

Health Ministry Announced on Tuesday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic in Iran Increased to 124,423 With 167 More Iranians Killed by the Virus Over the Past 24 Hours

IRAN NEWS

Iran's Ambassador to Kabul Bahador Aminian Met and Held Talks With Ex-Chairman of Afghanistan's High Council for National Reconciliation Abdullah Abdullah on the Latest Developments in Afghanistan

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Iran Warns Over Tying Prisoner Exchange To Vienna Talks

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's foreign minister says any potential prisoner exchange process should not be tied to the ongoing talks in Vienna that are looking into the likelihood of removal of the US's oppressive sanctions against the Islamic Republic.

"Iran considers the issue of the prisoners to be [an issue that lies] in the humanitarian category. We are not inclined for this issue to be tied to the nuclear talks," Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said on Tuesday.

The top diplomat made the remarks during a telephone conversation with the United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

Amir-Abdollahian rated as "positive" talks between Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Ali Baqeri-Kani and the European Union's deputy foreign policy chief Enrique Mora, who was paying a visit to Tehran to discuss, among other things, the future of the Vienna talks.

Baqeri-Kani and Mora would keep up their negotiations in Brussels the next week, the foreign minister said, and noted that Iran welcomed whatever talks that would bring along tangible results for the Islamic Republic.

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Enemies to Rue Any Adventurism Against Iran

TEHRAN (PressTV) - A senior commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) says Iran will continue the path towards attaining self-sufficiency and becoming more powerful, stressing the country will give a harsh response to any adventurism "at any level and by any regime or group" which will make them regret.

"Today, some countries that went to [ask for the support of] the Zionist regime (Israel) after they were disappointed by the United States, and think that their security will be guaranteed by this regime are completely wrong. Israel is not even capable of maintaining its own security," Commander of the IRGC Aerospace Division Brigadier General Amir Ali Hajizadeh said in a Monday meeting with military attaches of foreign countries in Tehran.

"Therefore, if governments and nations have the will, they can end four decades of insecurity and widespread wars in the region through [promotion of] local, internal and regional security," he added.

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President Calls for Unity Among Muslim Nations



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi called on Muslim nations to strengthen their unity and establish stronger relations, saying they should avoid any statement or measure that may create rifts within their ranks.

Speaking at the opening ceremony of the 35th International Conference on Islamic Unity in Tehran on Tuesday, Raisi paid homage to the late secretary general of the World Forum for Proximity of Islamic Schools of Thought, Ayatollah Mohammad Ali Taskhiri, and former commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) General Qassem Soleimani, who was assassinated by the U.S. last year.

Raisi said General Soleimani's strides and Ayatollah Taskhiri's scientific steps worked to erase any doubts and deviations in the Muslim world, and effectively fostered unity and cohesion among Muslims.

He described the proximity of Islamic schools of thought as an essentially strategic approach for the entire Muslim world to adopt, describing Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as the pivot of unity among Muslims.

Raisi also urged Muslim nations to stay away from discord and division and to avoid any divisive remarks and statements.

The Iranian president also urged the Muslim Ummah to exert efforts to liberate themselves from the yoke of the global arrogance, slamming hegemonic powers for attempting to sow the seeds of discord among Islamic nations.

"After World War II, the hegemonic system faced only one sole power, and that was the Islamic system. It, therefore, placed on agenda various threats forming Takfiri groups, arming and funding the outfits in order to plunder Muslim nations, provoking divisions among Muslims, and installing weak government that pursue their own interests, rather than those of the Muslim world," Raisi stated.

He added, "They desecrated holy sites, created divisions among Muslim nations, exploited scholars, and disregarded the potentials of Muslims and the issue of Palestine as the Islamic Republic's most important matter."

Raisi warned attempts to shift attention away from the Palestinian issue, saying the Muslim world should not allow the subject to be sidelined.

He also urged Muslim states to use Islamic awakening to stand up against ignorance, imperialism, and terrorist groups such as Daesh.

Raisi said U.S. officials, including former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, had admitted to Washington's key role in the creation of Daesh.

"Conspiracies are now unfolding in Lebanon and Afghanistan, as was the case previously in Iraq and Syria. It is very important to notice such plots, and the enlightenment of Muslim scholars will protect the youth against them," he noted. He called for closer scientific, cultural and media cooperation among Muslim countries.

Raisi also reiterated Iran's preparedness to help boost efforts to eradicate corruption, poverty, terrorism, insecurity and instability in the Islamic world.

"We seek to ensure stability in Islamic countries, as opposed to the enemy, which tries to create instability. We believe unity is the strategy that the Islamic community should adopt, but the enemy's strategy is to sow discord," he said.

The 35th International Conference on Islamic Unity kicked off in Tehran on Tuesday, and hundreds of Muslim scholars and thinkers from around the world are participating in the international event.

Several dozen guests are in the Iranian capital in person, while the rest are attending the six-day conference virtually.

Forging peace and unity in the Muslim world and refraining from discord and conflict are the main themes. Fighting extremism and terrorism and promoting respect among different schools of thought are some of the topics that will be highlighted.

The idea of holding the annual event was initiated by Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei.

Exports to ECO Member States up by 80% in H1

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Spokesman for Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) announced that Iran's exports to Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) member states registered an 80% increase between Mar. 21 and Aug. 21.

Iran's trade 15,307,000 tons of goods valued at \$7,255,000,000 with ECO member states during the first six months of the current Iranian of 1400 (from March 21 to August 21), which showed a 67% and 60% growth in weight and in the value of traded goods, respectively compared to the same period of last year, said the Spokesman for IRICA Seyyed Rouhollah Latifi on Tuesday. "Out of a total of 15,306,916 tons of traded goods, 12, 878,839 tons of goods worth \$4,555,123,472 was the share of our country's exports to ECO while was 2,428,078 tons worth \$2,700,106,929 dollars was the share of imports from 9 ECO member countries to Iran," Latifi added.

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Iran Not to Fall Apart Under Pressure

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

The West and especially the U.S. is gradually coming to its sense that the Islamic Republic of Iran is not a country to fall apart under pressure and those countries have to respect the Islamic establishment because Iran is now a powerful regional country and it is even one of the most influential countries in the world.

Since 1979 and the establishment of the Islamic Republic in Iran, the U.S. and its allies have tried to put the country under different types of pressures, mostly under economic sanctions, but they have failed to achieve anything but making Iran more powerful and independent.

Every time some Western politicians or political bodies and institutions acknowledge that Iran will not bow to the aliens' pressure at any cost but unfortunately the U.S. and its allies do not want to accept this reality and they continue insisting on their stupid strategy of stepping up pressure.

Recently a report published in the U.S. media revealed the true power of the Islamic Republic of Iran and failure of the West in bringing down this Islamic state.

A panel of experts at John Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) has recently listed U.S. miscalculations about Iran, saying the Islamic Republic is "extremely unlikely" to fall apart under foreign pressure and sanctions.

SAIS's RETHINKING IRAN project has outlined "core policy principles" with regard to Iran, saying "it aims to provide the policy community with the most academically grounded analysis of contemporary Iran".

"We are particularly focused on the effects of sanctions on Iranian society and the necessity for a 'reexamination' of sanctions policy rooted in sober social science," the panel said.

"We hope to reach a bi-partisan audience through our work, particularly those officials who do not believe that the cruel effects of sanctions on the lives of everyday Iranians were precisely the goal of enacting such sanctions in the first place," it said.

"We also contend that another U.S.-led war in the Middle East is clearly not in the American national interest," it added.

The academic initiative lists ten "core policy principles" related to America's Iran policy, saying many of these principles are applicable irrespective of the outcome of the current negotiations to return the U.S. to a 2015 nuclear deal with Iran.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran has proven to have a uniquely durable capacity to survive in comparison to other revolutionary" establishments, the panel said, noting that it is "extremely unlikely to fall apart as a result of foreign pressure, either by means of kinetic intervention, sanctions or support of opposition organizations".

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Iran Wants Pakistan To Lift Covid Travel Ban

LAHORE (Dispatches) - Iran has urged Pakistan to remove it from category C of its Covid-19-related travel restrictions, as the ban is not only affecting the flight operations but also bilateral trade between the two countries.

"Pakistan has retained Iran in category C in terms of coronavirus restrictions, which is adversely affecting flight operations and bilateral trade between the two countries," Iranian Consul General Muhammad Raza Nazri said while speaking to the business community here at the Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Following directions of the National Command and Operation Centre, the government revised its inbound air/land travel categories in June, keeping Iran, India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Indonesia, Iraq, the Maldives, Nepal, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, South Africa, Tunisia, Bolivia, Chile, Columbia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Namibia, Paraguay, Peru, Trinidad, Tobago and Uruguay in category C and imposing a ban on people travelling to Pakistan from these countries.

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6m More Doses of COVID19 Vaccines Imported

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's Red Crescent Society (IRCS) on Tuesday delivered the 28th consignment of imported COVID-19 vaccines, containing 6 million doses, to the Health Ministry.

Head of Iran's Red Crescent Society (IRCS) Karim Hemmati said that the IRSC has imported five consignments consisting of 30 million doses of vaccine in the past ten days.

He added that some 82,390,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccine were imported so far.

Iran, Russia to Strengthen Defense-Military Ties

MOSCOW (IRNA) - Iran's Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Baqeri, who is on a visit to Moscow, held a meeting with Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and both sides highlighted the need to strengthen military-defense ties.

Both sides, assessed the level of bilateral ties between the two countries, especially in the military field, as favorable and emphasized strengthening cooperation.

The meeting, which followed General Baqeri's meetings with senior Russian defense and military officials, the two sides expressed interest to improve bilateral ties.

During the meeting, they discussed bilateral ties between the Russian and Iranian armed forces and the military agreement that would be signed.

Iran's Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Baqeri announced in Moscow on Monday that Iran-Russia Joint Military Commission will convene three months from now.

Major General Baqeri made the remarks yesterday in a joint press conference after meeting with his Russian counterpart, General Valery Gerasimov.

"In the meeting of the Iran-Russia Joint Commission, mutual cooperation in defensive, security, and academic fields will be in the agenda and reviewed," he reiterated.

He said that in his meeting with General Gerasimov, cooperation between the armed forces of Iran and Russia, and a contract on cooperation in this field were discussed.



"In the meeting, we surveyed the grounds of bilateral cooperation in defense and security fields," said the Iranian high brass commander, adding that the Iranian armed forces have broad programs to implement with the Russian side during the upcoming year.

Major General Baqeri, meanwhile, said that his talks with his Russian counterpart were on various issues, including Iran's membership at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Israel's terrorist acts in Syria, the Caucasus region and Karabakh ceasefire, and Afghanistan and the need for the establishment of an all-encompassing government there. "The security threats posed by the ISIS terrorists need to be harnessed before pouring out of that country," said Major General Baqeri.

Major Baqeri started a tour of Russia on Sunday.

Iran Serious About Nuclear Talks, Sanctions Must Be Removed

TEHRAN (IFP) - President Ebrahim Raisi has reaffirmed Tehran's readiness for talks aimed at reviving the Iran nuclear deal known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, JCPOA.

In an interview with the IRIB, Raisi said Iran is serious about result-based negotiations, noting that the sign of seriousness on the part of the other side is the removal of sanctions on Iran.

He however noted that his administration will not tie people's livelihoods and the Iranian economy to the nuclear talks. Raisi said Iran has never walked away from the negotiating table and is ready for talks.

The president referred to his promise before the formation of his cabinet to pursue the issue, saying the Foreign Ministry is now doing just that.

Raisi reiterated that Iran sticks by its word and that it conveyed this message to the envoy of the European Union. Elsewhere in his comments, the Iranian president spoke of the country's membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, SCO. Raisi said Iran's access to the SCO linked the country to the economic infrastructure of Asia and that all economic activists should avail themselves of this potential.

He added that Iran has a good capacity for increasing exports to the region, including neighboring countries. Raisi said Iran's current economic standing in regional trade is not good, adding that strengthening ties with neighboring and regional countries is a priority and "I want all economic activists to be ready for a different movement in economic and trade ties in the region".

Asked about his appointment of a special envoy for Afghanistan and Iran's stance on the developments in the war-ravaged country, Raisi said, "As we have said before, we support the formation of an inclusive government with the participation of all ethnic groups in Afghanistan".

He however noted that, apart from the need to create a broad-based government, what matters now is the presence of the Daesh terror group in Afghanistan as a creation of the US.

The president said this "U.S.-made group" is destabilizing Afghanistan but our strategy regarding Afghanistan is to establish unity and stability there. Raisi noted that Daesh is sowing sedition in different countries including Afghanistan.

He also urged Afghanistan's rulers to stand up to the terrorist group's crimes against the Afghan people.

Iran at Forefront of War on Drugs

TEHRAN (IFP) - Iran's interior minister says the country ranks first in the fight against illicit drugs and attaches great importance to the campaign against narcotics.

Ahmad Vahidi added Iran has been engaged in the fight against drugs for several decades.

He explained that drug-trafficking is a lucrative business, so those involved will not easily give up this illegal trade.

"The [drug] mafia gains tremendous economic profits from it and, hence, will not abandon it easily," said the minister.

He lashed out at some international banks which refuse to deal with the drug money deposited there.

"This is one of the issues which we seriously criticize. Why don't they tackle the [drug] money circulating at global

banks and easily changing hands?" he asked rhetorically.

He then lambasted the United States for failing to deal with drug production and smuggling in Afghanistan.

"The Americans were in Afghanistan for 20 years and had a heavy military and security presence there. ... They killed women and children, but did not prevent the cultivation of narcotics," he added.

The minister explained that, ironically enough, drug production increased in Afghanistan during the US presence there, so much so that it grew by 30-40 times during that period.

"They (the Americans) are accused, but they are not taken to task," he said.

Tehran, Baghdad to Pursue Assassination Case of Soleimani, al-Muhandis

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Head of the Iranian Supreme Court Ahmad Mortazavi Moghadam has emphasized that a joint committee of Iraq and Iran should pursue the case of assassination of top Iranian and Iraqi anti-terror commanders by a common enemy.

Iranian Quds Force commander Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani along with Iraqi senior commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis was martyred in a U.S. airstrike at Baghdad International Airport on January 3, 2020.

According to eadl.ir, Mortazavi Moghadam made the remark in a meeting with Iraqi Minister of Justice Salar Abdul Sattar Muhammad.

The Iraqi minister, heading a delegation, arrived in Tehran on Monday to discuss ways to reinforce bilateral legal and judicial relations between the two neighboring countries.

The Iranian official said that unity between Iraq and Iran can help the two nations overcome the grief of losing these two important figures and that a joint committee would be able to bring the perpetrators and those behind such a heinous act of terrorism to justice.

The Iraqi minister, for his part, underlined that his country is committed to implement bilateral judicial agreements, including extradition of criminals. Salar Abdul Sattar Muhammad also met his Iranian counterpart Amin Hossein Rahimi on Monday. The four-day visit comes in response to the last-year visit of the then Iranian Judiciary Chief Ebrahim Raisi and former Justice Minister Alireza Avaei to Iraq.

Paying a visit to Imam Reza (AS) Holy Shrine in Mashad, Khorasan Razavi, northeastern Iran, is among the Iraqi minister's agenda during his stay in Iran.

Qalibaf Calls for Closer Economic Ties With Venezuela

TEHRAN (IFP) – Majlis Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf has called for enhanced economic cooperation with Venezuela.

"It is the duty of the governments and parliaments of Iran and Venezuela to pave the way for the expansion of cooperation by bringing the private sectors of the two countries closer together," Qalibaf said in a meeting with Venezuelan Foreign Minister Felix Plasencia in Tehran on Monday evening.

"Political ties between the two countries are at a good level, so we should try to strengthen economic relations accordingly; although the long distance has made it (boosting economic ties) a bit difficult... problems can be solved," the Iranian parliament speaker told the visiting Venezuelan foreign minister.

Qalibaf referred to the experiences of the Islamic Republic in countering sanctions imposed by the United States against Iranians stressing that Tehran and Caracas should boost cooperation in the fields of tourism, agriculture, technical services and engineering.

The Venezuelan foreign minister said Caracas is interested in strengthening economic relations with Tehran adding that a meeting of the joint economic commission of Iran and Venezuela in the coming months will help strengthen bilateral economic ties.

Iran, Pakistan FMs Talk Afghanistan on the Phone

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian has held talks with his Pakistani counterpart Shah Mahmood Qureshi over the phone, with Afghanistan topping the agenda of the talks.

In this telephone conversation, the Iranian foreign minister invited his Pakistani counterpart to attend a meeting of foreign ministers of Afghanistan's neighbors in Tehran.

Shah Mahmood Qureshi thanked for the invitation and stressed that the meeting is a joint initiative of the two countries to ensure peace and stability in Afghanistan and its holding is important for the Afghan people.

Amir Abdollahian expressed regret over the recent terrorist incidents in Afghanistan, which led to the killing of worshipers in this country. Amir Abdollahian condemned these terrorist acts and stressed the need for all neighboring countries of Afghanistan and other world nations to condemn them.

In other remarks, the Iranian foreign minister also spoke of the responsibility of the rulers of Afghanistan to ensure the Afghan people's security and to effectively confront the actions of terrorist groups.

The top Pakistani diplomat also said in the telephone conversation that the Pakistani government condemns these terrorist acts in Afghanistan. Shah Mahmood Qureshi expressed hope that the rulers of Afghanistan will take necessary actions and prevent the terrorist groups from gaining a foothold in Afghanistan.

U.S.' Lebanon Plot Failing

TEHRAN (IFP) - A senior Iranian military commander says the United States has incurred defeat in its recent conspiracy for Lebanon.

"These days we are seeing the United States' retreat and its last months of presence in Iraq. We are seeing their failure in the dangerous Lebanon project," said Major General Hossein Salami, the commander in chief of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC).

"We are seeing the enemy has failed to achieve its objectives in Syria. We are seeing that the enemy has failed to reach the objectives it has pursued in imposing sanctions on Iran, and we are seeing the enemy's political and economic blockade on our country has failed," said the top commander.

He then touched upon late Iranian general Qassem Soleimani, who was assassinated by the US in Iraq in January 2020.

He said the movement of Iran's Islamic Revolution and its military drive not only does not stop with the martyrdom of such great people, but gains momentum as well.

"Today, we are seeing this momentum all across the region where a resistance front has emerged to fight colonialism and hegemony in order to restore Muslims' rights," said the top commander.

"You are seeing the conspicuous retreats of our enemies and major powers from the region," he said.

Gov't Resumes Issuing Visas For Foreigners From October 23

TEHRAN (IFP) - Iran will in a few days resume issuance of tourist visas for foreigners after a 19-month halt, due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Ezzatollah Zarghami announced the news after a meeting with Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian and Health Minister Bahram Einollahi on Tuesday.

"After numerous meetings of government officials and experts ... the issuance of tourist visas will be resumed from October 23," Zarghami said.

The minister added that the guidelines on how to issue the visas are prepared based on health protocols. He called on his colleagues and all occupational associations involved in visits by foreign tourists to seriously follow the protocols and make sure no one neglects them.

"Unfortunately, despite historical, natural, pilgrimage, health, educational and other advantages and [tourist] attractions, we never had the standing we deserved in the world and over this period, the coronavirus disease worsened things," he said.

Iran suspended issuance of visas for foreign tourists in March 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic, except for visitors who sought to come to the country for treatment, trade and education.

Zarghami now says, based on a directive by President Ebrahim Raisi, issuance of visas will resume starting from October 23.

Iran Criticizes Policies of Western Countries Regarding Immigrants

TEHRAN (IP) - Criticizing the policies of some Western countries, the ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Belgium said that countries that had closed their doors to refugees cannot expect neighboring countries to keep their gates open to immigrants.

Gholamhossein Dehqani, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Belgium, participated in a webinar on "The Consequences of the Situation in Afghanistan for the Silk Road and its Outlook".

Daesh Terrorism Aims to Sow Religious Discord in Afghanistan

TEHRAN (pressTV) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian says Daesh attacks in Afghanistan are aimed at sowing religious discord in the crisis-hit country, urging the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to condemn such attacks.

In a phone call with OIC Secretary General Yousef al-Othaimeen on Monday, Amir-Abdollahian said extremist groups are among the most important challenges facing the region.

Pointing to the acts of terrorism by Daesh in Afghanistan, he threw Iran's weight behind more active role of the OIC, particularly its chief, in dealing with the ongoing problems in the war-ravaged country.

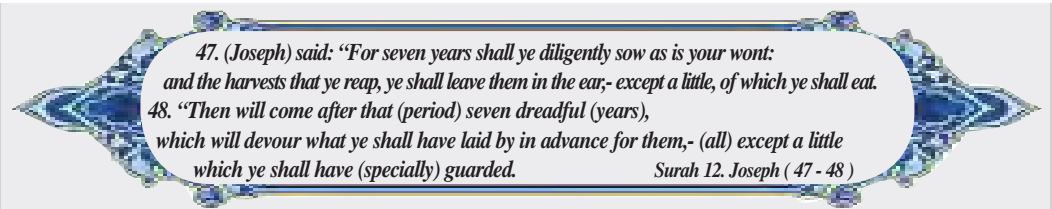
He emphasized that the OIC chief and its members should condemn Daesh inhumane measures, including the Takfiri group's recent "terrorist and criminal" attacks at two mosques in the Afghan cities of Kunduz and Kandahar.

More than 60 people were killed in three back-to-back explosions that hit the Bibi Fatima mosque during Friday prayers, one of the biggest blasts in Kandahar. It came just a week after a bomb attack killed more than 150 people and left scores of others injured at a Shia mosque in the northeastern city of Kunduz.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	11:49
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:41
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:52
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:16



Tehran, Caracas to Launch Their Own SWIFT System

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Iran's former ambassador to Venezuela says Iran has no limitation in legal cooperation with Venezuela and both countries benefit it and Iran is determined to expand its co-operations with this Latin American state.

Speaking to ILNA and touching upon the oil trade between Iran and Venezuela, Ahmad Sobhani said Venezuela is a friendly country to Iran and despite there is a geographical distance, in the new trade era, the geographical distance does not hinder these relations, adding that Iran will sell and export its products to any part of the world which is economy wise and its products have customers. He noted that oil trade is a known and legal trade in the international laws even if it is accompanied with the illegal U.S. sanctions.

Sobhani went on to say that the oil trade with Venezuela should have begun 10 years ago, adding that Venezuela is a heavy oil producing country which needs to distillate its oil in the refineries for consumption and for this reason it can be mixed with the gas condensate which will have better market and better value added. Therefore it is natural that Iran as a country with having the most condensate reserves takes advantage of it and cooperates with Venezuela in order to resolve Venezuela's heavy oil problem and to create value added from its condensates and to consume it in the market, he added.

On the launch of SWIFT system between the two countries, he said it is natural that when both countries facing illegal U.S. sanctions, they seek ways for transfer of money in different ways like using national currencies. Sobhani said of course Iran has no difficult condition in ties with Venezuela like in the past because actually sanctions in the early stages can have devastating effects but after their prolongation, ways are found for making the sanctions ineffective, noting that by the way when sanctions are lifted, both countries can use the innovated ways which cost lower.

Touching upon Venezuela Foreign Minister's visit to Tehran on Monday, the former diplomat said soon Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro will pay a visit to Tehran and before his arrival in Tehran, the road-map for a 20-year cooperation

between Tehran and Caracas will be drawn up to be signed during Madura's visit.

Sobhani pointed to the positive effects of trade between the two states and said Venezuela is a country with 30m population and rich in underground resources and it is a good market for Iranian products in the fields of industry, medicines and food-stuff, and due to the presence of contractors, Iran has good experience in the construction and mining sectors of Venezuela and it can continue exporting technical and engineering services to Venezuela. He reiterated that economic crisis in Venezuela have been alleviated and now the economic condition has improved and it provides new opportunity for presence of Iran in the technical and engineering sector of this country.

He went on to say that Canadian, Australian and American companies which were active in the mines of Venezuela have left the country and it is good opportunity for Iranian companies to enter into Venezuela for a win-win cooperation in mining sector.

He then explained oil cooperation between the two states based on their 20-year road-map and said Iran and Venezuela are two oil partners and are both of the founders of the OPEC and their economies are very similar. He went on to say that today Venezuela's oil industry needs reconstruction and Iran can help it due to its experience gained during forty years of sanctions.

Sobhani reiterated that in the past when Iran faced sanctions on importing gasoline, it imported it from Venezuela and now that Venezuela is under sanctions and has faced gasoline shortage, Iran due to its self-sufficiency in gasoline production has exported several ships of gasoline to Venezuela.

Contracts Worth 22,000b Rials Signed For Indigenizing Auto Parts

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Deputy Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade and Head of Industrial Development and Renovation Organization of Iran (IDRO) says some contracts worth over 22,000b rials have been signed for indigenizing the auto parts which will save the country some 56m euros per year.



Speaking at the ceremony of the fifth desk of developing and deepening domestic production of the auto part, Mr. Mohsen Salehinia said that the value of the contracts signed in this desk is over 22,000b rials that indigenization of these auto parts will save the country 56m euros per year.

He said these contracts have been signed between 23 capable domestic companies for indigenization of 33 project-parts in the productions of two major domestic auto-making companies.

Referring to the joint planning of the ministry and IDRO for employing capacities of auto-part making and knowledge-based companies, he expressed hope that with materialization of indigenizing the auto parts they can reach the qualitative and quantitative goals and rise in the supply and production of cars in the current and next year.

According to Salehinia, so far in the past four desks, 154 part-projects worth 4,460b have been indigenized in mass circulation which helped the country save 341m annually.

Tehran to Host Int'l Electricity Exhibition

TEHRAN (MNA) - The 21st Iran International Electricity Exhibition (IEE 2021) is scheduled to be held during October 29-November 1.

Over 245 domestic companies along with 11 foreign exhibitors from China, Italy, Turkey, Canada, Germany, France, and Japan are set to participate in the current year's exhibition which is going to be held at Tehran Permanent International Fairgrounds.

The exhibition covers a variety of areas including lighting, wire and cable, electrical panels, electrical equipment, automation and instrumentation systems, and transmission lines. Due to the special conditions created by the coronavirus pandemic, the exhibit will be only open for scholars and experts and also businessmen active in the mentioned industry.

The exhibition will be held in full compliance with safety standards and protocols.

The exhibition is a great opportunity for companies active in the electricity industry, to showcase their achievements and products to the experts and people involved in the mentioned fields, and to direct their future activities and innovations by considering the market demand trends and the direction of growth of this industry.

Over 6.7m Tons of Steel Products Produced in H1

TEHRAN (MNA) - Over 6.768 million tons of steel products was produced in Iran during the first half of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-September 21).

As reported, the six-month output indicates a nine-percent fall as compared to the figure for the same period of time in the past year, which was a result of constant power outages in the country.

After the withdrawal of the United States from Iran's nuclear deal, the Islamic Republic has faced sanctions in various industries, including steel sector.

The United States has sanctioned entities and individuals associated with Iran's steel industry.

In early January, the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) added twelve Iranian producers of steel and other metal products to the list of sanctions.

However, at that time, the U.S. experts said that the Islamic Republic of Iran had resisted the so-called U.S. maximum pressure policy for the past three years, and the Trump administration had failed to achieve any of its goals in the face of sanctions against Iran.

PGSOC Bags Another Accolade for Social Responsibility

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Persian Gulf Star Oil Company (PGSOC) received the medal of ambassador and promoting social responsibility due to its outstanding performance in the field of social responsibility.

According to reports, PGSOC garnered another accolade and this time in the First Festival of the Public Relations and Corporate Social Responsibility and it was honored with the medal of ambassador and promoting social responsibility award.

The jury of the festival presented the award to the company after evaluating the company's performance in the social responsibility related field.

The festival was aimed at improving the social

responsibility activities of the companies and organizations.

PGSOC has always been a pioneer in fulfilling the social responsibilities while it does its innate task of providing the fuel for Islamic Iran.

The company has donated some equipment needed by the medical centers or by the ICU wards of the hospitals especially during the pandemic era.

CEO of the company Mr. Mohammad Ali Dadvar received the award for the company's outstanding performance in the social responsibility field.



ESCO, MSC on Course to Increasing Cooperation, Interaction

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – On the eve of the Unity Week, the CEO of Esfahan Steel Company (ESCO) and his assistants paid a visit to the site of martyrs of Mobarakeh Steel Company (MSC) and after paying homage, they met the CEO of MSC and his assistants and discussed and exchanged views on boosting bilateral cooperation in the field of steel industry.

According to reports, in this sincere meeting, the CEO of Mobarakeh Steel Company Mr. Mohammad Yaser Tayebnia pointed to the role of the synergy of these two veteran and giant steelmakers and said that birth and formation of big complexes like ESCO, MSC and their affiliate companies is the outcome of the long-term and strategic thought of managers who have tried to launch such big important industrial centers in the past years for the next generations despite facing limitation of resources.

He stated that in fact saving the industry, progress and development of the country needs a national approach and if we in the management seats of these two mother industries do



not pursue the same trans-regional and national approaches, in the future we will face organizational conflicts and inefficiency in fulfilling our role and great responsibility for advancing the national goals in the field of steel industry.

Tayebnia called ESCO and MSC as the two giant steelmakers in a joint geographical region and said that apart

from existing problems, both companies can define joint projects through cooperation of managers of these two states and it can earn them increasing interests. He stated that although so far there have been interactions for daily activities, they can earn more joint synergic interests through cooperation.

Then the CEO of ESCO Mr. Mansour Yazdizadeh pointed to the joint interests of these two important industries of the country and said they are considered as the reference to the national steel industries and can support each other in different fields which lead to protecting the total interest of the national steel industry.

He then pointed to some fields that the two companies can cooperate and interact together for attaining more collective value added and both companies can enjoy it.

Chadormalu Wins Highest Medal of Social Responsibility

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Chadormalu Mining and Industrial Company due to its effective services in the field of activities won the plaque and medal of ambassador and promoting social responsibility which was presented to the CEO of the company Eng. Naser Taghizadeh.

In the first Festival of Public Relations and Corporate Social Responsibility which was held at IRIB's Press Conference on Monday, Taghizadeh received the award for the effective performance of the company in fulfilling its social responsibility.

Meanwhile the public relations of the company was honored with the highest medal of social responsibility.



KSC Receives Highest Medal of Corporate Social Responsibility



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – Khuzestan Steel Company won the highest medal of social responsibility during the First Festival of Public Relations and Corporate Social Responsibility which was held on Monday in presence of Vice-President on the Executive Affairs Mr. Seyed Solat Mortezaei, caretaker of Imam Khomeini (R) Relief Committee Mr. Bakhtiari, Head of Iran Chamber of Cooperatives Mr. Bahman Abdollahi and some of managers of companies and organizations.

In the festival and with invitation of 30 organizations and companies they were honored after their performances were evaluated by the jury and they were feted with the highest medals of social responsibility and medals of ambassador and promoter of social responsibility.

The goal behind holding this event is to help the excellence of social responsibility activities in the organizations and their optimization, and evaluation of the organizations and companies were carried out in three categories of developing, developed and pioneer.

At the end of the festival, the organizers honored the CEO of Khuzestan Steel Company Mr. Amin Ebrahimi and head of public republications of the company Mr. Gholamreza Forooghi Nia was feted with award for promoting social responsibility. Deputy Head of the public relations of the company Mr. Vali Mehdipoor received the award on behalf of Forooghi Nia.

Colin Powell Dies of Covid-19 Complications

WASHINGTON (AFP) - Colin Powell, a U.S. war hero and the first Black secretary of state who saw his legacy tarnished when he made the case for war in Iraq in 2003, has died from complications from Covid-19. He was 84.

"We have lost a remarkable and loving husband, father, grandfather and a great American," the family said in a statement posted to social media on Monday.

The retired four-star general and former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff who served four presidents made his reputation as a man of honor distant from the political fray -- an asset in the corridors of power.



Air Strikes Hit Capital of Ethiopia's Tigray

ADDIS ABABA (Dispatches) - Ethiopian forces hit the northern city of Mekele with air strikes on Monday, humanitarian officials and diplomats told AFP, the first reported bombing raids over the Tigrayan capital since the early stages of the year-long war.

Air raids were reported inside and outside Mekele, the regional capital held by the Tigray People's Liberation Front since it was recaptured from government forces in June.

"Air strike now in Mekele," one humanitarian official in the city said via SMS to AFP on condition of anonymity, describing attacks also confirmed by a second humanitarian source, two diplomats and a rebel spokesman.



Russia Closes NATO Missions As Ties Plunge to New Low



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia said Monday it was suspending its mission to NATO and closing the alliance's offices in Moscow, as relations with the Western military bloc plunged to new depths.

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov announced the moves after NATO expelled several members of Moscow's delegation to the alliance for alleged spying. "Following certain measures taken by NATO, the basic conditions for common work no longer exist," Lavrov told reporters in Moscow. He said Moscow was suspending the work of its official mission to NATO in Brussels, including its military representative, from around November 1.

Russia was also shutting down the alliance's liaison mission in the Belgian embassy in Moscow, set up in 2002, and the NATO information office set up in 2001 to improve understanding between NATO and Russia.

"NATO has already greatly reduced its contacts with our mission," Lavrov said, adding that the alliance is "not interested in dialogue and work as equals". "We see no reason to pretend that any change is possible in the foreseeable future."

Lavrov said that in case of urgent matters NATO could liaise via the Russian ambassador in Belgium.

NATO spokeswoman Oana Lungescu said the alliance had noted Lavrov's comments but had not received "official communication on the issues he raised."

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas described the announcement as "more than regrettable" and said it would prolong "icy relations" between Russia and NATO. "We are ready for dialogue, but must realise that this is no longer the case with Moscow," Maas told journalists in Luxembourg.

The moves cut off years of efforts to improve ties between Russia and NATO that followed the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union.

They come after NATO earlier this month stripped eight members of Russia's mission to the alliance of their accreditation, with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg calling them "undeclared Russian intelligence officers".

"We have seen an increase in Russian malign activities, at least in Europe and therefore we need to act," Stoltenberg said at the time, describing the relationship between NATO and Russia as "at its lowest point since the end of the Cold War".

Russia had an observer mission to NATO as part of a two-decade-old NATO-Russia Council meant to promote cooperation in common security areas.

The Russian mission has been downsized before, when seven of its members were ejected after the 2018 Novichok poisoning of a Russian former double agent, Sergei Skripal, and his daughter in Britain.

Meetings of a NATO-Russia council have not been held since 2019 against the backdrop of the heightened tensions.

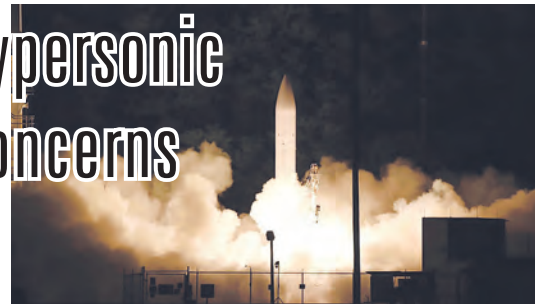
Russia's relationship with the West has been on a downward spiral since Moscow's 2014 annexation of Crimea from Ukraine and support for pro-Russian separatists in the country's east.

China Denies Testing Hypersonic Missile Amid Rising Concerns

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China said Monday its launch of a new spacecraft in August was merely a test to see whether the vehicle could be re-used, denying a Financial Times report that they had tested a rocket carrying a hypersonic missile, as the U.S. expressed concern about hypersonic missile technology and its potential military applications by China and Russia.

China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said on Monday the August launch involved a spacecraft rather than a missile and was of "great significance for reducing the use-cost of spacecraft and could provide a convenient and affordable way to make a round trip for mankind's peaceful use of space".

The Chinese official comments came after the Financial Times reported on Saturday that China had launched in August a rocket carrying a hypersonic glide vehicle that flew through space, circling the globe before cruising down toward its target, which it missed by about two dozen miles.



Azerbaijan Wants World Court to Order Armenia to Hand Over Landmine Maps

THE HAGUE (Dispatches) - Azerbaijan on Monday asked the World Court to order neighboring Armenia to hand over maps it says show the location of landmines on its territory, while the judges consider tit-for-tat claims that the other side violated an anti-discrimination treaty.

This time last year, Azeri troops drove ethnic Armenian forces out of swathes of territory they had controlled since the 1990s in and around the Nagorno-Karabakh region, before Russia brokered a ceasefire. Azeri Deputy Foreign Minister Elnur Mammadov told judges that the emergency measures sought were urgently needed to protect against the "dire threat" posed by what it says is Armenia's refusal to hand over the maps.

The alleged campaign of placing landmines "is quite simply a continuation of Armenia's decades-long ethnic cleansing operation and an attempt to keep these territories cleansed of Azerbaijanis", Mammadov said.

Armenia's agent before the court, Yeghishe Kirakosyan, dismissed the Azeri claims as "manufactured and defensive moves". He pointed out that Azerbaijan itself planted hundreds of thousands of landmines in the conflict area in the early 1990s.

Armenia has already handed over two minefield maps and "we stand ready to provide any more maps in our possession", Kirakosyan said.

Last week, Armenia also sought emergency measures from the World Court. Lawyers for Armenia told judges then that Azerbaijan promoted ethnic hatred against Armenians.

Azerbaijan rejected Armenia's claim and said that it was the other way around and that it was Armenia that carried out ethnic cleansing.

The requests for emergency measures are part of tit-for-tat cases filed at the World Court last month where both Armenia and Azerbaijan claimed the other country has violated the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, to which both states are signatories.

The hearings on Monday and last week do not go into the merits of the cases but instead deal with requests from both sides for emergency measures while the court considers the claims.

Thousands Protest in El Salvador Against President Bukele

SAN SALVADOR (Dispatches) - Thousands of people in El Salvador took to the streets on Sunday in protest against President Nayib Bukele, who has stoked concern that he is steadily concentrating power and who responded by changing his Twitter profile late in the day to "Emperor of El Salvador".

Local media estimated at least 4,000 people marched through capital San Salvador. They bore banners and signs decrying Bukele's ouster of Supreme Court judges, the potential for the president to seek a second consecutive term and the adoption of bitcoin as legal tender.

Bukele's apparent joke with his Twitter profile follows an update last month when he changed it to say "Dictator" of El Salvador.

Sunday's protesters chanted slogans including "What does El Salvador want? Get rid of the dictator!" Near the capital's main square, some set fire to an effigy bearing the likeness of the 40-year-old president.

It was at least the second large protest in just over a month, following marches in September that denounced bitcoin being made legal tender alongside the U.S. dollar.

In May, a Congress dominated for the first time by Bukele's New Ideas party voted to fire the judges on the constitutional panel of the Supreme Court, among the most senior jurists in the country, as well as the then-attorney general. Replacements seen as friendly to Bukele were swiftly voted in to replace them, which generated harsh criticism from the United States as well as top international rights groups.

Bukele's administration then came under fire from the United States after the Supreme Court judges ruled that the president could seek a second consecutive term, which Washington saw as unconstitutional.

"We are totally losing rights because today they do not respect the laws. Here, what's done is the will of Nayib," said Rosa Granados, a labor union member who participated in the protests. "If he raises his hand, all the deputies approve it and there is no law and no legal process that is respected," she added.

Bukele, a seasoned and often provocative user of social media, dismissed the protests as a "failure" on Twitter.

"The march is a failure and they know it.... Nobody believes them here anymore," he wrote.



Polish PM Warns EU Leaders of Threat To Bloc's Future

WARSAW (AFP) - Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki on Monday warned fellow EU leaders that the European Union risked unravelling if there was no "democratic control" over its institutions.

On the eve of a speech to the European Parliament, Morawiecki asked EU leaders to protect the sovereignty of member states and said Poland would remain a "loyal member" of the EU.

Poland's populist right-wing government has been at odds with the EU for years over controversial judicial reforms.

A ruling by the Polish Constitutional Court this month questioning parts of EU law has raised tensions further.

Writing to EU leaders ahead of a summit this week, Morawiecki wrote that the EU risked becoming a "centrally managed organism run by institutions deprived of democratic control".

He warned this was "a dangerous phenomenon that threatens the future of our union", saying: "We ought to be anxious".

"If we do not stop this phenomenon, all will feel its negative effects. Today it may concern just one country -- tomorrow, under a different pretext, another," he said.

But he added that "without imposing one's will on others, we can find a solution that will strengthen our European Union".

The letter comes in the wake of the ruling from Poland's Constitutional Court challenging the primacy of EU law.

The ruling was widely criticized by many EU members such as France and Germany but Hungary's nationalist Prime Minister Viktor Orban and far-right politicians across Europe defended it.

Analysts said it could be a first step towards Poland one day leaving the EU -- a process that would require the government to issue a formal notification of its desire to quit.

The court stated that parts of the EU treaties were "incompatible" with Poland's constitution and warned the EU's Court of Justice against interfering with the Polish judicial reforms wanted by the ruling Law and Justice (PiS) party.



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J, L.balcony
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Fully Furn

Shanon (adviser)

Jordan Villa (\$3000)
1000sq.m
5bdrs, S/p
S, J, & pkg
green yard
Fully Furn

Parsian

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Zaferanieh (\$2000) 200sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, S, J, balcony, F.F
Gheitarieh (\$2300) 240sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, S, J, balcony, F.F

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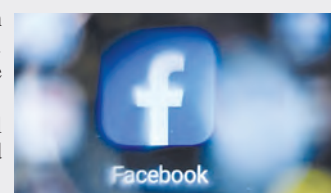
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Facebook Announces 10,000 EU Jobs to Build “Metaverse”

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Facebook on Monday announced plans to hire 10,000 people in the European Union to build the “metaverse”, a virtual reality version of the internet that the tech giant sees as the future. Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg has been a leading voice in Silicon Valley hype around the idea of the metaverse, which would blur the lines between the physical world and the digital one. The technology might, for example, allow someone to don virtual reality glasses that make it feel as if they’re face-to-face with a friend -- when in fact they are thousands of miles apart and connected via the internet.



China Growth Slows Further In Q3

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China’s economic growth slowed more than expected in the third quarter, official data showed Monday, as a crackdown on the property sector and a looming energy crisis began to bite.

After a swift coronavirus bounceback, recovery in the world’s second-biggest economy is losing steam, with gross domestic product expanding 4.9 percent on-year, said the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), citing an “unstable and uneven” domestic rebound.

The reading was just short of the 5.0 percent tipped by analysts polled by AFP -- and a sharp three percentage points off the April-June performance. NBS spokesman Fu Linghui told reporters Monday that “current international environment uncertainties are mounting and the domestic economic recovery is still unstable and uneven.”

The economy grew only 0.2 percent from the previous three months, the weakest since a historic contraction in the first quarter last year. “Growth was dragged down by a slowdown in real estate, amplified recently by spillover from Evergrande’s travails,” said Oxford Economics’ head of Asia economics Louis Kuijs. The struggles of property giant China Evergrande -- which is drowning in more than \$300 billion of debt -- has battered sentiment among prospective buyers.

A government regulatory clampdown on the real estate sector -- particularly the tightening of lending rules -- has dealt a severe blow to a crucial driver of economic growth, with a knock-on effect for other parts industries including construction.

Investors are now keeping a worried eye on developments in the Evergrande saga on concerns it could impact the wider economy. However, China’s central bank at the weekend reassured that any financial sector fallout would be controllable, while governor Yi Gang told a seminar Sunday that authorities were watching for problems like default risks “due to mismanagement and breakneck expansion” at some firms. In a sign of the ongoing weakness in the property market, home sales by value slumped 16.9 percent on-year last month, following a 19.7 percent fall in August, AFP calculations based on official data showed.

Kuijs also noted there was an “additional hit in September” from electricity shortages and production cuts caused by strict implementation of climate and safety targets by local governments. The added damage, he said, was visible in weaker industrial output, which slowed to 3.1 percent on-year.

“The weak third quarter GDP print reflected a combination of negative factors,” said Rajiv Biswas, Asia-Pacific chief economist at IHS Markit, including supply chain disruptions.

Analysts at Fidelity International said that while property fears were the “epicentre of the shock”, economic drag was being exacerbated by the power crunch, regional lockdowns and a “zero Covid” strategy that hit the services sector and disposable income.

“The only surprise in China’s published GDP figures is that they have not come in lower,” said Paras Anand, Fidelity’s Asia-Pacific chief investment officer. “Policy actions have been swift and have led to a collapse in global investor sentiment,” he said, though adding tightening measures have likely peaked for now.

Kuijs believed that although electricity shortages and production cuts will be controlled in the fourth quarter, “the pending real estate downturn will continue to weigh substantially on growth”. GDP is still expected to grow around eight percent for the whole year, People’s Bank of China governor Yi added.

The weak figure has added to speculation that officials will announce a cut in the amount of cash banks must keep in reserve, providing liquidity to the financial system, but they have to walk a fine line between supporting growth and keeping a lid on inflation.

There were bright spots, however, with retail sales rising 4.4 percent -- from 2.5 percent in August -- as virus containment measures were eased in the country, which has imposed local lockdowns over a few cases. While the urban unemployment rate dipped slightly at 4.9 percent, ING economist Iris Pang told AFP this year’s clampdown on private tutoring could also hit white-collar employment.

“There will be a lot of joblessness from these centres,” she warned, saying that the former staff might have to accept new jobs at lower wages, which would in turn hit spending. Officials have been concerned unemployment could cause social unrest after it hit a five-year high in February last year.

Toyota to Invest \$3.4b Into U.S. Battery Production

TOKYO (Dispatches) - The world’s biggest carmaker Toyota unveiled plans on Monday to invest \$3.4 billion into automotive batteries in the United States and build a factory in the country for their production.

The 10-year investment is part of a project announced last month by the Japanese firm to pour 1.5 trillion yen (\$13.1 billion) into the development and supply of batteries for electric vehicles as it pushes to make its production carbon-neutral.

“Toyota’s commitment to electrification is about achieving long-term sustainability for the environment, American jobs and consumers,” said Ted Ogawa, chief executive officer at Toyota Motor North America.



The company did not specify further details such as a site and production capacity but said it would establish a new company for the U.S. project.

In June, Toyota said it aimed to make its production carbon-neutral by 2035, replacing the previous target date of 2050.

Toyota is a pioneer of hybrid vehicles and autos using hydrogen fuel and is also stepping up its development of battery-powered electric cars.

Last year Japan’s former Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga set a 2050 deadline for the world’s third-largest economy to become carbon neutral, significantly firming up the country’s climate-change commitments.

The nation has struggled to cut carbon emissions after shutting down reactors following the 2011 meltdown at the Fukushima nuclear power plant.

U.S. Industrial Output Drops 1.3% in September

WASHINGTON (AFP) - Output by U.S. industries fell 1.3 percent last month amid continued supply constraints hindering manufacturing, the Federal Reserve reported Monday.

Declines were apparent across multiple categories, but stark in the auto sector, with production of motor vehicles and parts falling 7.2 percent “as shortages of semiconductors continued to hobble operations,” the central bank said. The drop came as a surprise as economists were forecasting a modest increase in industrial production.

And after reporting a gain in August that returned total output in the world’s largest economy to its pre-pandemic level, the Fed revised the data to instead show a decline.

Faced with ongoing supply bottlenecks, factory output fell 0.7 percent last month after a 0.4 percent drop in August according to the revised data.

Mining, including oil drilling, plunged 2.3 percent, while cooler weather contributed to the 3.6 percent drop in utilities output.

However, the report said some of the declines were due to the impact of Hurricane Ida, which caused flooding and destruction in parts of Louisiana and the northeastern United States.

“The lingering effects of Hurricane Ida more than accounted for the drop in mining in September; they also contributed 0.3 percentage point to the drop in manufacturing,” the report said. “Overall, about 0.6 percentage point of the drop in total industrial production resulted from the impact of the hurricane.”

Despite the declines, total output is 4.6 percent above September 2020.

However, industrial capacity in use declined sharply to 75.2 percent, a full point lower than in August.

Nord Stream 2 Fills First Line With Gas Ready for Export

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - The operator of the Russia-led Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline on the bed of the Baltic Sea said the first of the project’s two lines has been filled with so-called technical gas, while still awaiting clearance to start sales to Europe.

The pipeline, funded by Kremlin-owned energy giant Gazprom and its European partners, is expected to gain certification from a German regulator to begin commercial sales of natural gas, though the approval process could take several months.

About 177 million cubic meters of technical gas, needed to maintain pressure in the pipeline for future gas sales, has been pumped into the pipeline, reaching a pressure of 103 bar.

“This pressure is sufficient to start gas transportation in future,” the pipeline’s Swiss-based operator said in a statement.

Pre-commissioning steps for the second line are ongoing, it added.

The pipeline project has faced resistance from the United States, which says the pipeline will increase Europe’s reliance on Russian energy.

Russia has said Nord Stream 2, which is set to double Moscow’s annual gas export capacity in the Baltic to 110 billion cubic meters, could provide relief to the European gas market, which has been grappling with tight supplies and soaring prices.

Moscow says it has played no role in causing Europe’s surging gas prices, responding to accusations from the International Energy Agency (IEA) and some members of the European Parliament that Russia had not done enough to increase supplies to Europe.

Bank Indonesia To Hold Rates Until Late 2022

BENGALURU (Dispatches) - Indonesia’s central bank will hold interest rates steady next week to bolster the economy as activity stalled by the recent devastating COVID-19 wave gradually gathers pace, according to a Reuters poll of economists.

Since the onset of the pandemic, Bank Indonesia (BI) has slashed its benchmark seven-day reverse repurchase rate by 150 basis points to a record low 3.50% and injected liquidity worth more than \$57 billion. All 29 economists expected the rate to remain steady at the conclusion of BI’s Oct. 18-19 policy meeting.

Median forecasts from the poll, conducted over the past week, predicted interest rates will stay at their current 3.50% until the third quarter of next year, increasing by 50 basis points in the last quarter of 2022 to 4.00%. “As long as inflation remains weak and the currency remains broadly stable, then they are happy to keep monetary policy supportive to try and boost the recovery,” said Gareth Leather, senior Asia economist at Capital Economics.

Inflation, at 1.6% in September, has held below the central bank’s target range of 2% to 4% since mid-2020 and was expected to remain subdued this year. But it is seen rising next year, to 2.9%, and then 3.0% in 2023. The Indonesian rupiah has largely remained steady this year, down around 1% against a resurgent dollar. The recent rise in energy prices has also provided support as Indonesia is a major commodity exporter.

The central bank has remained cautious, hoping to avoid any backdraft from the U.S. Federal Reserve’s plans to taper its bond purchase program, likely starting next month. When the Fed last tapered in 2013, the rupiah depreciated more than 20%.

“In 2013, it was one of the fragile five currencies that got caught up in a big sell-off,” Leather said. “There’s a whole bunch of differences (now) all suggesting Indonesia won’t get caught up as badly as it did then.”

Indeed, analysts say Indonesia’s economy is on more solid footing. The current account deficit is relatively narrow, with BI’s own estimate at 0.6% to 1.4% of GDP for 2021.

The trade surplus touched an all-time high in August at \$4.7 billion but was expected to narrow to \$3.8 billion in September.

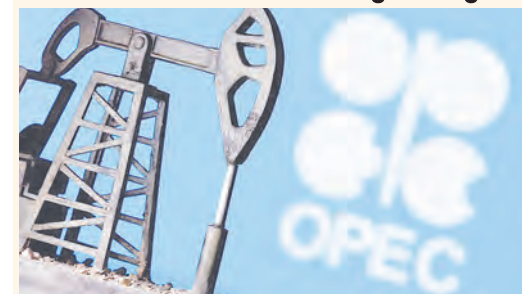
Indonesia’s economy expanded at the fastest pace in 17 years in the second quarter this year, breaking a four-quarter streak of contraction as a result of the pandemic.

But building optimism around the recovery was clouded by an outbreak in July - one of the worst resurgences of COVID-19 in Asia - that compelled authorities to re-impose restrictions.

Southeast Asia’s largest economy was predicted to grow 3.2% in the quarter just ended and 4.6% in this one, according to the latest Reuters poll. That is down from 4.7% and 4.8% expected in the last Reuters economic outlook poll taken in July, at the time of the outbreak.

The economy was expected to grow 3.4% this year and accelerate to 5.1% in 2022. Those forecasts were downgraded from earlier predictions of 4.3% and 5.2% respectively. Growth is forecast to remain steady at 5.1% in 2023, the poll showed.

OPEC+ Misses Target Again



LONDON (Reuters) - OPEC+ compliance with oil cuts fell slightly to 115% in September, sources said, indicating that as the alliance raises production targets, some members are still falling short as they face challenges in pumping more oil.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and allies led by Russia, or OPEC+ as the alliance is known, raised its output targets by 400,000 barrels per day (bpd) in September.

It has also agreed to raise them by a further 400,000 bpd in October and in November.

Underinvestment and maintenance problems have stymied efforts by Angola and Nigeria to raise output, an issue that is expected to continue impacting the West African producers in the near future.

Last week, Saudi Arabia, the defacto leader of OPEC, defended the policy of gradual production increases from OPEC+ despite calls from major consumers like the United States to add more barrels as oil prices rise.

Asked about calls OPEC+ to increase production further, Saudi energy minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman: “I keep telling people we are increasing production,” read more

Brent crude prices were trading near \$86 a barrel on Monday, a three-year high, buoyed by strong demand.

The International Energy Agency in its monthly report last week said OPEC+ spare capacity could fall to below 4 million bpd in the fourth quarter of 2022 from 9 million bpd in the first quarter of 2021.

Spare capacity will be concentrated in Middle East producers Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Iraq and Kuwait, the IEA said.

OPEC+ meets next on Nov. 4 to set policy for December.

Tehran Int’1 Short Film Festival Kicks Off

TEHRAN (IP) - The opening ceremony of the 38th Tehran International Short Film Festival was held on Tuesday in Iran Mall Cinema Complex.

The 38th Tehran International Short Film Festival is held every year in two sections; national and international.

Some 64 films from 32 countries will compete at the 38th

Tehran International Short Film Festival (TISFF) Award and the event’s \$2,000 Grand Prize.

Sadegh Mousavi, the festival secretary, said at the opening ceremony: “This year, we also received approval from the Academy Awards to be the third country in the Middle East and the seventh country in Asia to achieve this.”



Afghanistan-Wide Polio Vaccination Starts Next Month

KABUL (AFP) - Afghanistan will kick off its first countrywide polio immunization campaign in years next month to protect millions of unvaccinated children, the UN said Monday.

The United Nations’ health and children’s agencies said the campaign to vaccinate against the crippling and potentially fatal disease would begin on November 8, with full support from the Taliban leadership.

“WHO and UNICEF welcome the decision by the Taliban leadership supporting the resumption of house-to-house polio vaccination across Afghanistan,” they said in a statement.

Since the Taliban swept back into power two months ago, the UN had been talking with the group’s leadership to address the towering health challenges in the country, the statement said.

“The Taliban leadership has expressed their commitment for the inclusion of female frontline workers,” it said.

Afghanistan’s new rulers had also committed to “providing security and assuring the safety of all health workers across the country, which is an essential prerequisite for the implementation of polio vaccination campaigns,” the agencies said.

That marks a dramatic about-face from the Islamists’ position during their years of insurgency against the ousted Western-backed government.

Due in large part to Taliban opposition to door-to-door vaccination campaigns, which they suspected were being used to spy on their activities, no campaigns with countrywide reach have been carried out in over three years.

Taliban leaders often told communities in areas they controlled that vaccines were a Western conspiracy aimed at sterilising Muslim children.

The UN agencies said next month’s campaign would aim to reach 9.9 million children under five -- more than a third of them in regions that had long been inaccessible to vaccinators.

A second nationwide polio vaccination campaign had also been agreed upon and would be synchronised with a campaign planned in neighboring Pakistan in December, they said.

“This is an extremely important step in the right direction,” WHO Representative in Afghanistan Dapeng Luo said in the statement.

“Sustained access to all children is essential to end polio for good.”

Afghanistan and Pakistan are the only countries where the wild version of the poliovirus continues to spread.



In rare cases, polio infections surface in other countries caused by one type of polio vaccine that is no longer used -- OPV -- which contains small amounts of weakened but live poliovirus.

The UN agencies noted that only one case of wild poliovirus had been reported in Afghanistan since the start of the year, providing “an extraordinary opportunity to eradicate polio.”

“Restarting polio vaccination now is crucial for preventing any significant resurgence of polio within the country and mitigating the risk of cross-border and international transmission,” they said.

Herve Ludovic De Lys, UNICEF’s representative in Afghanistan, stressed that “to eliminate polio completely, every child in every household across Afghanistan must be vaccinated.”

“With our partners, this is what we are setting out to do.”

The UN agencies said that children under five would also be provided with an extra dose of Vitamine A during the campaign.

The discussions with the Taliban leadership had also resulted in agreement on the need to “immediately start measles and Covid-19 vaccination campaigns”, they said.

Italy Considers New Fuel Poverty Monitor As Energy Prices Soar

MILAN (Reuters) - Italy is looking to monitor fuel poverty as part of broader plans to reform the energy market and temper price increases for consumers, a government decree showed.

Under the plan, presented to parliament for a non-binding opinion, a national observatory for fuel poverty would be set up at the Energy Transition ministry within 90 days of the decree coming into effect.

The decree, which still needs a final nod from government, is designed to transpose into national law EU legislation aimed at putting the consumer at the heart of energy markets.

The surge in retail power prices has stoked tensions between European Union countries over the energy transition, with some saying new green policies could inflate consumer bills.

In September, Rome set aside more than 3 billion euros (\$3.5 billion) to curb a sharp rise in retail energy bills triggered by soaring gas prices.

It is currently working on a series of longer-term measures to reduce so-called systems costs in bills, possibly by booking them in the general tax system.

Systems charges, such as nuclear decommissioning costs and renewable energy incentives, account for around 20% of Italian consumer bills.

According to the decree, when liberalization of Italy’s energy markets is complete in 2023, suppliers will have to offer clients who are deemed vulnerable power at a price reflecting, among other things, wholesale market prices.

Energy regulator ARERA will have to publish monthly reference figures on wholesale prices to inform end users - at least till the end of 2025, it said.

Iran Wants Pakistan...

FROM PAGE 1

Nazri said there was no such restriction from the Iranian side on the other hand. “Pakistan should also remove the restriction on Iran,” he sought.

The consul general complained that the Pakistani consulate in Iran took a long time to issue visas to Iranians, while the Tehran consulate in Islamabad issued travel documents without any delay. He was of the view that despite the U.S. sanctions on Iran, there is a lot to trade.

“The Iranian trucks should be allowed to enter Pakistan,” he sought. The diplomat also complained about the imposition of 50 per cent duty on Iranian apples, while in Afghanistan the duty is just 10pc.

“We request Pakistan to reduce this duty too.”

On the issue of barter trade, he said it was decided that rice and denim would be exported from Pakistan to Iran and in exchange Islamabad will buy electricity from Tehran. But the State Bank of Pakistan refused to facilitate this deal and has kept it pending.

Foreign Consortium Gets Deal to Tap Turkey’s Largest Gas Reserve

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkey’s state energy company Turkish Petroleum Corporation (TPAO) has awarded a consortium of foreign companies a significant contract for the development of the Black Sea gas field, home to the country’s largest-ever natural gas discovery.

Schlumberger-Subsea 7 consortium, which supplies engineering services for undersea energy projects, will be providing engineering, procurement, construction and installation (EPCI) of end-to-end production solutions at the Sakarya gas field, both companies said in their statements Friday.

The integrated project scope will cover subsurface solutions to onshore production, including well completions, subsea production systems (SPS), subsea umbilicals, risers, flowlines (SURF) and an early production facility (EPF).

Turkey has discovered around 540 billion cubic meters (bcm) of natural gas in the Sakarya field since last year. Ankara aims to start pumping the gas to the national grid in 2023, the centennial of the founding of modern Turkey, with sustained plateau production starting in 2027 or 2028.

Turkey plans to cover up to a quarter of its consumption from the discovery by 2027. Energy and Natural Resources Minister Fatih Dönmez last month said the country may be able to start with an initial annual production capacity of 3.5 bcm of gas in 2023.

Enemies to...

FROM PAGE 1

Iran has written to the United Nations Security Council over a sharp increase in Israeli threats against the country, warning against any “miscalculation” or “military adventurism” on the part of the regime against the Islamic Republic, including its nuclear program.

In a letter submitter to the current president of the Security Council on Wednesday, Iran’s Ambassador to the United Nations Majid Takht-Ravanchi warned that the frequency and severity of the regime’s provocative and adventurous threats had steadily increased over the past months and reached an alarming level.

Pointing to four decades of military and civil wars, sanctions and intimidation in the West Asian region, Hajizadeh said the U.S. supported former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein in his eight-year imposed war on Iran (1980-88), which killed more than 230,000 Iranian people.

“For more than four decades, the Islamic Iran resisted and stood against all excessive demands of the US and arrogant allies of the White House,” he added.

In the Iraqi imposed war, Iran managed to stand up to the Saddam regime, which was backed by more than 30 countries, the top IRGC commander said.

He noted that the U.S. also waged two wars in Iraq in 1991 and 2003 and attacked Afghanistan in 2001 but “left the country after 20 years of attempting to cause civil war and chaos.”

Exports to ECO...

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“The country’s exports to ECO member states are more than 5 and 1.7 times the imports in weight and value, respectively and Iran’s trade balance with ECO members in the first half of this year was positive \$ 1,855,000,000. The exports to these states have registered 98% and 81% percent hike in terms of weight and value, respectively as compared to the same period last year,” he added.

Regarding the volume of imports from ECO, he noted that 2,428,0000 tons of goods worth \$ 2,700,000,000 were purchased from ECO member states in the first half of the year, which showed a decrease of 9% in weight, but in terms of value, it has recorded a growth of 34% in transactions. The spokesman added that the main destinations for Iranian products were Turkey, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Azerbaijan, while the major ECO exporters to Iran included Turkey, Pakistan and Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan, respectively.

Iran Not to Fall...

FROM PAGE 1

According to the analysis, the Iranian establishment “consists of rational actors making decisions on domestic and international policy out of conceptions of national interests”.

The establishment, it says, “is neither irrationally messianic nor anti-Semitic in its hard power calculations”.

Moreover, Iranian society and politics have shifted to “an intensification of Iranian nationalism that includes a populist religious element”.

“This element is strengthened by the popular perception that Iran has been humiliated by foreign powers and subjected to inhumane suffering due to U.S.-imposed sanctions,” it said.

Such elements, it added, have broadened the Islamic Republic’s base of support within Iranian society.

The analysis explained that the U.S. and Israeli assassinations of senior figures such as General Qassem Soleimani and the head of Iran’s nuclear program Mohsen Fakhrizadeh – along with the foreign sabotage of nuclear facilities – have intensified this dynamic.

According to the report, “a Cold War posture of the US towards Iran does not realistically account for the complexity of Iran and the U.S.’s relationship in the context of the current power relations structuring the international community and the attendant regional dynamics”.

“Furthermore, Iran is not the Soviet Union, and a Cold War positioning and pursuit of a containment strategy modeled after US Soviet policy is neither appropriate nor realistic.”

The fifth principle listed by the study states that the Trump-era “maximum pressure” sanctions and the assassinations of Gen. Soleimani and Fakhrizadeh have neither led to a realignment of Iran’s regional posture nor halted the pursuit of the nuclear energy program.

“Instead, these actions have achieved quite the opposite results. These activities only strengthen actors opposed to increased cooperation and dialogue with the United States.”

It advises that a rejoining of the U.S. in the nuclear deal must be accompanied by mechanisms that allow foreign business entities especially those in Europe to be confident in their investments into the Iranian economy.

This is not the first time such a confession and analysis is made or released by a Western institution and all of them have admitted that Iran is strong enough to overcome the Western pressure although the country may face some turbulence but it can safely pass it.

Recent developments in the region and the reports on the talks between Iran and Saudi Arabia is another proof to this claim that all the countries in the region have realized that Iran is not a country to fall into apart under pressures and they have better to make friend with this peace-loving country which is the pride of the Muslim world in resisting against the aliens’ dominance and meddling in its domestic affairs.

So it is time for the U.S. to read this report and come to its sense and to put its hostility toward Iran and Iranians because this country will endure any pressure and will have proper response to any atrocity in its due time. Therefore if the West seeks peace and stability in the region it is better to leave the region and stop using the lever of sanctions or war against the countries in the region because this lever is a threadbare tactic which has no effect especially on the Islamic Republic.



Iran Warns Over Tying...

FROM PAGE 1

In 2018, the United States left the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), a historic nuclear accord that had been clinched between the Islamic Republic and world countries three years earlier.

So far this year, six rounds of negotiations have taken place in the Austrian capital to examine the prospect of the sanctions’ removal. The talks are expected to pick up where they left last time, on Thursday.

Amir-Abdollahian underscored that should the Western allies live up to their JCPOA commitments, Iran too would reverse a set of nuclear countermeasures that it has been taking in retaliation for their refusal to meet their obligations.

He also extended an invitation to Guterres to pay a visit to the Islamic Republic.

The UN chief, for his part, noted how the world body has “constantly” supported the JCPOA, saying since former US president Donald Trump’s departure from the deal, the world body has been seeking a way to return the situation to how it used to be before Washington’s exit.

Jabeur First Arab Tennis Player to Reach Top 10

PARIS (Dispatches) - Tunisia's Ons Jabeur became the first Arab tennis player to break into the world's top 10 on Monday, while Indian Wells champion Paula Badosa gained 14 places in the WTA rankings.

Jabeur, a Wimbledon quarter-finalist earlier this year, was beaten by Spain's Badosa in the Indian Wells semi-finals last Friday.

Before the tournament, 14th place was the highest achieved by Arab players, a record which was jointly held by Jabeur and former Moroccan star Younes El Aynaoui.

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England Get Wembley Stadium Ban

LONDON (Dispatches) - England have been ordered to play their next two home games in UEFA competition without supporters present after disturbances during their Euro 2020 final against Italy at Wembley in July, European soccer's governing body said in a statement on Monday.

The ban on fans attending the second game has been suspended for a probationary period of two years, while the English FA has been fined 100,000 euros (\$116,000), UEFA added.

8 IRAN NEWS

SPORTS

WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 20, 2021

Norrie Upsets Basilashvili To Win Indian Wells

INDIAN WELLS (Dispatches) - Cameron Norrie battled back to defeat Nikoloz Basilashvili 3-6 6-4 6-1 in the Indian Wells final, becoming the first British man to win the Masters 1000 tournament.

It appeared an upset was in the works when the hard-hitting Basilashvili quickly took the first set but Norrie regrouped in the second, breaking the Georgian at love to force a decider.

In the third set, the left-handed Norrie broke early and saved three break points to take a 3-0 lead as unforced errors began to pile up for Basilashvili under the lights in the Southern California desert.

Norrie sealed the biggest win of his career when Basilashvili sent a forehand long on championship point.

The World No. 26 became the first man ranked outside the Top 25 to win in the desert since Ivan Ljubicic in 2010 and jumped to 10th in the FedEx ATP Race To Turin. The 3-6, 6-4, 6-1 result over the 29th seed came on the back of 10 winners and 25 unforced errors and handed him a second title this season from his sixth final.

"What can I say? Obviously, I'm so happy. It's my biggest title so I can't really describe it right now," said Norrie, who was playing in his sixth final of his breakout year.

Britain's Andy Murray, Tim Henman and Greg Rusedski have all played in the men's finals at Indian Wells but finished runner-up.



Norrie has shown steady improvement all year and expertly executed his strategy of forcing Basilashvili into long rallies in the final, giving himself the opportunity to dictate points from the baseline.

He congratulated Basilashvili on his outstanding tournament, where the 29-year-old stunned world number three Stefanos Tsitsipas in the quarter-finals and American Taylor Fritz in the semis.

"I'm sorry it went my way. You deserved it just as much as I did," Norrie said.

"Well done to you and your team on a great week."

Basilashvili said he was disappointed in the outcome but looked forward to returning to the event, which is sometimes referred to as the fifth major.

The tournament was not held last year due to the COVID-19 pandemic and was pushed from March to October this year because of the global health crisis.

It will return to its regular March date on the sports calendar next year.

"I was hoping to get a title, but it's okay," Basilashvili said.

"I will move on and I hope that I'll come back here in March and play better tennis."

Norrie's breakthrough win comes on the heels of British teenager Emma Raducanu's stunning triumph at the U.S. Open last month.

Earlier in the day, the tournament crowned its first female champion from Spain when Paula Badosa came out on the winning side of a three-set thriller against Victoria Azarenka to claim the biggest title of her career.

Federer Drops out of Top 10



ZURICH (Dispatches) - Roger Federer dropped out of the top 10 in the ATP rankings on Monday for the first time in almost five years, as newly-crowned Indian Wells champion Cameron Norrie jumped 11 spots.

Federer, 40, has not played due to a right knee injury since losing in the Wimbledon quarter-finals to Hubert Hurkacz in July.

Poland's Hurkacz climbed two places to 10th after making the Indian Wells last eight last week, knocking Federer down to 11th.

It is the first time the 20-time Grand Slam champion has been ranked outside the top 10 since January 2017, when he went on to win the Australian Open following a knee injury.

Norrie, who beat Georgia's Nikoloz Basilashvili on Sunday to become the first Briton to win the prestigious Indian Wells title, breaks into the top 20 at world number 15.

His compatriot Andy Murray dramatically slid down the rankings, though, falling 51 places to 172nd.

Hernandez Given Until October 28 To Enter Prison

MADRID (AFP) - Bayern Munich defender Lucas Hernandez has until October 28 to enter prison "voluntarily" after he appeared before a Madrid court on Monday for violating a restraining order in 2017.

France left-back Hernandez has 10 days from Monday to enter prison "voluntarily", unless his appeal is accepted.

The 25-year-old was arrested four years ago for violating a court order banning him from contacting his partner after a violent altercation between the pair.

He was summoned to be notified of his imprisonment order and appeared "voluntarily at 11.30am today (Monday), one day before his summons," the Madrid court said in a statement.

The "ten-day period to voluntarily enter prison" now runs from Monday and expires "on October 28," the statement added.

Hernandez, a World Cup winner with France in 2018, and his partner, Amelia Lorente, were both convicted of domestic violence in February 2017. Neither made a complaint against the other but both were charged by Spain's public prosecutor.

The then-Atletico Madrid player and his girlfriend were each sentenced to 31 days of community service. They were also ordered not to see each other for six months.

Four months later though, Hernandez was arrested at a Madrid airport.

He was in the company of his partner, who was not arrested as her own restraining order had not yet been formally served. They were returning to Spain after getting married in the United States and the couple have since had a son.

Benzema Goes on Trial

PARIS (Dispatches) - Real Madrid forward Karim Benzema goes on trial in France on Wednesday accused of complicity in the attempted blackmail of former international teammate Mathieu Valbuena in a case known as the "sextape affair".

Benzema, 33, stands accused of helping a group of alleged blackmailers to approach Valbuena in an attempt to extort money. Four other men are also on trial.

The 26-year-old Norrie, born in South Africa to a Scottish father and Welsh mother, won his first ATP singles title at Mexico's Los Cabos Open in July.



Badosa Stuns Azarenka for Indian Wells Title

INDIAN WELLS (Dispatches) - Paula Badosa demonstrated her mental toughness to become the Indian Wells champion in her desert debut with a hard-fought, three-set victory over two-time champ Victoria Azarenka.

The Spaniard, who had not lost a set since her first match of the WTA Tour tournament, needed three hours and four minutes to out-muscle Azarenka 7-6 (7/5), 2-6, 7-6 (7/2).

Badosa won her only previous WTA final

earlier this season in Belgrade but she did it via a retirement over Ana Konjuh.

This one was sweeter because Badosa got to close out the championship point on the court, hammering a forehand winner to the open side that Azarenka could only watch sail in.

Badosa celebrated the biggest win of her career by falling face first to the court with her hands covering her face while the crowd cheered.

Two-time Australian Open winner Azarenka was trying to become the first three-time WTA winner in Indian Wells.

She battled back several times on Sunday, digging in after dropping the first set in a tightly-contested tiebreaker.

But the Belarussian fell behind early in the final set tiebreaker and couldn't recover.

Ronaldo Teams With Singapore Tycoon for Secretive Soccer Startup



LONDON (Dispatches) - ZujuGP is an upcoming digital community built around football, helmed by the son of secretive Singaporean investor Peter Lim and fronted by global superstar Cristiano Ronaldo.

The Portuguese footballer has peppered his social media with posts tagged #WritingTheFutureOfFootball and linking to ZujuGP's website. One of them features the player as an umbrella-wielding warrior and another sees him clapping hands with Lim, whose company Mint Media Sports owns and administers Ronaldo's image rights.

The startup aims to drive communication and commerce in the worldwide community of four billion fans, allowing them to watch live games virtually, buy merchandise, engage with players and bet. It also aims to make it easier for club owners, agents and scouts to discover and develop talented players.

Lim, 68, bought Spanish club Valencia C.F. in 2014 and is also a shareholder of English club Salford City F.C. His son, Kiat, had started working on his own stealth tech startup called Arc, a new type of a closed social space, and he'd often talk to his father about it. The coronavirus pandemic took a heavy toll on the finances of the football industry and the Lims figured it was ripe for change, using technology.

"It turned out he'd been thinking deeply for a solution," 28-year-old Kiat said of his father in his first ever interview with media. The ambitious plan they came up with was to bring together football fans and professionals on a single platform. They brainstormed and fine-tuned the idea over the past year and plan to beta-test it in the first half of 2022. "I've never seen him so excited about a project."

ZujuGP promises a lot. ZujuGamePlay will be an immersive platform for fans to watch games together and collaborate "in a fully-functioning economy that spans the real and digital worlds." The company dubs it a footballverse, much in the vein of the metaverse visions posited by the likes of Facebook Inc. and Epic Games Inc.

Wenger to Meet With National Coaches Over World Cup Plan



MANCHESTER (Dispatches) - FIFA has invited the coaches of all 211 men's national teams to a meeting about their plans for a biennial World Cup and new international match calendar, the organization said.

Video conferences for the coaches will be held tomorrow and Thursday and will be led by former Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger, FIFA's head of Global Football Development.

UEFA have vowed to oppose FIFA's plans until they are dropped by FIFA and sources told Reuters on Friday that European bodies will refuse to participate in any new tournament and calendar if the plans are pushed through at a planned vote in December.

"As a coach of the men's national teams, their input is essential," Wenger, who has been central to the development of FIFA's plans, said in a statement.

"Opportunities for us to come together are few and far between, but we must embrace these occasions as such dialogue helps us all to protect the unique place that football has in the world and to make it truly global."

FIFA has argued that a biennial World Cup would lead to increased chances for countries to play in the tournament and that a streamlined qualification process, with fewer international breaks, would reduce travel for players.

UEFA says that a more frequently held World Cup would dilute the competition's prestige and that holding major tournaments every year would increase the load on players and crowd the schedule.

FIFA is holding a separate consultation about the future of women's football, headed by former US women's national team coach Jill Ellis.