

Iraq Minister of Electricity Arrived in Tehran at the Head of a High-Ranking Ministerial Delegation to Discuss the Issue of Gas Injection Into Iraqi Power Plants and “Payments” To Iran’s Electricity and Oil Sector

IRAN NEWS

Health Ministry Announced on Wednesday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic in Iran Increased to **141,041 With **17** More Iranians Killed by the Virus Over the Past 24 Hours**

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Tehran Slams Illegal Foreign Presence in Syria

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran’s ambassador to the United Nations has censured the “illegal presence” of foreign forces in Syria, stating that the war on terrorism must not be used as a pretext to undermine Syria’s sovereignty.

Addressing the UN Security Council on Tuesday, Majid Takht-Ravanchi reiterated Tehran’s call for the withdrawal of foreign forces from the Arab country, saying their plundering of Syria’s natural resources, particularly oil and agricultural products, must come to an end.

“This criminal act not only violates Syrian territorial sovereignty, relevant Security Council resolutions, and the United Nations Charter, but also has a negative impact on efforts and measures aimed at restoring the Syrian economy,” he said.

He stressed that the war against terrorism must not be used to undermine Syria’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.

“After more than a decade of conflict in Syria, it has become evident that only one solution exists: a Syrian-led, Syrian-owned political process facilitated by the United Nations,” Takht-Ravanchi said.

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Today the World Is on Threshold of a New World Order



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Ahead of the upcoming International Quds Day, Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has criticized Muslim governments for “acting very poorly” in defending the Palestinian cause against Israeli occupation.

Ayatollah Khamenei made the remarks in a meeting with a group of university students and representatives of student associations in Tehran on Tuesday.

The Leader took the Muslim countries to task for normalizing relations with the Israeli regime, describing the move as a “big mistake.”

“Unfortunately, Muslim governments are acting very badly [vis-à-vis Palestine] and are not even willing to talk about the Palestinian issue. Some of them imagine that establishing relations with the Zionists is the way to help Palestine, while this is a big mistake,” the Leader stated.

Ayatollah Khamenei said such normalization would bear no fruit even for the Tel Aviv regime, expressing hope that the Palestinian people will soon regain their territories and liberate the al-Aqsa Mosque from Israeli occupation.

The Leader hailed the “oppressed but powerful” Palestinian people who have been preventing the Palestinian issue from sinking into oblivion through their resistance and sacrifices.

“The Quds Day is an appropriate opportunity to express sympathy and solidarity with the oppressed people of Palestine,” the Leader said.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the Leader also drew attention to a new world order being formed, under which the United States has been losing power continuously.

“Today, the world is on the threshold of a new international order that has been in the making following the era of a global bipolar order and the theory of a unipolar world order, during which America has, of course, been growing weaker day by day,” the Leader said.

On the eve of a probable new world order, all countries including Iran have a duty to be active in the fields of both soft and hard power such that they can ensure their nation’s interests and security. The most important duty is on the shoulders of the university students.

The U.S. is getting weaker day by day—from within, in its domestic policies, in its foreign policies, in its economy and in its security. The US has become weaker since 20 years ago and continuing up until today, the Leader said.

Ayatollah Khamenei further stressed the importance of developing a deeper view point to the conflict in Ukraine within the framework of the new order emerging in the world.

“The events of the recent war in Ukraine must be viewed more deeply and in the context of the formation of a new world order which will probably be followed by complex and difficult processes,” the Leader stated.

In such a “new and complex situation,” Ayatollah Khamenei added, all countries, including the Islamic Republic, are duty-bound to have a presence in the new order in terms of both hardware and software to ensure their interests and security and avoid isolation.

Unilateral Coercive Measures Jeopardize Economic Growth of Countries

NEW YORK (IRNA) - Iran’s Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Zahra Ershadi said that under the current difficult circumstances arising from COVID-19 pandemic, Unilateral Coercive Measures seriously jeopardize the economic growth of the targeted countries and hamper easy access to basic medical items and requirements thus endangering the lives and health of their citizens.

Ershadi made the remarks addressing the 55th Commission on Population and Development under Item 3: “Population and sustainable development, in particular sustained and inclusive economic growth”.

The full text of Ershadi statement is as follows:

It is a great privilege for me to address the 55th Session of the Commission on Population and Development. I would like to take this opportunity and extend my sincerest congratulations to you and the other members of the Bureau on your election.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been and continues to be a severely exacerbating situation worsening the vulnerabilities and inequalities within a multitude of societies. Furthermore, it has devastatingly impacted sustainable development and humanitarian needs while disrupting economies, employment and working conditions, quality education, health systems, global trade, supply chains and travel as well as agricultural, industrial and commercial systems thereby significantly impacting food prices. Despite the challenges posed, it has also taught us the significance of combining our efforts and the importance of placing people, especially people in vulnerable situations, at the very center of our responses.

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ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian



Quds Day, The Nightmare of Zionists

As the international Quds Day is approaching and Muslims worldwide are preparing to hold massive rallies to express their protests over the fake Israel, the Zionist regime has beefed up its attacks on the Palestinian fighters to show that this day has turned into a nightmare for them.

Muslims on last Friday of the holy month of Ramadhan stage protest rallies worldwide to support Palestinians and condemning the occupier regime of Israel. This day was initiated by the Islamic Republic of Iran and by its founder the late Imam Khomeini in 1979 to express support for the Palestinians and oppose Zionism and Israel.

The late Imam Khomeini declared the “liberation” of Quds and Occupied Lands a religious duty to all Muslims and called Muslims to stage protest rallies and stated: “I invite Muslims all over the globe to consecrate the last Friday of the holy month of Ramadan as Al-Quds Day and to proclaim the international solidarity of Muslims in support of the legitimate rights of the Muslim people of Palestine. For many years, I have been notifying the Muslims of the danger posed by the usurper Israel which today has intensified its savage attacks against the Palestinian brothers and sisters, and which, in the south of Lebanon in particular, is continually bombing Palestinian homes in the hope of crushing the Palestinian struggle. I ask all the Muslims of the world and the Muslim governments to join together to sever the hand of this usurper and its supporters. I call on all the Muslims of the world to select as Al-Quds Day the last Friday in the holy month of Ramadan—which is itself a determining period and can also be the determiner of the Palestinian people’s fate—and through a ceremony demonstrating the solidarity of Muslims world-wide, announce their support for the legitimate rights of the Muslim people. I ask God Almighty for the victory of the Muslims over the infidels.”

Since then, the Islamic Republic of Iran has become the flag-bearer of this protest rallies in the world and every year the number of protesting nations increases and it has really turned into a nightmare for Israel.

Of course on this day which is the last Friday of Ramadhan, Israeli regime is mobilized to counter Palestinians in the occupied lands and every year this fear of Palestinians’ uprising for liberation of the occupied lands is on the rise and Israelis have to resort to iron fist and bloodshed.

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No Ministers Meeting On JCPOA Unless U.S. Observes Iran Redlines

TEHRAN (PressTV) - In exclusive remarks to Press TV, a source close to the Iranian negotiating team dismisses reports claiming that the foreign ministers of the countries remaining in the 2015 deal with Iran would travel to Vienna to announce a “final agreement.”

There has been talk of a potential travel by the countries’ foreign ministers to the Austrian capital over the past months, the source said on Tuesday.

“However, it is not yet clear when such a trip would take place,” it noted, adding, “No such trip is going to take place as long as the United States refuses to accept Iran’s redlines.”

The U.S. left the deal, which is officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), in 2018 and returned the sanctions that the accord had lifted. The deal’s remaining members—the UK, France, Russia, and China plus Germany—have been holding many rounds of negotiations in Vienna to examine the prospect of the accord’s revival.

The Islamic Republic insists that it will not enter any agreement that bypasses its redlines. Among other things, Tehran says, a “good agreement” features complete lifting of all the sanctions, guarantees that Washington would not sabotage the deal again, and exclusion of such issues as Tehran’s defense program and regional influence.

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President Felicitates South Africa on National Day

TEHRAN (IRNA) - In a message to the South African President Cyril Ramaphosa on Wednesday, Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi congratulated on South Africa's National Day.

"I hope that under the leadership of His Excellency, the Government and people of South Africa will move forward in the direction of social and economic development and at the same time we witness the growth and promotion of bilateral relations and cooperation between the two countries," Raisi wrote in his message.

Raisi also stated, "Considering the invitation of His Excellency to pay an official visit to South Africa, I hope that this visit will pave the way for further development of relations between the two countries".

Zionist Regime Emblem of Violation of Human Rights

TEHRAN (IRNA)- Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Ali Bagheri Kani has underscored that the Zionist regime is the symbol of violation of human rights at global level.

The deputy foreign minister made the remarks in the first Conference on Referendum in Palestine at Imam Sadeq University on Wednesday, saying that the cause of Palestine is an issue in which values of the Islamic Revolution, including justice-seeking, freedom-loving and counter-hegemony fighting, are remarkably reflected.

As to the so-called Abraham Accords, Bagheri Kani warned that Palestinians' rights have been traded with politics, economy, and temporary security profits of certain governments, while the maximum usage of the project is to give artificial respiration to the occupying regime.

Among all important issues related to Palestine, the topic of humans' life and human rights is of the most importance, he noted.

For seven decades, the Zionist regime has had the biggest compilation of human rights violation, the official said, noting that the issue of Palestine is not limited to the dispute over a part of land because the regime is the systemic violation of human rights in recent history and at international level.

Only a peace based of justice can be sustainable in Palestine, he said, stipulating that fairness has nothing to do with occupation and incursion by Zionists.

The Westerners' support for the occupying Zionist regime has challenged their claims on backing human rights and democracy, he added.

He went on to say that any initiative, which does not end occupation and incursion of Zionists in Palestine, is not a solution, and that the hard solution is resistance and



the soft solution would be a referendum; thus, each of the solutions, which help end occupation sooner and pave the way for return of Palestinians to their homeland, can bring about sustainable peace in the region and the world.

Resistance and referendum are two sides of one coin, Bagheri Kani said, adding that all those who claim that they are backing human rights should support resistance.

The Zionist regime and its Western allies hatch plots for "eradication of Palestine," without knowing that resistance has its roots in hearts of regional nations, he underlined.

The regime is still facing lack of legitimacy after 70 years of occupation; therefor, along-term program for the Israeli regime is nothing but a mirage.

The Zionists are of the opinion that they can find legitimacy by the use of force and crime while the continuation of incursion and occupation has been threatening the existence of the regime internally.

President Calls on Academics to Provide Solutions to Country's Key Issues

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi described the university as a think tank for the government, and urged university professors and students to look at important issues in the country, including water, smuggling, the development of knowledge-based companies, and the prevention of crude sales, and give solutions.

Speaking on Wednesday in the cabinet meeting, Raisi referred to the strategic statements of the Supreme Leader of the Revolution in his meeting with students yesterday, regarding the importance and position of science and culture centered on the university, and obliged all government departments to try to fulfil his orders.

The President considered the preservation of the scientific, religious and revolutionary identity of the university as the most important concern raised by the Supreme Leader in this meeting and said, "The enemy has always tried to distort the identity gained by the university thanks to the Islamic Revolution and we all have a duty to prevent the implementation of this sinister plan".

He described giving hope to students as one of the other concerns of the Supreme Leader of the Revolution and said, "One of the problems of students after graduation is employment, which the Ministry of Science should plan for with the cooperation of the Ministries of Industry and Labor".

Expressing that the government will be the executor of the Supreme Leader's instructions, the President urged his Vice-President for Science and the Minister of Science to cooperate with the relevant departments, to review and follow up on the implementation of the Supreme Leader's statements.

Raisi also described the organization of the dormitories to be important and necessary, and instructed the Ministry of Science and the Plan and Budget Organization to address this issue immediately.

The President also mentioned the university as a think tank of the government and urged the university professors and students to study the important issues of the country such as water issues, smuggling of goods, development of knowledge-based companies and prevention of raw materials and to find and provide a solution to them.

No Border Skirmish With Taliban

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Minister of Interior Ahmad Vahidi dismissed reports about a clash between Iranian and the Taliban forces at the common border with Afghanistan, saying what has happened resulted from a misunderstanding.

Vahidi rejected the media stories about a skirmish between the Iranian and the Taliban forces at the common border, sating, "No clash has taken place. What has occurred was based on a misunderstanding."

"The Taliban believe that some border points must be under their control, but they are mistaken. Therefore, our border guards are there and have explained to them that what they conceive is wrong," Vahidi added.

The interior minister noted that the armed presence of the Taliban at the border has triggered the "smart presence" of the Iranian forces near the frontier, although no skirmish has erupted.

On Saturday, a disagreement between the Iranian and Afghan border forces emerged when the Taliban wanted to build a road near the Islam Qala-Dogarun border crossing.

Vahidi also said that crossing the Iran-Iraq land border requires a valid visa.

Attending a press briefing after the National Task Force for Combatting Coronavirus meeting on Tuesday, Ahmad Vahidi stated that consultations are underway with Iraqi officials for visa waivers at land borders.

"Travel through the land border to Iraq is not possible

without a visa, and pilgrims must have a visa," he said.

Regarding the recent developments on the Dogharoun border crossing in northeastern Iran, the Iranian interior minister also pointed out that the problems on the border were the result of a misunderstanding created by some local Afghan officials.

Vahidi highlighted that the necessary reprimands have been issued to the local officials of Afghanistan, and expressed hope that these officials would pay attention to the friendship between the two nations and would not allow this friendship to be damaged.

Iran to Mark Int'l Quds Day With Nationwide Rallies

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Iranians are going to hold rallies in 900 cities and towns on coming Friday to mark the annual International Quds Day after a two-year hiatus caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

The head of the Islamic Development Coordination Council said at a press conference on Wednesday that pro-Palestinian marches will be held in the streets across the country on April 29 in commemoration of the International Quds Day.

In 2021 and 2020, the authorities had called off the countrywide demonstrations marking the International Quds (Jerusalem) Day on the last Friday of Ramadan due to coronavirus concerns.

According to Mohammad Hossein Moussapoor, this year's rallies will be held in the capital Tehran and 900 other cities and towns across the country in compliance with the health protocols.

The demonstration in Tehran will begin at 10 am on Friday and rallies will converge on the University of Tehran, he added. The keynote speaker in Tehran will be Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Major General Hossein Salami, while a commander of the axis of resistance will also deliver a speech at the Friday prayers, Moussapoor said.

The International Quds Day is an annual event during which demonstrators express their solidarity with the Palestinian people and opposition to the occupation of the Palestinian territories by the Zionist regime of Israel.

The day is seen as the legacy of the late founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Imam Khomeini, who officially declared the last Friday of the holy month of Ramadan as International Quds Day back in 1979.

Iran-Iraq Strong Bilateral Relations Effective in Region



TEHRAN (MNA) - Majlis Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf said that Iran and Iraq play an important role in the regional, political, security, economic and stability issues of Islamic countries.

Speaking in a joint press conference with his Iraqi counterpart Mohammed al-Halbousi in Tehran, Qalibaf said, "The policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the current parliament and the 13th government [under President Raisi] is to develop relations with countries, especially with neighboring and regional countries. Iran seeks economic, political, cultural ties and especially cooperation in the field of environment."

He also said that Iran asks the Iraqi parliament and government to open land routes between Iran and Iraq for the pilgrimages who want to travel to Iraq for Arbæen [the anniversary of the 40th day of the martyrdom of third Shia Imam Hussein bin Ali (PBUH)].

He added that strong bilateral relations between Iran and Iraq are effective in the region and the world, adding that Iran and Iraq play an important role in the regional, political, security, economic and stability issues of Islamic countries.

Mohammed al-Halbousi, for his part, said that stability in Iran has a positive effect on Iraq and the region.

"Respect for the sovereignty of countries, good neighborliness and protection of citizens' rights should be the principles of relations between countries, and we should try to improve and develop relations between the countries of the region. In this regard, it is necessary to provide the basis for economic, political, cultural, social and parliamentary relations between countries," he added.

Referring to the common positions of the two neighboring countries in the international community, the Iraqi speaker, "We must not allow nations to be sanctioned and intimidated. We must not allow armed groups to take action against countries."

Mohammed al-Halbousi arrived in Tehran on Wednesday morning and is scheduled to hold talks with the Iranian President and Foreign minister, too.

Minister Emphasizes Expansion of Int'l Relations in Medicine

TEHRAN (IP) - Health minister announced the strategy of the government to expand international relations in various fields of medicine.

In a meeting with a group of foreign ambassadors and representatives of international organizations and agencies in Iran, Bahram Einollahi, the Minister of Health, said: "Such meetings should be operationalized by the formation of specialized working groups."

After the speech of the Minister of Health, participants expressed their points of view on the topic.

Ambassadors from Cuba, Spain, Japan, Nicaragua, and Bulgaria attended the meeting.

Azerbaijan Stresses Broadening Economic Ties With Iran

TEHRAN (MNA) – Azerbaijan's Minister of Economy stressed that his country is interested in expanding and developing trade and economic ties with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Speaking in his meeting with Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Economic Diplomacy Affairs Mehdi Safari in Azeri capital of Baku on Tuesday, Mikayil Jabbarov emphasized the serious determination of his country to develop all-out relations with Iran, especially in the field of economy including implementation and design of joint projects.

During the talks, the two sides discussed the latest situation of trade and economic ties between Iran and Republic of Azerbaijan.

Azeri Minister of Economy reiterated the serious determination of Azeri government for the development of all-out relations with Iran in the field of trade and economy in particular.

Farhadi Chosen as Jury Member Of 75th Cannes Film Festival

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's internationally-renowned director Asghar Farhadi was chosen as one of the jury members of the prestigious 2022, 75th Cannes Film Festival of France.



The head of this year's festival, too, was elected after lots of speculations.

The French actor Vincent London, who won the gold Palm Tree of last year's festival for his acting in the film Titan will be the head of the 75th festival's board of jurors.

Farhadi was among the contestants for that position this year.

The 75th annual Cannes Film Festival is an upcoming film festival scheduled to take place from May 17 to May 28, 2022.

The festival will see a tribute to actor Tom Cruise, whose film Top Gun: Maverick is due to premiere at the festival. The official poster for the festival was designed in honor of The Truman Show.

'Leyla's Brothers' directed by Saeed Rustaie, will be Iran's representative among 18th fields in the main competition of this year's Cannes Festival.

The Iranian-Swedish director, Ali Abbasi, too will with his Persian language film "The Sacred Spider, coproduced by France, Germany, Sweden and Denmark, too, will be in this year's main competition.

Also 'Imagination', directed by Ali Behdad, whose leading role is acted by Leila Hatami is among the 7 full length feature films in Cannes Festival Film Critics Week films.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:01
■ Evening (Maghreb)	20:06
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:41
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:14

9. See what kinds of comparisons they make for thee!
But they have gone astray, and never a way will they be able to find!
10. Blessed is He who, if that were His will, could give thee better (things)
than those, - Gardens beneath which rivers flow;
and He could give thee palaces (secure to dwell in).

Surah 25, The Criterion, The Standard (9 - 10)

Road Accident Fatalities 20% Above Global Average Rate

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Head of Road Safety Supporters Society believes the road accident fatalities in Iran are 20% above the global average rate and bikers lead the fatalities list of road accidents in Tehran.

Speaking in a press conference on the occasion of the national day of transportation safety, Mohammad Bokharaee said that currently road accounts for 90% of the transfer of passengers and goods, and issues related to the transportation should be considered as one of the important factors of development.

He went on to say that the issue of boosting transportation safety and protecting human, social and economic assets as well as reducing driving accidents is considered as a big problem and national concern, and for this reason, April 27 has been named as the national day of transportation safety and it is good opportunity all responsible bodies in the traffic and transportation industry in cooperation with the public and creative a nationwide and inclusive current to focus on the dangers and irreparable consequences of the driving accidents.

Bokharaee then pointed to the share of the transportation in the national economy, adding that today transportation and driving accidents have turned into a social and economic concern in the country.

He reiterated that the rate of road and driving accidents in Iran is 20% above the international average rate, adding that the country has reached a critical point regarding driving accidents and the society should be sensitive to this issue.

He pointed to the effective factors in the rise in number of the road accidents, adding that three factors of human force, road infrastructures and vehicles should be



blamed 70% for the road accidents, adding that the low-cost and fastest means for reducing the road accidents is culturalization among the people.

Bokharaee went on to say that bikers top the list of the road accident fatalities in the country and its number is considerable, and reiterated that bikers account for 25% of the road accident fatalities, and in order to reduce the accidents and fatalities, the Road Safety Supporters Society pursues education, participation of the insurance companies and encouraging auto-makers not to produce unsafe vehicles.

He said currently some 3000 accident-prone areas have been identified in the country and they should be continuously reconstructed and reformed. He noted that human force factor is still the main factor behind the road accidents and quality of the roads is just 10% behind accidents.

Then in the presser, head of Road Construction Companies Association Mr. Ali Azad blamed the quality of the asphalt in the roads, saying that in the past, 28m tons of asphalt sealer was usually used in the roads and today due to the rise in the length of the roads, some 9m tons of asphalt is used and this has lowered the quality of the roads in the country.

He stressed that roads and accident-prone areas are not the main problem in accidents but this is the drivers who should be blamed for accidents and human factor plays 70% role in the road accidents.

Pistachio Exports Down 33% in Year To March



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iranian customs office (IRICA) figures show pistachio exports from the country declined by nearly a third in the calendar year to March 20.

IRICA spokesman Rouhollah Latifi said that annual pistachio exports from Iran reached a total of \$915 million in late March.

Shipments declined 33% in volume terms to stand at over 135,000 metric tons over the past calendar year, said Latifi, adding that Iranian pistachio had reached 75 countries around the world.

He added that sales of green unshelled pistachio had accounted for a bulk of Iranian exports over the year to March as shipments reached nearly \$700 million in value terms.

IRICA figures showed that China, India and Russia were the largest buyers of Iranian green pistachio over the period.

That comes as annual exports of dry unshelled pistachio from Iran totaled nearly \$216 million in March, said Latifi, adding the country had sold more than 19,000 tons of the variety to customers in Germany, India, the United Arab Emirates and a handful of other countries.

The official blamed adverse weather and lower crop for a sharp decline in pistachio exports from Iran over the calendar year to March.

Iran is the world's largest producer of pistachio with more than 40% of the global production of the nut.

The country had reported record sales of pistachio in the fourth quarter of 2020 at around \$540 million as IRICA figures published at the time showed the volume of shipments had doubled from the similar quarter in 2019 to nearly 90,000 metric tons.

Those figures showed that pistachio exports from Iran had soared by nearly 56% in value terms over the year to March 2021.

Tehran, Baku Have Proper Capacity to Elevate Trade Ties



ARDABIL (IRNA) - Azerbaijan Republic's ambassador in Tehran said that his country and Iran have proper capacities to raise economic and trade ties.

Ali Alizade who has travelled to Ardabil Province, northwestern Iran, made the remarks on the sidelines of a meeting with the province's governor-general.

The ambassador said that Iranian and Azerbaijani businesses have ties with each other's countries which could

be strengthened by facilitating cross-border exchanges.

He noted that the borders of the Republic of Azerbaijan was open to Iranians during the pandemic despite limitations in place for other counties.

Alizade also said that the flights between the two countries have increased and cross-border travels have been easier for citizens of both countries, further reinforcing health tourism.

Energy Supply, a Major Challenge for Big Industries

TEHRAN (MNA) - Keyvan Kashefi, a board member of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA), said supplying electricity has become a major concern for large industries in the country, the ICCIMA portal reported.

Speaking in a meeting with Deputy Majlis speaker Abdolreza Mesri, Kashefi said: "Over the past few years, energy supply has become a major challenge for large industries and has greatly increased their production costs."

This challenge has significantly affected large and high-consuming industries which are the main drivers of the country's economy, the official added.

He noted that during the hot season's peak consumption period such industries are faced with limited energy supply.

Kashefi, who is also the head of the Kermanshah Chamber of Commerce and Industries, criticized the fact that most of the times industries are the government's priority for imposing energy consumption restrictions, emphasizing: "The sum of these situations has greatly increased the cost of production."

According to the official, in some cases, when industries plan to build specialized power plants to meet their needs or store enough fuel oil for the cold season, they still face some challenges, for example in the field of fuel oil, sometimes industries have to supply their fuel oil at a cost many times higher than the average prices.

The head of the Kermanshah Chamber emphasized that the energy supply of industries should be considered by the government as a major issue, especially in less developed provinces, saying: "All industrial units in Kermanshah together are not consuming as energy as some large-scale industrial units in developed provinces, and therefore a single recipe should not be applied for all industries in all provinces."

Traders Hail Decision to Scrap Tax on Import of Forex

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Foreign currency traders in Iran have hailed a decision by the government to scrap a tax on import of foreign currency into the country, saying the move would help neutralize the impacts of American sanctions on the Iranian economy.

"This new ratification is very smart as many companies and individuals currently seek to transfer foreign exchange into the country to fund their imports," said Ahmad Lavasani, who leads Iran's

Association of Money Exchangers, on Tuesday.

The comments came a week after Iranian National Tax Administration announced that any import of foreign currency into the country, including cash or banking transactions, will be free of duty as of April 16.

A decree issued to provincial tax offices said that companies or individuals will be allowed to import any amount of foreign cash into Iran without any need to state the origin of the money.

Iran, Russia to Develop Transport Ties

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Minister of Road and Urban Development Rostam Qasemi headed a delegation to Moscow to meet his Russian counterpart to discuss transport and transit agreements.

The transport and transit agreements include activation of International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and development of maritime, air, and rail cooperation, according to a report on MRUD website.

Increasing the number of flights, activating the two countries' ports, agreement for operation of the rail corridor from Chabahar Port to Russia and electrifying of Incheborun-Garmsar Railway are on the minister's agenda on this visit.

Previously, Iranian and Russian transport ministers met in Moscow in November 2018 at the sideline of International Transport Week. The two emphasized the development of rail cooperation, acceleration of joint projects, and the necessity of mutual collaboration for completion of North-South railway corridor.

North-South railway corridor starts from Helsinki in Finland and passes through Russia, Azerbaijan, Iran, and Mumbai in Indian Subcontinent.

5 Shipments of Oil Products Exported in a Month

TEHRAN (IP) - The CEO of the National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company (NIORDC) says Iran exported five consignments of petroleum products last month.

Jalil Salari stated that in addition to meeting domestic fuel needs, five consignments of diesel and kerosene had been exported from Iran from March 21 to April 20, 2022.

He also referred to the construction of pipelines in Iran and said that by using these capacities, exports could be increased.

Iran to End Flare Burning at Plants

TEHRAN (IFP) - Oil Minister Javad Oji says the country has signed 28 contracts worth one billion euros (1.065 billion dollars) to end flare burning at its industrial plants.

Oji said the contracts would see all flare stacks removed in two to three years and "these rich gases, which would have been burned into smoke and contaminate the environment, will be used as petrochemical feedstock," IRIB News Agency reported on Wednesday.

He did not specify what partners the contracts had been signed with.

The Iranian minister said the country was also planning to build eight new petrochemical plants and one petrochemical unit in the southern province of Hormozgan that would have a production output of 300,000 barrels per day.

He said Iran needed to increase its refinery output capacity to end the import of petroleum products over the next three to four years.

Iranian Elites Rank 1st, 3rd in Asia Pacific Vocational Contest

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Elite Iranian technicians ranked 1st in graphical designing and 3rd in web technology in 2021 Russia Asia Pacific Vocational Contest, Research Planning and Testing deputy of Iran's Technical and Vocational Organization said on Tuesday.

Ali Hossein Shahrivar announced that in the 2022 4th Asia Pacific Vocational Contest, hosted by Russia, the Iranian technicians ranked first in graphical designing and 3rd in web technology.

The participants in this year's competition are from Iran, China, India, Malaysia, Belarus and Russia, and the competitions were held from March 14 to April 3, 2022.

The Research Planning and Testing deputy of Country's Technical and Vocational Organization said that those competitions pave the path for Iranian technicians' presence in the 46th International Vocational Contest in Shanghai, China in three fields of graphic design, web technology, and mechanical and engineering design fields.

The competitions were held in 16-year to 23-year old range and Hamed Kasaie ranked 1st in graphical design, and Amir Kabiri ranked 3rd in web technology field.

Sri Lanka to Sell Golden Visas

COLOMBO (Dispatches) - Cash-strapped Sri Lanka announced it would sell long-term visas to attract desperately needed foreign currency after the island nation ran out of dollars to pay even for food and fuel.

Foreigners who deposit a minimum of \$100,000 locally will be granted permission to live and work in Sri Lanka for 10 years under the “Golden Paradise Visa Program”, the government said.

But any income from the scheme is likely to be dwarfed by the scale of the current crisis, with acute shortages of food, fuel and medicines that have triggered widespread protests.



Australia PM Morrison Trails in Poll

SYDNEY (Dispatches) - Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison is struggling to close the gap with the main opposition ahead of an upcoming general election, a poll showed today, amid criticism over his handling of a security pact between China and Solomon Islands.

A poll for The Australian newspaper showed centre-left Labour maintaining its 53-47 lead on a two-party preferred basis against the conservative Liberal-National coalition, even as it showed Morrison extending his lead as the preferred leader.

With Australia going to polls on May 21, national security has dominated the election campaign after China last week struck the security deal with the Solomon Islands, stoking concerns in Canberra and Washington.



U.S., Allies Promise Heavy Arms for Ukraine



RAMSTEIN AIR BASE (Dispatches) - The United States and its allies promised to send more heavy weaponry to Ukraine during talks at a German air base, brushing off a threat from Moscow that their support for Kyiv could lead to nuclear war.

But in a move that sharply raises the economic stakes for the West, Russia said it would turn off gas supplies to Poland on Wednesday morning after weeks of threats that it would cut off supply to countries who refuse to pay for gas in roubles.

Poland, a key NATO ally of the United States and among the European countries seeking the toughest possible sanctions against Russia, said it had sufficient gas reserves.

Russia's defense ministry said its forces had “liberated” the entire Kherson region in southern Ukraine and parts of the Zaporizhzhia, Mykolaiv and Kharkiv regions, Interfax news agency reported. If confirmed, that would represent a significant Russian advance across eastern and southern Ukraine.

One of President Vladimir Putin's closest allies, Nikolai Patrushev, said Ukraine was spiralling towards a collapse into “several states” due to what he cast as a U.S. attempt to use Kyiv to undermine Russia. His comments seemed to be an effort to blame Washington for any break-up of Ukraine that emerges from the war, now in its third month.

U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, welcoming officials from more than 40 countries to Ramstein Air Base in Germany, headquarters of U.S. air power in Europe, said: “Nations from around the world stand united in our resolve to support Ukraine in its fight against Russia's imperial aggression.”

“Ukraine clearly believes that it can win, and so does everyone here,” he said.

The United States has ruled out sending its own or NATO forces to Ukraine but Washington and its European allies have supplied Kyiv with arms including howitzer heavy artillery, drones and anti-aircraft Stinger and anti-tank Javelin missiles.

In a notable shift, Germany, which had come under pressure after refusing Ukrainian pleas for heavy weapons, announced it would send Gepard light tanks with anti-aircraft guns. Washington welcomed Berlin's move.

U.S. officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, believe Russia will rely heavily on artillery strikes to pound Ukrainian positions while moving in ground forces from several directions to try to envelop and wipe out much of Ukraine's military.

But Washington also estimates that many Russian units are depleted, with some operating with personnel losses as high as 30% - a level considered by the U.S. military to be too high to keep fighting indefinitely.

In a marked escalation of Russian rhetoric, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov was asked on state TV late on Monday about the prospect of World War Three and whether the current situation could be compared to the 1962 Cuban missile crisis that nearly caused nuclear war.

North Korea Parades Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles

SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korea will speed up development of its nuclear arsenal, leader Kim Jong-un said while overseeing a huge military parade that displayed intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and other weapons, state media reported.

The parade occurred last night during celebrations for the founding anniversary of North Korea's armed forces, state news agency KCNA said. It comes as Pyongyang has stepped up weapons tests and displays of military power amid stalled denuclearisation talks with the United States and an incoming conservative administration in South Korea.

U.S. and South Korean officials say there are signs of new construction at North Korea's only known nuclear test site, which has been officially shuttered since 2018, suggesting Pyongyang may be preparing to resume testing nuclear weapons.



Tunisian Opposition Announces Alliance Against President

TUNIS (Dispatches) - A veteran Tunisian opposition figure announced Tuesday the creation of a new alliance to “save” the country from deep crisis following President Kais Saied's power grab last year.

Ahmed Nejib Chebbi, 78, a prominent left-wing politician who opposed dictator Zine el Abidine Ben Ali's rule, said the new National Salvation Front aimed to unite political forces, re-establish constitutional and democratic processes and guarantee freedoms and rights in the country.

“We want a return to legitimacy and democracy,” he told a news conference in the capital Tunisia.

Saied -- a former law professor elected in 2019 amid public anger against the political class -- on July 25 last year sacked the government, suspended parliament and seized wide-ranging powers.

He later gave himself powers to rule and legislate by decree and seized control over the judiciary.

He dissolved parliament last month, dealing another blow to the political system put in place after the North African country's 2011 revolution.

Chebbi opposes Saied's moves and describes them as a “coup”.

The new alliance comprises five political parties including Saied's nemesis the Islamist-inspired Ennahdha party, along with five civil society groups involving independent political figures. The Front's priority is to rescue an economy ruined by a “rotten” political system that puts off investors, Chebbi said.

It also aims to involve other political groups and “influential” figures before launching a national dialogue on reforms to “save the country”, he added.

Chebbi called for a “salvation government” to lead the country during a “transition period” before new elections.

Last week Saied assigned himself the power to appoint the head of the electoral commission, a move critics say aims to create a tame electoral body ahead of a referendum slated for July on constitutional reforms, and legislative elections due in December.

Suicide Bomber Kills 3 Chinese Teachers, Pakistani at Karachi University

KARACHI (Dispatches) - A suspected female suicide bomber killed three Chinese teachers in Karachi on Tuesday, police and officials said, in the first major attack this year against nationals of long-time ally China working in Pakistan.

The three were among passengers on a minibus returning to Karachi university after a lunch break when the bomb exploded at the entrance to the university's Confucius Institute, killing the Chinese teachers and a Pakistani national, police and officials said.

A separatist group, the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) based in southwestern Balochistan province bordering Afghanistan and Iran, claimed responsibility for the blast, adding in an email to Reuters the attack was carried out by a woman suicide bomber.

It shared in the email a photo of her clad in a long shawl sitting with two children. The photo couldn't be verified independently by police or other officials.

Karachi police chief Ghulam Nabi Memon said, “the reports we have got say they're Chinese.” He added they were teachers at the Confucius Institute, a Chinese language and cultural center.

“The information we've got is that the female bomber was most probably a student at the university,” Memon told local Geo News TV.

A local guard and another Chinese citizen were also wounded in the minibus.

Local media showed CCTV footage of a woman dressed in black wearing a backpack standing close to the bus shortly before the bomb went off and sent up billowing clouds of fire and smoke.

Police did not verify the footage.

Local media showed the wrecked minibus dotted with shrapnel holes, and witnesses said the explosion was so big it rattled the windowpanes of other buildings on the sprawling campus.

The bombing was the first major attack against Chinese nationals in Pakistan since July last year when a suicide bomber blew up a passenger bus in northern Pakistan that killed 13 people, including nine Chinese working on a hydro-power plant.

Other attacks on Chinese working in Pakistan have taken place in Balochistan province, where separatist militants have waged an insurgency against authorities for decades.

Balochistan houses a deep-water port in Gawadar city which Beijing is developing under the China Pakistan Economic-Corridor (CPEC) project as part of President Xi Jinping's Belt and Road initiative to seek trade linkages with rest of the world.

The incident poses a major challenge to Pakistan's newly elected Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif who took power this month. He condemned what he called a cowardly act of terrorism.



Erdogan Plans Visit To Saudi Arabia

ISTANBUL (Dispatches) - Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is expected to fly to Saudi Arabia on Thursday, mending a rift between the Suni powers caused by the murder of Riyadh critic Jamal Khashoggi in the kingdom's Istanbul consulate in 2018.

The two-day trip comes on the heels of an Istanbul court's decision to halt the trial in absentia of 26 Saudi suspects linked to the gruesome killing, transferring the case to Saudi Arabia.

The Turkish decision infuriated human rights campaigners and Khashoggi's widow Hatice Cengiz, who tried to appeal it in a higher court. But it opened the way for Erdogan to go ahead with the Saudi visit, which had been discussed for months.

“We don't have a negative attitude towards Saudi Arabia in terms of normalising relations, either commercially, economically, or politically,” Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu told state television last month.

A Turkish official told AFP that Erdogan was not expected to make any formal announcement during his trip to Riyadh, which is expected to stretch into Friday but will be closed to the press.

Erdogan is due to meet Saudi Arabia's King Salman, said the official, adding that Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman will likely be in the delegation attending the talks.

The murder of 59-year-old Khashoggi, a Saudi insider turned critic who wrote columns for The Washington Post, threw Saudi Arabia into international isolation and escalated Riyadh's regional rivalry with Ankara.

Turkey infuriated the Saudis by pressing ahead with an investigation into the murder, which Erdogan said was ordered at the “highest levels” of the Saudi government.

Saudi Arabia responded by unofficially putting pressure on Turkey's economy through a boycott of key Turkish imports.

But trade between the two has been gradually improving, underscoring an easing of regional tensions that has also seen a reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and its Persian Gulf rival Qatar.

The Istanbul trial was suspended during a new spell of economic turmoil in Turkey, which has suffered from soaring inflation and a wave of winter street protests that have hurt Erdogan's popularity ahead of a general election next year.





Kamranieh Apt (\$2200)
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S/pool, S, J
balcony, pkg
L.balcony
Fully Furn

Shanon (adviser)

Niavaran Villa (\$4000)
1400sq.m
6bdrs, S/p
green yard
marble floor
Nicely Furn

Parsian

Pasdaran (\$2800)
300sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p
Sauna, Jacuzzi
balcony, pkg, F.F

Apt Mahmoodieh
240sq.m, 4bdrs, S/pool
Sauna, J, pkg, & F.F

Andarzgoo Villa (\$8000)
5storey, 20bdrs
S/pool, S, J, pkg lots
marble fl, Fully Furn

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Turkish Manufacturing Capacity Makes Slight Gains in April

ANKARA (Dispatches) - The capacity utilization rate (CUR) in the Turkish manufacturing industry inched up in April, the Central Bank of the Republic of Turkey (CBRT) announced on Monday.

Local manufacturing industry units are operating at 77.8% of their capacity this month, up 0.5 points from March, according to a survey by the bank.

CUR figures are based on the responses of local units operating in the manufacturing industry to a business tendency survey, according to the bank.



World Military Spending Tops \$2 Trillion for First Time

LONDON (Dispatches) - The global military expenditure has reached an all-time high, passing \$2 trillion in 2021, according to a report by a leading defence think-tank based in Sweden, as spending increased for the seventh consecutive year.

The United States, China, India, the United Kingdom and Russia were the top five defence spenders, together accounting for 62 percent of the global expenditure, according to new data published on Monday by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). "In 2021 military spending rose for the seventh consecutive time to reach \$2.1 trillion. That is the highest figure we have ever had,"

Diego Lopes da Silva, senior researcher at SIPRI, told AFP news agency.

Despite the economic fallout of the global COVID pandemic, countries around the world increased their arsenals, with global military spending rising by 0.7 percent last year, according to SIPRI.

Russia, which invaded Ukraine on February 24, saw its spending grow by 2.9 percent – the third year of consecutive growth – to \$65.9bn.

Defense spending accounted for 4.1 percent of Russia's gross domestic product (GDP), "much higher than the world average", and made Moscow the fifth largest spender in the world, Lopes da Silva said.

In 2014, when Russia annexed Crimea, the country was also targeted with sanctions at the same time as energy prices fell, making it difficult to gauge how effective sanctions were on their own.

On the other side, Ukraine's military spending has risen by 72 percent since the annexation of Crimea. While spending declined by more than eight percent in 2021 to \$5.9bn, it still accounted for 3.2 percent of Ukraine's GDP.

As tensions have increased in Europe, more NATO countries have stepped up spending.

Eight member countries last year reached the targeted two percent of GDP for spending, one fewer than the year before but up from only two in 2014, SIPRI said.

Lopes da Silva said he expected spending in Europe to continue to grow.

The US, which far outspent any other nation with \$801bn, actually went against the global trend and decreased its spending by 1.4 percent in 2021.

Over the past decade, US spending on research and development has risen by 24 percent while arms procurement has gone down by 6.4 percent.

While both decreased in 2021, the drop in research was not as pronounced, highlighting the country's focus "on next-generation technologies".

"The US government has repeatedly stressed the need to preserve the US military's technological edge over strategic competitors," Alexandra Marksteiner, another researcher at SIPRI, said in a statement.

China, the world's second largest military spender at an estimated \$293bn, boosted its expenditure by 4.7 percent, marking the 27th straight year of increased spending.

The country's military buildup has in turn caused its regional neighbors to beef up their military budgets, with Japan adding \$7bn, an increase of 7.3 percent – the highest annual increase since 1972.

Most Workers May Seek New Job If Forced Back to Office

LONDON (Dispatches) - Worker demands for more flexibility and security, bolstered by the coronavirus pandemic and a tight labor market, are only growing more intense as the world economy reopens and some firms begin trying to pull employees back to offices, payroll provider ADP reported in a survey of nearly 33,000 people worldwide.

The survey found that two-thirds of workers would consider looking for a new job if forced unnecessarily to return to the office full time. Workers who feel their industry is secure fell from 36 percent in a similar 2021 survey to 25 percent. The share actively looking to change jobs rose from 15 percent to 23 percent, with a nearly a third mulling the start of a job search compared to 24 percent in 2021.

Half of workers said they were only somewhat or not at all satisfied with their current job, and ADP said issues that emerged during the pandemic – around hours worked, job-site locations, working unpaid time, and stress – were driving employees to negotiate the terms of their current jobs or plot an exit.

"The pandemic has sparked a rethink of priorities and workers are signaling a willingness to walk away if employers don't meet their standards on a variety of fronts," the ADP survey concluded.

The findings track United States data showing high levels of job turnover, as well as near-record vacancies as firms struggle to recruit and hold onto workers.

The mismatch between the numbers of people looking for work and the number needed to fill vacancies is driving high wage gains in some industries and is one of the key tensions that US Federal Reserve officials feel needs to be resolved to slow high inflation.

U.S. Refiners Set for Strong Start to 2022

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - U.S. oil refiners expect strong first-quarter earnings as margins to sell gasoline and diesel strengthened due to a steep dropoff in refining capacity and crude oil supplies tightened because of Russia's war with Ukraine.

Refining capacity worldwide has dropped during the coronavirus pandemic, with several less profitable oil refineries closing in the last two years. However, worldwide fuel demand has rebounded to near pre-pandemic levels, boosting profits for facilities that are still operating.

Seven U.S. independent refining companies are projected to post earnings-per-share of 61 cents, compared with a loss of \$1.32 in first quarter of 2021, according to IBES data from Refinitiv.

Profit margins for making both gasoline and distillates - diesel, jet fuel and heating oil - were already at their highest in several years coming into 2022, and have since risen, with the heating oil crack spread at nearly \$41 per barrel by the end of March, nearly \$20 more than average over the past five years.

U.S. independent refiners including Marathon Petroleum Corp, Valero Energy Corp and Phillips 66 also benefited from a surge in natural gas prices in Europe which occurred due to the risk of European sanctions on Russian energy exports.

Valero kicks off refinery earnings on Tuesday; Phillips reports on Friday, with Marathon the following week.

Natural gas is needed to operate various units of oil refineries and the expense caused some European refineries to cut runs, particularly distillate-producing units. This contributed to a sharp fall in distillate inventories worldwide, putting a premium on production of diesel and jet fuel.

"Geopolitical dynamics should support U.S. refiners on wide natural gas spreads, though some impacts may be less visible with first quarter earnings than in future quarters," said Jason Gabelman, refining analyst at Cowen.

However, backlogged refinery maintenance and soaring crude oil prices may cap the otherwise strong earnings for some plants. Analysts lowered estimates for both Phillips 66 and PBF Energy Inc due in part to spring maintenance.

Refinery feedstock costs soared in the first quarter as global benchmark Brent crude averaged near \$98 a barrel for the first three months of the year, according to OPEC data. That was up about \$18 from the last three months of 2021.

Feedstock costs heading into the summer looking increasing uncertain, according to the Energy Information Administration.

Indonesia's Palm Oil Export Ban Leaves Global Buyers With No Plan B

MUMBAI (Dispatches) - Global edible oil consumers have no option but to pay top dollar for supplies after Indonesia's surprise palm oil export ban forced buyers to seek alternatives, already in short supply due to adverse weather and Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The move by the world's biggest palm oil producer to ban exports from Thursday will lift prices of all major edible oils including palm oil, soybean oil, sunflower oil and rapeseed oil, industry watchers predict. That will place extra strain on cost-sensitive consumers in Asia and Africa hit by higher fuel and food prices.

"Indonesia's decision affects not only palm oil availability, but vegetable oils worldwide," James Fry, chairman of commodities consultancy LMC International, told Reuters.

Palm oil - used in everything from cakes and frying fats to cosmetics and cleaning products - accounts for nearly 60% of global vegetable oil shipments, and top producer Indonesia accounts for around a third of all vegetable oil exports. It announced the export ban on April 22, until further notice, in a move to tackle rising domestic prices.

"This is happening when the export tonnages of all other major oils are under pressure: soybean oil due to droughts in South America; rapeseed oil due to disastrous canola crops in Canada; and sunflower oil because of Russia's war on Ukraine," Fry said.

Vegetable oil prices have already risen more than 50% in the past six months as factors from labour shortages in Malaysia to droughts in Argentina and Canada - the biggest exporters of soybean oil and canola oil respectively - curtailed supplies.

Buyers were hoping a bumper sunflower crop from top exporter Ukraine would ease the tightness, but supplies from Kyiv have stopped because of what Russia calls its "special operation" in the country.



This had prompted importers to bank on palm oil being able to plug the supply gap until Indonesia's shock ban delivered a "double whammy" to buyers, said Atul Chaturvedi, president of trade body the Solvent Extractors Association of India (SEA).

Importers such as India, Bangladesh and Pakistan will try to increase palm oil purchases from Malaysia, but the world's second-biggest palm oil producer cannot fill the gap created by Indonesia, Chaturvedi said.

Indonesia typically supplies nearly half of India's total palm oil imports, while Pakistan and Bangladesh import nearly 80% of their palm oil from Indonesia.

"Nobody can compensate for the loss of Indonesian palm oil. Every country is going to suffer," said Rasheed JanMohd, chairman of Pakistan Edible oil Refiners Association (PEORA).

In February, prices of vegetable oils jumped to a record high as sunflower oil supplies were disrupted from the Black Sea region.

Pakistan Seeks More Funds From IMF



ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Pakistan has sought an increase in the size and duration of its \$6bn International Monetary Fund (IMF) programme, the country's finance minister, Miftah Ismail, has said.

Ismail made the comments in a video statement on Monday following talks with the IMF in Washington. It came after the fund said Islamabad had agreed to roll back subsidies to the oil and power sectors ahead of a resumption next month of a review of the IMF's support for the country.

"I've requested the fund and I think they have, largely, they've agreed to extend this program for another one year," he said. "I've also requested that they enhance the funding available to Pakistan from \$6 billion under this program to perhaps a little bit more."

The details will be decided when the mission comes to Pakistan in May, he said.

"Based on the constructive discussions with the authorities in Washington, the IMF expects to field a mission to Pakistan in May to resume discussions over policies for completing the 7th EFF review," the IMF said in a statement, referring to its Extended Fund Facility program.

This covers \$6bn of support the IMF agreed in 2019 to extend to Pakistan. The IMF suspended its loan to Pakistan in 2020 after the country failed to meet the conditions. The plan was revived last year after removed premier Imran Khan's administration agreed to tougher conditions, including raising oil prices and electricity tariffs although a few months later he rolled back the increases to soothe public anger over rising living costs.

The IMF also said the Pakistani authorities had requested to extend the EFF arrangement through June 2023 after the talks in Washington agreed to drop the subsidies.

Electricity Exchanges Urge Spain, Portugal Not to Act Alone on Power Prices

MADRID (Dispatches) - Power trading platforms are urging the Spanish government not to intervene alone in the system that sets the price of electricity, in its bid to bring down sky-high utility bills, according to a letter seen by Reuters.

European countries are scrambling to agree on ways to manage surging gas and power prices, pushed higher by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which are eating away at people's spending power across the bloc.

Spain and Portugal received permission in March to take their own temporary measures to contain prices. The neighbours have been working on ways to limit the impact of expensive gas, which often sets the overall price in the electricity system.

Spanish Energy and Environment Minister Teresa Ribera has said the simplest option is to cap the price at which gas plants can sell their power to the market. Portugal's Environment Minister Jose Duarte said last week the details were still being negotiated.

In response to these discussions, Spanish derivatives exchange MEFF and clearing house BME Clearing, along with Portuguese counterparts OMIP and OMIClear wrote to Spain's Secretary of State for Energy to express their worries.

"In our opinion, a possible regulatory intervention that affects the price-setting mechanism for the underlying asset, as an administrative measure unconnected to the effective market conditions, and that deviates from the price-setting model that is common in all of Europe, would generate a high risk of regulatory uncertainty," they said in the letter dated April 22.

Any changes must be made "in harmony with the rest of the EU", the letter said.

Spanish electricity providers association AELEC - formed of power firms EDP, Endesa, Iberdrola and Viesgo - also voiced

concerns about the possible unintended consequences of any mechanism to create a reference price for the gas used to generate electricity, in a letter to European officials dated April 8 and seen by Reuters.

AELEC said such a mechanism would cost more than it would save and suggested it would even encourage the use of gas.

The group said its members had not been consulted and based its comments on leaked documents as there had been no official communication from Spanish or Portuguese authorities at that time.

Ribera and Duarte will meet EU antitrust chief Margrethe Vestager in Brussels on Tuesday to discuss their joint proposal and iron out the details of the Iberian mechanism, Ribera's ministry said.



High-Ranking Hamas Delegation in Tehran

TEHRAN (IRNA) - A high-ranking delegation of the Islamic Resistance Movement of Palestine (Hamas) headed by Khalil al-Hayyah, the head of the Arab and Islamic Relations Portfolio of Hamas, arrived here in Tehran on Wednesday morning.

The delegation, also accompanied by representatives of

Hamas in Lebanon and Iran respectively Osamah Hamdan and Khalid Qaddoumi, is going to attend a meeting on the latest status of the Palestinian nation’s resistance on Thursday.

The meeting is hosted by the Permanent Secretariat of the International Conference in Support of the Palestinian Intifada affiliated to Iran’s Parliament.



Le Pen Far From Finished Despite New Defeat

PARIS (Dispatches) - Three failed tilts at top office would be enough to end the careers of many politicians. But not, it seems, French far-right leader Marine Le Pen, who is already preparing for legislative elections and possibly even another crack at the presidency in five years.

Rather than showing any indication of bowing out of politics after conceding defeat in Sunday’s election to President Emmanuel Macron, the National Rally (RN) chief immediately staked her claim to be leader of the future opposition.

With more than 41 percent of the vote, “the ideas we represent have reached new heights,” Le Pen told a crowd of supporters at an election-night party, vowing a “great battle for the legislative elections” in June.

But maintaining momentum will be an uphill struggle for RN, which has bled members and officials for want of electoral breakthroughs and lacks dense local networks.

Based around a personal brand rather than a party, “presidential elections are traditionally favourable for the RN,” said Sylvain Crepon, a political scientist specializing in the far right at the University of Tours.

“After all, the Le Pen brand embodies nationalism in France the best,” he said, adding this was thanks both to Marine and her father Jean-Marie, who founded the party as the National Front (FN).

But the far more localized parliamentary polls are a tougher nut to crack.

“When you have no significant allies to carry the (parliamentary) run-offs, it’s very complicated,” Crepon said.

With just six MPs in the lower chamber at present, the surge from this year’s unprecedented presidential result might carry the RN into the low double digits, he suggested.

But he said it is “totally impossible for them to form a majority in the National Assembly.”

Voters from the traditional right Republicans and hard left, who backed Le Pen mainly to try and eliminate Macron, will likely return to their political homes for the legislative vote.

RN party spokesman Sebastien Chenu told RTL radio Monday that “the French have made (Le Pen) the leader of the opposition”.

The party was already “looking to the legislative elections,” he said, targeting “an RN group in the National Assembly that will be strong enough to oppose Emmanuel Macron’s policies.”

“We will be the ones to protect the French people during the five years ahead,” agreed party president Jordan Bardella, the RN’s 26-year-old rising star and one of its few figures other than Le Pen with nationwide recognition.

That position will be most fiercely contested by hard-left leader Jean-Luc Melenchon, who has called on France’s fragmented political left to back him in June and deny Macron a majority.

And the RN must also fend off Eric Zemmour’s attempts to claim the nationalist limelight.

The former journalist and TV pundit scored eight percent in the presidential election’s first round with an even more xenophobic message than Le Pen -- as well



as winning over her niece Marion Marechal and a string of other prominent RN names to his cause.

Between Marine and her father, “it’s the eighth time the name Le Pen has been met with defeat” in a presidential vote, Zemmour said after Sunday’s result, adding that a coalition between his outfit Reconquest and the RN in June is “not an option, it’s a necessity, it’s a duty”.

“That’s a fine way to propose marriage!” Bardella retorted Monday.

Looking still further ahead, the RN will likely continue to struggle at regional, departmental and municipal elections, but can expect good scores at European polls under proportional representation, Crepon said.

Above all, some in the party already have their eye on the next presidential vote five years away.

“If every five years we gain 10 percentage points, we’ll make it next time,” RN chief Bardella told reporters Monday.

But it is likely too soon for such predictions, as the field will be completely open after Macron serves out his maximum two terms.

What is almost certain is that Le Pen will contest the election for the RN -- despite suggesting during this year’s campaign that she would step back if defeated.

“Marine Le Pen has not prepared a successor, and since there’s no internal democracy, neither has a competing school of thought been able to coalesce inside the party,” Crepon said.

In the long term, she may hope to pass the reins to Marechal, if she can be persuaded back across party lines.

For now, “those who imagine that Marine Le Pen will retire to raise cats are mistaken,” spokesman Chenu said, referring to her penchant for breeding the animals.

Religious Freedom in India Significantly Worsened

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - The state of religious freedom in India “significantly worsened” last year, a United States panel has said, calling for targeted sanctions against the country over alleged abuses.

In its annual report released on Monday, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) urged the State Department for the third straight year to place India on the US list of “countries of particular concern”.

The independent bipartisan panel accused India of “engaging in and tolerating systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom”.

The USCIRF puts forward recommendations and documents alleged abuses, but the State Department ultimately makes the decision on the religious freedom blacklist.

“During the year, the Indian government escalated its promotion and enforcement of policies—including those promoting a Hindu-nationalist agenda—that negatively affect Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Dalits, and other religious minorities,” the report (PDF) said.

“The government continued to systemize its ideological vision of a Hindu state at both the national and state levels through the use of both existing and new laws and structural changes hostile to the country’s religious minorities.”

India has previously rejected the commission’s recommendation to blacklist the country over alleged violations of religious freedom, calling its findings “biased”.

Monday’s report comes as US officials say they are seeking “maximum alignment” with India over Russia policy and the war in Ukraine. Washington has also been strengthening ties with New Delhi amid growing competition with China.

US President Joe Biden held a virtual meeting with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi earlier this month and the two leaders are set to meet in Tokyo next month as part of a summit for the leaders of the Asia-Pacific “Quad” alliance, which also includes Japan and Australia.

Still, the USCIRF on Monday accused India of repressing human rights defenders from religious minorities.

The commission hit out against the Indian government over a citizenship law that fast-tracks naturalisation for non-Muslims, calling it “discriminatory”, while also slamming anti-religious conversion laws that it said target interfaith marriages in some states.

“Government action, including the continued enforcement of anti-conversion laws against non-Hindus, has created a culture of impunity for nationwide campaigns of threats and violence by mobs and vigilante groups, including against Muslims and Christians accused of conversion activities,” the report reads.

Drop in Vaccines Exposes Latin American Kids to Disease

PANAMA CITY (Dispatches) - One in four children in Latin America and the Caribbean does not have vaccine protection against three potentially deadly diseases, a UN report said Monday, warning of plummeting inoculation rates.

While 90 percent of children in the region in 2015 had received the vaccine for diphtheria, tetanus and whooping cough (DTP3), by 2020 coverage had dropped to three-quarters, according to the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), a regional office of the WHO.

This means some 2.5 million children were not fully protected -- and 1.5 million of them have not had even one dose in the three-shot regimen.

Globally, according to the World Health Organization, 17.1 million infants did not receive an initial dose of DTP3 vaccine in 2020, and another 5.6 million were only partially jabbed.

Outbreaks of preventable diseases “have already occurred” in Latin America and the Caribbean, the agencies said.

Unilateral Coercive...
FROM PAGE 1

Under the current difficult circumstances arising from COVID-19, Unilateral Coercive Measures also seriously jeopardize the economic growth of the targeted countries as well as hamper easy access to basic medical items and requirements thus endangering the lives and health of their citizens. Medicines, medical supplies and health commodities have been targeted through tight restrictions of foreign exchange resources resulting in the violation of the right to health and the right to life of the affected countries’ populations.

As the representative of a Country whose people are subjected to the most brutal and illegitimate unilateral coercive measures, I would like to seize this opportunity to call for the complete and immediate lifting of all aforementioned measures in order to ensure the full achievement of economic and social development as well as enable targeted countries to effectively repair their economies while guaranteeing the well-being of their people in the aftermath of the pandemic.

Despite all of the restrictions and pressures caused by the illegal sanctions, the Islamic Republic of Iran has taken concrete steps to formulate and implement population policies and measures as part of its National Development Plan. In this connection, priority has been given to increasing youth population, women’s empowerment as well as demographic dividend and demographic windows of opportunity through employing elders’ experiences in social and economic development.

At the same time, the health sector in Iran has undergone significant reforms concerning system policies and services to achieve the target of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and improve citizens’ satisfaction with health service provision while enhancing equity. In this connection, women, in particular, have been provide with access to all necessary health services, including reproductive health care services along with economic incentives to support female-headed households.

As a Country that currently hosts more than 5 million refugees, in particular Afghan refugees, Iran has remained dedicated to its humanitarian commitments and, among other services, has continued to provide the children of undocumented refugees in Iran with the opportunity to receive education in Iranian schools.

As Iranian society faces the prospect of a significant portion of its population ageing in the coming decades - in light of previous decades’ strong demographic transitions - the Iranian Government has established a National Council for Older Persons in order to provide special attention to the elderly population with the aim to implement related policies and programs.

In conclusion, let me reiterate my delegation’s full support for your efforts, Mr. Chairman, to lead the work of the Commission to a successful conclusion.

No Ministers Meeting...
FROM PAGE 1

The source relayed the information to Press TV after the Saudi Arabia-owned al-Arabiya news channel alleged, citing “diplomatic sources,” that Vienna was “likely” to host a meeting among the foreign ministers of the parties to the deal aimed at announcement of

“an agreement.”

Observers say the channel has come up with the false report to potentially alleviate the pressure that European countries have been mounting on the US to accept Iran’s conditions.

Quds Day...
FROM PAGE 1

This year Muslims are on the verge of marking the day while the Palestinians have started a new round of intifadha and the Zionist regime has started committing crimes by killing Palestinian protestors. The slogan of the Quds Day is “Down to Israel” which is chanted worldwide in different forms.

On the eve of this important international event, Muslim leaders, officials, and personalities from across the regional resistance axis and beyond take to the “al-Quds Podium” to denounce the Israeli regime over its sheer escalation of violence against Palestinians in the holy occupied city of al-Quds.

Although it is expected the day to be marked in the Muslim states, thousands of people take to the streets throughout many Western countries in support of the Palestinian cause of liberation from Israeli occupation and aggression.

This day tries to unite Muslims symbolically against the Zionists but they need a practical determination to fight the Zionists for the liberation of the occupied lands.

The Islamic Republic of Iran since its first day of establishment has supported Palestine and called for the liberation of the occupied lands and it has turned as the doctrine and policy of the country.

It seems this year protest rallies in Iran and in the world to be a strong blow to the Zionists in support of Palestinians and in recent days one can see the anger in the face of the Zionists in dealing with the new surge of intifadha in the occupied lands and they fear this struggle to be supported worldwide and to isolate the Zionist regime more than ever.

As the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has repeated, the countdown for the collapse of this fake Zionist regime has begun and this regime is living through artificial respiration and any moment its respiration may be stopped by the brave Palestinians. God willing.

Tehran Slams...
FROM PAGE 1

He added that Iran supports the continuation of inter-Syrian talks in Geneva and welcomes the convening of the Constitutional Committee’s seventh session.

The Iranian ambassador also strongly condemned Israel’s repeated violations of Syria’s sovereignty and territorial integrity and called on the Security Council to hold the Tel Aviv regime accountable for such acts of aggression.

Since a foreign-backed conflict erupted in the Arab country in 2011, Israel has been mounting attacks on Syrian soil for several years, targeting government positions as well as resistance forces that have been fighting the Daesh and other terrorist groups.

The Damascus government has on numerous occasions condemned Israeli airstrikes as well as the illegal presence of American and Turkish forces in the country, which both Washington and Ankara claim aims at fighting terrorism.

Since its onset, the Syrian conflict has killed nearly half a million people and displaced around half of the country’s population.

Speaking at the Tuesday meeting of the Security Council, Syria’s delegate underscored that ending the illegal presence of the United States, Turkey, and Israel in his country will help eliminate the terrorist presence, end all forms of displacement, restore Syrian national economic resources and improve the humanitarian and living situation in the country.

“The United States and its Western allies continue to obstruct the delivery of cross-line aid within Syrian territory to justify their continued violation of Syria’s sovereignty through the so-called cross-border aid mechanism that serves as a lifeline for terrorists,” the Syrian envoy added.

Senior UN officials also urged the council not to forget about the dire humanitarian situation in Syria in light of other conflicts, with Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, emphasizing that “Syria is a hot conflict, not a frozen one.”

Most Attacks...
FROM PAGE 1

Most of the attacks on Iran’s diplomatic missions have occurred in European countries, he also said, the governments of European countries had a hand in supporting such moves.

Stating that the immunity of diplomatic missions is obvious right, Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Saeed Khatibzadeh said at the conference that unfortunately, over the past few years, the employees of the Iranian Foreign Ministry in different countries have been martyred while performing their diplomatic missions.

Liverpool to Face Crystal Palace in Pre-Season Friendly

LONDON (Dispatches) - Liverpool will face Crystal Palace in Singapore as part of their pre-season tour of Asia in July, the Premier League club said on Tuesday.

Liverpool will meet Palace at the Singapore National Stadium on July 15, three days after facing Manchester United in Thailand.

“The Reds previously visited Singapore for two hugely successful games in 2001 and 2009, and an open training session in 2011, and are returning to Asia for the first time since 2017,” Liverpool said in a statement.

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Araujo Signs New Barca Contract Until 2026

MADRID (Dispatches) - Barcelona defender Ronald Araujo has agreed a new contract until 2026 with a buy-out clause set at €1 billion (RM4.6 billion), the club announced.

Araujo's previous deal was due to expire next year and his commitment comes as a huge boost to Barca, who see the 23-year-old as a key player for the future.

Barcelona's financial problems mean the club cannot currently compete with Europe's richest clubs and Araujo had reportedly been attracting interest from teams in the Premier League.

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SPORTS

THURSDAY APRIL 28, 2022

Man City Defeat Real Madrid in a Seven-Goal Thriller

LONDON (Dispatches) - Manchester City have a slender lead to defend in the second leg of their Champions League semi-final against Real Madrid after winning a thrilling first leg 4-3 at the Etihad on Tuesday.

The English champions could live to regret not killing off the 13-time winners after taking a two-goal lead three times.

Kevin De Bruyne, Gabriel Jesus, Phil Foden and Bernardo Silva were on target for Pep Guardiola's men, who should have scored many more.

But Karim Benzema's double and a brilliant individual effort from Vinicius Junior gave Madrid hope of another famous Champions League fightback at the Santiago Bernabeu on May 4.

Guardiola lamented letting Liverpool escape "alive" in the Premier League title race after a 2-2 draw at the Etihad nine days ago and will have similar regrets after a blistering opening that could have seen City go 4-0 up inside half an hour.

Madrid were playing in their 30th semi-final to City's third, but the English giants lived up to their tag as pre-tie favorites early on.

Only 92 seconds had passed before the Madrid rearguard was breached by Riyad Mahrez's quick feet and perfect cross for De Bruyne to stoop and head past Thibaut Courtois.

Guardiola has often been criticised for overthinking his team selection at the business end of the Champions League.

But his decision to break from the mould of the past two seasons and play Jesus as a central striker was inspired as the Brazilian ran the Real defense ragged.

Raducanu Splits With coach Beltz After Five Months

LONDON (Dispatches) - U.S. Open champion Emma Raducanu has split with German coach Torben Beltz after working with him for five months, the BBC reported on Tuesday.

Raducanu appointed Beltz as her coach in November after she had parted ways with Andrew Richardson following her surprise triumph at Flushing Meadows, where she became the first qualifier to win a Grand Slam.

The 19-year-old said she needed "a new training model" and that Britain's Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) would support her in the interim.

"I want to thank Torben for his coaching, professionalism and dedication over the last half a year," the BBC quoted her as saying in a statement.

"He has a huge heart and I have enjoyed our strong chemistry during the time together.

"I feel the best direction for my development is to transition to a new training model with the LTA supporting in the interim."

Reuters has requested comment from Raducanu and the LTA.

Raducanu, ranked 11th in the world, lost to world number one Iga Swiatek in the quarter-finals of the Stuttgart Open last week.

Investcorp, Elliott Could Clinch AC Milan Deal This Week

MILAN (Dispatches) - Bahrain-domiciled asset manager Investcorp could agree the buyout of Italian football club AC Milan as early as this week, when an exclusive negotiation period with U.S. fund Elliott is set to end, sources familiar with the matter said.

Italian football clubs have recently become a popular target for overseas investors, attracted by cheaper valuations compared with those of England's Premier league and other rivals in major European championships.

Talks between Investcorp and Elliott are progressing based on a valuation of about €1.18 billion (RM5.5 billion), including debt, for the former European champions, the sources briefed on the matter told Reuters.



Moments later it was Foden who was guilty of wasting a glorious chance when he dragged wide another pinpoint De Bruyne through ball.

Benzema dragged Madrid back from the dead to see off Paris Saint-Germain and Chelsea in the previous two rounds and again rose to his side's rescue before half-time.

The Frenchman cushioned in his 40th goal of the season off the post from Ferland Mendy's cross.

Yet, Madrid's good work in steadying the ship towards the end of the first half was undone in another slow start after the break.

Mahrez hit the post when one-on-one with Courtois before Dani Carvajal blocked Foden's follow-up on the line.

Fernandinho was forced to deputise at right-back after replacing the injured John Stones in the first half.

And the City captain had a major role to play in two goals in two minutes at either end. Firstly, he picked out Foden to restore City's two-goal lead.

But the 36-year-old showed his age as Vinicius sprinted clear of his Brazilian compatriot from the halfway line before slotting past Ederson.

City continued to create chances at an alarming rate for Carlo Ancelotti but it took something special when they did finally get a fourth.

Oleksandr Zinchenko was fouled on the edge of the area, but Romanian referee Istvan Kovacs played advantage and Silva thrashed into the top corner.

Again City failed to put the tie to bed as Mahrez was inches away from finding the far corner from the narrowest of angles.

But there was a final twist eight minutes from time when Aymeric Laporte handled inside the area.

Benzema was the coolest man in the stadium as he chipped the spot-kick down the middle to leave the tie on a knife-edge headed back to the Spanish capital.

Federer to Play Basel Tournament In October

PARIS (Dispatches) - Former men's tennis world number one Roger Federer, plagued by recurring knee problems for the last two years, will play singles at the ATP Basel indoor tournament in October, organizers said.

Federer, who hasn't played competitively since losing last July in the quarter-finals at Wimbledon to Pole Hubert Hurkacz, replied to the organizers' Instagram announcement with the message: "Looking forward to playing back home."

The tournament, like the 10-time winner, will be making its return after an enforced break having not taken place for the past two years due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

"After a two-year break due to the pandemic, the Swiss Indoors Basel will return to the ATP Tour in the fall of 2022," organizers said in a statement.

"10-time singles champion and hometown hero Roger Federer has announced his comeback to the stadium at St Jakobshalle," adding that "the worldwide interest...is expected to be tremendous".

Federer, who turns 41 in August, is also due to play in the three-day team event Laver Cup with long-time rival Rafael Nadal in London in September.

The duo teamed up to play doubles at the inaugural event in 2017.

Federer withdrew from the Olympics last year and underwent his third bout of knee surgery in 18 months, to "suture" his right internal meniscus and "treat (his) cartilage".

Nadal Not to Return at Madrid Open Next Week



MADRID (dispatches) - Rafael Nadal is not to return to competitive action at next week's Madrid Open, a month out from the French Open which the Spanish legend has won 13 times.

The 35-year-old resumed training last week after being on the sidelines for four weeks due to a rib injury.

He said on social media he wanted to play in the Spanish capital despite being "short of preparation".

Nadal picked up the injury in his loss to American Taylor Fritz in the Indian Wells final on March 22, announcing at the time he expected to be out for between four and six weeks.

That defeat ended his perfect 20-0 run to start 2022 which had included winning the Australian Open title.

Nadal beat Daniil Medvedev in an epic final in Melbourne after Novak Djokovic was deported from Australia over his Covid vaccination status.

That victory gave him a men's record 21st Grand Slam title, moving him out of a tie with Djokovic and Roger Federer.

The French Open begins on May 22.

Chiellini to Retire From Internationals After Argentina Friendly

ROME (Dispatches) - Italy defender Giorgio Chiellini will retire from international football after the European champions play a friendly against their South American counterparts Argentina at Wembley in June.

Italy's failure to qualify for this year's World Cup in Qatar seems to have hastened the 37-year-old Juventus defender's decision, with the Argentina match in London, where the Azzurri won the European Championship last July, to be his last.

"I'll say goodbye to the national team at Wembley, which is where I experienced the pinnacle of my career winning the Euros," Chiellini told DAZN after Juve's 2-1 win at Sassuolo in Serie A on Monday.

"I'd like to say goodbye to the Azzurri with a nice memory. That will certainly be my last game with Italy."

With 116 appearances for the national team, Chiellini is joint fifth in the all-time Italy charts alongside Andrea Pirlo, with only Daniele De Rossi, Paolo Maldini, Fabio Cannavaro and Gianluigi Buffon ahead of him.

The veteran center back, who came on as a substitute for Juventus on Monday, has not decided whether to prolong his club career beyond this season, however.

"My love affair with Juventus is not ending, it will never end," he added. "Of course, from now to the end of the season I do have to evaluate everything, talk to my family about what is best.

"Let's reach fourth place (in Serie A) first and win the Coppa Italia, then we'll sit down with my two families — at home and Juventus — to figure out what is best for everyone.



Djokovic Gets a Shot at Wimbledon Title Defense

LONDON (Dispatches) - Unvaccinated players are not barred from participating in Wimbledon, clearing the path for Novak Djokovic to defend his men's singles title in June.

The CEO of All England Lawn Tennis Club, Sally Bolton, said Tuesday the tournament would not mandate vaccination against COVID-19, adding participants are not required to quarantine on arrival ahead of the tournament.

"The requirements set up do not include mandatory vaccination," Bolton said. "It will not be a condition of entry for the championships this year."

Wimbledon begins June 27, when Djokovic has a shot at becoming a seven-time champion on the grass court.

Djokovic was in Australia and even practiced on the court after being sent to a quarantine hotel in a litigious tug of war with the top officials in the country. The Serbian ultimately was sent home because of his unvaccinated status. The matter played out in the court system as Australian officials flagged Djokovic for breaking quarantine prior to his arrival and submitting inaccurate documentation to receive an exemption to play in the January event.

Djokovic plans to compete in the French Open and publicly objected to Wimbledon's ban of Russian and Belarusian players from the 2022 event. Bolton said Tuesday the decision was made under direct guidance from the British government.

Among the banned players on the men's side are World No. 2 Daniil Medvedev and No. 8 Andrey Rublev. It's the first time since immediately after World War II that players were banned on the basis of nationality, when Germans and Japanese were barred.

Djokovic, 34, is seeking his 21st major championship, and is currently one behind Rafael Nadal with 20 Grand Slam titles.

