

**Health Ministry Said on Monday That the Number of Deaths From The Coronavirus Pandemic in Iran Increased to 94,603 With 588 More Iranians Killed by the Deadly Virus Over the Past 24 Hours**

# IRAN NEWS

**An American Cinematic Magazine Has Predicted That Iranian Filmmaker Asghar Farhadi's Film "A Hero" Seems to Be One of the Top Movies, Which May Win the Award for the Best Film at Oscar 2022**

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## Call for Completing Connecting Iranian Railway to Iraq

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iranian Ambassador to Baghdad called for the completion of construction of a project connecting Iranian railway to neighboring Iraq.

Iraj Masjedi, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Iraq, in a meeting with the Secretary of Council of Ministers in Iraq Hamid Naim Al-Ghazi on Monday said that the relevant organizations in the Islamic Republic of Iran have completed all preparations for the construction of a project to connect Iranian railway to Iraq.

It should be noted that Iraqi government agreed on May 27 to connect the railways to Islamic Republic of Iran's railway via Basra-Shalamchah line in southern Iraq, Masjedi highlighted.

Islamic Republic of Iran completed the plan of connecting Khorramshahr Railway to Shalamchah Border, as long as 17km, in 2011, but since then a 32-kilometer section of Shalamchah-Basra border to connect Iranian railway to Iraqi national railway network has not been completed by the Iraqi side.

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## Syria Backs Iran, Terms Accusations "Systematic Targeting"

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) - The Syrian government has denounced what it calls "fabricated accusations" by the Israeli regime as well as its allies, the US and the UK, against Iran over recent incidents in the regional waters.

The Syrian Foreign Ministry said the accusations leveled against the Islamic Republic of Iran are part of the "systematized targeting" of the country by the West, Damascus-based Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) reported Sunday.

The agency, quoting an official source, said the Syrian government "reiterates its solidarity and support" for Tehran against "false allegations and hysterical campaign" by the Western powers.

The source further said the accusations "will not affect Iran's patriotic choices and its constructive role in maintaining stability in the region" as opposed to "policies of the West and the Zionist entity to spread chaos and inflame tensions in the region."

There has been a dangerous escalation in the region against the backdrop of a suspected drone attack last week that targeted an Israeli-managed tanker off the Omani coast. Two crew members were killed.

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## Tehran Terms Security of Persian Gulf "Red Line"



### IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN – The Islamic Republic of Iran termed the security of the Persian Gulf as its "red line", while denouncing "baseless accusations" by British government officials against Tehran over recent incidents in the regional waters.

Saeed Khatibzadeh, the spokesperson for Iran's Foreign Ministry, told reporters on Monday that Tehran has "done its best" to protect the waterway from "insecurities orchestrated by countries like the UK", while advising the British government "to pay attention to its own responsibilities and duties."

In response to a question about allegations leveled by British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab about the recent ship incident in the Sea of Oman, Khatibzadeh emphasized that such "irresponsible statements" against Iran are "not new".

He said Iran is "concerned about the obvious violation" that the UK did against an Iranian oil tanker in international waters in July 2019, terming security of the Persian Gulf as "red line" for Iran.

British Royal Marines seized a giant Iranian oil tanker in Gibraltar in a dramatic step that drew Tehran's fury, with the saga ending only after authorities in the disputed island released the vessel about a month later, defying a United States request to retain the seizure.

Khatibzadeh said the Foreign Ministry had summoned the British and Romanian envoys in Tehran to register protest against the "baseless allegations".

"The fact that Britain has sided with the rebellious and notorious Zionist regime shows the position of this country," the ministry spokesman said.

He also offered condolences to the families of the British and Romanian victims in the attack on Mercer Street, asserting that Iran is "concerned about the safety of commercial vessels in international waters".

The attack on Mercer Street late last month was followed by another incident in the Persian Gulf off the coast of the United Arab Emirates, when at least four ships broadcast warnings that they had lost control of their steering under unknown circumstances.

The British maritime trade agency termed it a "potential hijack," while accusing Iranian naval forces of "seizing" an oil tanker.

Khatibzadeh also said that the United States won't have an achievement unless they put aside former U.S. President Donald Trump's mentality and considers facts on the ground.

On the accusation raised by European officials against Iran, the spokesman said that allegations made by UK authorities were nothing new, as it was a ring of a chain of irresponsible statements by UK officials against Iran.

Khatibzadeh also said that statements by EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell were irresponsible and biased and that Iran condemned the G7 communique in the strongest possible terms, as they were not helping peace and stability of the Persian Gulf and Oman Sea waterways.

The Israeli regime has committed sabotage acts against Iranian vessels several times, he stressed, adding that however, the European countries have kept silent on such aggression.

He also underlined that Iran has never quitted talks in Vienna, but they have been deferred until the new administration in Iran forms its cabinet and the minister and negotiation team are appointed.

President Ebrahim Raisi has made it clear that his administration would welcome any negotiation that would lead to removal of sanctions against Iranian people, Khatibzadeh highlighted.

## U.S. Troops Still Dealing With Mental Trauma Since Ain al-Asad Attack

NEW YORK (PressTV) - In January 2020, when the US assassinated Iran's celebrated anti-terror commander Gen. Qassem Soleimani, thousands of American troops at Ain al-Asad Airbase in Iraq braced for retaliation.

The occupying forces stationed at the airbase in western Anbar province thought it would be a volley of rockets with 60-pound warheads, trusting their air defense systems to intercept the imminent attack.

On Jan. 8, 2020, shortly after midnight, five days after the drone strike killed Gen. Soleimani and deputy head of Iraq's Hashd al-Sha'abi Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis near Baghdad airport, at least a dozen ballistic missiles with warheads weighing more than 1,000 pounds rained on the airbase.

It was the largest ballistic missile attack against American troops anywhere in the world in modern history and was the "first slap" for a US drone strike that killed the lynchpin of anti-Daesh resistance.

The then U.S. president Donald Trump initially said that no Americans had been harmed in the attack. The Pentagon also downplayed reports of brain injuries sustained by US troops in the attack but later admitted that more than 100 troops had been diagnosed with severe traumatic brain injuries. The troops who were stationed at the western Iraq airbase that fateful night are still feeling the effects from Iranian ballistic missiles more than a year and a half after the attack, according to a program aired by CBS pNews.

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## Iraqi FM to Visit Tehran

TEHRAN (MNA) – News sources reported the Iraqi Foreign Minister will travel to Tehran soon to invite the Iranian President to attend a security meeting attended by some countries in the region, including Turkey, Syria, and Saudi Arabia.

During his visit to Tehran in the next two days, the Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein intends to formally invite Iranian President Ebrahim Raeisi to attend the meeting, the New Arab reported.

He will also discuss bilateral relations, including issues related to Iraqi security, during his meeting with the Iranian President.

Hussein also invited Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to attend a key summit of regional leaders that aims to bring together representatives of Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Iran.

The source quoted an informed official as saying that Baghdad had received positive responses from the invited countries to hold the meeting. Informed officials at the Iraqi Foreign Ministry had previously said that the meeting would be held later this month to deescalate tensions in the region.

## Pakistan to Host Neighboring FM's On Afghan Peace

ISLAMABAD (IRNA) - Pakistan, which was set to hold an Afghan peace conference last month, is now preparing to host a meeting of foreign ministers from neighboring countries, including the Islamic Republic of Iran, to help overcome Afghan crisis.

Local media reported on Monday that Pakistan has planned a conference as its latest diplomatic effort to bring peace in Afghanistan.

"Islamabad is trying to host the foreign ministers of Afghanistan's neighboring countries," a senior Pakistani foreign ministry official told the Express Tribune.

"The main agenda of the conference of foreign ministers of neighboring countries is to build a consensus on Afghanistan and find a common solution to save the country from civil war and to encourage a comprehensive political solution," he said.

The Pakistani Foreign Ministry official did not mention the names of the participating countries, but it is said that the foreign ministers from Iran, China, Russia and Turkey will be among the most important delegations invited to attend the Islamabad conference.

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## U.S. Transports Stolen Syrian Oil to Iraq

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) – U.S. forces stationed in Syria have transported consignments of stolen oil to Iraq, using scores of tanker trucks.

According to official news agency SANA on Monday, the U.S. forces allowed a convoy of 80 vehicles, including tanker trucks carrying stolen Syrian oil, to cross the "illegitimate" al-Walid crossing into Iraq.

SANA cited local sources from Rmelan town in the northeastern province of Hasakah as saying that the convoy was accompanied by armored vehicles. On Thursday, 25 U.S. tanker trucks carrying stolen oil also headed from Syria to Iraq.

The U.S.-led coalition purportedly fighting Daesh has been conducting airstrikes and operations inside Syria since September 2014 without any authorization from the Damascus government or a United Nations mandate.

The military alliance has repeatedly been accused of targeting and killing civilians.

In 2019, then U.S. President Donald Trump decided to keep hundreds of U.S. troops in Syria to "secure" the country's oilfields which Syrian troops have yet to retake from militants.

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# Tehran Expresses Sorrow Over Greece Wildfires

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh expressed sorrow over heavy fire in Greece forests, which resulted in killing and injuring people and caused damages to their properties.

Khatibzadeh sympathized with the Greek government, people, and bereaved families of the victims.

He hoped for containing fire as soon as possible. Fire in Greece forests which has continued for five days without being contained has burnt parts of the country in Euboea.

## Tehran Calls for Presence of All Afghan Sides in Peace Talks

*IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK*

**TEHRAN - Emphasizing the presence of all Afghan parties in intra-Afghan peace talks, a senior Iranian Parliamentary advisor attached great importance to ensuring the security of the people inside Afghanistan.**

The Iranian Parliament Speaker's Special Aide for International Affairs, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, made the remarks on Sunday in a meeting with the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General in Afghanistan, Jean Arnault.

Stressing the need for unity among all parties, he attached importance to ensuring the security of the people inside Afghanistan and preventing the influx of migrants to the borders.

Referring to the role of the United Nations in establishing peace and security in Afghanistan, he said, "The Islamic Republic of Iran supports UN initiatives in resolving the Afghan crisis."

At the same time, he criticized the UN for lack of action in the face of recent developments in Afghanistan.



The irresponsible moves of the Americans and the effects of the behavior of the occupiers have multiplied the problems of the people of Afghanistan, Amir-Abdollahian said.

"We must not allow the Americans to continue to act irresponsibly and remain silent at the United Nations", he added.

Jean Arnault, also spoke about the significant role of neighbors, especially Iran, in resolving the conflicts in Afghanistan.

"A stronger international consensus on Afghanistan is needed, and this requires the support of neighboring countries", he stressed.

At the end of the meeting, he praised the constructive role of the Islamic Republic of Iran in supporting a political solution to the Afghan crisis.

## Gov't Not to Pursue Complaints Lodged Against Journalists

TEHRAN (IFP) - President Hojjatolislam Seyed Ebrahim Raisi says he will ignore all the complaints lodged against reporters and journalists by the previous president and administration.

Raisi added he will not pursue the complaints on the occasion of National Reporter's Day unless in cases where people's rights have been trampled underfoot or the public purse has been interfered with. In comments on Sunday, he touched upon the necessity of observing health protocols amid the coronavirus outbreak.

He called on public places, including sports complexes, universities and schools to cooperate with mourning congregations during the month of Muharram while abiding by health protocols.

He also said during the period of transition from the previous administration to the new one, care should be taken to keep adopting the necessary decisions on people's livelihoods and monitoring the market.

## Minister Urges Observing Health Protocols in Muharram Rituals

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli on Monday called on the health and executive officials of the country to cooperate with each other so as to observe health protocols during the rituals of the mourning month of Muharram.

Rahmani Fazli made the remarks after a meeting with governors of different provinces of the country on the eve of the month of Muharram. "We are both concerned about the (health) protocols and the significance and respect for Muharram rituals," the minister said.

He however noted that it is finally the people that need to help the government as always.

## Taherian, Abdullah Review Latest Status of All-Afghan Peace Talks

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Special envoy of Iranian Foreign Ministry on Afghanistan affairs on Sunday talked with Abdullah Abdullah, the head of Afghanistan Supreme National Peace Council on the current status of the all-Afghan peace talks.

Mohammad Ebrahim Taherian in his Sunday phone talk with Abdullah Abdullah was meanwhile informed about the latest status in Afghanistan.

The top Afghan official in the phone talk with the Iranian diplomat also appreciated the Islamic Republic of Iran's logical stands on supporting the peaceful all-Afghan negotiations and stressed the great significance of the continuation of supporting the peace initiative.

## President Urges Using Potentials for Containing COVID-19



*IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK*

TEHRAN - President Hojjatolislam Seyed Ebrahim Raisi ordered the health Minister to use all the necessary potentials for containing COVID-19 as well as the treatment of the patients.

Ebrahim Raisi, in the separate phone calls with Iran's Minister of Health and the Governor-General of Khorasan Razavi, called for the latest Covid-19 updates across Iran and the Khorasan Razavi Province.

The 8th President, during the phone calls, stressed using all the available potentials for accelerating the controlling process of the disease along with the treatment and providing medical service to the patients and issued the necessary decrees in this regard.

He underlined that all capacities in the country be deployed to acceleration containment of the spread of the virus and treatment of all patients and gave required orders.

Iran has recently seen a sheer growth in the number of new cases and deaths, with the new strain of the coronavirus called Delta spreading fast throughout the country.

## Iran Emphasizes Continuing Trading With Afghanistan

TEHRAN (IP) - The member of the Iran parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Commission has said that the closure of borders should not affect Iran-Afghanistan mutual trading.

Fada Hussein Maliki said the Taliban's first move was occupying border areas with neighboring countries, which created problems for Iran.

Maliki told IP that the trade exchanges commute was too slow, especially in Islam Qala and Nimruz border areas.

"Security forces are monitoring all developments, but Taliban has raised concerns, especially in Nimruz and Sistan-Baluchistan, though, they are not cohesive," the MP said.

He further said that negotiations were held with the President of Afghanistan Ashraf Ghani, so, to solve the Afghan crisis, negotiations and peace talks were the keys.

The MP stressed that those Afghans who took refuge in Iran to be safe from Taliban attacks should be quarantined, so, Sistan-Baluchistan, South Khorasan, and Khorasan Razavi's healthcare centers were asked to quarantine and take care of them.

## 4th Virtual Course of Persian Language Ends in Japan

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The fourth course of Persian Language, organized by cultural attaché of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the representative of Saadi Foundation in Japan was completed.

The fourth online course was attended by 122 Japanese Farsi learners.

In the course, the participants who took part in the course were from Tokyo, Hokkaido, Osaka, Kyoto, Hiroshima, Fukuoka, Kagoshima, Kanagawa, Chiba, Saitama, Tochigi, Gunma, Ibaraki, and some other places.

Hossein Divsalar, the cultural attaché of Iran to Japan, said in this regard that 17 classes are held on line in a weekly basis and participants from all around Japan can register in the courses.

He also said that some courses addressing children and young adults were also designed and were successful, adding that the new courses will continue independently.

## Iran Seeks Respectful Ties With All Countries

TEHRAN (IRNA) - A high-ranking member of National Security and Foreign Policy Commission of Majlis (Iran's Parliament) said on Monday that the West thought it could force Iran through pressure and threat, but Iran seeks respectful ties with all countries.

The United States was the party that violated the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), and after it was signed and Europeans didn't do their commitments, Abbas Moqtadaei Khorasgani said.

Iran has abided by all its commitments in the deal and has had a good cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), as the sole entity

qualified to verify Iran's compliance, Moqtadaei added.

He underlined that the U.S. and European participants to the deal are the ones who must do the commitments and they'd better not miss the opportunity as a new administration has taken office in Iran.

Iran is a sovereign country, the MP stressed, seeking for respectful ties with all countries.

He added that Iran wouldn't follow the West's will under pressure.

He advised the U.S. and European participants of the JCPOA, which was also endorsed by the United Nations Security Council, to abide by their commitments, so that Iran could do the same.

# Iran Trade With Afghanistan in Limbo

TEHRAN (MNA) - Following the recent unrests in Afghanistan, Iran's exports to the country have fallen significantly and Iranian exporters should look for alternative markets to replace the neighboring country, the head of the Iran-Afghanistan Joint Chamber of Commerce said on Sunday.

According to Hossein Salimi, the country which was the top export destination for non-oil Iranian commodities has fallen to second place recently, the portal of the Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (TCCIMA) reported.

Afghanistan accounted for 11 percent of Iran's total non-oil exports in the first quarter of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-June 21), during which the country imported 296,000 tons of agricultural and food products worth \$134 million from Iran, the official said.

Tomatoes, apples, potatoes, sweets, and fruit juice concentrate were the top exported items to the neighboring country, according to Salimi.

He noted that the deployment of Taliban militants in provinces and cities adjacent to the Iranian border has left Iranian exporters unsure about sending goods to the country.

Salimi had previously said that exports from Iran to Afghanistan have declined

more than 85 percent due to the increasing tensions in the country.

"With the escalation of the conflict in Afghanistan, the number of trucks carrying Iranian goods to this country has decreased from 100 trucks every day to two or three trucks per day," he said on August 6.

According to Salimi, Iranian exports to Afghanistan over the past two weeks have been only 15 percent of the figure for the same period in the previous year.

"When turmoil or conflict arises in a country, the first area that will suffer is that country's economy and trade," he said, adding: "Unfortunately, the situation is so bad that at the moment it is not easy to predict what awaits us. We still do not have an accurate estimate of the amount of damage inflicted on Iranian traders. We have to see how long this situation will last."

In response to the question that if the Taliban finally takes control and peace is restored, the economic relations between Iran and Afghanistan will continue in the same way or not? Salimi said: "In any case, the needs of that country will not be eliminated. Any group that gains power in Afghanistan, the country will still need food and construction materials and so on and their best option [for meeting those needs] would be Iran."

## Iranian Commander Refuses to Extradite Afghan Refugees

TEHRAN (FNA) - A senior commander of Iranian border guards refused to hand over a group of Afghan refugees to Taliban militants after holding talks with them.

The refusal by a border guards commander of Sistan-Balouchestan province came after the Taliban demanded from Iran the extradition of Afghan refugee citizens.

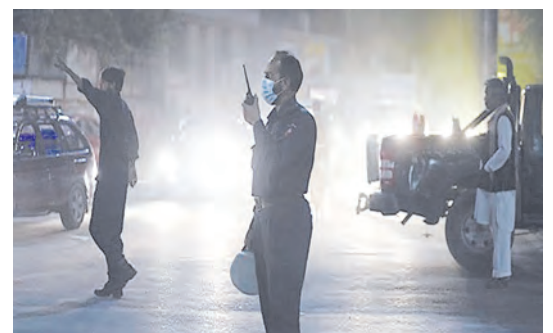
Road Transport Deputy of Sistan and Baluchestan province said that 'Milak' Border Terminal was shut down due to the insecurity in Afghanistan.

Taliban militants have been captured on videos

appearing to show them riding in US-made Humvee vehicles after seizing the city of Zaranj, the capital of Afghanistan's Southwestern Nimroz Province.

In the videos shared on social media, the insurgents are seen parading in the captured Humvees, with the group's flags spotted being installed on the rooftop of the military vehicles.

The footage was posted after local police announced on Friday that the Taliban took control of Zaranj's airport and the provincial administration building. The city is the first Afghan provincial capital that the group has managed to capture since 2016.

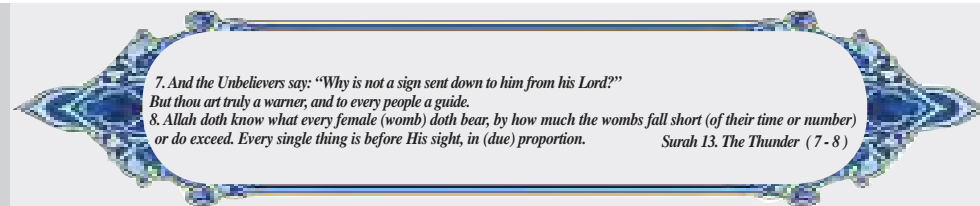






## PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:09
■ Evening (Maghreb)	20:19
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:47
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:20



# Petchem Industry To Earn Iran \$21.5b By Yearend

**IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK**

**TEHRAN - Head of Iran's National Petrochemical Company (NPC) Behzad Mohammadi says for the first time this year, the revenues of petchem industry will hit \$21.5b, adding that by the yearend, some 43m tons of final petrochemical products will be produced and 33m tons of it to be exported.**

Speaking in an unveiling ceremony yesterday, Mohammadi said that the national petchem industry plays very proudly and dynamically its role in exports and earning forex for the country, noting that last year, the petchem industry received feedstock equal to \$6b which was used in 67 petrochemical complexes.

He went on to say that last year, 25m tons was added to the capacity of the national petrochemical industry, adding that some 34m tons of products have been produced that earned \$15b.

Pointing to the COVID-19 pandemic in the country, he said despite the pandemic, all developmental goals in the petrochemical industry have been materialized. Mohammadi also said that today there are 50 active projects in the petchem



industry which will come on stream by 2025 and they will increase the production capacity to 135m tons.

Then he explained the fourth step in the petrochemical industry and said the fourth step has been defined in three categories which includes 47 projects and by 2027, Iran's revenues from petrochemical industry will reach \$50b.

Mohammadi reiterated that by 2027, some 2.3m barrels of crude oil per day will be used as the feedstock in the petchem industry and the capacity of this industry will increase to 167m tons.

He added that with implementation of the projects in the fourth step, the collective investment in this industry is estimated to hit \$125b by 2017.

Mohammadi stated that access to the feedstock is the most important advantage for developing petrochemical industries and the production capacity in this industry has neared to 100m tons. He said currently industry uses some one million barrel per day of oil as the feed.

## Tehran, Hanoi Explore Ways To Expand Economic Ties

**IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK**

TEHRAN - Secretary of Vietnam Desk at Iran Trade Promotion Organization says Iran and Vietnam are trying to boost their economic relations and to develop their trade exchanges.



Mohsen Rezaee Pour during the introductory session of Vietnam's new commercial attache in Tehran said that Iran and Vietnam are exploring major axes for boosting bilateral economic cooperation and expansion of trade. He said due to the considerable potentials of the markets of the two countries, it is expected that with efforts of both sides, soon one can witness growth and expansion of trade exchanges between Tehran and Hanoi.

Rezaee Pour noted according to Vietnam's commercial attache, this country has some 65 trade offices as well as 100 commercial attaches in the world and its trade volume with the world was some \$542b in 2020 that exports account for \$281b of the mentioned volume.

He also said that in the past, Iran's exports to Vietnam were limited to petrochemical and oil derivative products but in recent year and by diversification of export products by Iran, new products like dried fruits, date, fig, saffron and pistachio have been exported to Vietnam.

Rezaee Pour said Iran's to Vietnam in 2017 was around \$500m but after the reimposition of the U.S. sanctions, the trade volume of Iran and Vietnam declined to \$93m in 2020 as Iran's exports to Vietnam were around \$61m.

Vietnam is one of the ASEAN members has the highest GDP rate among the association with 6.9 percent.

## Iran, Brazil to Expand Mineral Cooperation



TEHRAN (MNA) – The head of Iran Mine House Mohammad Reza Bahraman said that mineral cooperation between Iran and Brazil will be expanded.

Referring to the recent visit of a Brazilian delegation to the Iran Mine House, Mohammad Reza Bahraman said that in this meeting, which was attended by the Chairman of the Friendship Group of the Brazilian Parliament, Chairman of the Brazilian Mines Commission, along with the Ambassador and Chargé d'Affaires, in addition to discussing the capabilities of the Iran Mine House, a report on the geological structure of Iran was presented.

During the meeting, it was decided to prepare a memorandum of cooperation between the two countries in the field of technical issues and supply of mining machinery, he added.

Brazil is a large mining country and one of the largest suppliers of iron ore in the world, which uses its own technologies in the field of exploration and extraction, the official said.

Bahraman went on to say that it was decided that the reciprocal meetings in Iran and Brazil with the presence of representatives of the governmental and parliamentary sectors of the two countries as well as the private sector would continue.

The two countries have great potential for developing cooperation, especially in the field of investment and supply of machinery in this sector, he added.

## Iran to Export Surgeon Robots to Indonesia

**IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK**

TEHRAN - Iran has, in a virtual ceremony, signed with Indonesia a contract to export the domestically-made Sina surgeon robot to the Southeast Asian country and establish two advanced tele-robotic surgery skills centers there.

In the ceremony, Iranian Vice-President for Science and Technology Sorena Sattari hosted Indonesia Health Minsiter Budi Gunadi Sadikin online.

Moreover, a delegation led by Indonesia Deputy Health Minister Abdul Qadir met with Sattari to discuss closer cooperation between the two countries.

In addition to the contract signed by the Sina Robotic Company of Iran and the Indofarma Pharmaceutical Company of Indonesia, an executive document was signed between the Iranian Nanocommission and the Treatment Department of the Indonesian Health Ministry.



Speaking in the ceremony, Sattari said the Science and Technology Department of the Iranian Presidential Office and the Indonesian Health Minsitry had close cooperation back in 2019.

"Since then, at least 4 events have been held in the health sector in cooperation with the two countries," he noted.

"I know that during this

time, a number of face-to-face meetings have been held between Iranian knowledge-based firms and Indonesian companies, which has resulted in technical and trade cooperation between the two sides," the vice president said. "I hope this cooperation will grow and continue until [the end of] 2021," he added.

"We are trying to sustain that cooperation in the form of developing tele-robotic surgery technology, developing laws and regulations related to digital health, developing relevant infrastructure and biotechnology medicines as well as API," Sattari said.

## Iran Builds Power Plant in Western Syria

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has started building a power plant in the western Syrian province of Latakia as part of the Islamic Republic's bid to help the Arab country rebuild itself after more than of a decade of foreign-imposed war.

On Sunday, it was reported that a number of gas turbines had been shipped to the province in line with Iran's efforts to carry out the project.

Pictures circulated across the social media showed the huge equipment entering Latakia using heavy transport vehicles.

Iran's Mapna Group, a sprawling industrial conglomerate, has been tasked with implementing the project.

The Islamic Republic has been providing economic, political, and military advisory support for Syria in the face of the foreign-backed violence that began afflicting the Arab country in 2011.

The advisory assistance helped the Arab country defeat the Takfiri terrorist group of Daesh in late 2017.

The volume of the Islamic Republic's exports to Syria now stands at some \$1 billion each year. The countries' ties are now focused on helping Syria rebuild itself and recover faster from the fallout of the war.

Most recently, the two sides reaffirmed their intention to further develop their relations during a trip by Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad-Baqer Qalibaf to Damascus.

## Gov't Reports \$2.91b in Tax Revenues for Two Months to Late May

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Figures by Iran's Supreme Audit Court (SAC) show the government collected \$2.91 billion in tax revenues in the two first months of the current fiscal year.

A report by the SAC published on Sunday said that tax receipts had fallen short of a target of 836.4 trillion rials (\$3.345 billion) set by the budget law for the two months to May 21.

The report said income tax had amounted to 98.6 trillion rials (\$394 million) while tax on goods and services reached 184 trillion rials (\$736.3 million) over the period.

It said foreign travel tax collected in the two months to May 21 had reached nearly \$2 million despite restrictions imposed on travel to Europe and elsewhere because of

the spread of the coronavirus pandemic.

The SAC said Iranian National Tax Administration had 2,659 trillion rials (10.637 billion) in tax arrears related to the calendar year to March 20 of which some 1,966 trillion rials (\$7.865 billion) were fines accrued on unpaid taxes.

Tax receipts related to surcharges on luxury goods and houses were not included in the report, said the SAC.

Iran eyes higher tax revenues this year as it seeks to impose taxes on vacant homes and luxury goods and properties.

Tax receipts have increased in recent years to help government offset losses suffered because of US sanctions on oil exports.

## Cooperation With Iranian Technology Park Strategic

TEHRAN (IP) - Nicaraguan Minister of Foreign Affairs called the cooperation of his country with Iran's Pardis Technology Park strategic.

Denis Moncada and the country's Minister of Health and Ambassador to Tehran visited Pardis Technology Park on Sunday.

The visit, hosted by the chairman of the technology park Mahdi Saffarinia was followed by the two sides' consultations over cooperation.

The Nicaraguan delegation also visited the permanent exhibition of technological products of Pardis Technology Park and a specialized exhibition of medical equipment.

During the visit, Saffarinia pointed to the memorandum of understanding between Pardis Technology Park and the Nicaraguan Council of Science and Technology, saying: "Iran welcomes the implementation of the agreement's provisions."

For his part, the Nicaraguan Foreign Minister said the visit took place under the very MoU framework, with the Nicaraguan ambassador reiterating the country's interest in cooperation with Iran.



## Sudan Recalls Ambassador to Ethiopia

KHARTOUM (Dispatches) - Sudan recalled its ambassador to neighboring Ethiopia on Sunday, frustrated by the stance of Ethiopian officials whom it said were refusing Sudan's offer to mediate in the ongoing conflict in Tigray.

"Ethiopia will improve its position if it considered what Sudan could do...instead of completely rejecting all of its efforts," a statement from the foreign ministry read.

Sudan's Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok spoke with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Wednesday about the conflict in the northern Ethiopian region of Tigray, which has led to an influx of 53,400 refugees since late 2020.



## N. Korea's Kim Calls for Relief Campaign in Rain-Hit Areas

SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has mobilised the military to carry out relief work in areas recently hit by heavy rains, state media said on Sunday, amid concerns over an economic crisis and food shortage.

The ruling Worker's Party's Central Military Commission held a meeting of its chapter in the eastern province of South Hamgyong to discuss damage and recovery from the downpour, the official KCNA news agency said.

An early monsoon season arrived on the Korean peninsula last month, with torrential rains also inflicting damage in some southern regions.



## Taliban Overrun Kunduz, Sar-e Pul, Taloqan



KABUL (Dispatches) - Taliban fighters overran three provincial capitals including the strategic northeastern city of Kunduz on Sunday, local officials said, as the insurgents intensified pressure on the north and threatened further cities.

The insurgents have taken dozens of districts and border crossings in recent months and put pressure on several provincial capitals, including Herat in the west and Kandahar in the south, as foreign troops withdraw.

The offensive has gathered momentum in recent days after the United States announced it would end its military mission in the country by the end of August.

Taliban fighters seized key government buildings in Kunduz, leaving government forces hanging onto control of the airport and their base, a provincial assembly lawmaker said on Sunday, raising fears it could be the latest to fall to the Taliban. The city of 270,000, is regarded as a strategic prize as it lies at the gateway to mineral-rich northern provinces and Central Asia.

"Heavy clashes started yesterday afternoon. All government headquarters are in control of the Taliban, only the army base and the airport is with ANDSF (Afghan security forces) from where they are resisting the Taliban," the lawmaker, Amruddin Wali, said.

A security forces spokesman said on Sunday evening that government forces would launch a large scale operation to retake lost areas of the province as soon as possible.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said the group had largely captured the province and were close to the airport.

Health officials in Kunduz said that 14 bodies, including those of women and children, and more than 30 injured people had been taken to hospital.

The Taliban have also taken government buildings in the northern provincial capital of Sar-e Pul, driving officials out of the main city to a nearby military base, Mohammad Noor Rahmani, a provincial council member of Sar-e Pul province, said.

On Friday, they captured their first provincial capital in years when they took control of Zaranj, on the border with Iran in Afghanistan's southern Nimroz province.

In recent days they have escalated attacks on northern provinces, which lie outside their traditional strongholds in the south but where the group has been quickly taking ground, often along the border of Afghanistan's Central Asian neighbours and trading partners Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

On Sunday evening, Ashraf Ayni, representative in parliament for Takhar province, said its capital Taloqan had fallen to the Taliban who had freed prisoners and taken control of all government buildings, driving officials to a nearby district.

On Saturday, heavy fighting took place in Sheberghan, the capital of northern Jawzjan province. The Taliban said they had captured the entire province.

## Anti-Military Protests in Myanmar On Anniversary of 1988 Uprising

YANGON (Dispatches) - Protests against Myanmar's military government broke out across the nation on Sunday, the anniversary of the bloody suppression of a 1988 uprising against a previous army junta.

At least six separate protests were documented on Facebook pages of opponents of the military, which seized power from the elected government six months ago and detained its leader, Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, and several other key officials. The Feb. 1 coup ended a brief, decade-long experiment in democracy in the Southeast Asian nation of 53 million, shattering hopes that it would emerge from more than half a century of military rule.

The new government led by Min Aung Hlaing, the military's most senior general who assumed the post of interim prime minister a week ago, says it acted within the constitution to remove Suu Kyi's government after disputing the election her party won, though the election commission said the vote was fair. Many of Sunday's protests made reference to the "8-8-88"



democracy uprising on August, 8, 1988, which the then-military regime crushed. Opponents of the military say an estimated 3,000 people were killed during that crackdown. "The old debt from 88, we must get it all in this 21," chanted protesters in Wundwin township in Mandalay region, recorded on Facebook videos.

Another anti-protest in Myaing township featured placards reading: "Let's struggle together toward the unfinished 8.8.88 people's liberation."

A military government spokesman could not be reached on Sunday for comment on the protests. The 1988 uprising was at the time the biggest challenge to army rule that had last since 1962.

Min Aung Hlaing on Sunday released a statement praising another anniversary - the founding of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) 54 years ago.

The statement did not mention the special ASEAN envoy to Myanmar that the 10-member regional bloc appointed in recent days, who has been tasked with ending post-coup violence and fostering talks between the military and its opponents.

## Rwandan Troops Help Mozambique Recapture Key Port Held by Jihadists

KIGALI (Dispatches) - Rwandan forces deployed last month to help Mozambique's army battle jihadists said Sunday they had recaptured control of the key northern port of Mocimboa da Praia from the extremist militants.

"The port city of Mocimboa da Praia, a major stronghold of the insurgency for more than two years has been captured by Rwandan and Mozambican security forces," the Rwandan Defence Forces said in a tweet.

Force spokesman colonel Ronald Rwivanga confirmed this to AFP, saying "yes (Mocimboa da Praia) has fallen".

The port town, from where the first Islamist attacks were staged in October 2017, has since last year become the de-facto headquarters of the Islamic State-linked extremists, locally referred to as Al-Shabab.

Mocimboa da Praia "was the last stronghold of the insurgents, marking the end of the first phase of counter-insurgency operations which is dislodging insurgents from the stronghold," Rwivanga said in a text message.

Rwanda sent in 1,000 troops last month to shore up Mozambican military forces that have been struggling to regain control over the northern Cabo Delgado province, which is home to one of Africa's biggest liquefied natural gas projects.

The forces last week claimed their first success since deploying, saying they had helped the Mozambique army regain control of Awasse -- a small but also strategic settlement near Mocimboa da Praia.

"We will continue with security operations to completely pacify those areas and allow Mozambican and Rwandan forces to conduct stabilisation operations as (the displaced) return home and business continues," added Rwivanga.

The Rwandan troops deployed on July 9, following an April visit to Kigali by Mozambican leader Filipe Nyusi. They were followed weeks later by forces from neighbouring countries, who are deploying under the aegis of the 16-member regional bloc, the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

## German Greens Co-Leader Defends Embattled Chancellor Candidate

BERLIN (Dispatches) - The co-leader of Germany's Greens on Sunday defended the party's candidate for chancellor at next month's federal election, and brushed off suggestions that he should replace her after she made a string of costly mistakes.

The ecologists briefly surged in the polls to overtake Chancellor Angela Merkel's conservative bloc after they named Annalena Baerbock as their chancellor candidate in April, but have since waned.

Baerbock's error-strewn campaign has included mistakes in her resume and a scandal over a Christmas bonus payment that she failed to declare to parliament. Baerbock has also said that sexist scrutiny is holding her back.

"Ms Baerbock is suitable for the office of chancellor, and our task is to ensure that the Greens are strong," the party's co-leader, Robert Habeck, told broadcaster ZDF in an interview.

Asked whether the Greens should replace Baerbock with him as their chancellor candidate, Habeck responded: "No, that's not a debate."

Adding to the Greens' woes, the party will be excluded from the ballot in the state of Saarland in the Sept. 26 national election due to irregularities in the selection of regional candidates following internal squabbling.

"The Greens campaign had a few problems but ... I'm looking forward to August and September," said Habeck, who is party co-leader with Baerbock. "Everything is possible."

An opinion poll published earlier on Sunday showed the left-leaning Social Democrats (SPD) drawing level with the Greens on 18%, behind Merkel's conservatives on 26%. Merkel, in power since 2005, plans to stand down after the election.

The INSA poll showed that in a hypothetical direct vote for chancellor, SPD candidate Olaf Scholz was well ahead, with 27% support. Conservative Armin Laschet languished on 14%, one point ahead of Baerbock, on 13%.

The Greens presented an "emergency climate protection program" on Tuesday, aiming to reset their campaign.



## Venezuela's Ruling Party Holds Primaries for

CARACAS (Dispatches) - Venezuela's ruling Socialist Party on Sunday held a primary to choose candidates for November elections for governors and mayors, an election that may see the return of opposition political parties that have boycotted recent ballots.

Allies of President Nicolas Maduro will vie for the chance to be elected to 23 state and 335 municipal governments that have been a key element of the Socialist Party's dominance of the country's politics.

Sunday's vote came as the opposition and government prepare to enter into a negotiation process set to start later this month in Mexico, sources told Reuters. "Winning the governorships and mayors in the mega-elections on November 21 will give us greater governance in the country," Maduro said on Tuesday in a live broadcast on state television. "The entire opposition knows that we will have clean and transparent elections."

Voting seemed slow in Caracas shortly after polls opened at 7 a.m. on Sunday. There were no lines at polling stations.

The mainstream opposition boycotted presidential and parliamentary elections in 2018 and 2020, arguing they were rigged in favor of Maduro's ruling socialist party. But a coalition in the opposition has said its willing to participate in the November election.

In May, the socialist-held National Assembly named two opposition-linked figures to a new elections council for the first time in years. In June, the head of the electoral council said the government would allow a coalition of major opposition political parties to field candidates in November's elections.

The opposition is still negotiating conditions for participating in November and opposition leader Juan Guaido has not said whether or not he believes candidates should take part.

The opposition, backed by the United States and most Western democracies, labels Maduro a dictator who has clung to power through rigged elections and persecution of opponents. Maduro, supported by Russia and China, labels Guaido a puppet of Washington seeking to oust him in a coup.







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## Maersk Continues Shopping Spree After Strong Earnings

COPENHAGEN (Reuters) - Maersk announced it had bought two e-commerce companies and said more acquisitions were coming soon as the world's biggest container shipping line boosts its bet on land-based services.

Maersk, which handles one in five containers shipped worldwide, aims to expand its land-based logistics services, hoping to gain a larger share of the supply chain from existing shipping clients such as Puma and Walmart.

It bought Visible Supply Chain Management and B2C Europe, both specialized in e-commerce, for a combined enterprise value of \$924 million, Maersk said.



## Airbus Sees 1,000 German Jobs at Risk Without Parts Unit Spinoff

MUNICH (Dispatches) - Airbus has warned employees of hundreds of possible job losses at its small-parts manufacturing business in Germany if the unit isn't hived off in line with a cost-cutting strategy set out in April, a source familiar with the plan told Reuters.

The group sees 1,000 of its 2,500 jobs in Germany at risk if it continues to manufacture parts within the group, rather than spinning off the activities, said the source who is familiar with plans presented to its works council and trade unions.

Under the shakeup set out four months ago, Airbus's Premium Aerotec unit in Germany would be split off, with part combined with other Airbus manufacturing plants and the rest folded into a new business specializing in small mass-produced "detail" parts which could be spun off.

Premium Aerotec makes components for commercial and military aircraft, mainly in Augsburg and Varel near Bremen.

The unit has been loss-making for years and Airbus argues that with a new owner it could also work for competitors or win customers from other industries, and thus better utilize its workforce.

The planemaker has previously said it calculates that Premium Aerotec is between 25% and 30% more expensive than other suppliers. Airbus declined to comment when asked about the numbers of jobs at risk under the restructuring.

Trade union IG Metall is opposed to the spinoff, fearing job cuts and less favourable working conditions after a break-up of the unit, at which fuselages of Airbus aircraft are also assembled.

The issue is taking on a political dimension. Finance Minister Olaf Scholz, the Social Democrats' (SPD) chancellor candidate for September's federal election, is planning a "solidarity visit" on Monday to Premium Aerotec in Varel.

Airbus has also promised to examine a future for parts production within the group.

"Our analysis, which we shared with employee representatives at the end of July, clearly showed that the internal route would be much more painful for employees to achieve competitive cost structures," a spokesperson said.

Therefore, he said, the company wanted to find a better owner who could preserve more jobs. Switzerland's Montana Aerospace has already expressed interest.

"The window of opportunity to reposition is now, before production rates return to pre-crisis levels," the Airbus spokesperson said.

## China's Crude Oil Imports Rebound

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China's crude oil imports rebounded in July from a six-month low as state-backed refiners ramped up output after returning from maintenance, though independent refineries slowed restocking amid probes by Beijing into trading and taxes.

China brought in 41.24 million tons of crude oil last month, equivalent to 9.71 million barrels per day (bpd), data from the General Administration of Customs showed.

That compares with 40.14 million tons in June and 51.29 million tons in July 2020.

In the first seven months of the year, China, the world's top crude oil importer, took in 301.83 million tons, or 10.39 million bpd, down 5.6% from the corresponding period last year.

"With state-owned refineries completing overhauls, the number of refineries resuming operation is gradually increasing," said analysts at China-based Longzhong consultancy, while adding that overall utilization rates have not seen a significant jump.

Operating rates at independent refiners in refining hub Shandong, however, showed a clear downtrend in the last month, with the average rate hitting the lowest level this year at 63% in late July.

Analysts had expected that Beijing's crackdown on the misuse of import quotas and the impact of higher crude prices could see China's oil import growth sink to the lowest in two decades in 2021.

China in June cut 35% of crude oil import quotas to non-state refiners in a second batch of allowances for 2021, in which several small refiners did not receive any quotas.

Meanwhile, the central government has been carrying out investigations since April on illicit trading of import quotas, partly to ease a fuel surplus that has hurt state-owned refiners' profits.

Shandong province, where most independent refiners are located, stepped up efforts this week to curb fuel production by ordering its independent refineries to promise not to trade crude oil quotas.

Customs data on Saturday also showed China exported 4.64 million tons of refined oil products in July, up 44.5% from a year ago but down 28.0% from June.

Natural gas imports, including piped and liquefied natural gas (LNG) were at 9.34 million tons last month, up 27.1% on year, the data showed.



## Saudi Aramco Q2 Profits Nearly Quadruple Compared to 2020

RIYADH (AFP) - Energy giant Saudi Aramco said Sunday its second quarter profits for 2021 had nearly quadrupled compared to the same period last year on the back of higher oil prices.

The company's success comes after its debts climbed last year, when Saudi Arabia was hammered by the double whammy of low prices and sharp cuts in production triggered by the coronavirus pandemic. Aramco said its net profit rose to \$25.5 billion in the second quarter of the year, compared to \$6.6 billion in the same quarter of 2020, owing to a stronger oil market and higher refining and chemicals margins, and with the easing of Covid-19 restrictions.

"Our second quarter results reflect a strong rebound in worldwide energy demand, and we are heading into the second half of 2021 more resilient and more flexible, as the global recovery gains momentum," Aramco chief executive Amin Nasser said in a statement.

The announcement comes approximately two months after the company said it raised \$6 billion from its first dollar-denominated Islamic bond sale, posting earlier this year a 30 percent jump in first quarter profits. Aramco -- the kingdom's cash cow -- said in May that its net profit rose to \$21.7 billion in the first three months of the year.

The energy giant posted a 44.4 percent slump in 2020 net profit, piling pressure on government finances as Riyadh pursues its multi-billion dollar projects to diversify the economy.

The world's leading oil producers agreed last month to continue to modestly boost output from August reaching a compromise after the United Arab Emirates blocked a deal.

An OPEC+ meeting decided to raise output by 400,000 barrels per day (bpd) each month from August to help fuel a global economic recovery as the pandemic eases.

Long seen as the kingdom's economic "crown jewel", Aramco and its assets were once tightly government-controlled and considered off-limits to outside investment.

But with the rise of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler, who is accelerating efforts to implement his "Vision 2030" reform program, the kingdom has shown readiness to cede some control. Aramco previously sold a sliver of its shares on the Saudi bourse in December 2019, generating \$29.4 billion for 1.7 percent of its shares.

In April, the company said it had struck a \$12.4-billion deal to sell a minority stake in a newly formed oil pipeline business, to a consortium led by US-based EIG Global Energy Partners.

And in June, Aramco "successfully raised \$6 billion, following the sale of US dollar-denominated sharia-compliant securities to leading institutional investors", the company said.

Aramco also declared a dividend of \$18.8 billion for the second quarter.

Earlier this year, Prince Mohammed said the kingdom would sell more Aramco shares.

## Turkey Ratifies Agreements With 5 Countries



ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkey has ratified agreements with five countries in various fields such as economics, trade, and transportation, according to the country's Official Gazette.

The agreements with Hungary, Burkina Faso, Uzbekistan, China, and Montenegro are detailed in the gazette published.

Ankara ratified a Protocol of Turkish-Hungarian Joint Committee Meeting on Road Transport signed on Nov. 26, 2020, in which the two countries agreed on various transit document quotas for road transportation.

A protocol between the governments of Turkey and the West African country of Burkina Faso on the exchange of land plots for diplomatic missions, signed in January 2020, was also ratified.

An air transport agreement signed with the Central Asian republic of Uzbekistan on June 23, 1994, and amended on April 30, 2018, was also ratified.

The gazette also contains the ratification of a May 2017 agreement between Turkey and China on the "international road transport of passengers and goods."

Under the pact, the two countries want "to contribute to the development of trade and economic relations between their countries as well as the development of transport of good and passengers by road between the two countries, to and from third countries and in transit through their territories within the framework of the market economy."

The gazette also includes an agreement signed on Feb. 11, 2020, under which Turkey will provide consular services to Montenegrin nationals visiting or residing in countries where the Balkan nation lacks a diplomatic mission.

## Argentinians Protest for More Jobs, Food Amid Economic Crisis

BUENOS AIRES (Dispatches) - Tens of thousands of Argentinians have protested across the country over poverty and unemployment as an economic crisis worsened by the coronavirus pandemic continues to hit residents hard.

Organizations working with the unemployed and left-wing groups led a protest in the capital, Buenos Aires, that started at a church where thousands of pilgrims travel each year to pray at the shrine of San Cayetano, the patron saint of work, whose feast day.

It ended at the Plaza de Mayo, an enormous square in front of the seat of government where protests usually take place.

"I come on behalf of people who do not have work: my brother, my neighbors and many people who you see really struggling everywhere," Nestor Pluis, a 41-year-old educational assistant, told the Reuters news agency.

Protests also took place in other parts of the country, including in Argentina's second city of Cordoba and the western city of Mendoza.

On Friday, the Argentinian government announced it would ease coronavirus restrictions after weeks of declining case and mortality figures.

"The more we vaccinate and take care of ourselves, the more we can sustain these achievements and advance in sustained and progressive openings," President Alberto Fernandez said in a recorded television message.

Fernandez said he saw brighter days ahead. "Argentina is growing, recuperating jobs and will recover income," the president said.

## Pakistan to Pursue Tea Plantation on Commercial Scale

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - While pursuing tea plantations on a commercial scale, the government of Pakistan has decided to cultivate tea on an area of about 25,000 acres over the next five years.

"This year we are going to approve a project where we are growing tea on an area of 25,000 acres; we are creating history; we plan to complete the proposed tea plantations over the next five years," said Special Assistant to Prime Minister on Food Security Jamshed

Iqbal Cheema during his visit to the National Tea and High-Value Crops Research Institute (NTHRI) at Shinkiari, Mansehra.

On the recommendation of Chinese tea experts, the National Tea Research Institute (NTRI), later renamed as NTHRI, was set up on 50 acres of land in Shinkiari in 1986. NTHRI is playing a crucial role in promoting tea cultivation in the country.

Out of the proposed 25,000 acres of land, 10,000 are government-owned forests; 12,000 acres are private land where the Forest Department has planted forests while 3,000 acres of land have been identified in Azad Kashmir. During the next phase, the tea plantation would be extended to all tea-cultivable land of the country, as per the government plan.

Pakistan has great potential for growing tea, according to Cheema, as the country has 178,000 acres of tea cultivable land. "Pakistan can grow its own tea," he said, adding that the country imported 30 million tons of tea each year from 15 different tea-producing countries.

Cheema said Pakistan spent Rs90 billion annually on importing tea. The import value of black tea is Rs89 billion while Rs1 billion goes to green tea's import.

While inviting private tea companies to invest in the tea sector, Cheema said, "We are ready to facilitate and solve any problems of the private companies regarding their investment." The government is providing an opportunity to the private companies to invest and to promote the tea trade, which would also create thousands of jobs for the locals. The Ministry of Food Security has allocated Rs8.5 billion budget for high-value crops and cluster development.

According to experts, China from the beginning has played a crucial role in tea promotion in Pakistan. As potential suitable sites and land for tea cultivation are located alongside the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), China has a big role to play in promoting tea on a commercial scale through joint ventures and technical and financial support.



# Iran Volleyball No Longer the Best Asian Team

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran volleyball team have dropped to 12th place in the latest FIVB ranking released on Monday.

The Iranian team finished in ninth place in the 2020 Olympic Games. Brazil leads the table, followed by Poland, Russia and France. Japan volleyball team are the best Asian team in the ranking, sitting in 11th place.Iran were placed in eighth place before the start of 2021 Volleyball Nations League and Olympics.



# Pandemic-Era Olympics Proved Doubters Wrong

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Britain’s Olympic chief has told AFP the staging of the Tokyo Games in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic has proved the doubters wrong while a former IOC executive claims it was a “miracle”.

The first Olympics ever to be postponed took place a year late and in stadiums where spectators were largely banned by the Japanese authorities.

Yet the competitors produced outstanding performances, seemingly unaffected by the lack of atmosphere, and the highly skeptical Japanese public slowly warmed to the Games happening in their city -- even if they were not able to watch in person.

Hugh Robertson, chairman of the British Olympic Association (BOA), said the many who questioned whether they should go ahead had been put in their place.

“The doubters have been proved wrong. The world has gone through an exceptionally difficult 18 months but athletes from across the globe came together and put on a memorable show,” he said.

“The Games have been held in the most challenging circumstances imaginable and the organisers have excelled.”

Michael Payne, the former head of marketing at the IOC, said he believed these unusual Games had provided “optimism and hope for the future”.

Payne, who in nearly two decades at the IOC was credited with transforming its finances through sponsorship, said he believed the IOC “held its nerve”.

Polls before the Games consistently showed the Japanese people were against hosting them as Covid-19 cases rose to record levels and a state of emergency was declared in Tokyo.

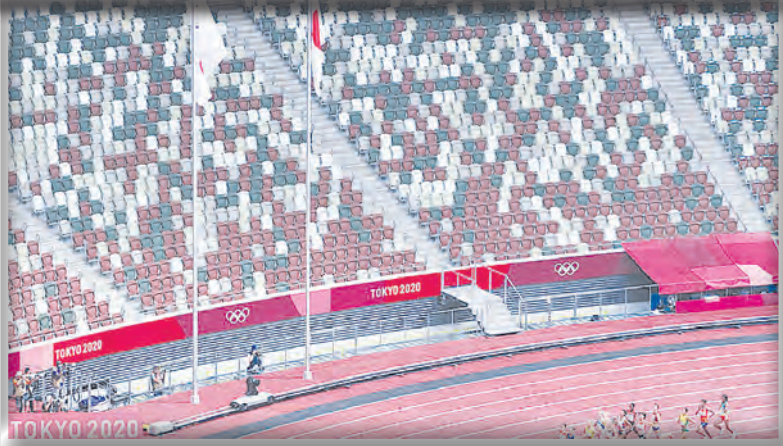
“It was an absolute miracle they happened,” said Payne. “A miracle the Japanese pulled it off, a miracle the IOC got all the athletes here and stage a Games in the midst of a pandemic giving optimism and hope for the future.”

Veteran IOC member Gunilla Lindberg, secretary-general of ANOC (Association of National Olympic Committees) and responsible for supporting the 206 national Olympic bodies, admitted that even two weeks before the Games she was unsure whether they would go ahead.

While it was not the first time an Olympics have been affected by health issues -- organisers at Rio 2016 grappled with the Zika virus, for example -- Lindberg said this “was worse than anything” other Games had had to face.

“They were difficult preparations and nobody knew I would say even two weeks before the Games if it would happen,” the Swede, who has worked on 26 Summer and Winter Games, told AFP.

“It exceeded all of our expectations because it was a very tough Spring preparing the teams.



“That was because we could not get answers. Why was that not possible? Because nobody knew anything.

“Neither the IOC nor the Japanese had the answers. We thought it would be a real mess.”

Payne says it is debatable whether this is the biggest crisis the IOC has faced in its long history, citing the financial problems the movement experienced in the 1980s, but said: “You look today, and these Games, in spite of the pandemic, have been incredibly successful.

“You’ve seen incredible sport, you’ve seen new sports (sport climbing, skateboarding to name two) come in to a program that have been a big hit and the athlete performances have been better than you could have hoped for.”

Payne regrets there were no spectators -- “the Japanese people were the biggest losers” -- because of what he maintained were largely political reasons.

But both Lindberg and Payne believe the Games have proved popular with the Japanese.

“The moment they started winning gold medals, the TV ratings went off the charts,” Payne said. “The Japanese embraced the Games in their living rooms.

“It’s a pity they couldn’t embrace it in the stadiums, but you talk to the volunteers and staff and this was still magical, this was still great.”

And Lindberg said the Games’ success against the odds had been “good for the Olympic heart.”

## Hundreds Flee, Homes Destroyed as Forest Fires Ravage Greek Island



ATHENS (Dispatches) - Hundreds of Greek firefighters fought desperately Sunday to control wildfires on the island of Evia that have charred vast areas of pine forest, destroyed homes and forced tourists and locals to flee.

Blazes also raged in the Peloponnese region in the southwest, but fires in a northern suburb of Athens have subsided.

Greece and Turkey have been battling devastating fires for nearly two weeks as the region suffers its worst heatwave in decades. Officials and experts have linked such intense weather events to climate change.

So far, they have killed two people in Greece and eight in neighboring Turkey, with dozens more hospitalized.

But while rains brought some respite from the blazes in Turkey over the weekend, Greece continued to suffer amid soaring temperatures. The rugged landscape and thick pine forests on Evia which made it appealing to tourists have turned in into a nightmare for firefighters.

The inferno on Greece’s second largest island, which lies east of the capital, has turned thousands of hectares into ashes and destroyed homes.

Thousands have been evacuated, and hundreds of locals and tourists have fled on ferry boats.

Authorities have continued to evacuate residents from Evia. The Greek Coast Guard said 349 people were taken off the island early Sunday. On Saturday, nine people were evacuated from a beach surrounded by flames by the coastal village of Psaropouli, the ANA news agency reported.

Some 260 Greek firefighters with 66 vehicles were battling the blazes on Evia, helped by 200 more from Ukraine and Romania with 23 vehicles and seven aircraft.

One fire service official told the Eleftheros Typos newspaper that the heat from the fires on Evia and elsewhere was so intense that “the water from the hoses and the water-dropping aircraft was evaporating” before reaching the blazes.

Flames were devouring houses in the villages of Ellinika, Vasilika and Psaropouli.

Local officials were critical of the efforts to control the fires, which erupted on the island on August 3.

“With what we have seen so far the fire won’t be under control any time soon. I have no more voice left to ask for more aircraft. I can’t stand this situation”, Giorgos Tsapourniotis, mayor of Mantoudi in Evia told Skai TV.

## Russia Expresses Interest in Sharing Advanced Drug With India

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russian industrial major Rostec, which has developed ‘Covid Globulin’ drug to treat Covid patients, will be ready to consider both supply of drug as well as its production in India once domestic needs are addressed, Rostec CEO Sergey Chemezov told ET in an exclusive interaction amid close bilateral health cooperation to combat Covid.

Covid Globulin is produced out of blood plasma of people who either recovered from Covid or are fully vaccinated (got two jabs) against the coronavirus as such blood plasma contains the antibodies. The drug neutralizes the virus and its application helps the organism to fight the disease and create the antibodies faster, said Chemezov, who is a close associate of Russian President Vladimir Putin. Chemezov said while Rostec’s current priority is the Russian healthcare, it remains open for new opportunities and cooperation, in particular those relating to healthcare and fighting Covid-19. “As soon as the drug passes all stages of clinical research, we will be ready to consider both orders from our Indian colleagues and potential production opportunities in India,” he said.

“Since the beginning of the pandemic, we have been proactive in fighting the coronavirus. In 2020, we supplied over 200,000 units of medical equipment—IMV devices, air disinfection machines, thermal imaging systems for detecting elevated body temperature, and the like. Part of these went to exports,” Chemezov said, adding, “Our group includes Nacimbio Holding that developed a truly unique drug—Covid Globulin.”

Put simply, patients treated with Covid Globulin receive donor antibodies, i.e. dedicated proteins produced by the immune system in response to the virus entering the human organism; such antibodies recognize and neutralise the virus, said the Rostec CEO.

Covid Globulin has already been officially registered and became the first ever medication for Covid-19 in its class. “I want to emphasize that the drug is specially intended to treat the coronavirus rather than prevent it,” Chemezov noted.

“Our research confirmed the drug’s safety, absence of side effects, and the ability to neutralize the virus. The Covid Globulin production process includes an up-to-date cleaning stage to ensure the drug’s highest safety and suitability for practically every patient, regardless of their age, blood group, or anamnesis.” Rostec has wide-ranging expertise covering defense to civil aviation sectors and it works closely with its Indian counterparts on defense hardware.

## Thailand’s Consumer Confidence Plunges as Pandemic Surges

BANGKOK (Dispatches) - Thailand’s University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce (UTCC) reported on Thursday that the consumer confidence index fell to 40.9 in July from 43.1 in June, 44.7 in May, 46 in April, 48.5 in March, 49.4 in February and 47.8 in January.

Reporting consumer and business sentiment continued to plunge because of the rising Covid-19 infections and deaths, the poor economic outlook and the Thai Governments failure to procure sufficient vaccines for its citizens.

UTCC president Thanavath Phonvichai told the Bangkok Post that there is also much uncertainty over the government’s vaccine distribution plan, while political instability and anti-government rallies are gathering pace and oil prices are rising.”

People are really worried about the country’s overall economic prospects. The Fiscal Policy Office downgraded its 2021 growth forecast for Thailand to 1.3%, a dip from a projection in April of 2.3%, on the assumption new infections will peak in the middle of August.

“What people are worried about the most right now is the government extending lockdown measures to 29 high-risk provinces including Bangkok, which represent up to 80% of GDP,” he said. “Those provinces account for 90% of the country’s industrial sector, 80% of logistics and are highly connected to tourism. We estimate the lockdown measures in those provinces will heavily affect the economy, with losses estimated at 500-700 billion baht between July and August.”

Mr Thanavath said there are a handful of positive factors such as the recovering export sector, the government’s stimulus measures through myriad relief schemes, and the pace of global and domestic inoculations. The UTCC projected the Thai economy would tally -2% to zero growth this year, a slight change from an earlier forecast of zero to 1% growth.

In a related development, the UTCC announced on Thursday the TCC consumer confidence index, which gauges the sentiment of chamber members in all provinces nationwide, dropped to 20.7 in July following readings of 22.5 in June, 24.7 in May, 27.6 in April, 30.7 in March and 29.6 in February.

## African Oil Producers Struggle to Raise Oil Production as Investment Lags

LONDON (Oil Price) - Sub-Saharan Africa, especially its largest oil producers Nigeria and Angola, will struggle to raise oil output through the middle of this decade, as international majors are shifting their investment priorities, data and analytics company GlobalData said.

Lack of sufficient investments and few new projects could derail Sub-Saharan Africa’s ambition to increase its crude oil production through 2025 after a difficult pandemic-hit 2020, GlobalData said in its report.

As international oil majors are reassessing their investment priorities and projects compete for less capital amid an ongoing capex discipline, Nigeria and Angola—the leading African producers in OPEC—are seeing few new projects being approved.

### Call for Completing...

FROM PAGE 1

With the completion of Shalamcheh-Basra border railway project, pilgrims from the two countries would be able to visit holy shrines through the railway fleet, he said, adding, “The project will expand trade exchanges and transit transport between the two sides.”

Elsewhere in his remarks, Masjedi called on the Iraqi government to agree with dispatching a number of Iranian pilgrims to Iraq to take part in this year’s Arbæen ceremonies.

During the meeting, the two sides discussed some of the joint development projects between the two countries of Iran and Iraq.

Secretary of Council of Ministers in Iraq Hamid Naim Al-Ghazi, for his part, emphasized the need for resolving water-related problems between concerned organizations of the two countries of Iran and Iraq as well as reaching a common understanding in the relevant issue.

### Syria Backs Iran...

FROM PAGE 1

The regime in Tel Aviv and its Western allies accuse Iran of orchestrating the attack. Iran rejects the charges.

The United States and the United Kingdom have thrown their weight behind the Israeli regime, calling for an “appropriate response.”

Iran has vehemently denied any hand in Thursday’s attack on an Israeli tanker off the coast of Oman, dismissing allegations leveled by Tel Aviv and its American and British allies.

### Pakistan...

FROM PAGE 1

The Pakistani government had announced plans to hold a peace conference last month with high-ranking Afghan officials and leaders of various factions, but the plan was postponed at the request of Kabul.

Speaking to Pakistani media last week, Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi stressed the need for direct talks between Kabul and Taliban to resolve differences, adding that Pakistan is in contact with key regional players, including the Islamic Republic of Iran, to advance the Afghan peace process.

### U.S. Transports...

FROM PAGE 1

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has reiterated that US attempts to control Syria’s oilfields were “illegal” and amounted to “robbery.”

Last year, Damascus strongly condemned an agreement signed between SDF Kurdish militants and an American oil company, declaring it null and void because it was aimed at stealing the country’s oil.

### U.S. Troops...

FROM PAGE 1

Recounting the horrors of that night when a barrage of missiles pounded their airbase, US troops recuperating from their brain injuries say they are still having nightmares.

In an interview with CBS News, U.S. Army Major Alan Johnson, who was stationed at Ain al-Asad Airbase on Jan. 8, 2020, said the attack “knocked the wind” out of him.

Hours before the attack, when he was informed by a U.S. military intelligence officer that Iran was about to hit the U.S. airbase, Johnson looked tearfully into a cellphone camera and recorded a farewell message for his mother, wife and son.

“Words can’t even describe the amount of energy that is released by these missiles,” he was quoted as saying by CBS News. “It knocked the wind out of me, I immediately lost all my hearing, I felt like I was underwater...followed by the most putrid tasting ammonia...dust that swept through the bunker [and] coated your teeth.”

Johnson was evacuated from Iraq to Germany where he underwent physical and speech therapy. But he still suffers from daily headaches, ringing in the ears, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Another trooper, Army Major Robert Hales, who suffered severe injuries in the attack, which the Iranian military officials asserted was not intended to kill anyone but to send out a strong message to Washington, said the attack was “sci-fi movie-like.”

The highest-ranking medical doctor at the base, Hales was in an armored vehicle at a safe distance outside the base and feared he would return to find hundreds of his fellow troops dead. “I honestly thought that I was going to come back, once the attack was over, and see just mass casualties across the base,” he was quoted as saying.

Hales said there is “not a lot known” about brain trauma caused by a ballistic missile attack of this magnitude, in part due to its unprecedented nature.



## Tuanzebe Returns to Villa On Loan From Man Utd

LONDON (Dispatches) - Aston Villa have signed defender Axel Tuanzebe from Premier League rivals Manchester United on a season-long loan, the Birmingham club announced Sunday.

"Aston Villa is delighted to announce the loan signing of Axel Tuanzebe from Manchester United," said a club statement.

Tuanzebe had returned to Villa Park two years after helping the club gain promotion to the Premier League via the Championship play-offs.

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## Martin Takes First MotoGP Win

VIENNA (Dispatches) - Rookie Jorge Martin of Ducati-Pramac cruised to his first MotoGP victory in the Styria Grand Prix on Sunday, finishing comfortably ahead of Spanish compatriot and reigning champion Joan Mir on a Suzuki.

French championship leader Fabio Quartararo of Yamaha was third in a race that had to be restarted after the KTM of Spaniard Dani Pedrosa and the Aprilia of Italian Lorenzo Savadori caught fire in the middle of the track after a third-lap crash.

# Tearful Messi Confirms Barcelona Exit

BARCELONA (Dispatches) - Lionel Messi fought back tears Sunday as he began a press conference at which he confirmed he is leaving Barcelona, where he has played his entire career.

The 34-year-old Argentinian superstar, six times a Ballon d'Or winner, has been out of contract since the end of June and Barca say they cannot afford to keep him, with Messi admitting that a move to Paris Saint-Germain is a "possibility".

"This year, my family and I were convinced we were going to stay here, at home -- this is what we wanted more than anything," said a suited Messi as he struggled to contain his emotions.

"I have still not come to terms with the reality of leaving this club now, changing my life. I love this club. Last year he sought to engineer a release from his contract in frustration at some poor showings in Europe by the club where he has won four Champions Leagues but ended up staying.

Last year, he explained, "I was convinced I knew what I wanted say, but this year is not the same", stressing his preference was to prolong his stay rather than contemplate what now seems a likely reunion with former clubmate Neymar at PSG -- ostensibly the only club that can afford him with Manchester City having distanced themselves.

He hotly denied asking for more money but had, on the contrary, accepted a 50 percent salary cut.

"I would've liked to have won another Champions League," he added while stressing that "I don't regret anything, I tried to give my best and I'm ending my career here with a good number of titles".

Last month Barcelona, battling huge debts, had said they were in agreement in principle with the player and his entourage on a new five-year deal on much reduced wages.

"The truth is I don't know what to say," said Messi, who signed for the Catalan giants as a 13-year-old. "After 21 years I am leaving with my three Catalan Argentine children," said Messi, who won 10 league titles with the club.

"I gave everything for this club from the first day that I arrived right to the last. I never imagined having to say goodbye. "In recent days I have given lots of thought to what I can say and truth to tell I can't think of anything.

"This is really difficult for me after so many years spent here -- my entire life. I'm not ready for this," he said.

"We have had some good times, some



bad times too -- but people always showed me the same love," said Messi, who said leaving was "sad and hard." As thousands of Barca fans milled outside in disbelief at his exit, Messi told reporters one day he hoped to be back in some capacity.

"I hope I can come back and be part of this club at some moment, in any way and bring something to help this club to be the best in the world."

Messi was at pains to say that "nothing has been signed with anyone" and insisted that a picture of him which has made waves on social media in recent days of him on holiday with PSG stars including Neymar and Angel Di Maria was "just a photo".

He said there was no question of his having engineered a path to the Parc des Princes, adding that there had been interest from other clubs.

"When the press release (of his departure) was published, I received a lot of calls from interested clubs," he told reporters who applauded him for several minutes as he took the stage at the start of the press conference and again as he left the stage to embrace staff in the club's trophy room.

"For the moment nothing is arranged but, yes, we are in discussion," said the Argentinian, who insisted he has always been "totally transparent" on his intentions.

According to Le Parisien, an agreement between PSG and the Argentinian could take place as early as later on Sunday. French sports daily L'Equipe forecast a "record contract" of three years, "with an annual net salary of 40 million euros".

## Lukaku on Verge of Big Money Move To Chelsea



ROME (Dispatches) - Romelu Lukaku is set to sign for Chelsea from Inter Milan in a deal worth up to 115 million euros (\$135 million), according to widespread reports in Italian media on Sunday.

Chelsea have been pursuing Lukaku since it became clear the European champions would not be able to prise Erling Braut Haaland from Borussia Dortmund, but Inter had been holding out on letting their star striker go.

However, now Inter are preparing to offload the Belgium forward for a fee which comes close to the record paid by a British club just days after Manchester City laid out £100 million (118 million euros) to sign England international Jack Grealish from Aston Villa.

Lukaku, who fired Inter to last year's Serie A title -- their first since 2010 -- was initially keen to stay in Italy after becoming a huge fan favourite under previous coach Antonio Conte.

Last month the 28-year-old told official club channel Inter TV that he wanted to "achieve even more than last year" after scoring 24 league goals in the 2020/21 campaign and being voted player of the season.

However the Gazzetta Dello Sport reports that the 28-year-old changed his mind and now wants to return to Chelsea, where, after signing from Anderlecht in 2011, he failed to make an impression ahead of a star-studded roll call of forwards which included his idol Didier Drogba.

## Cuba Reign in Olympic Ring

TOKYO (AFP) - Cuba won their fourth Olympic boxing title of the Tokyo Games on the final day of action on Sunday for their best performance in 17 years, as Team USA again failed to strike gold.

The classy Andy Cruz was the man to ensure a best gold-medal return since the five at Athens 2004, and did some Michael Jackson dance moves after defeating Keyshawn Davis on split points for the lightweight crown.

Cruz, already a two-time world champion and now a gold medallist at only 25, adds his Tokyo title to the ones won by compatriots Roniel Iglesias, Arlen Lopez and Julio la Cruz.

"We Cubans really worked hard in the run-up to the Games despite the situation in Cuba and around the world with Covid," said Cruz. "We have been working harder and training hard and also had a good training base here.

"I think that it all came together here. We are a close-knit family in the Cuban boxing community and we brought all that together to have success in Tokyo."

Cruz, who used to do karate, was all feints and flicks as he went ahead on the judges' scorecards after the first round.

The 22-year-old Davis, who has already turned professional, likes a scrap and was able to disturb the Cuban's rhythm in the second round. But Cruz got the decision -- and celebrated with some neat moves in the middle of the ring to show he can dance as well as he fights.

There was to be double disappointment for the United States.

They had been chasing a first men's gold since the 2004 Athens Games but after Davis tasted defeat, super-heavyweight Richard Torrez was given a pounding by the giant Uzbek Bakhodir Jalolov in their final.

Torrez had a point deducted for use of his head and took a standing count as Jalolov clicked ominously and ruthlessly into gear.

The American briefly needed medical treatment in the second round for a cut over his eye.

Jalolov, 27, cried his way through Uzbekistan's national anthem as he stood atop the podium.

# Sinner to Face McDonald in Washington Final



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Italy's Jannik Sinner, the ATP's top-ranked teen, will face Mackenzie McDonald in the Citi Open final after the American denied Japan's Kei Nishikori his first championship match in 2 1/2 years.

World number 24 Sinner, seeking his third ATP crown at age 19, beat 20-year-old U.S. wildcard Jenson Brooksby 7-6 (7/2), 6-1, while 107th-ranked McDonald reached his first ATP final by outgrinding Nishikori 6-4, 3-6, 7-5.

Sinner, who won at Sofia last year and Melbourne in January, could become the youngest Washington hardcourt champion since 19-year-old Juan Martin del Potro in 2008.

"What I'm trying to do is trying to work hard, trying to understand many things, and I think that's the most important thing when you're young," Sinner said. "It's working good."

Sinner became the first Italian finalist in the event's 52-year history. He was the first Italian in Washington's last four in 25 years.

After saving three break and set points in the 12th game of the first set, Sinner took the final four points in the tie-breaker and the 2020 French Open quarter-finalist rolled through the second set.

"The tie-break gave me confidence for the second set," Sinner said. "The level was quite high."

McDonald, whose only prior semi-final was in 2019 at Delray Beach, was happy to make his first final at age 26. "It means a lot," he said. "But I'm trying to keep my cool. It's Saturday. I don't want to get too high."

## India Showers Cash on Golden Boy Chopra



NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - Indian companies and governments promised cash and gifts worth more than two million dollars to javelin star Neeraj Chopra after he won India's first ever Olympic athletics gold medal.

The 23-year-old, who two years ago underwent surgery on a career-threatening elbow injury, threw 87.58 meters in the Tokyo Olympic stadium on Saturday to send his country into raptures.

Chopra led India's most successful Olympics ever with a gold, two silver medals and four bronze. He will also lead a cash bonanza for the winning athletes.

The government in his home state of Haryana said it would give a 60 million rupee (\$800,000) bonus to Chopra.

Other state governments offered another \$400,000 between them and a leading education company promised \$270,000.

India had to make its athletes "heroes so that we transform ourselves from a sport loving nation to a sport-playing nation," said Byju Raveendran, owner of the Byju's education tech company.

The Indian cricket board, the BCCI, and the Chennai Super Kings Indian Premier League team vowed to give \$135,000 each and Chopra will also get \$100,000 from the Indian Olympic Association. Other firms offered free air travel, luxury cars and cash gifts that took Chopra's bonus over two million and more was expected before he returns to India.

All of the medal winners can expect big cash rewards for their return, with the IOA offering \$53,750 for a silver, and \$33,500 for a bronze.

## Kipchoge Cements Legacy as Greatest Marathon Runner



TOKYO (Dispatches) - About 30 kilometers into the men's marathon in Sapporo on Sunday, Kenya's Eliud Kipchoge pulled away from the pack and began running his own race, chasing immortality.

Kipchoge looked like a man determined to run towards his legacy of greatness. He took a peek behind him at one point and there was no one there.

He was all alone - the greatest marathon runner in history and one of the greatest Olympians.

"I wanted to create a space to show the world that this is a beautiful race," Kipchoge said after winning gold.

He began to smile as marathon-mad Japanese fans, who defied Olympic organisers' request to stay away due to COVID-19, lined up the streets of Sapporo and cheered him on to the finish line.

Kipchoge was about to become only the third person ever to retain their Olympic marathon title, and cement his legacy. Smiling was his way of enjoying the race, he said later.

"That smile is the happiness," he said.

He waved at the fans as he came through the tape, slapped his chest and pumped his fist into the air.

"I have fulfilled the legacy by winning the marathon for the second time, back-to-back. I hope now to help inspire the next generation," he said.

Doubts crept in about his ability to retain the Olympic title he won five years ago in Rio de Janeiro, after he suffered a rare defeat in October's London marathon.