quality and its role in the transformation of the business .He said" :We produce the highest quality product in Hormozgan Steel .The slab produced in Hormozgan Steel is unique in the country and even in the Middle East".

Engineer Maroofkhani considered attention to systemic thinking as one of the important pillars of value creation .He emphasized :we should try to implement and strengthen the system thinking in the company.

PAKISTAN

 Special Supplement
 On 75th Independence
 Day of Pakistan

N. Korea PM Congratulates Iran First Vice President

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Prime Minister of North Korea Kim Tok-Hun has congratulated Iran's First Vice President on his appointment.

Mohammad Mokhber was appointed as First Vice President by Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi this week and North Korea's Prime Minister congratulated him in a message on Thursday.

Tok-Hun welcomed the expansion of ties with Iran and expressed hope to boost cooperation between North Korea and Iran in different sections.

Tehran-Ankara Cooperation to Benefit Islamic Ummah Greatly

TEHRAN (IRNA) - President Ebrahim Raisi said in a phone talk with his Turkish counterpart on Wednesday: Saving the Palestinians from the oppression of Zionists will always be in shared agenda of Tehran-Ankara cooperation, which is to great benefit of the Islamic Ummah (nation).

In his Wednesday evening phone talk with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, President Raisi evaluated the two countries' ties "beyond normal neighborly relations" arguing: The close cooperation between Iran and Turkey is necessary for ensuring the regional peace and stability.

Raisi said that Iran and Turkey's relations are friendly and brotherly, adding: We attach great significance to our bilateral ties with the friend and brother country, Turkey, and to our cooperation at the international scenes.

The news Iranian president said that the rapid convening of the 7th High Council for Iran-Turkey Cooperation in Tehran is necessary, expressing certainty that the two countries' comprehensive cooperation will not only ensure their own national interests, but also peace and security for the region and also greater blessings for the Islamic Ummah.

The president meanwhile referred to the broad potentials for further diversifying of the sphere of the two countries' cooperation, especially in the vaster expanse of the Islamic world, stressing: Assisting the oppressed and shelter-less Palestinian nation



and saving them from the oppression of the Zionists will never be eliminated from our two countries' shared cooperation agenda.

President Erdogan, too, in the phone talk once again congratulated his Iranian counterpart for winning the presidential election, condoled with him on the sad martyrdom anniversary of Imam Hussain (P), and said: I have no doubt that your tenure as the Iranian president will mark a new era in the two countries' stronger comprehensive bilateral and regional cooperation.

The Turkish president said that the High Council for Iran-Turkey Cooperation plays a decisive role in boosting bilateral cooperation, expressing hope that its upcoming Tehran meeting will be held as soon as possible, aimed at holding talks on broader bilateral cooperation.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan meanwhile dully appreciated the Islamic Republic of Iran's humanitarian contributions in Turkey's efforts to extinguish the raging fire in its juggles.

Rapid Compensation of Non-Diplomatic Moves Necessary

TEHRAN (MNA) - President Ebrahim Raisi's proposed foreign minister called for rapid compensation and correction of non-diplomatic moves taken by the ambassadors of Britain and Russia.

"The non-diplomatic action of two foreign ambassadors in Tehran has stifled public opinion in the Islamic Republic of Iran", Hossein Amir-Abdollahian tweeted Thursday.

He made the comments in reaction to the photo published by the ambassadors of Britain and Russia which was similar to the famous photo of the meeting of the leaders of the three allied leaders in World War II in Tehran.

"Such an act ignored diplomatic etiquette and national pride of the people of Iran", he said.

"Quick correction of such mistake is necessary", Amir-Abdollahian, the proposed Foreign Minister of Raisi's administration stressed.

Iran Rejects Concerns Over Afghanistan Developments

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The commander of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) says the country's borders enjoy full security, with the IRGC, Army and Police forces closely watching and controlling border areas, as the Taliban militants capture new territories in neighboring Afghanistan.

"The armed forces are present at the country's eastern borders with full readiness and vigilance," Major General Hossein Salami told reporters on Friday morning during a visit to the northeastern city of Mashhad.

Salami reiterated that all of the official and unofficial border crossings in the east of the country are under full control of the Iranian armed forces. "People should not worry at all, because the scope of our observations has gone beyond the borders and we are monitoring and controlling all the developments in the neighboring country," he said.

In recent weeks, the Taliban militants have waged a massive rampage across the war-torn country, seizing control of multiple strategic cities toward the capital, Kabul.

The Taliban now control more than half of the country's 400-odd districts. They took over Herat, Afghanistan's third-largest city, on Thursday and seized another district capital just 150 kilometers from Kabul.

Iraqis Allowed to Enter Iran With Negative Covid-19 Tests

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iraqi travelers and businessmen are allowed to enter Iran through Khosravi and Parvizkhan border crossings conditioned on carrying negative Covid-19 test results.

Moradali Tatar, the governor of Qasr-e Shirin County in Western Kermanshah Province, where shared Khosravi and Parvizkhan border crossings with Iraq are located, said on Wednesday that in coordination with the Iraqi central government, the Khosravi border has been reopened only for trade purposes, but the Parviz Khan border is open for travelers and trade activities.

The governor added that all the standard operating procedures of COVID-19 are practices at Khosravi and Parvizkhan and said only Iraqis will be let in that have valid negative Covid-19 test results.

Taking Care of Afghan Refugees; Priority for Iran

TEHRAN (IP) - Representative of Iran's Health Minister in Afghanistan's Sistan and Baluchestan says that taking care of the health of Afghan refugees is a priority for Iran.

"Following the Taliban attack in various parts of Afghanistan, a large number of Afghans entered Iran, and in such circumstances, taking care of the health of Afghan refugees is a priority for us," said the representative of the Minister of Health of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Sistan and Baluchestan.

In the wake of Taliban attacks on Zaranj city, the capital of Nimruz Province, and the fall of this city last Friday, many terrified people from Zaranj city and other parts of Nimruz Province entered the territory of the Islamic Republic of Iran through the Milak border.

The Sistan and Baluchestan Red Crescent Society has set up two 1,000-capacity camps to house Afghan refugees, but according to the latest reports, most of them have returned to Zaranj.

Great Jihad and Revolutionary Required in New Anti-COVID-19 Campaign



TEHRAN (IP) - The Chief-Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps urged Iran's new start for the campaign against COVID-19 to contain it, saying a great Jihad and revolutionary spirit is needed.

Major General Hossein Salami, Chief Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps, on Thursday in a joint meeting with Saeed Namaki, Minister of Health, Iran and Basij (Voluntary Force) Chief Brigadier General Gholamreza Soleimani said: "We must start again to confront coronavirus and give a national call for all people to contribute."

The IRGC Chief Commander stated that the Iranian people have gone through the most difficult crises, adding: "We must show this spirit again."

According to Major General Salami: "Today we need Jihad (struggle or fight against the enemies of Islam) and revolution, and with a great jihad we must dismantle this virus."

Saying that this meeting was formed following the orders of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Major General Salami said: "Yesterday's statement of the Leader of the Revolution was the agenda of the National Jihad to confront the coronavirus."

The Leader of the Islamic Revolution, at a time when the situation of the coronavirus in Iran and the world is becoming critical, considered the fight against the COVID-19 as the first and urgent issue in Iran.

Iran's Membership in SCO to Be Finalized as Obstacles Removed

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's top security official says the country's membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) will be finalized as political obstacles have been removed.

Ali Shamkhani, secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), said in a post on his official Twitter page on Wednesday that he had discussed the developments in Afghanistan, Syria and the Persian Gulf with his Russian counterpart, adding that Iran's membership to the SCO was also examined in his meeting with Head of Russia's Security Council Nikolai Patrushev.

"Fortunately, the political obstacles to #Iran's membership in the #ShanghaiCO have been removed & Iran's membership will be finalized," he added.

The SCO is an association of Eurasian political, economic and security alliance founded in 2001



in Shanghai by China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

The alliance is the largest regional organization in the world in terms of geopolitical coverage and population, covering three-fifths of the Eurasian continent and nearly half of the human population.

Under the SCO Charter signed in 2002, the member nations cooperate on security and military issues, especially with respect to terrorism, as well as on economic, environmental, cultural, scientific, and other issues.

The SCO has now eight member states and four observer states.

Having attained observer status in 2005, Iran officially applied for membership twice, in 2008 and 2009 respectively, but it is still waiting to be inducted.

No Malicious Intentions Behind Published Photo

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The British Ambassador to Tehran Simon Shercliff on Thursday felt sorry for the misunderstanding in publishing a photo with the Russian envoy in Tehran, stressing that there were no malicious intentions behind this issue.

The Director-General of the Eurasian Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iran has invited the British ambassador to Tehran Simon Shercliff to the Iranian Foreign Ministry to demand an explanation about a picture released by the Russian Embassy in Tehran.

Calling this action unacceptable, which has hurt the Iranians national feelings and pride, the Iranian officials said that the great people of Iran throughout history have always proved that they strongly stand against any movements that have resulted in arrogance.

British envoy also expressed his respect to the Islamic Republic of Iran, the people, and the history of this country, saying, "I emphasize that there were no malicious intentions behind this issue."

The ambassadors sought to remind the Russian-British alliance against the Nazi army during World War II, he added.

In the end, the British ambassador expressed hope that during his mission in Tehran, he would be able to help develop the relations between the two states, based on gaining and promoting mutual respect and trust.

Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf and Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif also slammed Russian and British Ambassadors for publishing the picture.

JCPOA Will Be Saved If Sanctions Lifted Iran Expresses Concern Over Rising Violence in Afghanistan

TEHRAN (IP) - The member of the National Security and Foreign Policy of the parliament said that if the parties wanted to return to the nuclear deal, all sanctions must be lifted.

"Over the past four decades, cruel sanctions have been imposed on Iran. If these sanctions are not lifted, the signatories of the JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action), will not have a chance to return to the nuclear deal," Shahriar Heydari said.

The member of the National Security and Foreign Policy of the parliament went on to say that Iran has its own mechanism to interact with international communities, but it has been crystal clear that Iran's attitude in nuclear issues was acceptable for all, specially IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency).

If verification is the case, Iran has repeatedly proven that its nuclear program has not deviated in any way, but if it is the US politically motivated behavior, Iran believes that the issue must be followed logically and in a diplomatic framework, he pointed out.

"The U.S. has intensified the sanctions based on its baseless excuses and its allies followed its policy too, so they must be well aware that Iran will not return to JCPOA if some of the sanctions are not lifted," he noted.

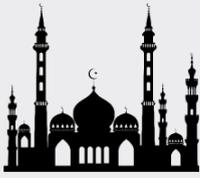
TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Ministry Spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh on Friday expressed concern over rising violence in Afghanistan.

He called on the warring sides to protect the lives of innocents and civilians amid the current situation. Taliban has taken control of Herat city, he said, calling on the sides to ensure the full safety and health of diplomats and the premises.

He announced the Ministry's constant contact with the Consulate General of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Herat. Iranian officials are following up on the health status of colleagues stationed there, he pointed out. Meanwhile Director General of West Asia at Iran's Foreign Ministry on Friday said that Iranian diplomats are inside Iran's consulate general in Herat and the officials are keeping in constant touch with them.

The Consul General, diplomats, and personnel of the Consulate General of the Islamic Republic of Iran are inside the premises, Rasoul Mousavi wrote in his Twitter account.

The city's governing forces have committed to the full security of Iran's consulate, its diplomats, and personnel, he further noted. On Thursday, the Taliban forces took over Herat city of Afghanistan.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:09
■ Evening (Maghreb)	20:14
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:51
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:23

13. Nay, thunder repeateth His praises, and so do the angels, with awe:
He flingeth the loud-voiced thunder-bolts, and therewith He striketh whomsoever
He will, yet these (are the men) who (dare to) dispute about Allah, with the strength of His power (supreme)!

14. For Him (alone) is prayer in Truth:
any others that they call upon besides Him hear them no more than if they were to stretch forth their hands for
water to reach their mouths but it reaches them not:
for the prayer of those without Faith is nothing but (futile) wandering (in the mind). Surah 13. The Thunder (13 - 14)

Iran Exports to Russia Up by 49% After Launch of Green Corridor

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – With the launch of Iran-Russia customs green corridor, Iran's exports to Russia has increased by 49 percent in the first quarter of this year comparing to the same period last year while at the same time the country's imports from Russia also have faced 15 percent growth.

The meeting of the customs managers of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mine and Agriculture (ICCIMA) was held on the topic of customs green corridor. In the meeting deputy head of chamber on provinces and formations Mr. Mozaffar Alikhani talked about the necessity of holding the meeting, adding that Iran's cooperation with the neighboring and regional states especially with the EAEU member states, while its economy and trade is challenging and suffering with sanctions restrictions, is very important and the meeting was to aimed at easing exploitation of the trade opportunities ahead of Iran.

Then Head of Iran-Russia Joint Chamber of Commerce Mr. Hadi Tiz Housh Taban, for his part, pointed to some problems ahead of traders for using the capacity of the green corridor and said that since 2016 that the creation of this corridor was signed by Iran and Russia, such a corridor was created by Turkey, adding that while Turkey's volume of exporting agro raw material has hit \$6b, Iran has been unable to use all capacities of the corridor. He noted of course there are several reasons behind that lack of information of economic activists from this occasion and the issue of coding are some of them. He said if Iran Customs Administration itself does coding process,



some of the problems of traders will be resolved and the can export major parts of their agro raw material to Russia.

He also said that turning Astara Khan Customs into a cross border custom is another problem because most of Iran's trade exchanges with Russia is done via Astara Khan.

Then director general of international co-operations office of Iran Customs Administration Mr. Kakhaki talked about the advantages of admission and activities of traders at the green corridor and said the project for the launch of Iran-Russia custom green corridor began 2006 which was aimed at paving the ground for easing the trade exchange between the two states. He said the green corridor minimizes the risk of customs offences and boosting information access for the economic activists.

Kakhaki then pointed to the comparative statistics of trade exchange of Iran and Russia in the first quarter of this year and last year, and added fortunately the trade exchange between Iran and Russia has increased this year, noting that Iran's imports from Russia have been valued at \$772m in the first quarter this year which shows 15 percent growth comparing to the preceding year while at the same time Iran's exports to Russia increased by 49 percent.

He also pointed to the problems regarding the SWIFT activities, adding that the transfer of forex between Iran and Eurasian states faces the same problem.

Iran Can Reach 10 Times Increase in Exports

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The Chairman of the Commission of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) said that Iran was capable of increasing exports 10 times.



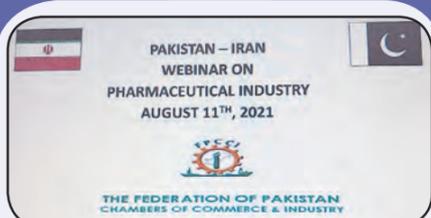
Jamshid Nafar said on Thursday that in order to put the due trade objective on Iran's commerce agenda, the needs of the neighboring countries must be taken into account, so the export and import of goods were facilitated.

"Many of the neighboring countries are export gateways for Iran's access to more distant countries, and the development of exports to neighbors could bring the country's domestic products to world markets so that goods of the best quality would be imported," Nafar noted. "We are currently looking for capacities to export to neighboring countries and then to the world," he said.

Nafar went on to say that by studying the needs of the neighboring countries, Iran can boost its exports and it will also helped that one prescription cannot be applied to all countries and every country needs a certain Prescription.

He said Iran enjoys a great deal of advantages for exports of its goods to the world and the current statistics are not acceptable for the economic activists because Iran's capacity for exports is higher than what has been experienced so far.

Iran, Pakistan Examine Ways to Expand Pharmaceutical Cooperation



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Participants at a webinar have stressed upon the need to explore more opportunities of cooperation between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan in pharmaceutical sector.

A virtual meeting of officials and members of the Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries and Agriculture and the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce was organized by Iranian Consulate General in Karachi and the Pakistani Embassy in Tehran.

Speaking at the webinar, Iranian Consul General in Karachi Hassan Nourian said that the Islamic Republic's foreign policy is based on the priority of relations with its neighbors.

He said although Iran and Pakistan have very good relations in political and cultural areas, but the level of economic relations between the two countries requires more serious measures by the governments of the two countries.

He pointed out the significant potential between the two neighboring pharmaceutical industries.

He added that more knowledge of each other's capacities and the use of infrastructure such as rail corridors and ECO roads on the Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul route should be encouraged.

The diplomat said new border crossing points between Iran and Pakistan and the existence of air freight service facilities through Iran Air on direct flights to Tehran and Karachi and the use of the capacity of the Iran-Pakistan Joint Investment Company can be used to increase trade cooperation.

Business activists and investors participating in the webinar said that the most important challenge in developing trade relations between Iran and Pakistan was the lack of banking channel and the problem of financial and monetary transfer.

"The reasonable price of energy and transportation costs in Iran is a good opportunity to design joint ventures in pharmaceutical products," said Massoud Ahmad, trade and investment adviser at Pakistan embassy in Tehran.

Najmuddin Hassan Java, Chairman of the Iran-Pakistan Chamber of Commerce affiliated with the Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry of this country, expressed hope that by creating joint production units, it is possible to meet the mutual pharmaceutical needs of Iran and Pakistan.

Nominee for Oil Minister to Push for Increased Gas Output

TEHRAN (PressTV) – President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi's pick for oil minister says he'll push for increased natural gas output beyond the current enviable record of nearly 1 billion cubic meters (3.5 billion cubic feet) per day.

A plan released by Javad Owji, nominated on Tuesday for the Oil Ministry post, showed he was keen to further boost gas production capacity to respond to a growing domestic demand in Iran.

Owji said Oil Ministry under his watch would seek to supply maximum amount of natural gas to industries and power plants to save other fuels for exports and other purposes.

Iran more than doubled its gas output during eight years of former president Hassan Rouhani. The increase became possible mainly thanks to massive expansion schemes in the country's giant South Pars gas field that is located in the Persian Gulf.

Currently third in the world in terms of gas output, Iran aims to further increase production to both expand its export markets and to feed more gas to refineries and industries.

Several large gas fields have been discovered in recent years both on the Iranian mainland and in the Persian Gulf.

Owji vowed in his plan for assuming the Oil Ministry job that he will also seek to cut the huge amount of natural gas burnt in Iran's household sector.

Moreover, Mr. Owji is deeply focused on expanding bilateral or multilateral agreements with target countries by tapping the capacities of international and regional organizations, including the Organization of the



Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), the Gas Exporting Countries Forum, etc.

He is also cognizant of modifying the consumption pattern of gas and oil products by implementing general policies to modify the consumption pattern using Articles 12 and 13 of the Law on Removing Barriers to Production.

Development and implementation of energy diplomacy document in cooperation with relevant institutions, maintaining and increasing Iran's status in OPEC, and expanding the field of activity of the oil and gas industry with neighboring countries and the countries bordering the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea in the field of exploration, production and joint venture capital are other areas Mr. Owji's team will be specially focused upon during his tenure as the Iranian oil minister under Raisi's administration.

Encouraging foreign investment for exports in the mid and downstream sectors and increasing the export of petroleum products to neighboring countries, as well as ensuring active support for boosting export of technology and engineering services of Iranian companies to neighboring countries are other areas of attention for Mr. Owji.

The plan, published exclusively by the Tasnim news agency, showed that the nominated minister will seek to increase the local use of crude in the petrochemical sector so that Iran will rely less on direct crude sales, an area which is normally a first target of foreign sanctions.

Iran COVID Vaccine Imports to Top 61m Doses in Late September

TEHRAN (PressTV) – Iran's Food and Drug Administration (IFDA) says the country's imports of coronavirus vaccines would expand to reach a target over 61 million doses before the end of next month.

IFDA spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour said on Thursday that Iran will have access to 120 million doses of coronavirus vaccines, including those manufactured locally, within the next three months.

The announcement comes as Iran is speeding up its vaccinations against the disease months after the campaign got off to a slow start. The country has taken delivery of over 21 million doses of vaccines with nearly a third being the Sinopharm jab from China.

Number of daily vaccinations in Iran reached nearly 650,000 on Wednesday, according to Jahanpour, who said that total number of shots administered since late December had topped nearly 17.295 million.

He said that locally manufactured vaccines had been responsible for seven percent of all vaccinations, adding that increased supply of flagship vaccine Coviran Barekat in the upcoming weeks would further speed up the inoculation program.

That comes as Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei on Wednesday urged the government to "increase efforts to both import and to produce homegrown vaccines".

Ayatollah Khamenei had made a similar call in January while insisting that Iran should refrain from importing vaccines from Britain or the US because of health problems reported from such imports in the past. Jahanpour said that Iran had no specific ban on any international brand of vaccine, saying all shots approved by the World Health Organization would have permission for imports except those that are exclusively developed and made by the United States or Britain.

Iran has accelerated its inoculation drive against the coronavirus since last month after the health ministry announced it can rely on abundant supplies of foreign jabs as well as regular deliveries of vaccines that are being manufactured inside Iran. Facing a series of inhumane sanctions imposed by the United States, the Iranian government has mostly relied on home-grown capacities to tackle one of the harshest outbreaks of the coronavirus in the Middle East.

Iran has already taken delivery of a number of batches of Russia's Sputnik V vaccines, Sinopharm jabs developed in China, and a batch of COVAXIN vaccines developed in India.



Iraq Eyes Qatar Gas Import Amid Shortage of Iranian Supply

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Iraq has reportedly plans to import gas from Qatar and other countries to make up for fluctuating supplies from Iran.

Iraq is eyeing plans to import gas from Qatar, Turkey, Algeria and Azerbaijan to boost electric power production plants in the country due to a fluctuation in quantities imported from Iran in recent years, an official said.

Baghdad has heavily relied on neighboring Iran for gas and electricity imports since signing agreements in 2013 and 2015.

In comments to the government-run Al Sabah newspaper, Spokesman for the Iraqi Ministry of Electricity Ahmed Al-Abadi said electric power production plants across the country operate using five types of fuel, however a recent reduction in imports from Iran has exacerbated an electricity production crisis.

Electricity, oil and energy authorities in Iraq are now edging towards avoiding a total reliance on a single gas source to ensure the flow of supplies to the country, the official added.

Al-Abadi said the Ministry of Electricity is "unbiased towards any of the companies specialized in supplying gas to Iraq, and there is no restraint towards any company provided it meets the required prices and specifications."

The Energy Ministerial Council and the Ministry of Electricity are also working on completing electrical interconnection projects with each of the Persian Gulf states as well as Jordan and Egypt, he said, adding that authorities are also seeking to implement solar energy projects to solve the ongoing crisis.

According to an Al Jazeera report, Iran on Tuesday reduced quantities of gas supplied to Iraq to operate electricity production plants in the central and southern region, leading to a loss of about 2,500 megawatts of the total energy produced and imported in the country.

Iran Steel Exports Increase As Output, Imports Decline

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – During the first four months of the current fiscal year (March 21-July 22), steel exports saw significant growth as imports and production declined compared with last year's corresponding period.

Exports of semi-finished products stood at 2.53 million tons during the period, up 52% year-on-year.

Billet and bloom had the lion's share of semis exports with an aggregate of 1.69 million tons, 26% higher than the previous corresponding period.

Slab amounted to 841,000 tons during the period, up 161% YOY.

Exports of finished steel products jumped by 104% YOY to 1.16 tons.

Haiti Postpones Election Date To Replace Slain President

PORT AU PRINCE (Dispatches) - Haiti will hold presidential elections last scheduled for September on November 7, officials said, with the assassination of president Jovenel Moise still shrouded in mystery.

A hit squad burst into the presidential residence and shot Moise dead in the early hours of July 7. His wife Martine was wounded but survived.

The provisional electoral council said polling day will include the first round of the presidential election, legislative elections that should have been held in 2019, and a constitutional referendum that Moise supported. The referendum was twice postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic.



Madagascar President Sacks All His Ministers

ANTANANARIVO (Dispatches) - Madagascar President Andry Rajoelina has sacked all his ministers, his office said, days after he criticized some of their performances as below par and weeks after officials said they had thwarted a plot to kill the former coup leader.

Rajoelina's office gave no reason for the dismissals in a statement issued late on Wednesday.

On Sunday, Rajoelina said the performance of some ministers was unsatisfactory.

"Like in a football team, you have to change when there are failures in government," he said in comments broadcast on national television.



Taliban Take Strategic Ghazni City on Road to Kabul



KABUL (Dispatches) - Taliban fighters in Afghanistan captured the strategic city of Ghazni, the ninth provincial capital they have seized in a week and another gain after U.S. intelligence said the insurgents could take the capital Kabul within 90 days.

The speed of the Taliban advance has sparked recriminations among many Afghans over U.S. President Joe Biden's decision to withdraw U.S. troops and leave the Afghan government to fight alone, ending the United States' longest war. Ghazni lies 150 km (93 miles) southwest of Kabul on the ancient route between the capital and the second city of Kandahar. The militants occupied Ghazni's government agency headquarters after heavy clashes, a security official said.

"All local government officials, including the provincial governor, have been evacuated towards Kabul," said the official who declined to be identified.

Fighting has also been intense in Kandahar. The city hospital had received scores of bodies of members of the armed forces and some wounded Taliban, a doctor said late on Wednesday. With the last of the U.S.-led international forces set to leave by the end of this month, the Taliban have taken control of about two-thirds of the country.

Even when the Islamist group ruled the country from 1996-2001, it never controlled all of the north. This time, it appears to be determined to secure it fully before turning its attention to Kabul.

Finding rural districts too hard to defend, government forces have withdrawn to protect Kabul and other cities, prompting thousands of families to flee the provinces in hope of finding safety there.

The Taliban said they had captured Kandahar's provincial prison.

"Fighting did not stop until 4 a.m. and then after the first prayers it started up again," said an aid worker in Kandahar.

The Taliban said they had seized airports outside the cities of Kunduz and Sheberghan in the north and Farah in the west, making it even more difficult to supply beleaguered government forces.

They said they had also captured the provincial headquarters in Lashkar Gah, the capital of the southern province of Helmand, a hotbed of militant activity.

Government officials there were not immediately available for comment. Fighting had also flared in the northwestern province of Badghis, its governor said.

Kandahar and other southern and eastern provinces bordering Pakistan have long been Taliban heartlands but it has been in the north where they have made their biggest gains in recent weeks.

President Ashraf Ghani flew to northern Mazar-i-Sharif on Wednesday to rally old warlords he had previously tried to sideline, now needing their support as the enemy closes in.

Canada Violating Int'l Law By Selling Arms to Saudis

OTTAWA (Dispatches) - Canada is violating international law by selling weapons to Saudi Arabia, according to a new report by rights groups Amnesty International Canada and Project Ploughshares, which are urging Ottawa to suspend all arms exports to Riyadh.

Released on Wednesday, the report, titled 'No Credible Evidence': Canada's Flawed Analysis of Arms Exports to Saudi Arabia, accuses Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's government of violating the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), an international agreement that Canada became a party to in 2019.

Canadian weapons transfers to the Gulf kingdom could be used to commit or facilitate violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, the rights groups found, particularly in the ongoing conflict in Yemen.

"It has been established through investigations and expert reports that Canadian weapons exports to [Saudi Arabia] are contrary to Canada's legal obligations under the ATT," the report reads.



Sicily Records Europe's Highest Ever Temperature as Fires Rage

ROME (Dispatches) - Fires stoked by hot winds tore through southern Italy on Thursday, a day after a monitoring station in Florida, Sicily reported temperatures of 48.8C (119.8F) - levels some scientists believe could be the highest in European history.

Wednesday's record temperature, which still needs to be verified by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), was reported close to the city of Syracuse, in the southeast of the island of Sicily, as an anticyclone nicknamed "Lucifer" swept in. "If the data is validated, it could become the highest value ever recorded in Europe, beating the previous record of 48 degrees measured in Athens on July 10, 1977," meteorologist Manuel Mazzoleni wrote on 3Bmeteo.com, a specialist website.

Temperatures are expected to remain high on Friday and over the weekend. Firefighters said on Twitter they had battles more than 500 blazes in Sicily and Calabria overnight, employing five planes to try to douse the flames from above. They said the situation was now "under control" on the island.

The fires have had a fatal impact, with the death toll linked to wildfires at least four people over the past week.

A 77-year-old shepherd who was found dead in the southern Calabria region was among the victims. Reports said he was in a farmhouse where he had apparently sought refuge with his flock.

"Yet another victim of the fires. We are losing our history, our identity is turning to ashes, our soul is burning," Giuseppe Falcomata, the mayor of Reggio Calabria, a province in the Calabria region, wrote on Facebook.

He urged people to keep away from the affected areas. Near Catania, Sicily, a 30-year-old farmer died when he was crushed by his tractor while fighting a blaze. The blazes in Sicily are destroying trees and threatening property in the southern and central parts of the island, local media reported.

"We must immediately respond to this emergency, providing economic relief to those who have lost everything," said agriculture minister Stefano Patuanelli.

N.Korean Envoy Calls for Cooperation With Russia to Counter U.S.

SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korea intends to strengthen cooperation with Russia to counter the United States, and peace on the Korean peninsula will not be possible until American troops are withdrawn, Pyongyang's ambassador to Russia told TASS news agency.

Ambassador Sin Hong-chol's comments come after senior North Korean leaders warned this week that South Korea and the United States would face repercussions for their decision to go ahead with annual joint military drills.

The drills are a "rehearsal for war" and prove the



United States is responsible for destabilising the situation, he told TASS in an interview published on Wednesday.

"We will also boost cooperation between North Korea and Russia with the view to counter the U.S., a common threat," Sin told TASS.

Around 28,500 American troops are stationed in South Korea as a legacy of the 1950-1953 Korean War, which left the peninsula in a technical state of war when fighting

ended with an armistice rather than a peace agreement. Washington and Seoul say the joint drills are defensive in nature.

Sudan to Hand Over al-Bashir to ICC for War Crimes Trial

KHARTUM (Dispatches) - Sudan will hand longtime ruler Omar al-Bashir to the International Criminal Court (ICC) along with two other officials wanted over the Darfur conflict, officials say.

Al-Bashir, 77, has been wanted by The Hague-based ICC for more than 10 years over charges of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Sudanese region. The United Nations says 300,000 people were killed and 2.5 million displaced in the Darfur conflict, which erupted in the vast western region in 2003.

The "cabinet decided to hand over wanted officials to the ICC," Foreign Minister Mariam al-Mahdi was quoted as saying by state news agency SUNA, without giving a timeframe.

The cabinet's decision to hand him over came during a visit by ICC chief prosecutor Karim Khan, but it still needs the approval of Sudan's ruling sovereign council, comprised of military and civilian figures.

On Wednesday, Khan met the sovereign council's leader, General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, its deputy chair. Daglo said Sudan "is prepared to cooperate with the ICC", SUNA reported.

Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok, who also met Khan, on Wednesday said "Sudan's commitment to seek justice is not only to abide by its international commitments, but it comes out of a response to the people's demands".

It remains unclear if al-Bashir would be extradited to face trial in The Hague, or could remain in Sudan.

Volker Perthes, the UN Special Representative to Sudan, on Wednesday said the ICC "can help" with the "establishment of (a) Special Court for Darfur", without giving further details. The transitional authorities have previously said they would hand al-Bashir over, but one stumbling block was that Sudan was not party to the court's founding Rome Statute.

But last week, Sudan's cabinet voted to ratify the Rome Statute, a crucial move seen as one step towards al-Bashir potentially facing trial.

Pakistan Useful for U.S. Only to Clean up Afghanistan "Mess"

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan has accused the United States of seeing his country as useful only in the context of the "mess" it is leaving behind in Afghanistan after 20 years of fighting.

Washington has been pressing Pakistan to use its influence over the Taliban to broker an elusive peace deal as negotiations between the fighters and the Afghan government have stalled, and violence in Afghanistan has escalated sharply.

"Pakistan is just considered only to be useful in the context of somehow settling this mess which has been left behind after 20 years of trying to find a military solution when there was not one," Khan told foreign journalists at his home in Islamabad on Wednesday.

The U.S. will pull out its military by August 31, 20 years after toppling the Taliban government in 2001. But as the U.S. leaves, the Taliban today controls more territory than at any point since then.

Kabul and several Western governments say Pakistan's support for the armed group allowed it to weather the war. The charge of supporting the Taliban despite being a U.S. ally has long been a sore point between Washington and Islamabad. Pakistan denies supporting the Taliban.

Khan said Islamabad was not taking sides in Afghanistan. "I think that the Americans have decided that India is their strategic partner now, and I think that's why there's a different way of treating Pakistan now," Khan said.

Pakistan and India are arch-rivals and have fought three wars. The two share frosty ties and currently have minimal diplomatic relations. A political settlement in Afghanistan was looking difficult under current conditions, Khan added.

He said he tried to persuade Taliban leaders when they were visiting Pakistan to reach a settlement.

"The condition is that as long as Ashraf Ghani is there, we (Taliban) are not going to talk to the Afghan government," Khan said, quoting the Taliban leaders as telling him.



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S, J, balcony
green yard
Fully Furn

Parsian

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PUBLISHER OF NEWSPAPERS

Adidas Ends Reebok Era With \$2.5b Sale

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Adidas is selling Reebok to Authentic Brands Group (ABG) for up to 2.1 billion euros (\$2.5 billion) as the German sporting goods company concentrates on its core brand after a deal that did not deliver.

Adidas bought Reebok for \$3.8 billion in 2006 to help compete with arch-rival Nike, but its sluggish performance prompted repeated calls from investors to sell the U.S. and Canada focused brand.

In the meantime, Adidas managed to eat into Nike's dominance in the United States with its own brand, helped by partnership with celebrities like Kanye West, Beyonce and Pharrell Williams.

Reebok will keep its headquarters in Boston and continue operations in North and Latin America, Asia-Pacific, Europe and Russia, the U.S. brand management firm said in a statement, adding it will work closely with Adidas during the transition.



U.S. Calls on OPEC and Its Allies to Pump More Oil

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - U.S. President Joe Biden's administration urged OPEC and its allies to boost oil output to tackle rising gasoline prices that they see as a threat to the global economic recovery.

The request reflects the White House's willingness to engage major world oil producers for more supply to help industry and consumers, even as it seeks the mantle of global leadership in the fight against climate change and discourages drilling at home.

Biden's national security adviser Jake Sullivan criticized big drilling nations, including Saudi Arabia, for what he said were insufficient crude production levels in the aftermath of the global COVID-19 pandemic.

"At a critical moment in the global recovery, this is simply not enough," Sullivan said in a statement.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies, known as OPEC+, had implemented a record output cut of 10 million barrels per day, about 10% of world demand, as global energy demand slumped during the pandemic. But it has gradually raised output since, with the cut eased to about 5.8 million bpd as of July.

OPEC+ agreed in July to boost output by 400,000 bpd a month starting in August until the rest of the 5.8 million bpd cut is phased out. OPEC+ is scheduled to hold another meeting on Sept. 1 to review the situation.

Biden later told reporters on Wednesday that the United States had made clear to OPEC that "the production cuts made during the pandemic should be reversed" as the global economy recovers "in order to lower prices for consumers."

U.S. gasoline prices are running at about \$3.18 a gallon at the pumps, up more than a dollar from last year at this time when the pandemic sapped travel demand, according to the American Automobile Association.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said the outreach to OPEC+ was aimed at long-term engagement to end anti-competitive practices, not necessarily to garner an immediate response.

The unusual statement ratcheted up international pressure and comes as the administration tries to contain a range of rising prices and supply bottlenecks across the economy that have fueled inflation concerns. Biden has made recovering from the economic recession triggered by the pandemic a key priority for his administration.

The message also underscored the new dynamic between Washington and OPEC since Biden's predecessor, Donald Trump, broke with prior practice in demanding specific policy changes from OPEC to adjust prices. Trump had threatened to withdraw military support from OPEC's de facto leader Saudi Arabia over output, which at the time he thought was too high and hurting U.S.-based drillers. Global benchmark Brent crude gained more than 1% to over \$71 a barrel on Wednesday. That is lower than the prices above \$77 in early July, but still represents an increase of nearly a third from the beginning of the year.

The Biden administration's push for lower fuel prices grates with its efforts to secure global leadership in the fight against climate change, an agenda anchored by efforts to transition the economy away from fossil fuels toward cleaner energy sources and electric vehicles.

Japan Wholesale Inflation Hits 13-Year High

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japanese wholesale prices rose in July at their fastest annual pace in 13 years, data showed on Thursday, a sign that global commodity inflation and a weak yen were pushing up raw material import costs for a broad range of goods.

There is uncertainty, however, on whether companies will start to pass on the higher costs to households and prop up consumer inflation, which remains stuck around zero due to weak consumption, unlike in other advanced nations, analysts say.

"The pass-through of raw material costs to consumer goods prices is slow," said Chisato Oshiba, an economist at Dai-ichi Life Research Institute. "While wholesale inflation is accelerating at a very fast pace now, it will take time for this to lead to higher consumer prices," she said.

The corporate goods price index (CGPI), which measures the price companies charge each other for their goods and services, rose 5.6% in July from a year earlier, Bank of Japan data showed, increasing for the fifth straight month and beating a median market forecast for a 5.0% gain.

It accelerated sharply from a 5.0% increase in June and marked the fastest pace of growth since September 2008, when emerging market demand triggered a spike in prices dubbed the commodities "super cycle".

On a month-on-month basis, wholesale prices rose 1.1% in July after gaining 0.6%, marking the biggest increase in nearly two years.

Prices rose for many raw materials including those for wood, which spiked 33.1% in July from a year earlier, and oil and coal goods, which saw prices rise 38.8%. Some countries, including the United States and Britain, have seen inflation rise faster than



expected as demand recovers from the coronavirus pandemic, triggering debate on how quickly they should wean their economies off massive monetary stimulus.

Few analysts expect Japan to see the same kind of rise in consumer inflation. Slow vaccinations and curbs in activity to combat the pandemic have hurt consumption, discouraging firms from passing on higher costs to households.

The dynamics were evident in wholesale price data. Domestic final goods prices rose just 2% in July from a year earlier, even as raw material prices spiked 48%.

Back in 2008, Japan's annual core consumer inflation hit 2.4% in July and August on rising commodity costs, but slowed to 0.2% in December and started falling from March 2009.

Kuwait's Economic Makeover Under Threat

KUWAIT (Dispatches) - Thousands of small and medium Kuwaiti businesses could go to the wall after being walloped by the pandemic, potentially torpedoing a private sector central to the country's efforts to remake its unorthodox and oil-pumped economy.

The government, which spends more than half of its annual budget on the salaries of Kuwaitis who mostly work in state jobs, has encouraged citizens to set up their own businesses over the past decade in an effort to engineer a private sector. The aim has been to ease state finances, reduce reliance on the imported labour of expatriates who make up most of the population, and also help Kuwait diversify away from oil, which brings in 90% of state revenues but is looking increasingly precarious as the world moves away from fossil fuels.

Yet much of that decade of work to foster small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which involved about \$500 million of state financing, has been undone by the COVID-19 outbreak, according to many industry experts.

Most of the 25,000 to 30,000 SMEs in Kuwait were operating with limited cash reserves even before the pandemic struck and were unable to weather a halt in operations due to lockdowns, investment management firm Markaz said.

In an indication of the scale of the problem, Abdulaziz al-Mubarak, head of the Kuwait Federation for Small and Medium Enterprises, said that about 8,600 entrepreneurs were currently switching from working in the private sector to the government.

He warned that the cash crunch could "end the whole sector".

That's a major problem for Kuwait, where SMEs generate 11.9% of GDP by gross value added, employ tens of thousands



of people and play an important role in sectors like wholesale and retail trade, food and drinks, hospitality and construction.

Take Mohammed al-Blushi. His factory making trucks and smart homes from light steel suffered heavy losses due to COVID-19 restrictions. He has been forced to shrink his staff to just three employees from about 60.

He came up with half of the 800,000-dinar (\$2.7 million) financing to start his business four years ago, with the rest coming from a loan from a state fund.

The 36-year-old now fears he could default on the loan, and is holding out for further support from the government such as compensation for its pandemic losses or exemptions from certain debts.

"I will not give up," he said. "The crisis will subside, God willing."

Expatriates, mostly from Arabic and Asian nations, make up about 70% of the 4.6 million-strong population of Kuwait, a small country on the Persian Gulf sandwiched by bigger regional players Saudi Arabia and Iraq.

Kuwait, like other oil exporters, was slammed by the double shock of low crude prices and the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to the economy shrinking by 8% last year.

On March 30 this year, parliament passed a law on financing for SMEs, but for some business owners it will prove too late.

Spread of COVID-19 Delta Variant Knocks Oil Demand Outlook

LONDON (Reuters) - Rising demand for oil abruptly reversed course in July and is set to proceed more slowly for the rest of the year due to the spread of the COVID-19 Delta variant, the International Energy Agency said on Thursday.

"Growth for the second half of 2021 has been downgraded more sharply, as new COVID-19 restrictions imposed in several major oil consuming countries, particularly in Asia, look set to reduce mobility and oil use," the Paris-based IEA said. "We now estimate that demand fell in July as the rapid spread of the COVID-19 Delta variant undermined deliveries in China, Indonesia and other parts of Asia," it said in its monthly oil report.

The IEA put the demand slump last month at 120,000 barrels per day (bpd) and predicted growth would be half a million bpd lower in the second half of the year compared to its estimate last month, noting some changes were due to revisions in data.

An output deal reached by the OPEC+ alliance - consisting of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and others such as Russia - last month would restore market balance in the near term, the IEA added. "But the scale could tilt back to surplus in 2022 if OPEC+ continues to undo its cuts and producers not taking part in the deal ramp up in response to higher prices," it said.

OPEC+, which had introduced output curbs to support prices and ease oversupply, agreed in July to boost output by 400,000 bpd a month starting in August until the rest of a 5.8 million bpd cut is phased out.

The United States on Wednesday called on OPEC+ to boost oil output to tackle rising gasoline prices and aid the global economic recovery. OPEC+ is scheduled to hold a meeting on Sept. 1 to review the situation.

UK Economy Grows for a Fifth Month

LONDON (Dispatches) - Britain's economy grew for a fifth month in June as the reopening of indoor hospitality and visits by patients to their GPs helped boost national output by 1%, official data has shown.

Despite the government's decision to delay the full lifting of restrictions by four weeks to 19 July, the Office for National Statistics said growth in June was almost twice as rapid as the 0.6% in May.

Gross domestic product remained 2.2% below the level reached before the Covid-19 pandemic

in February 2020, however, and some analysts said they expected the pace of recovery to have slowed in July as infection rates rose.

Growth in June was the result of a 1.5% expansion of the service sector, helped by a rise of just over 10% for restaurants, cafes and bars. Services account for about 80% of GDP.

The ONS said there had also been a 4.5% increase in health services, which accounted for almost half the monthly rise in output. Visits to GPs are the biggest element in the health services component of GDP, and the ONS said there had been a pick-up in non-Covid health activity in June.

Samuel Tombs, a UK economist at Pantheon Macro, said he expected GDP to increase by just 0.2% in July as businesses that relied on face-to-face transactions were affected by renewed consumer caution.

Data for the second quarter of 2020 showed the economy was 4.8% bigger than it was between January and March, when it was constrained by curbs on activity and GDP contracted by 1.6%.

Between April and June, the UK grew at more than double the rate of the 2% in the eurozone and faster than the US, which grew at a quarterly rate of just over 1.5%.

Ruth Gregory, a UK analyst at Capital Economics, said the main driver of growth in the second quarter had been a 7.3% jump in consumer spending, but that the economy had also been boosted by an increase of 6.1% in government spending and 2.4% increase in investment.

The chancellor, Rishi Sunak said: "Today's figures show that our economy is on the mend showing strong signs of recovery, thanks to our Plan for Jobs and successful vaccine programme.

"I know there are still challenges to overcome, but I feel confident in the strength of the UK economy and the resilience of the British people. With the fastest quarterly growth rate among the G7 economies, we have exceeded expectations, and I'm pleased to see the UK bouncing back."

UN Chief Emphasizes Youths Role for Building a World Based On Inclusive, Fair, Sustainable Development for All



TEHRAN (UNIC) - United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in his message on International Youth Day, 12 August 2021, urged everyone to guarantee young people a seat at the table as we build a world based on inclusive, fair, and sustainable development for all.

The full text of his message reads:

Young people are on the frontlines of the struggle to build a better future for all.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the dire need for the kind of transformational change they seek - and young people must be full partners in that effort.

This year's International Youth Day highlights solutions developed by young innovators to address challenges to our food systems. They are tackling inequities in food security, biodiversity loss, threats to our environment and much more.

We see that same drive, creativity, and commitment in many other areas - from gender equality to education and skills development.

But young people cannot do it on their own. They need allies to make sure they are engaged, included and understood.

Guided by the United Nations system-wide Youth Strategy, Youth2030, the UN is strengthening its work for and with young people worldwide.

I urge everyone to guarantee young people a seat at the table as we build a world based on inclusive, fair, and sustainable development for all.

U.S. Aims at Returning To JCPOA at Low Cost

TEHRAN (IP) - The spokesman for the National Security and Foreign Policy Commission of the Iran's Parliament said that the US proposal with the title of low versus low was actually a deception plan; its goal was to return to JCPOA at a low cost.

Mahmoud Abbaszadeh Meshkini tweeted on Thursday: "They want to return to the JCPOA at a low cost to put more pressure on the Islamic Republic of Iran to use the trigger mechanism."



Swiss Voters May Get Last Word on Inclusive Writing

GENEVA (Dispatches) - Ensuring gender neutrality in writing is a tricky business, and nowhere more so than in Switzerland which uses four languages and may soon put the issue to the popular vote.

Furious over inclusive writing making its way into officialdom, the media and schools, the Swiss branch of the Defend the French Language association is hoping to gather enough signatures to trigger a vote, as is possible under the country's direct democracy system.

Wrestling with language is part of the national identity in Switzerland, where German, French and Italian are used -- plus a fourth official language: Romansh.

French and Italian nouns have either a masculine or feminine gender, while German nouns have a masculine, feminine or neutral gender.

In French, Italian and German grammar, the masculine takes precedence over the feminine in situations describing both men and women -- a rule that activists for gender equality say instills the idea that men are superior to women.

As a result, there has been a rapidly spreading trend of filling words up with dots and stars to include their masculine, feminine and sometimes non-binary forms all in one go.

But critics say this is going too far, butchering the written language and creating an unreadable mess.

Since the 1990s, the Swiss government has tried to avoid the problem by leaning towards neutral terminology, where possible, in the three main languages.

For example, communications in French referencing voters get around the issue by referring to the electorate, "l'électorat", rather than "les électeurs et les électrices" -- the masculine and feminine forms of the word "voters".

But formats like "les électeur.rice.s" have now started appearing.

France's education ministry has recently banned the use of such formulations, and in neighbouring Switzerland, a string of politicians, mainly from the right, are also campaigning for them to be wiped off the page.

Benjamin Roduit of The Centre party brought forward a motion in parliament in March -- which has yet to be debated -- asking the Swiss federal administration to adhere to the established rules of the French language.

In June, the Swiss Federal Chancellery banned the use in German of asterisks and other signs that include the masculine, feminine and non-binary forms of words, believing they do not achieve their aim -- and instead "cause a whole host of linguistic problems".

It gave as an example this sentence: "Der*die Leiter*in bezeichnet eine*n geeignete*n Mitarbeiter*in, die*der ihn*sie bei Abwesenheit vertritt", which means "the director shall designate a suitable member of staff to replace him/her in his/her absence."

For the word "citizens" in its plural form -- "Buerger" for men and "Buergerinnen" for women, which turns into "Buerger" if both men and women are involved -- the federal administration will now simply use both in succession.

In French, though, some have been using the formulation "citoyen-ne-x-s" for citizens, with the "ne" denoting women and the "x" for those uncomfortable with either the masculine or feminine spelling.

In recent months, Switzerland's French-language public television service RTS has



also fanned the flames by replacing "Bonsoir à tous" ("good evening, everyone", using the masculine plural "tous") with "Bonsoir et bienvenue" -- a neutral "good evening and welcome".

The Swiss branch of Defend the French Language wrote an open letter asking RTS to reverse the change.

Branch president Aurele Challet is also attempting to gather enough signatures to trigger a public vote on the issue.

The initiative "aims to ban so-called inclusive writing throughout Switzerland".

"The French language cannot tolerate being dismantled by utopians creating gibberish," said Challet, a former sports journalist.

He said putting dots between letters is "inconsistent, it's ineffective, it's ugly and it will bring nothing to the legitimate fight -- which I support -- on the place of women in society."

A typographer by training, he deplores the introduction of this writing style in officialdom and soon in schools.

Taking advantage of the upcoming renewal of textbooks in French-speaking Switzerland, the Swiss authorities intend to introduce some elements of gender-neutral language from 2023.

Pascal Gygax, a psycholinguist at the University of Fribourg and author of the book "Does The Brain Think Male?", defends the "re-feminisation" of writing, including in the classroom.

"We see that there are now more egalitarian currents -- we saw it with the 'MeToo' hashtag," he told AFP.

"The language issue is part of a movement that aims for more equality."

For Janna Kraus, of the Transgender Network Switzerland association, being "against equitable language should not give anyone the right to prohibit its use by others".

No Trespasser Allowed

FROM PAGE 1

The senior Iranian commander said a day earlier that the force is keeping "a watchful eye" on Iran's strategic regions and will not allow any act of aggression by the enemy to go unnoticed.



The remarks come as tensions have simmered in the region after a suspected drone attack late last month on an Israeli-managed tanker off the Omani coast. Two crew members were killed in the attack, which was blamed on Iran by the United States, Israel and Britain. Iran categorically denied the accusation.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has repeatedly warned alien forces of staying away from its borders and air space and it has reiterated that there will be a harsh response to any offence of the enemies. The U.S. forces in the past have experienced Iran's reaction in the space or on the ground and they have not yet forgotten the shoot down of their sophisticated drone over the Persian Gulf space and missile rain on their Ain Asad Air Base in Iraq.

The Islamic Republic of Iran's military in recent years has shown its enemies and especially to the world arrogance that it will not give in to any pressure or threats and it will fight till its last blood to defend its rights and territory.

It seems American officials are wise enough not to test Iran's power and bravery by committing such a stupid act or accusing the country of some rubbish and baseless charges. The Islamic Republic of Iran has, since its advent in 1979, shown the world it respects the international laws and at the same time it will not bow down to discrimination or unilateral and illegal decisions of the world powers.

So the U.S. and Israeli forces or anyone who wants to take hostile attitude against Iran are recommended not to mess with this country because they will have to pay dearly for it. Each time the response may differ and if the response is soft it is not because of its weakness but it is because of the adopted tactic by the senior officials.

The U.S. forces are better to leave the region and the people in the region in order that peace and security is restored because history has shown that foreign forces have been always behind violence and rifts in the countries like what we today see in Afghanistan.

President Calls for...

FROM PAGE 1

Raisi called on the spokesperson of the National Task Force for Combating Corona, the Information Committee, and the IRIB to manage the information process so people can be informed about relevant news accurately, transparently and quickly through official sources.

Raisi emphasized that "There is enough medicine and the vaccination process will accelerate" and said: "There is no problem in allocating currency to the import of Corona vaccine and the import of vaccine has accelerated. At the same time production of domestic vaccine expanded."

"Acceleration of vaccination is one of the priorities of the administration that the first vice president is seriously pursuing and we hope with imports in a short time, we will witness a large percentage of people get vaccinated," President Raisi said.

Meanwhile Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps Ground Force expressed his forces' readiness to help the Iranian health society in the public vaccination program against the coronavirus.

In comments in Iran's northeastern city of Mashhad on Thursday, Brigadier General Mohammad Pakpour said the IRGC Ground Force is ready to help and promote the coronavirus vaccination centers across Iran.

He also noted that the IRGC Ground Force has set up an operational headquarters after Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei ordered the mobilization of efforts by the military forces in the battle against the pandemic.

The general also said that the IRGC Ground Force's stationary and mobile hospitals across the country have focused efforts on the treatment of the coronavirus patients.

WWF Sounds Alarm Over Colossal Black Sea Oil Slick



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russian scientists sounded the alarm over a huge oil slick in the Black Sea, with the World Wildlife Fund saying at least 100 tons of oil have leaked off the city of Novorossiysk.

After it emerged that the slick was much larger than initially reported, investigators launched a pollution probe and the General Prosecutor's Office said officials were studying the coast between the resort town of Anapa and Novorossiysk. The area is home to some of the country's best beaches popular with Russian tourists.

A leak occurred at a sea terminal near the southern port city at the weekend as the Greek-flagged Minerva Symphony was loading oil. On Monday, the Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC), which controls the terminal, said the spill was contained, estimating that oil had spread over 200 square meters (2,150 square feet) and involved around 12 cubic meters (423 cubic feet) of oil.

By early Sunday, "the situation was back to normal" and posed no threat to either the local population or wildlife, said the consortium.

CPC's shareholders include Russia's Rosneft, U.S. oil giant Chevron and Italy's Eni. The WWF and Russian scientists said the oil slick was much more serious than initially reported and could harm the environment. The conservation group said it had launched its own surveillance and found the slick had covered an area of 94 square kilometers by Sunday.

Greenpeace, which said it was asking for more information from officials, claimed the polluted area could be 400,000 bigger than initially reported.

The WWF estimated that at least 100 tons of oil -- "and most likely even more" -- had been released into the Black Sea.

"Despite the prompt involvement of rescue teams, the oil spread over a colossal area," the WWF said on Facebook, adding that marine wildlife could be affected.

Aleksei Knizhnikov, head of the responsible industry programme at WWF Russia, said the slick was drifting north, having already reached Abrau-Dyurso -- famed for its wine-making industry -- and might later reach the Utrish Nature Reserve.

Don't Bet on Eruptions to Lessen Climate Change

LONDON (Dispatches) - Climate change could magnify the atmospheric cooling effects of once-in-a-century volcanic eruptions, but also lessen the impact of smaller eruptions, according to new research released Thursday.

Scientists at the University of Cambridge and the UK Met Office examined how rising temperatures are likely to affect the ash and gases shot into the atmosphere by volcanoes.

The emerging "feedback loops" between the changing climate and eruptions were not accounted for in this week's landmark scientific report by the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), said lead author Thomas Aubry of Cambridge's Department of Geography.

"It could shed new light on the evolution of future volcanic influences on climate," he said of the study.

"Even if volcanoes have a limited influence on climate compared to human greenhouse gas emissions, they are an important part of the system." The research, published in the journal Nature Communications, used climate and volcanic plume models to project future changes. It also looked back at the worldwide impact of Mount Pinatubo's eruption in the Philippines in 1991, the second largest of the 20th century.

Iran Calls in...

FROM PAGE 1

U.S. and British leaders -- namely Joseph Stalin, Franklin Roosevelt, and Winston Churchill -- two years after the Anglo-Soviet invasion of Iran.

During the meeting on Thursday, the Russian diplomat explained that publishing the photo had merely been meant to highlight the WWII-era alliance with Britain against the Nazi army, and had no anti-Iran intention at all.

He emphasized the deep and strategic ties between Iran and Russia and expressed regret that the picture had hurt the feelings of the friendly Iranian people.

Having heard the explanations, the director-general of the Iranian Foreign Ministry's Eurasia section said the release of such a photo was still "unacceptable," and that it was a must for foreign missions to pay close attention to the political, cultural and historical exigencies of the host state.

The Russian official was also told that the great nation of Iran had time and again proved over the past 42 year since its Islamic Revolution that it would seriously work to safeguard the independence that the country achieved on the back of historical resistance and sacrificial struggles, and that it would adjust its ties, as a powerful state, with other countries based on national dignity.

Later in the day, the Iranian Foreign Ministry invited the British Ambassador Simon Shercliff to explain about the photo. Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif's assistant, who is also the Foreign Ministry's Director General for Western Europe, told the British envoy that it was an unacceptable measure, which "has hurt the national pride of the Iranian nation."

"The great people of Iran have proven throughout history that they reject any move emanating from arrogant thoughts and will resist against it," the Iranian official added. The British ambassador, for his part, expressed regret over the misunderstanding created by the photo.

During the historical conference, the three WWII Allies agreed to open a new front against the then Nazi Germany about two years prior to the end of World War II, a decision that changed the fate of the war in favor of the trio.

However, the image of the so-called "Big Three" is infamous to the Iranian people since it is reminiscent of the violation of their country's national sovereignty by the three countries, two of which had exploited the then Pahlavi regime's inefficacy and submissiveness to deploy troops to Iranian soil despite the fact that Tehran had declared neutrality in the war.

The Pahlavi regime had neither been informed of the vital meeting on Iranian soil nor invited to it.

"Ambassador Levan Dzhangaryan's meeting with the new head of the Flag of United Kingdom British diplomatic mission in Iran Simon Shercliff on the historical stair, where the 1943 Tehran conference was held," read the caption of the image tweeted by the Russian Embassy in Tehran.

The image, however, drew anger and criticism among Iranians, with the country's senior officials quickly reacting to the image that they viewed as an insult to the Islamic Republic. Similarly, Parliament Speaker Mohammad-Baqer Qaibaf censured the meeting between the Russian and UK envoys as "inappropriate and inconsistent with diplomatic protocols," calling on the Foreign Ministry to follow up on the insult.

"Both ambassadors must swiftly issue an official apology, otherwise firm diplomatic action will be necessary," the Parliament chief. Faced with the anger in Iran, the Russian Embassy tried to justify the meeting at the specific site with two more tweets on Thursday and said, "We would like to note that it does not have any anti-Iranian context. We were not going to offend the feelings of the friendly Iranian people."

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Shoulder Injury Sidelines Nishikori

TORONTO (Dispatches) - Japan's Kei Nishikori withdrew from the ATP Toronto Masters on Wednesday with a shoulder injury, handing a walkover to Poland's Hubert Hurkacz in a second-round match.

Asia's top men's player was fresh off a semi-final last week in Washington, his deepest run in any event since January 2019, and had defeated Miomir Kecmanovic in his opening-round match.

Foden Sidelined By Foot Injury

LONDON (Dispatches) - Manchester City midfielder Phil Foden is set to miss the first month of the Premier League season due to a foot injury he sustained at Euro 2020.

The 21-year-old missed England's final defeat to Italy due to the problem and is unlikely to feature before September's international break. City open their Premier League defence away to Tottenham on Sunday with Foden also set to miss clashes against Norwich and Arsenal.

"It is still a little bit sore," Foden told Sky Sports.

Kepa the Hero as Chelsea Win European Super Cup

BELFAST (Dispatches) - Goalkeeper Kepa Arrizabalaga came off the bench to make two shootout saves as Champions League winners Chelsea beat Spain's Villarreal 6-5 on penalties to add the UEFA Super Cup to their trophy collection.

Extra time had ended 1-1 at Belfast's Windsor Park stadium, with Chelsea bringing on Kepa for Edouard Mendy in the final seconds in what turned out to be the game's tactical master-stroke.

The freshest player on a field of tired legs saved first from Aissa Mandi at 1-1, after Kai Havertz had missed for Chelsea, and then made the winning stop at 6-5 when Villarreal captain and 2010 World Cup winner Raul Albiol hit the ball to the bottom left. Mendy was one of the first to congratulate his team mate, with Chelsea lifting the trophy for a second time.

"It was certainly not spontaneous," Chelsea manager Thomas Tuchel said of the goalkeeper switch.

"We had some statistics, we were well-prepared. Kepa is the best percentage in saving penalties. The analysing guys, the goalkeeper coaches showed me the data and then we spoke with the players that this can happen.

"And since then they know and it's fantastic how Edu accepts it," added the German. "Kepa is better in this discipline and these guys are true team players."

Mendy said he had no hard feelings at all. "Of course I'm happy because we won," the Senegal international told BT Sport television.

Hakim Ziyech had put Chelsea ahead in the 27th minute, sweeping in from 12 yards after a perfectly measured cross from Kai Havertz on the left.

The Morocco international, an unused substitute when Chelsea beat Manchester City 1-0 in the Champions League final in Porto on May 29, then went off injured four minutes before the break following a collision with Juan Foyth.

Ziyech returned with his right arm in a sling to watch the rest of the match from the bench while Christian Pulisic took his place.

Villarreal, the Europa League holders with a noisy contingent of some 1,000 fans among the 13,000-strong crowd on a clear



evening in Northern Ireland, hit the woodwork either side of halftime.

Their equalizer came as no surprise in a lively match with several scoring chances squandered on both sides and both keepers making key saves.

Gerard Moreno -- who scored against Manchester United before the Europa League final in Gdansk went to penalties -- rescued Unai Emery's side in the 73rd with a side-foot finish after a back-heel from Boulaye Dia.

It was Moreno's eighth goal in his last nine European appearances for Villarreal.

"It was tough, 120 minutes," said Tuchel. "We were very strong in the first 30-35 minutes and then we lost a bit easy balls after our goal... the equaliser was well-deserved.

"Right after we conceded the goal we were very strong again, right until the end."

Pulisic had a good chance in the 99th, the ball just running wide, while Mason Mount had a shot pushed out for a corner in the 108th.

Chelsea now turn their thoughts to the start of the Premier League season, and the imminent signing of striker Romelu Lukaku from Inter Milan, with an opening match at home to Crystal Palace on Saturday.

Messi Dreaming Of Champions League Win With PSG



PARIS (Dispatches) - Lionel Messi said he is "dreaming" of winning a fifth Champions League after signing a two-year contract with Paris Saint-Germain.

"I have said my dream is to win another Champions League and I think I'm in the ideal place to have that chance and to do it," he said as he was unveiled as a PSG player.

The 34-year-old claimed the last of his European titles with former side Barcelona in 2015, while the Qatari-owned Parisians are yet to clinch the continent's elite club competition.

Messi was a free agent after leaving boyhood side Barca at the weekend because of their financial predicament. He is expected to earn 35 million euros (\$41 million) a year with PSG.

Hundreds of fans gathered outside the Parc des Princes on Wednesday with supporters queuing near the club shop on the Champs Elysees to buy Messi shirts.

The Argentina attacker is unlikely to feature in Saturday's home game with Strasbourg having undertaken next to no pre-season after winning the Copa America on July 11.

Collins Halts Halep Injury Comeback

MONTREAL (Dispatches) - American Danielle Collins on the way to victory over former world number one Simona Halep in the second round of the WTA hardcourt tournament in Montreal.

A red-hot Danielle Collins spoiled Simona Halep's return from a three-month injury layoff on Wednesday, downing the former world number one in three sets in the second round of the WTA hardcourt tournament in Montreal. Romania's Halep, who won the Canadian titles in 2016 and 2018, saved four match points in the final game of an epic match lasting close to three hours but took a 2-6, 6-4, 6-4 defeat.

American Collins extended her win streak to 12 matches - a run that saw her claim back-to-back titles in Palermo and San Jose -- with her victory over the former top-ranked player who missed Roland Garros, Wimbledon and the Olympics with a calf injury.

Halep last competed in Rome in mid-May before taking time away for treatment and recovery.

"It was a great match especially after a few months of break," Halep said. "I played really well and I'm happy with everything - it was a bit unexpected.

"I'm getting better and I'm positive about how I played.

"After three months it's tough to play three hours at a high level with someone who has been winning a lot of matches."

Collins kept the sixth-seeded Halep under constant pressure, the Romanian saving 15 of 22 break points against her serve.

Top seed Aryna Sabalenka fired 18 aces to power into the third round, the world number three from Belarus defeating 2018 finalist Sloane Stephens 7-6 (7/4), 4-6, 6-4 in two and a half hours.

The Wimbledon semi-finalist had to overcome 11 aces from Stephens but broke the American's serve six times to secure the victory.

Sabalenka, winner of two titles this season, improved her 2021 record to 36-12.

She next faces comeback Canadian Rebecca Marino, the number 220 who quit the sport for five years from 2013 in the interest of her mental health.



Olympic Champion Zverev to Miss Davis Cup

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Newly-crowned Olympic men's tennis champion Alexander Zverev said he will not play for Germany in the Davis Cup tournament this November.

After knocking out world number-one Novak Djokovic in the semi-final, Zverev, 24, beat Russia's Karen Khachanov in straight sets to win the men's Olympic gold

medal in Tokyo earlier this month.

However, he insists he needs a break once the ATP season ends with Germany one of the 18 teams to play in the week-long Davis Cup tournament starting on November 25.

"I'm only human and I need a holiday. We play from January to October and I won't play in November," Zverev told magazine Sports Bild.

However, Zverev said he wants to play in the Davis Cup again in future should it revert to the old format with ties played over weekends during the season. "As soon as there is the old format again, with home advantage and matches at the weekend, I'm in," he added.

Paralympic Flame Ceremonies Begin

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japan held its first Paralympic flame-lighting ceremonies on Thursday, with athletes waiting to learn whether spectators will be in the stands as the country battles a spike in virus cases.

Fans were banned from almost all venues at the pandemic-postponed Tokyo Olympics, which ended Sunday, while athletes faced restrictions on movement and were tested daily.

The Paralympics are expected to take place under similar conditions when they begin on August 24, Japanese media said, with an official decision on spectators expected early next week.

Although Japan has seen a comparatively small Covid-19 outbreak overall, with around 15,300 deaths, the latest wave driven by the more infectious Delta variant is pushing daily case numbers to new records. Tokyo and five other regions are currently under a virus state of emergency, which bans bars and restaurants from serving alcohol and asks them to close by 8pm.

Instead of a traditional relay on public roads, "torch-kiss" Paralympic flame-lighting events will be held in towns and cities across Japan over the next week, with the flame transferred from torch to torch.

The flames will be brought to Tokyo and combined, but plans to have spectators line the route of a relay in the capital have been scrapped, a city government official told AFP.

"We had planned to hold the Paralympic torch relay in Tokyo with some 700 torchbearers," said Tokyo Metropolitan Government official Koichi Osakabe.

"But because of the state of emergency, we decided not to do the relay on public roads."

The emergency measures are scheduled to last until the end of August. Similar "quasi-emergency" measures are in place in other regions where cases are rising.

The remote city of Tono in Japan's northern Iwate region decided to open its Paralympic flame ceremony to the public, and was expecting a small crowd of around 50 people including officials. "We wanted to have a diverse group of people, young and old, non-Japanese nationals and those with disabilities, to take part in the event," the city official in charge of the ceremony told AFP.



Nadal Out of Cincinnati, Adds to Doubt Over U.S. Open

LONDON (Dispatches) - Rafael Nadal withdrew from the ATP Cincinnati Masters on Wednesday, organizers said, just a day after his withdrawal from the Toronto tournament had already cast doubt on his fitness for the U.S. Open.

The 35-year-old Spanish star has been suffering from a left foot injury since his semi-final exit at the hands of Novak Djokovic at the French Open in June.

Nadal, level with Djokovic and Roger Federer on a men's record 20 Grand Slams, is hoping to be fit for an assault on a fifth US Open title when the final Grand Slam of the year starts on August 30.

World number four Nadal's withdrawal means that none of the "Big Three" will compete again before the New York fortnight.

Top-ranked Djokovic, seeking to complete a calendar-year Grand Slam at the US Open, withdrew from Cincinnati on Monday, saying he needed more recovery time after the Tokyo Olympics.

Djokovic, 34, could become the first man since Rod Laver in 1969 to win all four major titles in one year.

But he missed a chance at a "Golden Slam" after losing to Alexander Zverev in an Olympic semi-final.

"I am taking a bit longer to recover and recuperate after quite a taxing journey from Australia to Tokyo," Djokovic posted on social media.

"Sadly, that means I won't be ready to compete in Cincinnati this year so I'll turn my focus and attention to U.S. Open and spend some more time with family. See you in New York soon!"

Federer, who turned 40 on Sunday, withdrew from Toronto and Cincinnati last Thursday, adding to fitness fears around the Swiss legend for the US Open.



Pakistan

IRAN NEWS

Special Supplement on Pakistan Independence Day

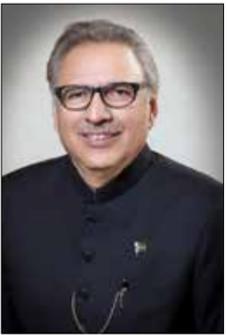
PRIVATE ENGLISH NEWSPAPER IN IRAN

23 MORDAD 1400 SATURDAY, AUGUST 14, 2021

Message from Dr Arif Alvi

President of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan

(On the occasion of 75th Independence Day of Pakistan i.e., 14 August 2021)



I wish to share in the happiness of my fellow countrymen on the auspicious occasion of the 75th Independence Day of Pakistan. This day reminds us to pay rich tribute to the Father of the Nation, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, and leaders and workers of the Pakistan Movement who created a separate homeland for the Muslims of the Indian sub-continent. During this 74 years journey, Pakistan faced many challenges but it successfully overcame them with hard work, sacrifices and the support of the entire nation. Pakistanis are a brilliant and brave nation, that has made tremendous successes in various fields making the country distinguished from other nations. The world must appreciate the fact that Pakistan singularly fought a long-drawn war against terrorism and eventually defeated the menace. Similarly, the development of nuclear deterrence by Pakistan is a great achievement that has made the country's defence impregnable. Not to forget that Pakistan is a host to millions of Afghan refugees for many decades. Pakistan also won laurels worldwide for successfully handling the Covid-19 pandemic. For this great achievement, I pay homage to doctors and paramedics, religious leaders, media, National Command and Operation Centre, Security Forces and the entire nation whose cooperation made it possible to contain the spread of the COVID-19 virus. We have significantly improved all our macro-economic indicators which are now positively impacting the lives of the masses. Despite these achievements, Pakistan is still facing many challenges on social and economic fronts, such as increasing population, lack of health and

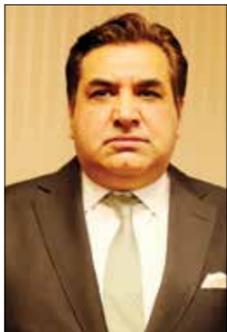
education facilities, stunted growth, malnutrition and various other diseases. It is encouraging to note that the government has taken certain steps for the empowerment of women and Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) by providing them loans and skills to make them financially independent. Additionally, the Government has initiated various social welfare programmes under the flagship "Ehsaas Program" to provide education, health, and financial assistance to the impoverished segments of society. However, we need to make more efforts for the facilitation and welfare of PWDs and the empowerment of women by ensuring the provision of their right to inheritance. On this Independence Day, we also reaffirm our commitment to continue our moral, political and diplomatic support to the cause of the Jammu and Kashmir dispute. I assure my Kashmiri brethren that Pakistan would continue to stand by them till the achievement of their right to self-determination in accordance with the United Nations Security Council's resolutions. I also urge the international community to play its role to compel India to stop committing human rights abuses against the innocent Muslims of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir and fulfil its commitment to grant Kashmiris their right to self-determination. Let's pledge to follow the ideals of the Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, and work for the unity and prosperity of Pakistan. May Allah be with us all. Amen!

Pakistan Paindabad!

Message from H.E Rahim Hayat Qureshi,

Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan

on Independence Day(August 14, 2021)



As we celebrate the 74th anniversary of Independence of Pakistan, today, I take this opportunity to convey my felicitations to all the Pakistanis living in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

This day is a powerful reminder of the heroic struggle undertaken by Muslims of the Sub-continent for a separate homeland where they could live their lives with freedom and dignity, in harmony with their religious and cultural values. Our forefathers underwent great trial and tribulation, with millions suffering the travails of dispossession and exile, and hundreds of thousands laying the ultimate sacrifice at the altar of freedom — so that our children may have a country to call their own, where they could build a prosperous and secure future for themselves. Envisioned by the great poet-philosopher Allama Muhammad Iqbal and founded by the father of the nation, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Pakistan was the culmination of a long and arduous constitutional struggle and was created to enable the Muslims of South Asia to lead their lives according to the religious, social, political and cultural aspirations. Since our independence in 1947, Pakistan has embattled multiple challenges of enormous magnitude. With the grace of Almighty Allah, we have succeeded in overcoming these challenges. As envisioned by our forefather, a democratic and civilized society with rule of law, tolerance for different

views of life and non-discrimination on any basis remain our guiding principles. Today, Pakistan is rapidly moving on a path to progress and development. Wide-ranging political, economic and social reforms, fighting terrorism and extremism in all its forms and manifestations as well as working for building peace and stability in the region, are all manifestations of Pakistan's courageous, enlightened and dynamic policies. Pakistan follows peaceful coexistence with our neighbors and endeavor for mutual growth and collective prosperity. Pakistan and Iran share common perceptions on international and regional issues and closely cooperate on the world fora. It is a matter of satisfaction that Pakistan and Iran are working in tandem to further promote their deep-rooted historical ties, strengthen regional and international cooperation and safeguard the interests of the Muslim Ummah. After several decades, a new phase in our bilateral relationship was initiated by the opening of 2nd International border between Iran and Pakistan at Gabd-Reemdan in December 2020, to facilitate bilateral trade and movement of people across the border. During the visit of Foreign Minister of Pakistan, Shah Mahmood Qureshi in April 2021, a new border crossing was opened at Mand-Pishin and a MoU was signed to establish six border sustenance markets. Preliminary work is already underway for planning the first three border markets at Gabd-Reemdan, Mand-Pishin and Chidgi-Kuhak. These measures have further deepened mutual understanding and led to a joint commitment to prioritize and pursue our economic goals. During this time of celebration, let us not forget the plight of our Kashmiri brethren who, despite the Covid-19 and persistent global condemnation by the UN, OIC and other human rights

Message from Mr. Imran Khan,

Prime Minister of Pakistan, on Independence Day of Pakistan 14th August, 2021.



As we hoist our national flag to mark Independence Day, we must reiterate the firm resolve to uphold our national values of unity, faith and discipline as envisioned by Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. We have surmounted monumental challenges during the course of our history to emerge as a united, peaceful and resilient nation. Even today, the changing regional dynamics along with some domestic issues continue to test our resolve. Like each time, we will also overcome these obstacles with our characteristic determination and come out stronger as a nation. Pakistan today can stand tall among the comity of nations. Our policies towards reviving the economy, handling the pandemic, and protecting the environment have received universal acclaim. On this

occasion, we should not forget our Kashmiri brothers and sisters in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) struggling for their right to self-determination under extremely adverse circumstances marked by illegal Indian occupation and unspeakable repression. Pakistan will continue to extend its full support to the Kashmiris in their just cause. Kashmiris are looking up to the international community to fulfil the promises made to them. Pakistan has rendered immense sacrifices and paid a heavy price for instability on its Western border. We have consistently stressed that there is no military solution to the conflict in Afghanistan. Pakistan will continue to support a negotiated political settlement for durable peace and stability in Afghanistan. We want peace within and peace without, to pursue our socio-economic agenda. The Naya Pakistan has shifted its focus from geo-politics to geo-economics, with the well-being and welfare of our people as the topmost priority. Our government has undertaken every possible effort for the development and prosperity of Pakistan. This country is undoubtedly a gift of Allah Almighty for us. I once again felicitate all Pakistanis, both inland and overseas, on this auspicious occasion. I urge you to play your part in making Pakistan a proud, prosperous and peaceful nation state.

bodies, continue to suffer systematic persecution of Kashmiri Muslims. Despite all the stubbornness on India's part, with the blessings of Allah the day is not far when IIOJK will soon realize its Right of Self Determination and the sun of independence from illegal Indian occupation will dawn upon them. As aptly said by Poet Sahir Ludhianvi:

ظلم پھر ظلم ہے بڑھتا ہے تو مٹ جاتا ہے۔
خون پھر خون ہے ٹپکے گا تو جم جائے گا۔

Pakistan deeply admires the principled stance of Supreme Leader Seyed Ayatollah Khamenei on the issue of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu & Kashmir (IIOJK) and the atrocious violations of human rights therein. Unfortunately since 5th of August 2019, Government of India has laid a military siege on IIOJK, by violating UN Security Council resolutions and illegally annexing Jammu & Kashmir. Youm-e-Istehsaal is commemorated by Kashmiris around the world on 5th August to shake the world conscience about the plight of the people of Kashmir. Finally, on this auspicious day, I pray to Almighty Allah to shower his blessings on the people of Pakistan and brotherly people of Iran. I am confident that our bonds of brotherhood would continue to grow in the years ahead to the mutual benefit of the two brotherly countries and the people as well as for the regional peace and security.

Ameen.

An Overview of Pakistan-Iran Trade & Economic Relations

By: Masood Ahmed,
Trade and Investment Counsellor

Pakistan and Iran are two brotherly neighboring countries having close relations based on commonalities of religion, culture and trade. As neighbors, a common border stretching over 900 km and their geo-strategic location brings the two countries even closer. Recent years have witnessed significant improvement in political relations between them. Both have great potential to work together for stability, economic growth and prosperity in the region. The present low volume of trade between Pakistan and Iran does not reflect the depth of their relations. It is heartening to see that during recent years the governments of the two countries have taken several measures to improve cooperation in trade and economy which includes negotiations on FTA and investment opportunities. Opening of new border crossing stations of Gabd-Rimdan and Mand-Pishin, besides signing MoU on establishing border markets are some examples of that. Amid Covid-19 and devaluation of Iranian currency in consequence of US sanctions against Iran, the bilateral trade potential largely remained compromised during the last year.

The problem of absence of banking channel remained the main factor that did not allow the bilateral trade between the two neighboring countries to grow. The efforts to formulate a barter trade mechanism between Pakistan and Iran therefore need to be geared up to finalize it. Increase in rice demand in Iran, removal of ban on import of kinnow/tangerine allowing 5000 tons through border markets and the recent trend of increase in import of Pakistani mango are encouraging signs for Pakistani exporters of these goods. Keeping in view that absence of the banking channels between two neighbors due to US sanctions on Iran is the major stumbling block in the way of bilateral trade and Investment, the State Bank of Pakistan and Central Bank of Iran should try to get involved and devise some mechanism to minimize the negative effects of this. There is dire need that both countries constructively and continuously engage to remove non-tariff barriers that have developed over the time. Iranian authorities should give due consideration to Pakistani request to do away with non-tariff barriers of Road tax, Load tax and charging heavy attestation fee from Pakistani exporters on their SPS documents as Pakistan is not charging similar taxes and fees from Iranian transporters and traders. Further, there is need to increase the visits of trade delegations between two countries in order to increase business to business interaction. However, until the Covid-19 situation in both the countries improves, webinars and online meetings are the solution. Pakistan and Iran had also been negotiating Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs) on Standards & Quality Controls, and Sanitary & Phyto-Sanitary measures. Their finalized drafts are ready which should be signed without any delay to enhance the level of bilateral cooperation in these areas. A lot of work is also needed to be done on rail network between the two countries. A railway network connects Quetta (Pakistan) to Zahedan (Iran). The three major partners of ECO i.e. Iran, Pakistan and Turkey had agreed to start both regular passenger and cargo trains from Islamabad to Istanbul via Quetta, Zahedan, Tehran and Tabriz. Both sides had agreed to offer freight train services on fortnightly basis, subject to availability of cargo. Pakistan had proposed concessionary fares between Zahedan and Quetta. There is a proposal from Iran to construct a line of standard gauge in the existing broad-gauge railway track from Quetta to Taftan. This will pave the way for Iranian trains to move up to Quetta and back upon implementation. In 2002, Pakistan started buying electricity from Iran for its areas along Pak-Iran border.



In addition, NTDC of Pakistan and its counterpart Iranian organization TAVANIR signed an Agreement for supply of 104 MW of electricity from Iran for the border districts of Pakistan. Proposals for 100 MW of electricity for Gwadar and 1000 MW of electricity from Zahedan to Quetta are also under review. Iran and Pakistan have also developed two major ports in respective countries, Chabahar Port and Gwadar Port. These ports are complementary to each other and would be beneficial to both countries. Both countries need to consider establishing connection between these two ports in the interest of trade and economic well-being. Strong trade and business ties between two countries will not only help these countries but will also lead to greater stability and economic prosperity in the entire region. Despite challenges, the potential for greater trade and investment between the two countries exists. There is a strong political will on both sides to strengthen economic ties. Both the countries need to adopt a targeted approach especially in the follow up and implementation of the decisions taken in the last Joint Economic Commission and Joint Trade Committee meetings.

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TREKS AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Kamran Sharif

We did two fascinating treks during October 2020 on the sides of River Kunhar at the mouth of the Kaghan Valley. We first climbed the Makra feature along the Kunhar River's left bank and the other to Musa ka Musalla off the right bank. However, our experiences over the years suggest that treks traverse a dwindling natural resource base and the touristic practices unfortunately contribute towards its degradation thus posing serious environmental challenges. More on this but first let us cover the wonderful treks.



fragrances during the summers. We camped close to the Jabbar village after a four-hour trek. The water streams were depleted due to less than normal rains. A summer grazing hut housed the seven of us. An early morning hike along the ridgeline brought us to the picturesque Gali, the jump-off point for the climb. The incline is mostly set above a 30 degrees gradient and after crossing successive crests we reached 'Pehli Ziarat', and another stiff climb led us to Musa ka Musalla or the summit at 4086 meters. It was an exacting four-and-a-half-hour trek. While the locals talk of a saint buried in the ziarat, no one seemed to know the reason for naming Musa ka

Makra draws its appellation from a spider-like extended configuration at its peak. Its height is 3,885 meters, or 12,746 feet, but we gauged its top point to be a shade above 13,000 feet. After an overnight stay at Shogran, we left early on October 3rd for the trek. We kicked off from the scenic Siri Paye reached the Makra Top in slightly above four hours after a challenging trek.

We could see some recognisable peaks along the upper Kaghan Valley and the Neelum Valley in AJK along with the adjoining regions of the Indian held Kashmir. Muzaffarabad lies on Makra's base and it also serves as another approach for the trek. We saw many young people trekking up, some quite late. A great experience and it endowed a captivating perspective to a familiar touristic venue. Musa ka Musalla's experience, on the other hand, made us traverse a varied landscape. The trek spanned nearly three days and two nights which allowed us to truly imbibe its unique beauty. We chose the Shinkiarī –Mandagucha approach and started our trek on October 30. Our camping gear and food were hauled on hired ponies. We walked along the scenic Siran River in its catchment region. After crossing the Dor village at the confluence of Dor Nullah and the Siran, we started to climb along a ridge laden with moist lower Himalayan forest. The ridgeline expanded into a series of expansive layered plateaus which had retained the green texture even in late autumn. It must be a pageant of exciting colours and



Musalla. Like from Makra, we could see Malika Parbat (with reference to the Lake Saif-ul Malook) and the Kunhar River flowing from Balakot towards Muzaffarabad. Allai Valley's mountainous façade is also visible. The summit sightings are a visual treat as they allow you to capture vast spaces in one contiguous dimension. We were treated to breath-taking sunsets and rises, and both treks coincided with the aesthetics of a full moon. The Musa ka Musalla venue serves as an adventure tourism destination with trekking, gliding, and snowboarding. The latter two have been attempted by young adventurers. Treks lead to Musa ka Musalla and to some peaks in the Allai Valley. It has the potential to be developed as an adventure ecotourism venue. Sadly, we came across numerous hunters killing pheasants and exotic birds. The locals seem to be having an adversarial co-existence with the mountain bears and the big cats. Research indicates the occurrence of organised poaching of bear cubs and even grown up animals in the region. This must stop as the wildlife is desperately trying to survive in a fast-shrinking habitat. I have shared our wonderful trekking experiences and what we observed as we very much desire our younger generation to explore the tremendous natural beauty that Pakistan has to offer.



NO ONE CAN UNDO PAKISTAN

Mian Saifur Rehman

No one can undo Pakistan, thus said Founder of the Nation, Quaid e Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, who is rated as one of the most upright and resolute statesmen of the 20th century and the times to follow. Now, that Pakistan has seen 74 years of independence (since August 14, 1947) that it got through the sacrifices and untiring struggle of the Muslims of the subcontinent (or undivided India), the world, at large, has witnessed, with appreciation, the resilience of Pakistani nation that has never waned, whatever the magnitude and multitude of anti-Pakistan conspiracies, India-led negative propaganda offensives and imperialistic powers' covert onslaughts through their proxies' overt machinations/moves in the region, all aimed at destabilizing, even disintegrating Pakistan nothing worked to the detriment of Pakistan in the 'desired' sense i.e as desired by Pakistan's staunch enemies or their proxies which have also been trying other options like creating traitors within the country to weaken Pakistan from within.



made the powerful British colonialists, realize that unrelenting struggle involving the masses just can't be resisted by way of any colonial machinations or by employing military might typical of British Raj of those days. Quaid e Azam, in particular, proved to be the main driving force behind the Muslim masses' Pakistan Movement which achieved its ultimate goal, the creation of Pakistan, after countering and combating challenges and intrigues, in numerous forms. The fact is that the creation of Pakistan is a unique rarity in the realms of statehood and nationhood as its creation defies all the traditional themes and requirements of statehood and nationhood. Instead, Pakistan emerged on the map of the world on August 14, 1947 as a non-traditional state coming into being on the basis of an ideology that had-and will always have-roots in the noblest

and most humane as well as pragmatic and principled faith of Islam. This unflinching faith of the Muslims of the subcontinent was provided impetus and transformed into a movement by Quaid e Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah who, besides galvanizing the freedom-seekers, stood ground against the ill-intentioned moves initiated every now and then by the British viceroys and some of their lackeys and accomplices among the Hindu leaders who worked incessantly, day and night, to subvert the idea and movement for a separate homeland for the Muslims after the departure of British rulers. The two-nation theory was castigated and repeatedly denounced by these Hindu leaders on one pretext or the other. Their emphasis, throughout, would be on propagating that the Muslims and Hindus were not (and thus, should not be) identified as two distinct entities,

having separate or different identities. Quaid e Azam and his associates, backed up by a consistent movement for a separate homeland for Pakistan, finally succeeded in the enforcement of the two-nation theory which finds almost no parallel in the political history of the world. And, if one were to find the real story behind Pakistan's ever-growing stability and its people's never-waning resilience, it all owed to the guidance and inspiration coming from our forefathers especially the great visionaries, Quaid e Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Allama Muhammad Iqbal. If an in-depth survey is conducted impartially and intelligently to ascertain the primary traits of Pakistani nation, the ingredients of a forward-looking nation will be found in abundance, obviously owing to the training of our former generations that worked for the creation of Pakistan against all odds, even laying down their lives to see their own free homeland coming into being, at last. It is indeed heartening to note that the former generations bequeathed this legacy of struggle, resilience and hope to the posterity and despite so many ugly happenings that the country has been facing in the backdrop of political rivalries of the past, the nation is flourishing in many ways. Today, the people feel proud to live in Pakistan that is led by an honest, bold and candid Prime Minister, Imran Khan, who doesn't believe in hypocrisy or even in bowing before foreign powers, unlike some of his predecessors who had been unconditionally surrendering to the dictates of foreign masters. Once again, we again see hope in the nation in general and its youth in particular whose faith in their destiny, as instilled by the optimistic and confident Prime Minister, Imran Khan, is certainly going to render Pakistan yet more stronger and much more honourable than the Pakistan of the past when dependency, corruption and nepotism have been ruling the roost, bringing a bad name to the country besides undermining our sovereignty and integrity.

No harm could be done, given the grooming of Pakistani nation by its leading statesmen including the two great visionaries of the world namely Poet of the East, Allama Muhammad Iqbal, and Quaid e Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. In fact, these two great visionaries instilled hope among the Muslims of the subcontinent by way of their speeches and concrete struggle that later on evolved into a great movement known and recognized, globally, as Pakistan Movement, that



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GREEN PAKISTAN TO FIGHT CLIMATE CHANGE

Malik Muhammad Ashraf

Climate change triggered by the increased emissions of green-house gases is undoubtedly the biggest challenge facing humanity in the twenty first century. Admittedly the failure of the international community to check the continued rise in temperature caused by the emission of green-house gases, can lead to catastrophic consequences. Therefore as repeatedly reiterated by the UN Secretary General it is absolutely essential to make peace with the nature, meaning thereby that there was no escape from keeping the rising temperatures below 1.5 centigrade as emphasized by the scientists and environmental experts. A report released by UN on Monday August 8, 2021 called ' Code Red for Humanity' says that the earth was getting so hot that temperatures in about a decade would probably blow past a level of warming that the world leaders have sought to prevent. The Climate change phenomenon has already started having devastating impact globally and Pakistan is among the top 10 countries which have been bearing the brunt of this climatic onslaught during the last twenty years. While the world is still indecisive and some countries including the major pollutants are even showing reluctance to cut down on the green house emissions preferring industrial growth over it. the developing countries including Pakistan perforce have to devise their own strategies to minimize the impact of the climate change till such time a collective will and commitment of the global community crystallizes into concrete actions to deal with the challenge. Pakistan, under the stewardship of Prime Minister Imran Khan has given top priority to putting in place steps and measures that can be helpful in lessening the debilitating impact of the climate change. The central theme of the effort is to make Pakistan clean and green. It has launched a number of initiatives including the landmark 10-Billion Tree Tsunami which has won international acclaim, including from the World Economic Forum.



Pakistan can also rightly boast about myriad of other initiatives including green economic stimulus, Eco-system Protection, Wild life management, Protected Areas initiative and Pakistan Clean Air Programme. Prime Minister Imran Khan has also inaugurated the world's biggest Miyawaki urban forest near Lahore on 9, August as part of monsoon drive under the 10-billion Tree Tsunami Project. All the foregoing steps in the words of Prime Minister are driven solely by his commitment to future generations of a clean and green Pakistan to mitigate the impact of climate change. It is pertinent to note that Pakistan besides the measures mentioned above has also launched the initiative to produce 60 per cent of all energy in the country through renewable resources by the year 2030. It has already scrapped two coal power projects which were supposed to generate 2600 MW of electricity and replaced them with hydro-power units. Prime Minister Imran Khan has been a vociferous advocate of collective action by the world community on climate change. In recognition of his discourses at the Convention of Biodiversity, in the UN General Assembly and the nature based solutions devised by his government, UNEP approached Pakistan for hosting the UN Environment Day 2021. Prime Minister Imran Khan addressing the moot apprised the world community regarding future plans of this government to deal with climate change, including Recharge Pakistan designed to divert flood water to wetland to recharge water table and Mangroves forestation which absorb carbon besides green-house gases. Explaining the threat faced by Pakistan due to climate change, he also urged the need for the world to pay attention to reducing carbon emissions which cause glacier melting posing threats to countries like Pakistan and Central Asia where rivers were fed by glaciers. He also called on the world community to assist the poor countries including Pakistan which were bearing the brunt of this phenomenon. Pakistan also co-chaired the multibillion-dollar Green Climate Fund, established to support climate actions in developing countries, last year. Pakistan as Vice President of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and member of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has also been playing a pro-active role in shaping the global discourse on fighting global warming. Perhaps a cursory glance at efforts at the international level to deal with the climate challenge would be quite relevant here. The first ever international Agreement on restricting emissions of green-house gases known as Koyoto Protocol was adopted on 11 December 1997. The Protocol operationalized the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change by committing industrialized countries and economies in transition to limit and reduce greenhouse gases (GHG) emissions in accordance with agreed individual targets. Those targets were stipulated to be met in two phases. But regrettably the required cooperation from the participating countries did not come forth. New Zealand, and Russia did participate in Kyoto's first-round but did not take on new targets in the second commitment period. Canada withdrew from the Protocol in 2012 and the USA did not ratify it at all. The second international agreement known as Paris Agreement, was signed on December 12, 2015 during the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change's (UNFCCC) 21st Conference of the Parties. The Paris Agreement marked a historic turning point for global climate action, as the world leaders were able to evolve a consensus on its framework and goals.

Plant for Pakistan

10 Billion Tree Tsunami 2021
Pakistan's Largest Ever Tree Plantation Drive

But regrettably President Donald Trump pulled out of the Agreement like he did in case of other international commitments by US. However it is satisfying to note that President Biden has announced to rejoin the Paris Agreement. Not only that, in view of the urgency involved he also convened Leaders Summit on Climate on 22-23 April, 2021 attended by 41 countries including Pakistan. The Summit underscored the urgency and the economic benefits of stronger climate action. Its deliberations are considered to be a key milestone on the road to the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) this November in Glasgow. While Pakistan celebrates its 75th Independence Day this year on 14th August, the nation apart from other moves initiated by the government to achieve the objectives of independence, can rightly take pride in the fact that it has not only set the ball rolling in the right direction in regards to saving the country from the vagaries of the climate change but has also made a sterling contribution to this global cause. The initiatives taken by Pakistan are surely worth emulating by the world community, particularly the developing countries.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC INITIATIVES & UPLIFT

Muhammad Zahid Rifat

Pakistan's economy is moving progressively on higher inclusive and sustainable growth path on the back of various measures and resultant achievements despite myriad of sorts of challenges. Pakistan was implementing policy of stabilization of national economy post crisis of 2017-18 and the economy was recovering from macroeconomic imbalances but pandemic of COVID-19 slowed down the pace which was recovered initially but the advent of second and third waves of Corona Virus posed further serious challenges which were, however, met by the incumbent federal government with its timely prudent policies. National economy of Pakistan already had volatile growth pattern over the years marked by regular boom and bust cycles facing challenges in achieving long-term and inclusive growth. In the backdrop of host of challenges, the present government focused on an economic vision of securing sustainable economic growth through improved efficiency, reduced cost of doing business, bettered regulatory environment, enhanced productivity and increased investment.

During the last three years of the incumbent federal government, it had faced numerous economic challenges which were somehow aggravated by the pandemic of COVID-19. However, the federal government has quite successfully progressed from recovery and stabilization of the national economy to its sustainable growth. The priorities of the federal government matched by socio-economic initiatives included inclusive and sustainable economic growth, pro-poor initiatives and social safety net through the Ehsaas Programme's vertical and horizontal expansion, reduction in inflation and price control and monitoring, increased development spending aiming at creation of maximum employment opportunities, the Prime Minister's initiatives including Kamyab Jawan and Kissan Programmes, impact mitigation of COVID-19 and the continuation of the Rs 1.24 trillion Economic Stimulus Package announced in March 2020 and extended for FY 2021, circular debt financing and power subsidies, revenue mobilization without resorting to levying of new taxes, supporting the Housing Sector and the Construction Industry through Naya Pakistan Housing Scheme and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) support programmes, facilitating expatriates home remittances and savings through innovative Roshan Digital Account, Pakistan remittances initiatives, providing relief to the vulnerable segments of the society through all possible measures among other number of measures. The impact of the federal government's timely and appropriate measures is very much visible in the form of a V-shaped economic recovery on the back of broad-based growth across all sectors. As a result of the federal government timely effective policies and initiatives, besides national economy witnessing a V-shaped recovery, some other achievements reported during the last financial 2020-21 reported were as under; the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) rate was estimated to be 2.94 per cent against the targeted growth of 2.1 % through the policy initiatives; besides extending the Economic Stimulus for the



Needless to mention here that social protection has a central role to play in addressing the social, economic and health dimensions of the COVID-19 crisis. Pakistan's largest social protection initiative, Ehsaas, comprises of over 260 policies initiatives. Ehsaas emergency cash programme has provided cushion worth Rs 179.8 billion to the vulnerable segments of the society due to COVID-19 and provided Rs 12000 to 15 million deserving families for their consumption smoothing, Ehsaas Roshan Portal links donors with beneficiaries for provision of basic food items through private sector and civil society organizations. As for the economic outlook for less than two months old financial year 2021-22 is concerned, with subsiding pandemic due to vaccine roll out, expected improvement in global economy, anticipation of favourable weather conditions and easing of COVID-19 related restrictions, GDP is targeted to grow at 4.8 per cent during 2021-22, a continuum of growth stabilization during 2020-21. Agriculture sector is likely to grow at 3.5 per cent on the back of revival of cotton, availability of water, certified seeds, fertilizers, pesticides and agriculture credit facilities. Industrial sector is expected to maintain its growth momentum and is targeted to grow at around 6.2 per cent on the back of sustained Large Scale Manufacturing (LSM) growth of 6 per cent, collateral-free credit guarantee scheme for SMEs, the buoyancy in construction with spillovers in allied industries. The services sector is also set to grow at 4.7 per cent on the back of the envisaged growth in agriculture and industry sectors.

On the fiscal and monetary front, average inflation is targeted to remain within 8 per cent on the basis of expected adjustments in energy tariffs while high global food and commodity prices may keep upward pressure. On external front, imports are expected to grow significantly at 9.5 per cent, however, robust growth in home remittances (10 per cent) and modest growth in exports (6.5 per cent) are likely to offset of its impact. Thus current account deficit is projected to remain subsided around 0.7 percent of GDP. However, building capabilities and providing opportunities through public investment will hopefully help to arrest widespread unemployment in the country and sustaining the national economy's growth momentum.

With number of socio-economic initiatives being persisted by the federal government aiming at ensuring and maintaining national economy growth pace despite waves after waves of COVID-19 Pandemic adverse impacts, it is quite appreciable to mention here in conclusion that the federal government is engaged in fighting three-pronged war for maintaining pace of economic growth moving onward from stability, expanding the social protection network to cover maximum number of vulnerable segments of the society through provision of as much relief as possible and offsetting and controlling COVID-19 adverse impacts through effective measures without harming the daily wagers and workers and other vulnerable segments of the society. The country's economy is moving forward from stability to growth and treading steadily on the path of progress and prosperity as the federal government is committed to do all that is possible to be accomplished through socio-economic initiatives for providing relief and assistance to the people at large. There are signs of hope and progress at the end of the tunnel as the federal government with active collaboration of the people keeps implementing all initiatives aiming at the welfare of the masses throughout the country.



FY 2021, an amount of Rs 155 billion was also released to mitigate the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 pandemic; home remittances by Overseas Pakistanis grew significantly; Current Account balance also showed improvement; country's exports also showed appreciable turnaround. Furthermore, the World Bank duly recognized Ehsaas Emergency Cash Programme as being amongst the top four social protection interventions in the world in terms of number of peoples covered, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) also appreciated the government policies which it remarked have been quite crucial in supporting the national economy and saving lives and livelihoods of the vulnerable segments of the society from adverse impact of COVID-19 pandemic. In alignment with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) the federal government is attaching high priority to poverty alleviation besides urban development, access to affordable housing, access to mass media and preservation of national heritage and promotion of culture which will also be contributing to achieving the target of inclusive growth. The rising trend of poverty related public expenditures is indeed manifestation of the federal government's commitment to making progress on SDGs. According to figures available from the Ministry of Finance, the federal government had spent as much as Rs 3447 on activities under 17 pro-poor sectors.

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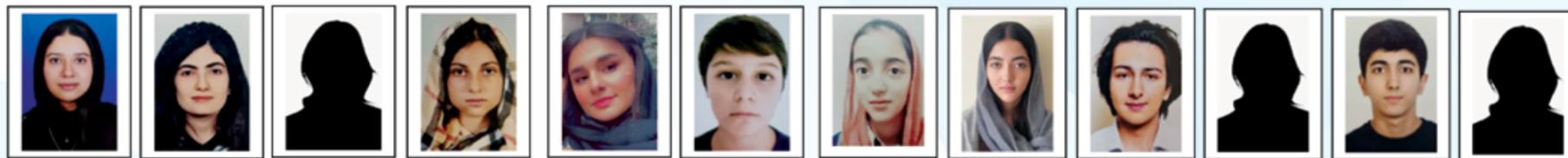
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Nandana Fort

The Unexplored Heritage of Humanity

By Qaiser Nawaz

Province of Punjab in specific is the hub of historic and cultural landmarks apart from its versatile landscapes from the South to the North. Lahore, the cultural capital of Pakistan, has recently been conferred with the title of "City of Literature" by UNESCO. Recently, I have been researching the 800 million years old Salt Range of Punjab, enlisted on the Tentative List. Stretching around 300 kilometers, the world's second largest salt range came into being after the geological phenomenon of sea evaporation and underneath propelling of regional plate. In the medieval era of the subcontinent and afterwards, many sites were built of military and religious significance such as forts and temples. Such sites are spread all over the salt range. It is high time to unveil, preserve and promote the magnificence of our legacy in order to reveal the true potential of tourism industry. On February 28, 2021 while scrolling through my twitter feed I found hash tag #AlBiruniRadius all over the timeline. It is a mega project by the name of "Al-Biruni Radius- A Heritage Trail" interconnecting seven major historic sites in the salt range.

It was announced when Prime Minister of Pakistan, Imran Khan, was at Nandana Fort to unveil the site where legendary Persian Muslim astronomer, mathematician, anthropologist, historian and geographer quantified the radius and circumference of the planet earth. Abu Rayhan Al-Biruni, the founder of Indology and father of modern Geodesy came into ancient India in 11th century to record its history, religions, culture and science. He established his observatory in the Nandana Fort and quantified the radius of the earth with immaculate precision. In his masterpiece "Al-Qadiri al-Masudi" which is also known as "The Masudic Canon", Al-Biruni has elaborated his whole methodology of Nandana Experiment. It is also narrated that he mentioned Nandana as a great place for learning in his famous Kitab-ul-Hind. Twelve centuries old, the Nandana Fort has such a rich history with events of great impact on region. It is told that foundation of the Nandana fort was laid in 8th/9th century by a Prince of Hindu Shahi Dynasty. It was named after the mythological garden "Nandana" of a Hindu Lord by the name of Indra. Nandana fort is strategically situated at the hilltop nearby Baaghanwala village of Jhelum district in the eastern flank of the salt range of Punjab, accessible from both Motorway and GT Road. Locals of Baghan'waala in the lap of Nandana Fort are very friendly people and mostly rely on livestock. From here, in the magnificent salt range of Punjab, one can witness a historical marvel, the ancient Nandana Fort standing tall in the lush green plateau of Pothohar. Nandana fort preserves the epic tale of historical drama and untapped scenic beauty so let's explore it. Terrain here is quite tough yet worth climbing not only for the Fort on its top but also for its streams of fresh water. Nandana Fort was built for surveillance of Nandana Pass and as deterrent for invaders from the empires in West and North. Nandana pass was the ancient stone paved road which used to connect Delhi with the capitals of modern day Afghanistan and Central Asia. Renowned Dutch scholar P.H.L Eggermont in his eminent book Alexander's campaign in Southern Punjab mentioned Nandana pass as the very route which was used by Alexander the Great for grand clash of titans; Alexander the Great vs. Raja Porus, in the Battle of Hydaspes in 326 B.C. Interestingly, it is also believed that horses of the Alexander's army first discovered the origin of Salt Mines of Khewra during the same campaign. During the stay somewhere in Khewra, horses of Alexander's army started to lick the stones, upon investigation soldiers found that rocks were of salt. What we have today in the Nandana are the ruins of a fort with a temple and a mosque. The temple is known as the Shiva temple which was built by Anandapala, son of the King of Hindu Shahi Raj "Jayapala" in the early medieval times, most probably in the 9th century. The mosque was built after Mehmood of Ghazni took over this place from Hindu Shahi Raj. Nandana Fort was surmounted by Mehmood of Ghazni in 1013 or in 1017 according to some sources. It is the same place which is believed to be Abu Rayhan al-Biruni's observatory in the 11th century where he quantified the radius and circumference of the earth. It remained under Muslim rule till things went South in Khawarizm of the 13th century. Sultan Jalaluddin of Khawarizm fled to India during the Mongol invasion of Khawarizm. Somewhere near Ghazni the Mongols were able to intercept him, but somehow Sultan managed to overcome them in the Battle of Marwan. Hence the escape of Sultan continued towards Delhi. Furious Mongols led by Genghis Khan via Nandana pass, outpost of Nandana was yet again under siege and captured, this time by the Mongols. During the Mughal Empire, Nandana was regarded as a place for leisure. Mughal emperors Jalaluddin Akbar and Jahangir have mentioned Nandana as a place for hunting and leisure in the 16th and 17th century. No wonder why, this is such a marvelous valley. Today, an institutional effort to uplift the standards of infrastructure, mechanism of preservation and qualitative marketing of sites with archaeological and religious significance are required that can surely help industrialise the sector of tourism in the region.

