

Vice President for Parliamentary Affairs Has Said 20 out of 36 MPs Have Withdrawn Their Signature From a Motion That Called for the Impeachment of Iran's Minister of Industries, Mines and Trade

IRAN NEWS

UK Prime Minister's Spokesperson Said That the Country Was Exploring Mechanisms to Facilitate Trade With Iran, Mentioning UK's Support for Expansion of Trade Ties With Iran

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U.S. Ordered to Pay \$4.3b in Fines Over Murder of Scientists

TEHRAN (PressTV) - An Iranian court has found the U.S. administration and dozens of American institutions and officials guilty of supporting the Israeli regime's targeted assassinations of Iranian nuclear scientists, ordering Washington to pay \$4.3 billion in compensation.

Families of three martyred nuclear scientists, along with a wounded nuclear scientist and wives of three nuclear scientists who sustained injuries themselves in terror attacks on their husbands had filed a lawsuit with a Tehran court against the U.S. government, institutions and authorities that were in office at the time of Israeli terror acts.

The crimes in question inflicted physical, psychological and financial damages on the families of the victims.

The U.S. was ordered by the court to pay \$4.3 billion in total compensation, including fines.

The lawsuit, the court said, was aimed at countering violations of international obligations and instances of hostile behavior on the international stage through supporting Israel's acts of terrorism. **See Page 7**

Unblocking of Afghanistan Assets Should Not Be Politicized

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's ambassador and permanent representative to the United Nations says Afghanistan's assets seized in the United States belong to the Afghan people and their release should not be politicized as the war-ravaged country is facing abject humanitarian crisis.

"As we have repeatedly stated, Afghanistan's frozen assets belong to the Afghan people, and their release, which is crucial for helping the Afghan economy and saving lives, should not be politicized or conditional in any way," Majid Takht-Ravanchi said in an address to the UN Security Council on the situation in Afghanistan on Thursday.

"We highlight the need for taking relevant actions, such as reopening channels of financial and in-kind support and resources to the Afghan people, as well as exploring real alternatives for unfreezing Afghanistan's financial assets and improving access to lawful banking services," he added.

The Iranian envoy stressed that sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council on specific individuals and entities in Afghanistan must not impede humanitarian, economic, or developmental cooperation with Afghanistan. **See Page 7**

Moscow Seeks High-Level Ties With Tehran



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian says the Islamic Republic is serious about achieving a lasting agreement through the Vienna talks on the removal of sanctions, adding that an agreement would be possible if the Americans acted realistically.

Amirabdollahian made the remarks on a Monday presser with his visiting Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov, in Tehran. Asked about the situation of the Vienna talks, Iran's top diplomat said he has discussed the negotiations with Lavrov, adding, "If the Americans act in a realistic manner, we are hopeful to reach a final agreement in the near future."

Amirabdollahian said the Russian diplomat reiterated Moscow's support for the Islamic Republic's political positions in the negotiations and a possible agreement.

He said the other side, specifically the United States and the European Union's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell and his deputy, Enrique Mora, are continuing their efforts to get all parties back to the negotiations and continue the talks, adding, "We hope to be able to keep the negotiations, which is already on its right track, again on the roll ... in the near future."

"I would like to emphasize here once again that the Islamic Republic of Iran is serious about reaching a good, strong and lasting agreement, and we will continue the path of diplomacy, which is the right path, and again call on the United States to be realistic so that [we will] reach the final stage of negotiations," the top Iranian diplomat noted.

In response to a question about plans by Iran and Russia to increase their economic and trade cooperation as well as to expand relations in the face of the new sanctions imposed by the United States, Amirabdollahian said, "We, in the government, have adopted a strategy to counter the sanctions by pursuing two paths in parallel; the first path is to neutralize the sanctions within the framework of President Raisi's sustainable economic development plan, and the second path, which is being pursued at the same time and its responsibility lies with the [country's] diplomatic apparatus, is through diplomacy and negotiations for the removal of sanctions."

Pointing to the ways of dealing with U.S. sanctions against countries, including Iran and Russia, Amirabdollahian said, "We have had important agreements in recent months on rendering the sanctions ineffective, but they must be acted on and there is no need to express them in front of the media."

The Iranian foreign minister also said the two diplomats had talked about the Zionist regime's political saber-rattling, stressing that the region will not allow the Tel Aviv regime to threaten the security, stability and progress of the region.

Lavrov, for his part, told the presser that Iran and Russia had decided to expand their relations, saying, "We agree that relations between the two countries can reach a high level. To this end, we are working on another major agreement initiated by the president of Iran."

Pointing to the 2015 Iran deal, the Russian diplomat said, "Regarding the JCPOA, our goal is to rectify what the United States did wrong. When the United States quit the deal and withdrew [support for UN Security Council] Resolution 2231, it once again violated international law. We must work to revive the JCPOA in its 2015 original form without any additions."

"All illegal sanctions imposed against Iran, which contravene the JCPOA, must be removed. We hope the United States would make a logical decision, though we are not very confident in this regard."

Asked about Iran-Russia's cooperation in reaching a good and lasting agreement, and on the other hand, the US's lack of commitment in imposing new sanctions on Iran, Lavrov said, "The United States takes into account its internal considerations not only in the JCPOA-related negotiations, but also in any other issue. The United States acts based on its own problems."

The Russian diplomat added, "A year ago, the United States tried to accuse us of stalling the Vienna talks, but everyone acknowledges that the United States alone is slowing down the process of reaching an agreement."

China Takes Delivery of Large Shipment of Iranian Crude

BEIJING (Dispatches)- A large shipment of Iranian crude has been delivered to China, according to a report and amid statements by Iranian government authorities insisting that exports to China have been robust despite claims that increased Russian supply of crude to China has affected Iranian shipments.

The Wednesday report by Reuters news agency said that China had taken delivery of 260,000 tons (nearly 2 million barrels) of Iranian crude in the past week at its southern port of Zhanjiang.

The report cited data by shipping tracking specialist Vortexa Analytics as well as an anti-Iran group based in the United States which tracks cases of U.S. sanctions violations.

Iran's supply of crude to China started to jump to record levels of above 1 million barrels per day (bpd) in the second half of 2021 despite a regime of American sanctions that ban purchases of Iranian oil for entities and governments that have interests in the U.S. A bulk of the Iranian oil supply to China has been delivered to private refiners in the country. **See Page 7**

Iran, Pakistan to Upgrade Existing Power Transmission Line

LAHORE (Dispatches) - Iran and Pakistan would upgrade the existing transmission line by doubling the circuits from Polan to Gwadar on their respective sides for the supply of 100 megawatt electricity, said power sector sources.

It may be noted that Federal Minister for Power Khurram Dastgir Khan had held a meeting with Iran's Minister for Energy Ali Akbari Mehrabian in Tehran recently and discussed various aspects of electricity supply from Polan (Iran) to Gwadar. Iran would upgrade 27 kilometer transmission line from Polan to zero point on the border sharing with Pakistan, followed by doubling the circuits on the TL from zero point to Gwadar port.

Pakistan is already getting 100 megawatt electricity from Iran through this route and an addition of another 100 megawatt would increase power supply from Iran to Pakistan to 200 megawatt in total, said sources from Quetta Electric Supply Company (Qesco). The sources further confided to this scribe that Pakistan had asked for 200 megawatt electricity from Iran, however, it was revised down to 100 megawatt due to the transmission issues. **See Page 7**

China Criticizes IAEA's Resolution on Iran

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's foreign minister has criticized a recent resolution adopted by the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency on the country's nuclear program as politicized and unconstructive.

Hossein Amirabdollahian made the remarks in a Thursday phone call with his Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi, during which the two sides discussed bilateral relations as well as regional and international developments.

Explaining on the situation of negotiations between Iran and the remaining members of the 2015 deal in the Austrian capital, Iran's top diplomat said the recent anti-Iran resolution adopted by the IAEA's Board of Governors was politicized and "unconstructive."

"The Islamic Republic of Iran is ready to achieve a lasting agreement with goodwill and seriousness and while taking the interests of the Iranian nation into account," Amirabdollahian said.

The anti-Iran resolution, proposed by the US, Germany, France and Britain, was approved by the IAEA's 35-nation Board of Governors on June 8, with 30 votes in favor, two against and three abstentions, accusing Iran of not cooperating with the (IAEA). **See Page 7**

Iran Reports \$25.5b of Trade in Q1

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Figures by the Iranian customs office (IRICA) shows the country's trade with the rest of the world without considering the share of crude shipments had reached a total of \$25.5 billion in the first quarter of the calendar year that started March 21.

IRICA chief Alireza Moghaddasi said that Iran had a trade surplus of \$605 million in the June quarter.

Moghaddasi said Iran's trade had increased by 19.5% in value terms compared to the quarter to June 21, 2021.

IRICA figures showed that Iran's non-oil exports had reached a total value of \$13.069 billion over the first quarter of the calendar year, up 21% compared to the same quarter last year.

Imports rose 18% year on year in the June quarter to stand at \$12.464 billion, showed the figures.

China was the largest importer from Iran over the period with \$4.214 billion worth of purchases, followed by Iraq at \$1.824 billion and Turkey at \$1.737 billion, the customs data showed. **See Page 7**

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Zionist Regime Blamed as Source of Insecurity

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's Embassy in Georgia has said that Israel is an occupying regime that kills children and is the source of war, assassination, and instability in the region.

The Embassy said so in reaction to remarks made by the Israeli Ambassador to Tbilisi, Ran Gidor, in an interview with a Georgian media. The Zionist regime of Israel is the main root of all problems and insecurities in the Middle East, the Iranian embassy said.

The Embassy further described it as a dark comedy when the Israeli ambassador talked of human values. Georgian people and government are aware of the ill will of such a liar regime's envoy, he added.

Oil Sales Rise Without Creating New Commitment

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

BOJNOURD - Iran's president says Tehran has increased oil sales to an acceptable level without signing a contract or accepting a new commitment for the country.

Speaking on Thursday during the 26th provincial tour of the Iranian government, President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi addressed the people of North Khorasan and said: "Today, thanks to the authority and honor that you people have created, without signing a contract or accepting a new commitment for the country, we have increased oil sales to an acceptable level, while previously they said it was not possible to sell oil."

Raisi also referred to the order of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, who said that today production should be the main focus of work in the country, and said: "North Khorasan has good universities, scientific and cultural centers that have educated men and women and valuable human resources."

He continued his speech by referring to the statistics of about 700 casualties due to the outbreak of coronavirus at the time when his administration started work, adding: "Today, while the number of COVID-19 patients and victims in our country has decreased sharply, this is not the case in some countries."

The president continued: "Thanks to God and thanks to the prayers and cooperation of the people and, most importantly, thanks to the efforts of the medical and nursing staff of the country, we are going through days when the number of corona victims has reached single digits and sometimes zero."



Raisi further pointed out that his administration faced financial problems and a budget deficit of 480 trillion at the beginning of its activity and said, "The government did its best not to borrow from the central bank or print money, which itself causes inflation."

The president continued: "Since the beginning of its term, the 13th administration is paying between 10 and 13 trillion tomans for expenses that have not been done in this government, in addition to paying salaries and wages."

The president referred to the statistics of the Central Bank and the Statistics Centre on the increase of economic growth rate from 4 tenths of a percent to about 5 percent in the last months of 1400.

Raisi added: "In the conditions of war and in the days of sanctions, when the enemy made things difficult for us, you people of North Khorasan, along with other Iranians, patiently resisted and made the United States officially announce today that maximum pressure on the Islamic Republic has failed miserably."

The president said: "As your representative, we tell the Americans to know that you should not speak to the Iranian people with the language of force. The language of force does not work. This nation has won the war with victory and authority and has resisted for 40 years. This nation will surely win the economic war and the media war."

President Warns Against Attempts to Expand NATO Influence Across World

TEHRAN (PressTV) - President Ebrahim Raisi has warned against attempts to expand the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)'s influence in different parts of the world, blaming the provocative acts of the US and the military alliance that it leads as the root cause of the ongoing conflict in Ukraine.

"There is no doubt that the U.S. and NATO provocations have been the factor behind these conflicts [in Ukraine], and therefore it is necessary to be active in the face of attempts to expand NATO's influence in any part of the world, including in West Asia, the Caucasus and Central Asia," Raisi said in a meeting with visiting Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in Tehran.

He stressed the importance of ending the war in Ukraine as soon as possible and expressed the Islamic Republic's readiness to help find a diplomatic solution to the crisis.

The war in Ukraine has inflamed tensions between Russia and the West, with the U.S. and its NATO allies imposing unprecedented sanctions on Moscow and supplying a large cache of weaponry to Ukraine.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Raisi stressed the importance of cooperation among the Caspian Sea littoral states and said foreign powers are not allowed to have a military presence in this region.

He noted that constant meetings and talks between Iranian and Russian officials indicate the two countries' firm determination to open a new chapter of fruitful and strategic cooperation, particularly in the economic sector.

"Strengthening cooperation and coordination is an effective way to counter US sanctions and economic unilateralism against independent nations," the Iranian president said.

During the meeting, Lavrov said Russia is keen to elevate cooperation with Iran to a strategic level.

Pointing to the significance of Iran's membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Russian foreign minister added that his country supports Tehran's role in regional and international organizations.

Iran Wants Afghanistan to Commit to 1973 Water Treaty

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Iranian Energy Ministry has asked Afghanistan to commit to a major water treaty signed between the two countries nearly half a century ago as he insists the Taliban-led government in Kabul needs to do more to implement the terms of the agreement.

Deputy energy minister for water affairs Mohammad Javanbakht said on Thursday that Iran had received only 4 million cubic meters (mcm) from an annual water right of 820 mcm under the 1973 Helmand River Water Treaty since the start of the current water year in October.

Javanbakht said an Afghan delegation attending the 25th meeting of Helmand River Water Commissars in Tehran on June 15-17 had been briefed about Iran's concerns on water rights issues.

"We hope the Afghan delegation will convey Iran's clear message to their rulers about the need to commit to the 1973 treaty between the two countries," he was quoted as saying by the official IRNA news agency.

Since taking control of Kabul in August, the Taliban government has vowed to implement the terms of the water agreement with Iran and reverse a trend set by a previous US-backed administration which had failed to commit to the treaty.

However, Taliban ministers have blamed drought and technical issues for low supply of water from to Iran in the past months.

Javanbakht said Afghanistan has yet to allow a visit by Iranian experts to measurement facilities on the upstream of its Kajakai Dam to verify claims made by the Afghan side about the drought.

He reiterated Iran's previous criticism of Afghanistan's move last year to complete the Kamal Khan Dam on Helmand River, which is known as Hirmand in Iran, saying the dam has deprived Iran of its water rights under the 1973 treaty while causing a major environmental crisis in the region.

Regional Nations Urged to Decide About Region's Future



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian in a phone talk with his Omani counterpart said that Iran favors regional talks and cooperation and it is the regional nations who should decide about the region's future.

Hossein Amirabdollahian in his phone talk with Badr Albusaidi exchanged views on bilateral relations, as well as regional and international issues of mutual interest.

The Iranian foreign minister said he believes Tehran and Muscat are both quite determined to expand and deepen comprehensive bilateral relations, stressing that the various dimensions of reached agreements during President Raisi's visit to Oman need to be implemented.

Amirabdollahian said that role played by Oman in regional developments is quite essential, appreciating that country's efforts aimed at establishment of peace and stability in the region, including Oman's efforts to harbor peace in Yemen.

Oman's foreign minister, too, said in the phone talk that the new Iranian government's approach on expansion of relations with regional countries is important, reiterating that Oman is serious in pursuing the bilateral agreements reached during the Iranian president's visit to Oman.

Amirabdollahian and Albusaidi also surveyed the latest status of Iran's talks with world powers aimed at removal of the unjustly imposed anti-Iran U.S. sanctions.

Tehran Calls on Washington to Free Afghanistan's Blocked Money

NEW YORK (IRNA) - Iran's Ambassador to the United Nations called for the release of Afghan assets confiscated or blocked by the United States, as Afghanistan is struggling with the aftermath of an earthquake that killed at least 1500 people.

In a statement to the UN General Assembly on Thursday, Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations Zahra Ershadi expressed "sympathy and deepest condolences" to the people of Afghanistan for the deadly earthquake in this country.

Ershadi urged the international community to mobilize its resources and take prompt action to respond to the urgent humanitarian disaster. "We also call upon countries that have confiscated or blocked Afghan assets, contrary to basic humanitarian and international norms, to release them for the sake of humanity," she said, referring to the US' freezing of billions of dollars of Afghanistan's money and confiscation of a portion of the assets.

Elsewhere in her statement, Ershadi reiterated Iran's "unwavering commitment to the noble goal of the protection of civilians as well as the prevention of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity and prosecution of their perpetrators." Early warning initiatives along with preventive diplomacy, including resorting to the appropriate peaceful settlement of disputes, serve as the cornerstones for these efforts in order to achieve this goal.

We acknowledge the inevitable role of the youths in this process and emphasize the commitment of all countries to protect all their citizens especially children, as well as youths during catastrophic humanitarian situations.

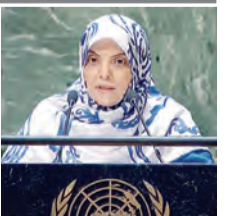
In this regard, we take note of the recent report of the Secretary-General under this Agenda item.

She also urged in-depth legal as well as humanitarian discussions on the concept of "Responsibility to Protect" as there's no consensus on the scope, definition and elements of the concept.

Ershadi said that the failure to effectively prevent atrocity crimes can be attributed more to the failures of the Security Council rather than due to the lack of a relevant normative framework.

She also mentioned the outstanding role of some mainstream media in the hands of certain states and lobbies that willfully portray humanitarian situations while manipulating the realities on the ground.

"This nonconstructive role manifests in an exaggeration of particular situations while downgrading or censoring certain critical conditions, such as the cases concerning Afghanistan, Palestine and Yemen," she noted.



Gen. Kazemi Appointed New IRGC Intelligence Chief

TEHRAN (MNA) - The commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Major General Hossein Salami has appointed Brigadier General Mohammad Kazemi as the new head of the IRGC's intelligence.

According to the Public Relations department of the IRGC, the commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Major General Hossein Salami issued a decree on Thursday to appoint Brigadier General Mohammad Kazemi as the new head of the IRGC's intelligence.

The IRGC spokesman Brigadier General Ramzan Sharif has said that Kazemi's predecessor clergyman Hossein Taeb will serve as an advisor to the IRGC's Commander-in-chief.

Kazemi was the head of the IRGC's counter-intelligence agency for a lot of years and is highly experienced in security and intelligence matters in the IRGC.

Iran Sends Two Aid Shipments

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Following the devastating earthquake in Afghanistan on Wednesday, which has so far claimed more than 1,000 lives, Iran expressed condolences and pledged full support to the neighboring country.

Iranian embassy in Kabul, in a tweet, offered its condolences to the people of Afghanistan, saying it has dispatched two cargo planes carrying first aid supplies to the quake-hit country.

It said that relief and rescue teams of Iran's Red Crescent Society (IRCS) as well as medical and volunteer squads have been put on standby to be deployed to Afghanistan.

"Search, rescue teams, emergency medical services, rescue workers, volunteers, and medical staff of the IRCS are fully prepared to be sent to Afghanistan if requested by the government," the embassy said.

IranAir to Resume Flights to Rome

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's flag carrier IranAir will resume direct flights between Tehran and Rome after four years of suspension and under a new agreement reached between aviation authorities of Iran and Italy.

IranAir's Tehran-Rome flights will resume on July 14. IRNA's London office said in a report that the route relaunch had been finalized during a meeting between Iran's civil aviation chief Mohammad Mohammadi Bakhsh and his Italian counterpart Alessio Quaranta. The report did not elaborate on when and where the meeting had been held.

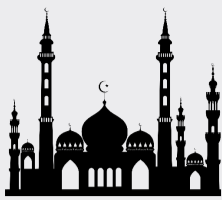
It said Mohammadi Bakhsh and Quaranta signed a revised version of the aviation cooperation agreement between Iran and Italy while emphasizing the need for increased flights between the two countries to help boost tourism and economic ties.

Under the new agreement, the IranAir will also increase the number of its current flights between Tehran and the Italian city of Milan, said the report.

Aviation ties between Iran and Italy took a hit in 2018 under pressure from a former American government that pulled out of an international deal on Iran's nuclear program and imposed sanctions on the country.

Italian officials refused to renew flight licenses for Iran's second largest airline the Mahan Air in November 2019, a month after former U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo traveled to Rome and urged Italy to ban the airline from the country's airspace.

IranAir's plans to resume flights between Tehran and Rome to replace the Mahan Air route was cancelled because of the spread of coronavirus in early 2020 as both Iran and Italy became hotspots for the disease and imposed severe restrictions on aviation activities.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:07
■ Evening (Maghreb)	20:45
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:03
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	05:50

11. Those who brought forward the lie are a body among yourselves: think it not to be an evil to you; On the contrary it is good for you: to every man among them (will come the punishment) of the sin that he earned, and to him who took on himself the lead among them, will be a penalty grievous. Surah 24. Light (11)

Tehran Ready to Cooperate With Baghdad on Oil and Gas

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The CEO of the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) announced Iran's readiness to export technical and engineering services to Iraq, saying: "Iran wants to benefit from participation in the development of the Iraq's oil and gas industry."

At the Joint Working Group on Iran-Iraq Oil Cooperation meeting, Mohsen Khojastehmehr stated that all the efforts had been targeted at taking steps in various oil fields and gas and developing economic relations between the two countries.

The meeting of the Joint Working Group on Iran-Iraq Oil Cooperation started this morning (Wednesday, June 22). It was chaired by Mohsen Khojastehmehr, the Deputy Minister and CEO of the National Iranian Oil Company, on behalf of the Iranian delegation, and Bassem Mohammad Khedir, the Iraqi Deputy Minister of Oil on behalf of the Iraqi board.

"It is time for Iran and Iraq to take practical steps to cooperate in the field of oil and gas activities and the scientific, technological and educational sectors," he Khojastehmehr.

He said that Iran and Iraq have a high capacity in the region and the world and are two influential and competent countries in the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) that must work diligently to ensure energy security in the region.

Khojastehmehr stated that Iran's current oil production capacity is about 4 million barrels per day. For gas, it is 1 billion cubic meters per day, adding: "To increase the crude oil production capacity to about 6 million barrels per day in the next eight years to \$90 billion and for bringing gas output to 1.5 bcm/d \$70b investment is needed."

The Iraqi Deputy Minister of Oil for Exploration, Bassem Mohammad Khazir, underlined the desire of the Iraqi Minister of Oil to develop relations and take broader steps through the formation of a joint working group with Iran, stressing that a roadmap should be prepared for future efforts and goals of the two countries.

He stated that in this crucial meeting, a roadmap should be prepared for the future



steps and goals of the two countries, adding: "Another important issue is Iranian technology and products. For example, this country already has a high capacity in many sectors such as power cables, pipes and fittings and up-to-date technologies that can be transmitted to us."

"The CEO of the National Iranian Oil Company emphasized the issue of training and transfer of technology and technical equipment in his remarks. The issue of transfer of expertise and technology is very important and we should be able to cooperate in this field," Shana cites an Iraqi official saying.

"The most important thing for Iraqi oil industry officials right now is to develop cooperation and get results from interaction. We hope this trip will be the beginning of a broader cooperation, especially in the scientific and technical discussion of the remaining cases between the two," said the Iraqi Deputy Minister of Oil.

The adviser to the Iranian Minister of Petroleum in Iraq stressed the need to strengthen cooperation between Iran and Iraq in the energy field.

Abbas Beheshti said: "Trade issues between the two countries will be discussed in this joint working group, and if necessary, separate meetings will be held."

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He called the formation of a joint chapter of Iran-Iraq relations valuable and added: "We hope to have good cooperation in the field of energy."

"We hope that the cooperation between the two sides, especially in the field of energy, will be strengthened," said the Iranian petroleum minister's adviser on Iraq, noting that Iran had made good progress during the sanctions.

Food Price Inflation in Iran Jumps by More Than 80%

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Inflation soared in Iran in May-June as the government lifted import subsidies for essential goods, with food prices jumping by more than 82 percent.

The inflation rate reported by the Statistical Center of Iran (SCI) pertained to point-to-point calculation of rising prices, comparing the last Iranian calendar month of Khordad that ended June 20 with the same month in 2021.

Based on figures announced by SCI on June 22, overall point-to-point inflation rose by 52.5 percent, while non-food goods and services rose by 36.8 percent compared to the same month in 2021.

In early May, the government decided to end food import subsidies in place since 2018, that was allegedly abused by corrupt officials and businessmen to divert cheap dollars provided by the government, for non-essential imports.

The program of import subsidies cost the government \$9-15 billion a year, depending on widely diverging figures quoted by different officials.

Compared with the previous month this year (April 21-May 20), the inflation index rose by 13.2 percent. But the shocking price jump was for the food sector with a 36.8 percent jump in one month.

However, the most politically significant and sensitive price increases were for cooking oil, bread and cereals.

Cooking oil jumped by 200 percent in one month and 250 percent compared with the same month in 2021. Bread and cereals jumped by 93.8 percent in one year and almost 20 percent compared to the previous 30-day period.

Dairy prices jumped by 47 percent in one month and 111 percent in one year.

Iran Apple Exports to Pakistan to Be Resumed After 16 Years of Hiatus



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran and Pakistan signed a trade and quarantine agreement and they decided to resume export of Iran's tree to Pakistan after 16 years of halt.

The agreement was signed between Iran's Agriculture Jihad Ministry and Pakistan's Ministry of National Food Security and Research. According to the reports, both sides signed an agreement on cooperation in resolving problems regarding the quarantine for broadening trade of agro products. Both sides also decided that export of Iranian apple is resumed officially after 16 years of halt.

According to the agreement, Iran will export apple, kiwi, date, pistachio, raisin and almond to Pakistan and in return and based on the earned forex, Iran imports orange, tangerine and mango from Pakistan while import of rice and spice from Pakistan is another part of the agreement.

During the ceremony for signing the agreement, Iran's agriculture ministry official Mr. Moharram Soltani said that Iran's apple exports to Pakistan have seen fluctuations in recent years, adding that for resolving the problem, the Pakistani official was invited to visit Tehran to resolve the problems and after several tense meetings between the representatives of the two countries they reached an agreement on resolving the trade and quarantine problems.

He noted that the trade volume between Iran and Pakistan in recent years has seen upward growth and their trade in terms of value has grown by 50% and in terms of weight by 100% from 2016 to 2021.

Soltani expressed hope this agreement would ease trade of agro products between Iran and Pakistan.

Ardebil Welcomes Cooperation With Australian Investors

TEHRAN - Head of Ardebil Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture Mr. Hossein Pir Moazen in meeting with Australian Ambassador to Iran Ms. Lyndall Sachs said the private sector of Ardebil Province welcomes any investment from Australians and it is also ready to dispatch investors to Australia.

Pir Moazen went on to say that the private sector in Iran has high capabilities so that it has tried to steer the country out of the economic crisis and sanctions in years and it is now ready to broaden economic relations with other countries.

He added that all industries in Ardebil Province are active, and considering the existing potentials in diverse sectors like industry, mine, agriculture and tourism they can cooperate. He said the province has great potentials in the field of agriculture and processing industries like producing one million tons of potato a year in its Pars and Moghan Agro-Industry Companies and it is ready to cooperate with Australian investors in those fields.

He also hailed the Australian ambassador for her visit to the province especially in the time of sanctions that the

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK



province seeks expansion of economic ties, adding that he believes practical steps should be taken in order to have some impact on broadening economic ties.

Then Australian Ambassador Ms. Sachs, for her part, said that the goal behind her visit to Ardebil Province was to see existing opportunities in this province and transfer it

to the economic activists in Australia in order that they take advantage from these opportunities for broadening bilateral cooperation.

She added that Iran's Embassy in Canberra with direct talks can also do the same and encourage Australian economic activists for presence in Iran's market.

Sachs stressed that some big Australian companies have offices in the UAE and she invites them to visit Iran due to the short distance to review the grounds for cooperation between Australian economic activists with their Iranian counterparts.

Touching upon admission of Iranian students, she said many Iranians study in Australia and Australia is eager to host more students from Iran and Ardebil province in its reputable universities.

Transit; Suitable Alternative for Oil Revenues

TEHRAN (IP) - Iran's first vice president mentioned transit development as a lucrative and job-generating factor for Iran, describing it as a suitable alternative for oil revenues.

First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber mentioned transit development as a lucrative and job-generating factor for Iran and said: "If the country's transit capacities are properly activated and get operational, transit can become a suitable alternative for oil revenues." Mokhber, in a meeting of the country's transit working group, on Wednesday evening, referred to Iran's exceptional geographical location and considered transit as one of the main advantages of the country, announcing the serious efforts of President Ebrahim Raisi's administration to develop transit.

The First Vice President pointed out the numerous necessities for developing the country's transit and its positive effects and consequences: The comment has not been fulfilled. Referring to recent international issues and the closure of some routes through neighboring countries due to unilateral sanctions, the First Vice President said: "Iran has an exceptional opportunity to expand the existing capacity to fill the gap in the region and earn more revenue."

It was also decided to prioritize railway projects to connect the country's railway network to certain international routes and to carry out the necessary planning to expedite their implementation. During the meeting, it was announced that the country's transit capacity could generate twenty billion dollars a year and create one million job opportunities.

Indigenization; One of Most Crucial Features of Knowledge-Based Products

TEHRAN (IP) - Vice-President for Science and Technology says what is important is the knowledge-based product development model, even though these models may exist outside of Iran.

Attending a press briefing on the sidelines of a visit to the Takgene Group and the unveiling of the "Bio Boost" drug supplement, Sorena Sattari stated that what is important in knowledge-based and accelerator-based companies is that a young person enters with an idea, and eventually several teams with several ideas enter the market.

He added that more than 3 teams are currently working in Takgene Group and are implementing cases that are almost unprecedented in Iran.

Referring to livestock probiotics, the Iranian vice-president for science and technology said livestock, poultry, aquaculture and food security are among Iran's priorities this year.

He noted that Takgene's work is almost unique and now they are exported to different countries, and in the future, each of these teams will become a successful entrepreneur.

Fruit Consumption Drops By About 30% in a Week

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Fruit consumption has decreased by 25 to 30 percent due to the expensiveness of a variety of products, according to the vice president of the Fruit and Vegetable Vendors Association.

"Many people wander and don't know which basic products to allocate their money to buy," Ismail Moradian told ILNA news agency.

According to Mr. Moradian, apricot varieties are rated at a cost of 40 to 70 thousand tomans per kilogram, cherry varieties between 30,000 and 120,000 tomans per kilo and strawberries between 30,000 and 80,000 tomans in the fruit and fruit market.

The unbridled increase in prices in Iran over the past months has accelerated as the implementation of the economic policies of Ebrahim Raisi's government, known as "surgery and economic reforms," has reduced the consumption of a wide range of products and foods.

In a letter, 61 economists in Iran warned of the consequences of recent policies.

Large Drop in Iran's Steel Production

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's crude steel production declined dramatically for the second month in a row, according to a new report by the World Steel Association on June 22.



The report says Iran's steel production declined 17.6% year-on-year in May to 2.3 million tons.

In April also, the figure plunged 20.7 percent to 2.2 million tons, according to this report.

Iran is the 10th largest steel producer in the world just behind Brazil. China is the undisputed producer with close to 100 million tons of monthly output. Production of all the top ten suppliers declined in the first 5 months of 2022, except India that had an increase of 6.5 percent. But Iran had the highest drop. An 8.7 percent reduction in China could be due to strict Covid lockdowns.

Production loss in Iran, however, was not related to the pandemic. There were no lockdowns in 2022, as cases dropped dramatically after a vaccination drive. But according to reports recent electricity cut and restriction in electricity supply should be blamed for this drop.

But Reza Shahrestani, a member of the Board of Directors of Iran Steel Producers Association told Shargh Daily that Russia is dumping its steel products by giving 15 to 20% discount: Iran's traditional markets including China, South Korea, Taiwan and Afghanistan are buying Russian steel now.

Suu Kyi Moved to Prison From Undisclosed Location

BANGKOK (Dispatches) - Myanmar's ruling military authorities have transferred deposed civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi to prison from the undisclosed location she has been held at since last year's army coup, news outlets including the BBC reported.

The BBC's Burmese-language service cited sources as saying the Nobel laureate, 77, was now being held in a separate building inside the prison.

She has been charged with at least 20 criminal offences since she was toppled in a military coup in February 2021, including multiple counts of corruption.



North Korea's Kim Oversees Military Meeting

SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korean leader Kim Jong Un continued to preside over the second day of the nation's major party meeting on its military and defense policies, the state media reported on Thursday, amid concerns over a potential imminent nuclear test.

At the meeting, the party discussed adding operation duties of the frontline units, modifying operation plans and restructuring key military organizational formations, Korea Central News Agency (KCNA) said, adding Kim stressed the importance of efforts to enhance the operational capabilities of the frontline units.



Ukraine Takes Step Toward EU Membership



KYIV (Dispatches) - Ukraine is set to be accepted as a candidate to join the European Union on Thursday, a move that boosts the country's morale as Russian assaults wear down the defenders of two cities in the eastern Donbas region.

Although the approval of the Kyiv government's application by EU leaders meeting in Brussels is just the start of what will be a years-long process, it marks a huge geopolitical shift and will anger Russia as it struggles to impose its will on Ukraine.

The expected green light "is a signal to Moscow that Ukraine, and also other countries from the former Soviet Union, cannot belong to the Russian spheres of influence," Ukraine's ambassador to the EU, Vsevolod Chentsov, told Reuters.

Friday will mark four months since Russian President Vladimir Putin sent troops across the border in what he calls a "special military operation" partly necessitated by Western encroachment into what Russia considers its sphere of influence.

The conflict, which the West sees as an unjustified war of aggression by Russia, has killed thousands, displaced millions and destroyed cities as well as having ramifications across much of the world as food and energy exports have been curtailed.

Russia has focused its campaign on southern and eastern Ukraine after its advance on the capital Kyiv in the early stages of the conflict was thwarted by Ukrainian resistance.

The war of attrition in the Donbas - Ukraine's industrial heartland - is most critical in the twin cities of Sievierodonetsk and Lysychansk, which sit on opposite sides of the Siverskyi Donets River in Luhansk province.

The battle there is "entering a sort of fearsome climax", said Oleksiy Arestovych, an adviser to Zelenskiy.

Russian forces were trying to encircle Ukrainian troops defending Lysychansk, senior Ukrainian defence official Oleksiy Gromov said in a briefing on Thursday.

Luhansk Governor Serhiy Gaidai said separately that all Lysychansk was within reach of Russian fire and the Ukrainian troops there might retreat to new positions to avoid being trapped.

Ukrainian forces were defending Sievierodonetsk and the nearby settlements of Zolote and Vovchovrovka, Gaidai said, but Russian troops had captured Loskutivka and Rai-Oleksandrivka to the south.

Hundreds of civilians are trapped in a chemical plant in Sievierodonetsk while Ukraine and Russia dispute who controls the bombed-out city.

Moscow says Ukrainian forces in the city are surrounded. But Gaidai said on Wednesday the Russians did not yet have full control of Sievierodonetsk.

TASS news agency quoted Russian-backed separatists as saying Lysychansk was now surrounded and cut off from supplies after a road connecting the city to the town of Sieviorsk was taken.

Reuters was unable to immediately confirm the report.

On the southern front, Russian forces struck Ukrainian army fuel tanks and military equipment near Mykolaiv with high-precision weapons, Russia's defense ministry said, quoted by the Interfax news agency.

Aid Trickles in to Afghan Earthquake Zone, Toll at 1,000 Dead

GAYAN (Dispatches) - Aid began arriving in a remote part of Afghanistan where an earthquake killed 1,000 people but poor communications and a lack of proper roads are hampering relief efforts in a country already grappling with a humanitarian crisis.

The magnitude 6.1 earthquake struck early on Wednesday about 160 km, (100 miles) southeast of Kabul, in arid mountains dotted with small settlements near the border with Pakistan.

"We can't reach the area, the networks are too weak, we trying to get updates," Mohammad Ismail Muawiyah, a spokesman for the top Taliban military commander in hardest-hit Paktika province, told Reuters, referring to telephone networks.

The earthquake killed some 1,000 people and injured 1,500 injured, he said. More than 3,000 houses were destroyed.

The toll makes its Afghanistan's deadliest earthquake in two decades, according to U.S. government data. About 1,000 people had been rescued from various affected areas by Thursday morning, Sharafat Zaman, a spokesperson for the health ministry told Reuters.

"Aid has arrived to the area and it is continuing but more is needed," he said.

The town of Gayan, close to the epicentre, sustained significant damage with most of its mud-walled buildings damaged or completely collapsed, a Reuters team said.

The town, with only the most basic roads, was bustling with Taliban soldiers and ambulances as a helicopter bringing in relief supplies landed nearby, whipping up huge swirls of dust. About 300 people sat on the ground waiting for supplies.

The rescue operation will be a major test for the hard-line Islamist Taliban, who took over last August as U.S.-led international forces withdrew after two decades of war.

Forty-six lawmakers named no one for the post, while 25 voted for Nawaf Salam, a former Lebanese ambassador to the United Nations and now a judge at the International Court of Justice.

Analysts and politicians expect this cabinet formation process to be further complicated by a looming struggle over who will replace Aoun, the Hezbollah-aligned Maronite Christian head of state, when his term ends on Oct. 31.

Parliament - which elects the new president - emerged highly fractured from a general election last month. The heavily armed Hezbollah and its allies lost their majority, reform-minded newcomers made a strong showing and the Saudi-aligned Christian Lebanese Forces party gained seats.

Reflecting the new landscape, Mikati, who hails from the northern city of Tripoli, secured around 20 fewer votes than when he was last designated prime minister in September.

Lebanon's Mikati Named PM, Faces Tough Path to Cabinet

BEIRUT (Dispatches) - Lebanese caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati was designated to form a new government, but faces a politically difficult path to agree a new cabinet as the country's devastating financial crisis festers.

The Sunni Muslim billionaire was nominated premier for a fourth time after securing the support of 54 of parliament's 128 lawmakers, including the Iran-backed Shi'ite Muslim party Hezbollah, in consultations convened by President Michel Aoun.

But with splits running deep among Lebanon's ruling elite, it is widely believed Mikati will struggle to form a government, spelling political paralysis that could hamper reforms agreed with the IMF to unlock aid.

Now in its third year, the financial meltdown has sunk the currency by more than 90%, spread poverty, paralyzed the financial system and frozen depositors out of their savings, in Lebanon's most destabilising crisis since the 1975-90 civil war.

Mikati, who has already served as prime minister three times, continues in a caretaker role until a government is formed, a process that typically goes on for months as political factions divvy up roles in cabinet and beyond.

any form of coalition saying there was no trust in Macron.

"For us it will be on a case-by-case basis," he said.

Louis Aliot, vice-president of Marine Le Pen's National Rally (RN) which is now the second-biggest party in parliament, also dismissed the appeal. Far-left leader Jean-Luc Melenchon called Macron's speech a "ratatouille", a southern dish made by combining vegetables with lots of olive oil.

The reactions offer little hope of a swift way out of the impasse.

Voters delivered what is for France a rare hung parliament, with Macron's centrist alliance 44 seats short of an absolute majority, and the far right and a broad leftwing alliance that includes the far left battling to be the main opposition force. The conservatives could be kingmakers.

Government spokesperson Olivia Grégoire qualified Macron's implication that he wanted parties to clarify their stances within 48 hours, saying any further consultations would likely take weeks.

"He has started a dialogue which won't end after 48 hours," she told radio.

French Parties Brush Off Macron Appeal to Unblock Parliament

PARIS (Dispatches) - French parties from left and right brushed off President Emmanuel Macron's appeal for help to overcome a hung parliament on Thursday, demanding he clarify what compromises he was ready to make to win their backing.

Before heading off to a European Union summit in Brussels, Macron late on Wednesday made a televised speech in which he acknowledged that this month's parliament elections had laid bare "deep divisions" across French society.

Ruling out a government of national unity, he called on rival party leaders either to look at possible coalition options with his centrist alliance or to consider lending support for reforms on a bill-by-bill basis.

But the gambit was widely dismissed as an attempt to rally others to his policies while making few concessions.

"If he sticks to his project, he doesn't have an absolute majority," Socialist deputy Valerie Rabault told France Inter radio. "It will be him blocking France, not us."

Bruno Retailleau, a senator for the mainstream right Republicans party considered Macron's best hope of getting his economic reforms through parliament, ruled out



Americans Have Right to Carry Guns in Public

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Americans have a fundamental right to carry firearms in public in a landmark decision that came just weeks after another deadly school shooting.

The 6-3 ruling strikes down a New York law that required a person to prove they had legitimate self-defense needs to receive a gun permit and will prevent states from restricting people carrying guns.

Despite a growing call for limits on firearms after two mass shootings in May stunned the country, the court sided with advocates who said the US Constitution guarantees the right to own and carry guns.

The ruling is the first by the court in a major Second Amendment case in a decade and a victory for the powerful gun lobby, the National Rifle Association.

"Today's ruling is a watershed win for good men and women all across America and is the result of a decades-long fight the NRA has led," NRA executive vice president Wayne LaPierre said in a statement.

"The right to self-defense and to defend your family and loved ones should not end at your home."

Justice Clarence Thomas, who wrote the majority opinion, said "the Second and Fourteenth Amendments protect an individual's right to carry a handgun for self-defense outside the home."

"New York's proper-cause requirement violates the Fourteenth Amendment by preventing law-abiding citizens with ordinary self-defense needs from exercising their Second Amendment right to keep and bear arms in public for self-defense."

The U.S. Senate is currently considering a rare bipartisan bill that includes modest gun control measures. On May 14, an 18-year-old used an AR-15-type assault rifle to kill 10 African Americans at a supermarket in Buffalo, New York.

Less than two weeks later 19 children and two teachers were shot and killed at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas, by another teen with the same type of high-powered, semi-automatic rifle.

The New York law said that to be given a permit to carry a firearm outside the home, a gun owner must clearly demonstrate that it is explicitly needed for self-defense -- meaning those without the demonstrated need could not do so.

Could Germany Keep Its Nuclear Plants Running?



FRANKFURT (Dispatches) - Every domestic energy source, including nuclear power, is under consideration as Germany seeks to fuel its economy and ward off a recession considered likely if faltering Russian gas supplies stop completely.

Former Chancellor Angela Merkel pledged to halt the use of nuclear power after the Fukushima nuclear disaster of 2011 and utility leaders have prepared for the closure of three remaining reactors by the end of 2022.

They say constraints in sourcing fuel rods and expert staffing make keeping them open impossible. The government also said in March that legal, safety and liability issues ruled out maintaining nuclear power. Some of the Liberals within the Social Democrat-led government and the opposition Conservatives say, however, that given coal, which Germany has been phasing out for environmental reasons, is being reassessed, nuclear should also be reconsidered.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz has so far opposed keeping nuclear running longer. Following Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, which began on Feb. 24, Germany's has reduced the share of Russia in its gas imports to an estimated 35% from 55%, but is still dependent on it.

While the European Union has sought to reduce its use of Russian energy, Russia has also cut flows through the Nord Stream 1 pipeline to Germany to 40% of capacity. Moscow says Western sanctions are hindering repairs; Europe says this is a pretext to reduce flows.

Whatever the explanation, the energy regulator, the Bundesnetzagentur, has said there will be problems keeping consumers warm and industry functioning. At the same time, surging prices as the markets brace for shortage add to the risk of recession.

Alongside increased use of imported and domestic coal, nuclear power could help to help relieve the power generation sector, of which 15% is generated by gas-fired plants.

Using less gas for power to heat Germany's 41 million households would also free up more for industry, which in many cases needs it as a feedstock.

Utilities E.ON, RWE and EnBW operate respectively Isar 2, Emsland and Neckarwestheim 2 - in total 4,300 megawatts (MW) of nuclear capacity.

Three other remaining reactors closed at the end of last year when six reactors provided 12% of Germany's electricity.

Other energy alternatives for Germany are solar and wind, which rely on the weather and imported liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminals.

The difficulty with LNG is a lack of import capacity and competition on the international market, especially as Freeport LNG, operator of one of the largest U.S. export plants is offline following an explosion earlier this month.

Nuclear-fired power plants remain unacceptable to the Green Party. It traces its origins to the environmentalist movement of the 1970s, which cited security risks and the unresolved question of nuclear waste.

Restating the usefulness of nuclear power would be a vindication for Merkel critics and populist voices. "An extension by a few years would be legally admissible," Leipzig-based lawyer Christian Raetzke wrote in an article published by nuclear technology association KernD, also citing the climate benefit from near zero-emissions.

A relevant law "is possible and could be quickly passed," he said.

Plastic Sachets: As Big Brands Cashed in, A Waste Crisis Spiraled



LONDON (Dispatches) - Tiny plastic packets known as sachets have allowed companies to tap millions of low-income customers in the developing world but also unleashed a global pollution crisis.

A Reuters investigation has found that London-listed Unilever plc, a pioneer in selling sachets, has privately fought to derail bans on the problematic packaging despite saying publicly it wants to "get rid of" them. Here's what you need to know about sachets.

While commonly associated with ketchup or cosmetic samples in wealthy countries, sachets are widely used in emerging markets to sell inexpensive micro-portions of everyday products, from laundry detergent to seasoning and snacks.

These palm-sized pouches tend to be made up of multiple layers of plastic and aluminum foil, melded together using adhesives, according to Mark Shaw, technical sales manager at UK-based packaging firm Parkside Flexibles.

A typical sachet will have an inner plastic layer that makes an airtight seal around the product, a foil layer that provides an additional barrier against moisture and heat - an important factor in tropical climates - and an outer plastic layer that provides flexibility and can be printed on, he said.

Unilever's India subsidiary, Hindustan Unilever Ltd (HUL), is widely credited as being the first to mass market products in sachets when it started selling tiny portions of shampoo for one rupee (\$0.01) in the 1980s.

HUL's former chairman, A. S. Ganguly, outlined the strategy in a publication to mark the firm's 75th anniversary in 2009. "We discovered that wealth lies in rural India, and we reached out to the wider market base," he said, referencing the shampoo sachets.

By the turn of the century, nearly 70% of all shampoo sold in India came in sachets, academic C.K. Prahalad wrote in his 2004 book, "The Fortune at the Bottom of the Pyramid."

By this time, other consumer goods giants like Nestle SA and The Procter & Gamble Company (PG.N) had also started selling reams of products in sachets to consumers across Asia, Africa and the Middle East. Now, 855 billion plastic sachets are sold every year, enough to cover the entire surface of Earth, according to London-based environmental group A Plastic Planet.

Proponents say sachets give low-income consumers access to high-quality, safe products. Critics say companies charge the poor a premium because products sold this way are more expensive by volume than bigger packages.

They also have created a massive environmental problem. Often sold in countries without proper waste collection, these single-use sachets end up as litter, clogging waterways and harming wildlife.

And even in countries with waste infrastructure, the complex design and small size of these packets makes them virtually impossible to recycle in a cost-effective way. It's easier to bury or burn them.

As sachets are made up of different materials bonded together, it is very difficult to separate them using current recycling infrastructure, said Stephan Laske, global director of research and development at Austrian plastic packaging maker Greiner Packaging.

Tiny sachets are also hard to collect, sort and wash, said Shaw of packaging firm Parkside Flexibles.

Both said sachets could be recycled using so-called advanced recycling processes that use heat or chemicals to turn plastic waste into fuel or reclaimed resin to make new plastic. But this technology has repeatedly flopped and struggled to achieve commercial scale despite heavy promotion by plastic makers and consumer goods firms, Reuters revealed last year.



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Lebanon Banks on Summer Tourism Windfall

BEIRUT (Dispatches) - Lebanon's ailing economy should receive a welcome injection of more than \$3 billion thanks to a rebound in tourist arrivals over the summer, the tourism minister said Wednesday.

Lebanon defaulted on its debt in 2020, the local currency has lost around 90 percent of its value on the black market, and the UN now considers four in five Lebanese to be poor.

While soaring inflation is ravaging households with incomes in Lebanese pounds, the informal exchange rate makes prices attractive to most tourists. "This summer is promising. We expect more than a million tourists and income of \$3-3.5 billion during this summer season," Minister Walid Nassar told AFP in an interview.



UK Inflation Hits 40-Year Record, Highest in G7

LONDON (Dispatches) - Soaring food prices pushed British consumer price inflation to a 40-year high of 9.1 per cent last month, the highest rate out of the Group of Seven countries and one which underlines the severity of the country's cost-of-living crunch.

The reading was up from 9.0 per cent in April and matched the consensus of a Reuters poll of economists. Records from the Office for National Statistics show May's inflation was the highest since March 1982 — and worse is likely to come.

Sterling, one of the weakest currencies against the US dollar this year, fell below US\$1.22, down 0.6 per cent on the day, before later recovering.

Some investors judge Britain to be at risk of both persistently high inflation and recession, reflecting its large imported energy bill and ongoing Brexit-related friction which could further hurt trade ties with the European Union. "With the economic outlook so unclear, no one knows how high inflation could go, and how long it will continue for — making fiscal and monetary policy judgments particularly tough," said Jack Leslie, senior economist at the Resolution Foundation think tank.

Earlier on Wednesday the Resolution Foundation said the cost-of-living hit for households was being compounded by Brexit, with damaging long-term implications for productivity and wages.

Average pay is not keeping up with inflation and trade unions have warned of widespread strikes in the coming months. Railway staff have already staged mass walkouts this week.

Britain's headline inflation rate in May was higher than in the United States, France, Germany and Italy. While Japan and Canada have yet to report consumer price data for May, neither are likely to come close.

The Bank of England said last week that inflation was likely to remain above 9 per cent over the coming months before peaking at slightly above 11 per cent in October, when regulated household energy bills are due to rise again.

Financial markets show interest rates in Britain are on course to rise above 3 per cent around the turn of the year from 1.25 per cent now, although most economists think waning economic growth means the BoE will raise rates by less than that.

Finance minister Rishi Sunak said after the data that the British government was doing all it could to combat a surge in prices and the central bank would act "forcefully" to contain inflation.

Prices for food and non-alcoholic drinks rose by 8.7 per cent in annual terms in May — the biggest jump since March 2009 and making this category the biggest driver of annual inflation last month.

Annual core inflation — which strips out food and energy prices to give an idea of domestically generated cost pressure — fell for the first time since September to 5.9 per cent from 6.2 per cent, a lower-than-expected reading.

"The Bank of England may indeed gain some hope from the fact that core price pressures are subsiding (but) we doubt this ... will be enough to avert further rate rises in the coming months," said Sandra Horsfield, an economist from Investec.

Overall consumer prices rose by 0.7 per cent in monthly terms in May, the ONS said, a little more than the 0.6 per cent consensus.

Sri Lanka's Economy Has Collapsed, Unable to Buy Oil

COLOMBO (Dispatches) - Sri Lanka's debt-laden economy has "collapsed" after months of shortages of food, fuel and electricity, and the South Asian island nation cannot even purchase imported oil, its prime minister said, in remarks underscoring the country's dire situation as it seeks help from international lenders.

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe told Parliament the South Asian country is "facing a far more serious situation beyond the mere shortages of fuel, gas, electricity and food. Our economy has completely collapsed."

While Sri Lanka's crisis is considered its worst in recent memory, Wickremesinghe's assertion that the economy has collapsed did not cite any specific new developments. It appeared intended to emphasize to his critics and opposition lawmakers that he has inherited a difficult task that can't be fixed quickly, as the economy founders under the weight of heavy debts, lost tourism revenue and other impacts from the pandemic, as well as surging costs for commodities.

Lawmakers of the country's two main opposition parties are boycotting Parliament this week to protest against Wickremesinghe, who became prime minister just over a month ago and is also finance minister, for not having delivered on his pledges to turn the economy around.

Wickremesinghe said Sri Lanka is unable to purchase imported fuel, even for cash, due to heavy debts owed by its petroleum corporation.

"Currently, the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation is \$700 million in debt," he told lawmakers. "As a result, no country or organization in the world is willing to provide fuel to us. They are even reluctant to provide fuel for cash," he said.

Wickremesinghe took office in May after days of violent protests over the country's economic crisis forced his predecessor to step down. In his comments Wednesday, he blamed the previous government for failing to act in time to turn the situation around, as Sri Lanka's foreign reserves dwindled.

The foreign currency crisis has crimped imports, creating severe shortages of food, fuel, electricity and other essentials like medicines, forcing people to stand in long lines to fulfill basic needs.

"If steps had at least been taken to slow down the collapse of the economy at the beginning, we would not be facing this difficult situation today. But we lost out on this opportunity. We are now seeing signs of a possible fall to rock bottom," he said.



US Fed Chair Admits Recession A Possibility After Rate Hikes

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The US economy remains strong but a series of aggressive rate hikes meant to cool soaring inflation could eventually trigger a recession, Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell cautioned.

Powell, whose testimony before senators was closely watched by investors and analysts, also said the world's largest economy faces an "uncertain" global environment and could see further inflation "surprises."

The Fed chair again stressed that the US central bank understands the hardship caused by rising prices and is committed to bringing down inflation, which has reached a 40-year high.

Last week, the Fed announced the sharpest interest rate increase in nearly 30 years and promised more action to combat the price surge, with gas and food costs skyrocketing and millions of Americans struggling to make ends meet.

But when peppered with questions about the prospect of a recession, Powell admitted it could not be ruled out.

"It's not our intended outcome at all, but it's certainly a possibility," he told the Senate Banking Committee.

"And frankly, the events of the last few months around the world have made it more difficult for us to achieve what we want, which is two per cent inflation and still a strong labor market."

In his opening remarks, Powell insisted the US economy "is very strong and well positioned to handle tighter monetary policy."

"Inflation has obviously surprised to the upside over the past year, and further surprises could be in store," the Fed chief said in his semi-annual appearance before Congress.

Policymakers "will need to be nimble" given that the economy "often evolves in unexpected ways," he said.



Russia Rerouting Trade and Oil to BRICS Countries

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - President Vladimir Putin said that Russia was in the process of rerouting its trade and oil exports towards countries from the BRICS group of emerging economies in the wake of Western sanctions over Ukraine.

The BRICS countries comprise Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

The West has imposed sweeping sanctions on Russia, including restrictions on imports of its oil, after the Kremlin sent its troops into Ukraine on February 24.

In order to weather the sanctions, Russia is trying to forge closer ties with Asia, seeking to supplant the markets it lost in the row with the European Union and the United States.

In a video address to the BRICS Business Forum participants, Putin said Russia was discussing increasing the presence of Chinese cars on the Russian market as well as the opening of Indian supermarket chains.

"In its turn, Russia's presence in the BRICS countries is growing. There has been a noticeable increase in exports of Russian oil to China and India," Putin said.

According to data from the Chinese General Administration of Customs, China's crude oil imports from Russia were up 55 per cent from a year earlier to a record level in May, displacing Saudi Arabia as China's top supplier, as refiners cashed in on discounted supplies.

Putin also said Russia was developing alternative mechanisms for international financial settlements jointly with its BRICS partners.

Pakistan, IMF Say Bailout Talks Make Progress

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Key progress has been made in talks on the revival of Pakistan's International Monetary Fund bailout program, both sides said, with Islamabad expecting the lender to increase the size and duration of the 39-month, \$6 billion facility.

The statements came as Pakistan's economy teeters on the brink of a financial crisis, with foreign exchange reserves drying up fast and the Pakistani rupee at record lows against the U.S. dollar as uncertainty surrounded the IMF program.

"Discussions between the IMF staff and the authorities on policies to strengthen macroeconomic stability in the coming year continue, and important progress has been made over the FY23 budget," Esther Perez Ruiz, the IMF's resident representative in Islamabad, told Reuters.

Pakistan unveiled a 9.5 trillion rupee (\$47 billion) budget for 2022-23 this month aimed at tight fiscal consolidation in a bid to convince the IMF to restart much-needed bailout payments.

However, the lender later said additional measures were needed to bring Pakistan's budget in line with the key objectives of the IMF program.

The two sides held talks on Tuesday night and agreed on the budget and fiscal measures but still need to agree on a set of monetary targets, Finance Minister Miftah Ismail said.

He did not expect any "hiccups" in the remaining talks and expected an initial memorandum on macroeconomic and financial targets and then an official agreement.

Details of the agreement were not immediately available to Reuters.

"I am also expecting that the duration of the program will be extended by a year and the amount of loan will be augmented," he told Reuters, adding that the IMF had not committed to it yet, but based on talks he expected it to come through.

Pakistan had sought an increase in the size and duration of the program when Ismail met with IMF officials in Washington in April.

Pakistan entered the IMF program in 2019, but only half the funds have been disbursed to date as Islamabad has struggled to keep targets on track.

The last disbursement was in February and the next tranche was to follow a review in March, but the government of ousted Prime Minister Imran Khan introduced costly fuel price caps which threw fiscal targets and the program off track.

Pakistan's new government has removed the price caps, with fuel prices going up the pump by up to 70% in a matter of three weeks.

Turkey Proposes Over \$50b Extra Budget to Tackle Rising Costs



ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkey's government submitted a proposal to Parliament for a supplementary budget of more than \$50 billion amid a surge in global energy prices and rampant inflation.

The government now expects to spend an extra TL 880.5 billion (\$50.8 billion) through the end of the year. The state-owned gas and coal importers account for 14% of the additional expenditures, according to the proposed midyear budget posted on the Parliament website.

Ankara was earlier this month reported having been mulling pushing a supplementary budget through Parliament before the summer recess to cover possible summer payments and the rising costs of a lira decline and inflation.

The budget burden has grown due to the rising energy costs, public sector wage and pension hikes, the lira drop and the related rising cost of a deposit protection scheme (KKM) launched late in 2021 to boost lira deposits by protecting them against depreciation.

"Significant rises in general prices have taken place as a result of the economic and geopolitical developments around the world and in our country, thus a need has emerged to also make increases to budget payments," President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said in the budget proposal.

The proposal will have to be passed first by a commission in Parliament and later by the general assembly. Parliament usually breaks from early July to early October.

Much of the expected increase in spending is due to adjustments, including salary increases, made to mitigate the impact of soaring inflation on government employees and pensioners.

To ease the burden on households' budgets, Ankara introduced fuel, electricity and gas subsidies worth TL 200 billion in 2021. They were expected to cost TL 300 billion this year, but energy costs have risen much more than anticipated.

Iran Beat U.S. in 2022 Volleyball Nations League

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran beat the U.S. in straight sets (25-18, 29-27, 27-25) in Week 2 of the 2022 Volleyball Nations League (VNL) on Thursday.

Amin Esmailnezhad from Iran's national volleyball team scored 20 points for the Islamic Republic, while Torey Defalco earned 13 points for the U.S. in the match.

The Volleyball Nations League is a worldwide series played by 16 countries in June and July. This year's preliminary round began on 7 June and will end on 10 July. The final round will be on 20 to 24 July.



Xi Warns About Expanding Military Alliances at BRICS Summit

BEIJING (Dispatches) - Chinese President Xi Jinping warned against "expanding" military ties in a speech ahead of a virtual summit with top leaders from Russia, India, Brazil and South Africa.

Beijing is hosting the meeting of the influential club of BRICS emerging economies, which accounts for more than 40 percent of the global population and nearly a quarter of the world's gross domestic product.

Three of its members -- China, India and South Africa -- have abstained from voting on a United Nations resolution condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Xi told the BRICS business forum that the "Ukraine crisis is... a wake-up call" and warned against "expanding military alliances and seeking one's own security at the expense of other countries' security".

China and India have strong military links with Russia and buy large amounts of its oil and gas.

In a call last week, Xi assured his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin that China would support Moscow's core interests in "sovereignty and security" -- leading the United States to warn Beijing that it risked ending up "on the wrong side of history".

South Africa, one of the few African countries wielding diplomatic influence outside the continent, has also not condemned the Russian military action.

Xi took a swipe at US and European Union sanctions on Russia in the speech on Wednesday, saying "sanctions are a boomerang and a double-edged sword".

Leaders of the Group of Seven (G7) nations will meet next week in Germany to discuss how to proceed with sanctions against Russia.

The BRICS summit takes place as Russian troops continue to pummel eastern Ukraine after invading the country four months ago.

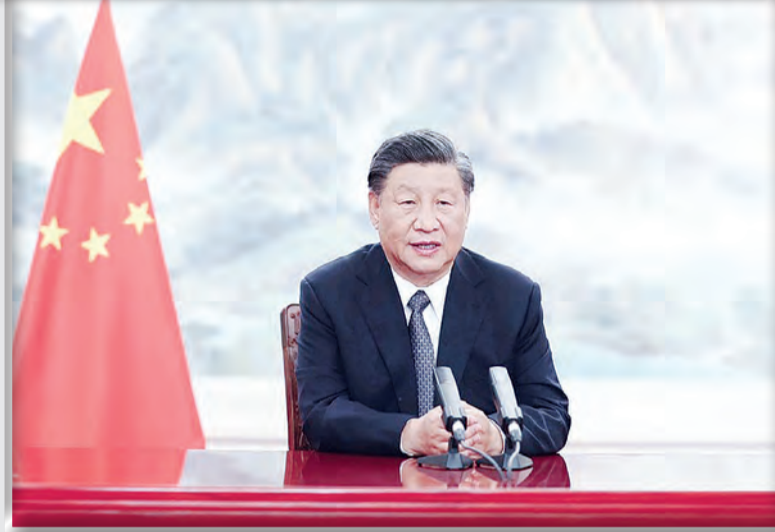
China and India have both ramped up crude oil imports from Russia, helping to offset losses from Western nations scaling back Russian energy purchases.

India bought six times more Russian oil from March to May compared with the same period last year, while imports by China during that period tripled, data from research firm Rystad Energy shows.

Once bitter Cold War rivals, Beijing and Moscow have stepped up cooperation in recent years.

President Putin was in Beijing for the opening ceremony of the Winter Olympics in February, just days before the invasion of Ukraine started.

Beijing and Moscow also flew bomber aircraft over the Sea of Japan and East China Sea while US President Joe Biden was in Tokyo in late May -- signalling strong military links between the two countries.



"The world has been divided into east and west after the Ukraine war," Manoj Joshi, a New Delhi-based author and geopolitical commentator, told AFP. He added that BRICS gives a platform for Putin to stand with leaders from emerging economies.

"It sends a message to the US and the EU that they have not succeeded in isolating him and Russia," he said.

Analysts say that Beijing will use the summit to promote its governance and development model at a time of global instability.

China said at a BRICS foreign ministers meeting in May that it wants other emerging economies to join the grouping, though it is unclear whether new members have been invited.

"Beijing would like to shape the BRICS agenda in line with... China-centric initiatives," said Madhu Bhalla, professor and editor of the India Quarterly journal.

"Entry of other members... who follow the Chinese line will help steer the group's agenda closer to the Chinese agenda," she said.

U.S. Ordered to...

FROM PAGE 1

Those convicted are 37 American natural and legal persons, including former presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump, former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, former Iran envoy Brian Hook and former Defense Secretary Ashton Carter.

The verdict cited evidence of Israeli involvement in the assassinations and the US financial and military support for the regime, saying Washington have had an "effective" role in establishing and supporting Israel as a terrorist regime.

The U.S. Congress has also passed several laws in support of Israel, it added.

Several U.S. courts have in the past fined the Iranian government under various pretexts, authorizing the government to pay damages to American plaintiffs from Iran's seized assets.

Over the past years, Iranian nuclear scientists have been the target of the Western and Israeli spy agencies' assassination attempts.

Between 2010 and 2012, four Iranian nuclear scientists -- namely Masoud Alimohammadi, Majid Shahriari, Darioush Rezaeinejad and Ahmadi Roshan -- were assassinated, while another, Fereydoon Abbasi, was wounded in an attempted murder.

Mohsen Fakhri-zadeh, who headed the Iranian Defense Ministry's Organization of Defensive Innovation and Research, was assassinated on November 27, 2020.

Following the assassination, Iranian officials said that Israel had acted with US intelligence and carried out the targeted killing of the prominent nuclear scientist.

In the latest terrorist attack in Tehran on May 22, Colonel Hassan Sayyad Khodaei was assassinated by two motorcyclists who shot him five times before fleeing the scene.

Unblocking of Afghanistan...

FROM PAGE 1

Takht-Ravanchi emphasized the importance of the international community's continued engagement with Afghanistan, particularly in supporting the people's humanitarian and development needs, saying, "We urge the international community, particularly donor countries, to continue to provide all possible and necessary assistance to the Afghan people."

Iran's ambassador and permanent representative to the UN said the Islamic Republic, for its part, has provided more than 30 consignments of humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan over the past months.

Expressing deep concern over the spike in terrorist attacks in Afghanistan, Takht-Ravanchi said, "This trend underlines the international community's continued demand that Taliban must commit to fighting terrorism and ensure that Afghanistan is no longer a safe haven for terrorist groups like Daesh and al-Qaeda that have been responsible for heinous acts of terror, not only in Afghanistan, but throughout the region and beyond."

Elsewhere in his address, the Iranian envoy underlined the need for the formation of an inclusive government in Afghanistan that represents the country's multi-ethnic society, saying, "The people of Afghanistan from different religious and ethnic backgrounds, especially the younger generation who will lead Afghanistan in the future, must be assured that they have a say in the affairs of their country. This would not be possible unless an inclusive government is established and sufficient attention is paid to Afghanistan's political and social structures that can involve people from all walks of life, including ethnicities, men, women, and youth."

Takht-Ravanchi added that despite repeated international calls, however, the Taliban have "failed to make significant efforts to ensure the government's true ethnic and political inclusiveness. Formation of an inclusive government in Afghanistan is a prerequisite and a critical component for the international recognition."

China Takes Delivery of...

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However, the Reuters report said Chinese customs is likely to include the records of the new delivery in its import data for June because the imports were meant for state reserves.

It said the new oil cargo had been delivered to Chinese authorities by vessel Dorena which is owned by the National Iranian Tanker Corp (NITC).

The report confirms statements by the Iranian Oil Ministry officials and others in the government denying that China has decreased its imports of oil from Iran because it has been receiving more supplies from Russia.

Recent data by the Chinese customs show that Iranian crude had accounted for nearly 7% of the East Asian country's total crude imports in May which amounted to 10.8 million barrels per day.

Tesla's New Car Factories Losing Billions of Dollars



SAN FRANCISCO (Dispatches) - Tesla Inc's new car factories in Texas and Berlin are "losing billions of dollars" as they struggle to increase production because of a shortage of batteries and China port issues, Chief Executive Elon Musk said recently.

"Both Berlin and Austin factories are gigantic money furnaces right now. Okay? It's really like a giant roaring sound, which is the sound of money on fire," Musk said in an interview with Tesla Owners Silicon Valley, an official Tesla recognized club, in Austin, Texas, on May 31.

The club divided its interview with Musk into three parts, the last of which was released on Wednesday.

Musk said Tesla's Texas factory produces a "tiny" number of cars because of challenges in boosting production of its new "4680" batteries and as tools to make its conventional 2170 batteries are "stuck in port in China." read more

The Shanghai COVID shutdowns in China "were very, very difficult," he said. The shutdown affected car production not only at Tesla's Shanghai factory, but also at its California plant, which uses some vehicle parts made in China.

"The past two years have been an absolute nightmare of supply chain interruptions, one thing after another, and we're not out of it yet," Musk said.

Tesla's overwhelming concern, he said, is "How do we keep the factories operating so we can pay people and not go bankrupt?"

Musk said earlier this week that a 10% cut in salaried staff at Tesla will happen over three months. The world's richest man also said a U.S. recession was more likely than not.

Tesla earlier this year started production at the factories in Berlin and Texas, both of which are critical to the growth ambitions of the top electric car maker.

Musk said he expected Tesla would start production of its Cybertruck electric pickup trucks, which has been delayed, in mid-2023.

China Criticizes...

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In reaction, Iran switched off a number of IAEA's surveillance cameras, which it had voluntarily allowed in a "goodwill gesture."

Reacting to the resolution, Iran's nuclear chief slammed the IAEA for politicizing the country's peaceful nuclear program under the Israeli regime's pressure regardless of Tehran's extensive cooperation with the UN nuclear watchdog.

Mohammad Eslami said Iran did not expect at all that such a resolution would be passed under the influence and political pressure of the Israeli regime.

He also expressed hope that the UN nuclear watchdog would be released from the "Zionists' captivity" so that the international prestige of the IAEA and its director general would not be undermined further more.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Amirabdollahian thanked his Chinese counterpart for inviting Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi to attend the ongoing meeting of the member states of the BRICS group of nations, expressing hope that China's chairmanship of the group would pave the way for the expansion of multilateral cooperation among its members.

Wang Yi, for his part, said China rejects unilateralism in international relations, noting that comprehensive strategic partnership with Iran would be useful for the expansion of relations between the two countries.

He also supported continuation of the Vienna talks, expressing hope that the path of diplomacy would lead to a final agreement in the Vienna talks.

Iran Reports \$25.5b...

FROM PAGE 1

Iranian exports to the United Arab Emirates and India reached \$1.645 billion and \$424 million, respectively, showed the data.

IRICA figures showed that the UAE was the largest exporter to Iran over the quarter to late June with \$3.426 billion worth of shipments delivered to the country, followed by China at \$3.131 billion and Turkey at \$1.273 billion.

India and Germany's exports to Iran over the same period reached \$512 million and \$456 million, respectively, showed the figures.

Iran's trade with the rest of the world has increased since the country came under a regime of American sanctions in 2018.

U.S. bans on Iran's sales of crude has caused a boom in exports of oil products as well as agrifood, metals and minerals.

Iran, Pakistan...

FROM PAGE 1

The sources said Iran was supply electricity at a price of 9 cents per unit. The sources further pointed out that payment to the Iranian authorities was a herculean task due to the international sanctions against Iran. According to the Qesco sources, the total demand of the distribution company was 2000 megawatt and it was facing a shortage of 700 megawatt. Therefore, the supply to the consumers was being managed through revenue-based load-shedding.

It is worth noting that a 3000 megawatt coal-fired power plant is also due under China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Financial closure of the same has been finalised and China is likely to complete it in three years.

When contacted former managing director Pakistan Electric Power Company (Pepco) Tahir Basharat Cheema, he said mainstreaming of the province of Balochistan has become need of the hour. Also, he said, the process of receiving energy from Iran should be institutionalised to mitigate payment issues against the energy supply. So far as the recovery of arrears against electricity bills is concerned, he said, the federal government should settle it through negotiations.

It is worth noting that the federal government had installed diesel generators in 17 different coastal locations to produce electricity during the peak hours back in 1970s. It was followed by import of electricity from Iran in three different phases, starting with 22 megawatt, then 35 megawatt and finally 100 megawatt in 2010. Dastgir has approached Iran again to bolster the electricity supply now to meet the energy demand of Gwadar port.

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U.S. Swimmer Alvarez Saved From Drowning

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - American artistic swimmer Anita Alvarez was in danger of drowning after losing consciousness in the pool at the world championships in Budapest before being rescued by her coach Andrea Fuentes. Spaniard Fuentes, a four-time Olympic medallist in synchronised swimming, jumped into the pool after she saw Alvarez sink to the bottom at the end of her solo free final routine. She was given medical attention beside the pool before being taken away on a stretcher.

McIlroy Rips Some Golfers For Duplicitous Behavior

NEW YORK (Dispatches)- Rory McIlroy didn't hold back when discussing PGA Tour players who have elected to join the LIV Golf Invitational Series. McIlroy was asked if he was surprised about one golfer in particular -- Brooks Koepka -- for his decision to join the rival tour. "Am I surprised? Yes, because of what he said previously," McIlroy said. "I think that's why I'm surprised at a lot of these guys because they say one thing and then they do another, and I don't understand that and I don't know if that's for legal reasons or if they can't -- I have no idea."

World Cup Officials Target Price-Gouging As 1.2m Tickets Sold

DOHA (Dispatches) - The Qatar World Cup's chief organizer announced "record-breaking" demand with 1.2 million tickets sold, but admitted it was hard to stop businesses taking advantage by raising prices.

Hassan Al-Thawadi, head of the organising committee for the November-December tournament, said he was working to limit "price-gouging" as costs soar for the Qatari capital's limited accommodation.

FIFA president Gianni Infantino said there were five million requests for tickets for the final at the 80,000-seat Lusail stadium, indicating feverish demand for the first World Cup in the Middle East.

"I think about 1.2 million tickets have already been purchased," Al-Thawadi told the Qatar Economic Forum in Doha. "So people are actually buying and people are excited to come there. There's no doubt about that."

Organising committee officials said there were about 40 million ticket requests in the two phases of online sales. Two million tickets will be sold in total, with another million reserved for world body FIFA and sponsors.

Doha, with a population of about 2.4 million, is bracing itself for the huge influx of visitors. The 32-team tournament will be held at eight stadiums in and around the capital, putting major pressure on infrastructure.

Qatar says there will be 130,000 rooms in hotels, apartments, cruise ships and desert camps, where there will be 1,000 tents. It has promised shared rooms for as little as \$85 a night.

"There will be glamping," Infantino told the forum, referring to upmarket camping. The traditional, Bedouin-style tents will be equipped with water and electricity, but no air-conditioning.

"Accommodation is not a worry," he added. "Everything is done for there to be enough accommodation ready here, and as well of course in the neighboring countries."

De Jong Has 90%

Chance of Joining Man Utd

MADRID (Dispatches) - Barcelona midfielder Frenkie de Jong has a "90 per cent chance" of joining Man Utd this summer, according to reports.

Widespread reports agree that new Red Devils boss Erik ten Hag has earmarked De Jong as his top target this summer before others follow.

A report insisted that Man Utd are in a 'bullish' mood over the potential De Jong deal with the 'belief firmly being that it is a case of when not if' he signs.

There is still no agreement between Barcelona and the Premier League side with the Catalan giants standing firm over their €86m (£74m) valuation of the midfielder.

But El Chiringuito journalist Jose Alvarez Haya (via Sport Witness) claims that there is a '90 percent chance' that De Jong ends up at Man Utd this summer.

Spanish journalist Miguel Angel Roman thinks Ten Hag will get the best out of De Jong if he moves to Old Trafford in the summer transfer window.

"If there is an area of the pitch where Barca can have performance in the short and long term, it is the midfield. Perhaps the Dutchman's exit will not be so screeching," Roman told Radio Marca.

"He is a player that Manchester United are interested in. Frenkie exploded with Erik Ten Hag when he was at Ajax."

"If I were Manchester United, taking into account the need there is, I would bet on him. Barca need to sell, and on the other side of the scale, there is Erik ten Hag who comes to revive a historical [club] in low hours [bad times]."

Arsenal Offer Defender in £15m Swap Battle With Rabiot

LONDON (Dispatches) - Arsenal are reportedly targeting Juventus midfielder Adrien Rabiot and are ready to offer a player in a straight swap deal.

The Gunners have already signed another midfielder in Fabio Vieira this summer, with the ex-Porto star joining for £34m earlier this week.

Brazilian youngster Marquinhos has also arrived from Sao Paulo, while American goalkeeper Matt Turner is expected to be formally announced in the coming days.



More than 160 round-trip shuttle flights a day will bring in fans from neighboring countries, easing the pressure on accommodation, while capacity has been doubled at Doha's two international airports.

To limit the number of fans, only people with match tickets will be allowed to enter the tiny, gas-rich country during the World Cup. But Al-Thawadi admitted it was "tricky" reining in accommodation prices, which are soaring in line with demand.

"(We want to) avoid price-gouging," he said. "Obviously market forces always mean that as long as there's a lot of demand, prices skyrocket."

"We're trying to create an environment where the business community benefits but at the same time, it is affordable and accessible for the fans as well."

Al-Thawadi also played down the prospect of protests in Qatar, following steady criticism of its treatment of foreign labourers and laws against homosexuality. Demonstrations are rare in Qatar.

"Everybody's welcome. But in appreciating where you're coming from, we have a very rich culture. We ask for people to respect our culture," he said.

Infantino also dismissed concerns that fans could be arrested for minor infringements. Drinking alcohol in public is also an offence in the conservative country.

"Of course people will get arrested if they destroy something if they start fighting in the streets, and we don't expect this to happen in World Cups normally," Infantino said.

Questions over rights and freedoms in Qatar have mounted as the World Cup nears, drawing an increasingly terse response from officials. The CEO of Accor, the Qatari-invested French hotel chain contracted to provide accommodation services -- using thousands of foreign workers -- dismissed labour rights criticism as "Qatar-bashing".

"I hear a lot of people doing some Qatar-bashing and they seem to enjoy that," Sebastian Bazin told AFP, adding: "We will do everything we can so this Qatar-bashing remains unfounded."

He also promised to find jobs after the World Cup for the 13,000 people hired to work with Accor at the tournament.

Ronaldo Worried over Man Utd Transfer Plan

LONDON (Dispatches) - Cristiano Ronaldo is concerned about the transfer plan at Man Utd and could consider his future this summer, according to reports in Spain.

The Portugal international returned to Old Trafford last summer to much fanfare with the signing of him. Jadon Sancho and Raphael Varane expected to catapult the Red Devils closer to challenging for the Premier League title.

However, Man Utd had a disastrous season with the club finishing sixth, 13 points off fourth-placed Tottenham and 35 points adrift of champions Man City, after sacking Ole Gunnar Solskjaer in November.

Transfer gossip: Manchester United need £160m-plus for three summer targets

Erik ten Hag has joined the club as the new manager for next season but his summer overhaul of the squad is yet to take shape despite Man Utd being linked to numerous players.

Widespread reports have indicated Barcelona midfielder Frenkie de Jong is Ten Hag's main target this summer with Man Utd 'bullish' that they will get the deal over the line.

Ajax trio Lisandro Martinez, Jurrien Timber and Antony have all been linked in recent weeks with Brentford's Christian Eriksen, Southampton's James Ward-Prowse and Porto's Evanilson all linked over the last couple of days.

Bayern Complete Signing of Mane From Liverpool



The 30-year-old won the Champions League, Premier League, FA Cup, League Cup and Club World Cup titles during six years on Merseyside.

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Bayern Munich confirmed the signing of Sadio Mane from Liverpool today, as the Senegal forward signed a three-year deal with the Bundesliga champions.

Bayern have reportedly paid a fee which could rise to €41 million for Mane.

"My agent told me that there were also enquiries from other clubs, but for me, the feeling was right from the start when Bayern presented their plan with me," Mane told German daily Bild.

"It was the right club at the right time."

"It is one of the biggest clubs in the world and the team are always fighting for all the titles." Mane added he wants to "do everything to make sure I win titles with my teammates".

Bayern won a 10th straight Bundesliga title last season.

Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp paid tribute to the departing Mane.

"One of Liverpool's greatest ever players is leaving and we must acknowledge how significant this is," said Klopp.

"The goals he scored, the trophies he won; a legend, for sure, but also a modern-day Liverpool icon." Mane, voted African footballer of the year in 2019, is a versatile attacker who has spent the majority of his career on the wing but can also play through the middle.

His arrival will ease the pain for Bayern if wantaway striker Robert Lewandowski leaves the club, while Serge Gnabry is also stalling over a contract extension.

La Liga Boss Tebas Hits Back at Arrogant Al-Khelaifi

MADRID (Dispatches) - La Liga president Javier Tebas accused Nasser Al-Khelaifi of lying and arrogance after Paris-Saint Germain's president defended his club's lavish spending to keep Kylian Mbappe.

La Liga have filed complaints to UEFA about PSG and Manchester City "continuously breaching the current regulations of financial fair play", the Spanish league confirmed last week.

In an interview with Madrid daily newspaper, Marca, Al-Khelaifi said: "We do what we do because we know we can. It's not our style to talk about other leagues, clubs or federations. We're not preaching and we're not going to allow anybody to preach to us. Every year it is the same. We are going to continue building our project."

Quoting Al-Khelaifi's comments on Twitter, Tebas wrote on Wednesday: "Al-Khelaifi is another level. He takes us all for fools (not even he believes his lies) and shows up in @marca preaching with pride and arrogance about the 'nouveau riche'."

"The rules do not exist for @PSG_inside. We will continue to fight for a football that is sustainable and without cheating."

Tebas has long-rallied against the financial wealth of state-backed clubs like PSG and City, who he insists are constantly breaking UEFA's financial fair play rules and disturbing the economic balance of the game.



Kyrgios Focusing on Wimbledon

LONDON (Dispatches) - Nick Kyrgios withdrew from the Mallorca Championships due to an abdominal injury, less than a week before the start of Wimbledon.

The Australian was due to play Roberto Bautista Agut in the round of 16 in Mallorca but pulled out to maximise his chances at the All England Club, where the tournament begins on Monday.

"I'm really sorry I'm going to have to withdraw from tonight's match here in Mallorca," Kyrgios said in a statement. "I have been playing a lot of great matches lately and unfortunately I woke up with a pain in my abs."

"I went to see the tournament doctor right away and he advised that I don't play tonight. I really value the Mallorca Championships but I will follow his advice as I don't want to risk Wimbledon next week."

Kyrgios has slipped to 45th in the world but, with his big serve and aggressive game, the 27-year-old will be an opponent the favourites want to avoid next week.

He beat Stefanos Tsitsipas and Pablo Carreno Busta -- both in the world's top 20 -- en route to the semi-finals in Halle last week and has won seven out of nine matches on grass this year.

Kyrgios' record in Grand Slams, though, remains underwhelming. He has only twice reached the quarter-finals of a major tournament in singles, including at Wimbledon in 2014.

