

Minister of Heritage, Culture, Tourism, and Handicrafts Ezzatollah Zarghami Met With Azerbaijan Culture Minister Anar Karimov to Discuss the Joint Reconstruction of The 15-Arched Khudafarin Bridges

IRAN NEWS

The Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic in Iran Remained Unchanged at **141,390** With **No Death** by the Deadly Disease Over the Past 24 Hours, Iran's Health Ministry Announced on Saturday

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Tehran to Coordinate With EU on Next Stage

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Following two days of fresh negotiations in the Qatari capital of Doha aimed at reviving the ailing 2015 deal, Iran's ambassador to the United Nations says Tehran will "coordinate" with the European Union on the next stage of the talks.

"Our team is ready to engage constructively to reach a deal," Majid Takht-Ravanchi said in a post on his Twitter account after he delivered a speech at a meeting of the UN Security Council on Thursday.

The top Iranian diplomat added that the sides to the deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), can reach a final agreement on the revival of the multilateral agreement in case of the U.S. acts realistically and shows seriousness. "If U.S. acts realistically & shows serious intention to implement its obligations, agreement is not out of reach," Takht-Ravanchi said.

The Doha talks started on Tuesday, in a high-stakes diplomatic process aimed at breaking the stalemate in efforts to restore the JCPOA, with EU coordinator Enrique Mora shuttling between Iran's top negotiator Ali Bagheri Kani and Robert Malley, the US special envoy for Iran.

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Iranian, Russian Deputy FMs Meet In Moscow

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri Kani, also Iran's top negotiator, and his Russian counterpart Sergey Ryabkov have held talks in Moscow.

Mikhail Ulyanov, the Permanent Representative of Russia to the International Organizations and Russia's top negotiator in Vienna, has also been present in the talks, according to his own Twitter post on July 1.

"It was a very professional exchange of views on the current situation around the JCPOA and prospects of the Vienna Talks," Ulyanov wrote.

"My assessment: despite all the difficulties, the nuclear deal still can be restored. For this to happen, the U.S. should demonstrate greater flexibility."

Talks on removal of the sanctions were held in the Qatari capital on June 28 with participation of Iran's top negotiator, Deputy Secretary-General of European External Action Service Enrique Mora and the US Special Envoy for Iran Robert Malley.

"We will keep working with even greater urgency to bring back on track a key deal..." Mora tweeted after the Doha talks.

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FM, Syrian President Meet in Damascus



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad met in Damascus on Saturday.

The Iranian foreign minister arrived in the Syrian capital at the head of a delegation earlier today. Upon arrival at Damascus airport, Amirabdollahian was accorded welcome by his Syrian counterpart Faisal Mikdad. Mikdad in a press statement described the visit of Abdollahian as very important that comes after a lot of local, regional and international developments.

"We stand by Iran in the nuclear file and we support its stance in this regard," Mikdad said. In Damascus, Amirabdollahian said that the Zionists are seeking to destabilize Syria and increase Syrians' problems. Upon his arrival in Damascus, Amirabdollahian told reporters that the Syrian president's recent visit to Tehran marks a new milestone in relations between the two states.

Referring to the importance of his visit to Syria, the top Iranian diplomat added that Iran and Syria are in a new phase of comprehensive cooperation, including in various economic and trade areas.

He highlighted that today is a great opportunity to discuss with his Syrian counterpart Faisal Mikdad the latest situation in relations between the two states.

Iran strongly condemns the attempts of the Zionist regime and their aggression on the territorial integrity of Syria, Amirabdollahian stressed, adding that the Zionists seek to destabilize and increase the problems of the people who are returning to their cities and homes in Syria along with the sanctions imposed against the Syrians and Resistance.

The Syrian people, government, and leadership are acting strongly in defending the territorial integrity of their country, he said.

Iran understands Turkey's concerns on security issues and strongly opposes any military attempts with any justification, he underscored, adding that Iran works to resolve the existing misunderstandings between Turkey and Syria through diplomacy and political dialogue.

Last week, the Syrian Minister of Agriculture extended his gratitude to the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei as well as the Iranian nation and government for assistance in a slew of construction projects in the Arab country.

Speaking on the sidelines of the 42nd edition of Damascus International Flowers Fair on June 26, Mohammad Hassan Qatana commended Iran for its support in wheat silos' construction, and for building a number of dams, roads, and highways in Syria.

ViewPoint

Rude and Pint-Size Like Bahrain

Some countries sometimes boast as if they are big powers but they are too petty to talk biggy and Bahrain is one of the so-called countries which act like big ones but it is too small to do so.

On Wednesday and in a meeting in Manama, Bahrain once again showed its anti-Iran feeling by a baseless claim against Tehran.

Bahraini King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifah met on Wednesday with visiting Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi in the capital Manama, where they accused Iran of meddling in the affairs of Arab countries.

They also charged Tehran with non-compliance with the principles of good neighborliness, and destabilizing activities.

Additionally, Bahraini Foreign Minister Abdullatif bin Rashid al-Zayani repeated the anti-Iran claims in a joint press conference with his Egyptian counterpart Sameh Shoukry.

Reacting to this baseless claim, Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kan'ani denounced the recent joint statement by Bahraini and Egyptian authorities about the nuclear and defense doctrines of the Islamic Republic, saying Tehran's defense and missile capabilities never pose a threat to neighboring states.

Kan'ani dismissed the anti-Iran allegations as "baseless, biased and unconstructive," stressing that they were made in the pursuit of certain objectives and motives.

He called on Manama and Cairo to acquire a true understanding of regional equations, and take note of the role that the Islamic Republic of Iran plays as to establishment and promotion of stability across the Middle East.

The spokesman for the Iranian Foreign Ministry went on to criticize the two Arab countries' stubborn insistence on following the wrong path of Iranophobia, stating that such an approach is far away from wisdom and serves the interests of the Israeli regime in the region.

"Safeguarding and protecting nuclear achievements is an inalienable right of the Islamic Republic of Iran," Kan'ani said, emphasizing that Tehran's defense and missile capabilities are promoted "based on the country's strategic policies, fall within the framework of its defense doctrine and by no means constitute a threat to neighboring states."

The Iranian diplomat further highlighted that the Islamic Republic is willing to maintain and expand relations with its neighbors as well as Arab and Muslim countries, stressing that the incumbent administration has devoted considerable efforts to that goal.

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Massive Fire Breaks out at Israeli Military Facility

BEIRUT (Dispatches) - A massive fire broke out at an Israeli military facility in the West Bank early on Saturday amid rising tensions in the occupied territories.

According to the Palestinian media sources, the blaze started at the base close to the town of al-Ram, which lies northeast of al-Quds, is still burning.

There were no immediate reports about possible casualties and the extent of the damage caused. This comes as tensions have been increasing in recent weeks in the wake of Israeli forces' intensified raids, including one in the al-Aqsa Mosque compound in the Old City of al-Quds.

On June 29, Israeli forces killed a Palestinian fighter in the northern occupied West Bank city of Jenin, after armed clashes broke out between the Israeli army and Palestinians following a dawn army raid.

Muhammad Maher Marei died after being shot in the chest. The bullet had pierced Marei's heart, according to the head of the Khalil Suleiman Governmental Hospital in Jenin, Wissam Baker.

"This is most likely a bullet from a sniper that aimed to kill," Baker said.

"This is what we've been getting used to in the recent raids on Jenin governorate - no raid takes place without lethal injuries. Even those that are wounded come with critical injuries," he added.

The Palestinian resistance group Islamic Jihad said that Marei had been one of their fighters, and died "confronting" an Israeli raid.

Reports of sexual assault, harassment steeply increase in Israeli military. Meanwhile, reports of sexual assault and harassment at Israeli military bases and barracks have increased significantly in recent years.

The Israeli military recorded 46 reports of sexual assault in 2021 compared to twenty-two reports the previous year, according to the Israeli public broadcaster Kan.

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Iran, Russia Emphasize Enhancing Trade-Economic Relations

TEHRAN (MNA) - Islamic Republic of Iran and Russian Federation stressed the need to increase bilateral relations in the fields of trade and economy.

In a meeting held between CEO of Sberbank of Russia and accompanying delegation with the Iranian Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade on Friday, they emphasized broadening trade and economic ties.

During the meeting, the two sides discussed issues such as creation of financial infrastructures and also joint trade-commercial infrastructures.

Since economies of the two countries of Iran and Russia are complementary to each other and both countries are consumers of manufactured goods, increasing exchanges and trade relations were emphasized.

Pursuing relations between the two countries at three levels of exchanges of goods i.e. exporting and importing goods and services, carrying out joint investment as joint ventures and also transit were other proposals raised in this meeting.

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Iran Embassy in Azerbaijan Denies Report of Land Border Closure

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - In response to public and media questions, the press service of Iran's Embassy in Azerbaijan reported that information on the closure of land borders by Iran is false, Trend reports.

According to the statement, the land, air and sea borders of Iran have been open to foreign tourists and citizens of neighboring states since November 2021. In particular, Iran's borders with Azerbaijan and its Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic are open as well.

President Says Gov't Backs Youth's Marriage

TEHRAN (MNA) – The President issued orders to facilitate the payment of marriage loans to young people, to provide government facilities and cultural centers for young people to marry, as well as to hand over land and pay loans.

Speaking in ceremony to commemorate the national Marriage Week in Vahdat Hall, Ayatollah Seyed Ebrahim Raisi said, "One of the most important celebrations is helping young people to get married, and whoever facilitates this good deed will enjoy its blessings in life."

The President also praised those who work to resolve the couples' dispute in order to strengthen families, saying, "Disputes sometimes occur in life, but the solution is not to go to counselling centers and a court order".

Ayatollah Raisi added, "No one is more capable of resolving family disputes better than the couple themselves, who can solve the problem by talking and communicating, but if they could not reconcile themselves, the best solution is the wisdom and the intervention of older people."

Emphasizing easy marriage, the President also referred to the issue of dowries and said, "Marriage is not a business deal and dowry cannot guarantee the happiness of couples, but what strengthens the family is friendliness and empathy."

Raisi interpreted friendship as love and the union of hearts and said, "God Almighty says in the Qur'an, "We have made you a partner of your own soul and we have established liking in human hearts."

In another part of his speech, the President explained the duties and actions of the government to facilitate marriage and said, "The government, as the agent of the Islamic system, considers itself obliged to support marriage, the President issued orders to facilitate the payment of marriage loans to young people, to provide government facilities and cultural centers for young people to marry, as well as to hand over land and pay loans".



Ayatollah Raisi said that one of the most important issues in easy marriage is to avoid unnecessary rituals and said, "In addition to exorbitant dowries, unnecessary rituals also prevent easy marriage".

He also stressed the need to expedite the payment of loans for marriage and said, "If the loans are not provided to the girl and boy who want to get married in time or it is difficult to pay them, it will make marriage hard".

The President referred to the problem of young couples in obtaining housing and called on the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development to prioritize young couples with housing.

Emphasizing the construction of 4 million houses in 4 years as the country's need, Raisi stated, "The government provides land for housing construction and the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development can accelerate the work in the form of cooperatives by providing land and paying loans."

The President also mentioned employment as one of the important issues in facilitating marriage and said, "Employment statistics are better than before and with the decline in pandemic, the situation of business and production is improving, which can greatly eliminate the concerns of the youth, especially the educated".

Azeri FM to Visit Tehran Over Next Few Days

TEHRAN (MNA) – An informed source told the media that Azerbaijan's Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov is set to pay a visit to Tehran in the coming days at the official invitation of his Iranian counterpart, Hossein Amirabdollahian.

In addition to meeting his Iranian counterpart, Bayramov is scheduled to meet with other Iranian high-ranking officials including Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and Iran's parliament speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf.

This will be the first trip of the Azeri top diplomat to Tehran since Raisi took office.

Amirabdollahian and Bayramov last month held a phone talk, discussing Tehran-Baku's political, economic, commercial, consular, and parliamentary ties.

The Iranian foreign minister paid a 1-day visit to Baku last year and met with his Azeri counterpart and the President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev.

Iran to Export \$3b of Construction Materials to Russia



TEHRAN (MNA) – The Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Economic Diplomacy Affairs has said that Iran has planned to export three billion dollars of construction materials to Russia.

Mehdi Safari made the remarks in a meeting with the General governor of North Khorasan Province Mohammadreza Hossein Nejad, adding that the province enjoys rich capacity of construction materials such as cement.

The government will support on goods transit and exports of construction materials, he underlined.

Russia imports 400-500 million dollars worth of tomatoes per annum, he said, adding that Iran can play a role to this end.

Earlier on January 24, 2022 the Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Economic Diplomacy Affairs announced that Russian Federation has called on Iran to export construction materials to this country.

Iran to Finalize National Urban Policy



TEHRAN (MNA) – Minister of Roads and Urban Development attending the eleventh session of the World Urban Forum (WUF11) in Poland informed of the finalization of NUP in Iran before long.

The Eleventh Session of the World Urban Forum (WUF11) took place in Katowice, Poland from 26 to 30 June. Iran Minister of Roads and Urban Development, Rostam Ghasemi, and his accompanying delegation participated in this forum as the head of the National Habitat Committee (NHC).

On the sidelines of the summit, Ghasemi met with Maimunah Mohd Sharif, the Executive Director of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and they signed an MoU for the implementation of joint projects by Iran and the UN-Habitat.

The minister pointed to the compilation of the National Urban Policy (NUP) and smart city strategies in Iran in a partnership between UN-Habitat and the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development and added, Iran as one of the three pioneering countries in compiling the NUP, will soon finalize the compilation.

He expressed hope for achieving the goals of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the New Urban Agenda (NUA).

The theme of WUF11 is "Transforming Our Cities for a Better Urban Future" stressing informed preparedness to "illuminate the ways that policy, strategies, and actions can promote desirable futures" in response to the rapid urbanization and its impact on communities and cities.

The World Urban Forum (WUF) is the premier global conference on sustainable urbanization convened by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat).

The first WUF was held in Nairobi, Kenya in 2002, and the WUF11 is co-organized by UN-Habitat, Poland's Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy, and the Municipal Office of Katowice.

Iran Ready to Help in Diplomatic Resolution of Ukraine Crisis

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has reaffirmed its commitment to contribute to the diplomatic resolution of the simmering crisis in Ukraine, which is now into its fifth month.

Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian in a telephonic conversation with his Ukrainian counterpart Dmytro Kuleba on Thursday pointed to Iran's principled position of opposing war and stressed ending the crisis through diplomatic means.

"We have said since the outset that while paying attention to the root cause of the crisis, we oppose war and do not consider war to be a suitable solution to resolve issues," said the top Iranian diplomat.

He emphasized that ties between the Islamic Republic and Ukraine have been based on friendship, respect, mutual benefits and cooperation in the past three decades and expressed readiness to collaborate with Ukraine within the framework of the agreement for the opening of the Black Sea corridor to ship grain products.

Iran's foreign minister also extended an invitation to his Ukrainian counterpart to visit Tehran.

Kuleba, for his part, expressed his appreciation for Iran's anti-war stance and emphasized that the Ukrainian government would welcome any political assistance towards ending the crisis.

He also expressed Kiev's readiness to expand bilateral relations with Iran, including in the fields of agriculture and grains, and described continued talks between the two sides for the expansion of ties as constructive.

Kiev's top diplomat also discussed the latest developments of the war in his country and thanked Amirabdollahian for Tehran's willingness to contribute towards resolving the conflict and invited him to visit Kiev.

It came as the head of the US-led NATO warned on Thursday that the current conflict in Ukraine could turn into an unrestrained battle between the Western military alliance and Russia.

Bagheri Pursues Sanctions-Removal Negotiations Seriously

TEHRAN (IP) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian wrote on Friday night that Iran's top negotiator seriously and in full coordination with him, pursues the negotiations logically and dynamically with the goal to remove all sanctions.

Amirabdollahian wrote on his Friday night tweet "Dr. Ali Bagheri pursues the negotiations in full coordination with me, logically, relying on strong reasons, and dynamically, aimed at removal of sanctions".

"We continue our efforts mightily and logically. America's rationalism and offering a sustainable guarantee to ensure Iran's full economic benefit from the agreement can lead to being fruitful of the negotiations," he added.

The last round of negotiations to lift the sanctions were held in Doha, Qatar, in the presence of Iran's top negotiator Ali Bagheri Kani, EU Foreign Policy Chief Enrique Mora, and US Special Envoy on Iran Robert Mali.

Iran Ready to Host 400,000 Foreign Pilgrims for Arbaeen

TEHRAN (IQNA) – An official with the Iranian Interior Ministry says that the country is ready to host 400,000 pilgrims who seek to pass through Iran to reach Iraq for the great march of Arbaeen.

Seyed Majid Mirahmadi, deputy Interior Minister and head of Iran's Arbaeen Headquarters

According to Seyed Majid Mirahmadi, deputy Interior Minister and head of Iran's Arbaeen Headquarters, the borders for the entry and exit of foreign pilgrims have been determined and related provinces have been tasked with preparing the grounds for hosting the pilgrims.

He said on Friday that the responsibility of accompanying foreign pilgrims inside Iran has been given to the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC).

Some 100,000 foreign pilgrims, mostly from Afghanistan, reached Iraq after going through Iran in the Arbaeen of 2019, he said, adding that according to estimates, this number may reach 400,000 this year.

The Arbaeen mourning ceremony is one of the largest religious gatherings in the world.

It marks the 40th day after Ashura, the martyrdom anniversary of the grandson of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH), Imam Hussein (AS). This year's Arbaeen falls on September 17. Each year, a huge crowd of Shias flock to Karbala, where the holy shrine of Imam Hussein (AS) is located, to perform mourning rites.

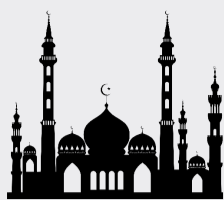
The pilgrims, mainly from Iraq and Iran, travel long routes on foot to the holy city.

Saudis Must Show Good Will in Action

TEHRAN (IFP) - An MP has reacted to Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian's support for the notion of reopening embassies in Tehran and Riyadh, saying the Islamic Republic never fears negotiations if its national interests are on the line.

Ebrahim Azizi added that Iran has repeatedly said that it sits at the negotiating table with full force while staying true to its core values.

Azizi said Iran's approach in talks is based on national security, noting that the reopening of embassies in Tehran and Riyadh can be a positive step and pave the way for future talks. The lawmaker said whether the negotiations will pay off depends on the Saudis.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:08
■ Evening (Maghreb)	20:45
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:08
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	05:53

22. Let not those among you who are endowed with grace and amplitude of means resolve by oath against helping their kinsmen, those in want, and those who have left their homes in Allah's cause: let them forgive and overlook, do you not wish that Allah should forgive you? For Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.

Surah 24. Light (22)

Iranian Private Sector Ready to Transit Ukrainian Products Via PG

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mine and Agriculture Mr. Gholam-Hossein Shafei in meeting with Ambassador of Ukraine to Tehran Mr. Sergei Burdiliak announced readiness of Iran's private sector for transit of Ukraine's agro products via the Persian Gulf.

In the meeting which was held on Saturday, Shafei expressed his disappointment over the war in Ukraine and said that the war has affected all countries of the region because Ukraine is the biggest country of the region and due to the unique position of the country in agriculture and mining, its condition is effective on the economic condition of the countries of the region.

He then said that all countries are concerned about deterioration of the world food industry condition under the effects of the Ukraine war, adding that fortunately, despite this condition, statistics show that Iran's economic relations with Ukraine in the upward trend.

Shafei added that since Ukraine owns almost a quarter of world's fertile agro grounds, Iranian economic activists are interested in extraterrestrial cultivation in Ukraine and due to widespread droughts in Iran, some provinces have already operationalized extraterrestrial cultivation in Ukraine.

He then pointed to the closure of transit routes of Ukraine due to the war, saying that since Ukraine is one of the biggest suppliers of agro and animal feeds and it is currently facing with serious problems for export of these products, Iran is ready for transit of these products from its land via the Persian Gulf in order to reduce these restrictions.

Shafei then pointed to exchanges of trade delegations between the two countries in the past and said that there are diverse grounds for cooperation between Iran and Ukraine and announced readiness for taking required measures for improving the economic relations.



Then Ukrainian Ambassador Mr. Burdiliak, for his part, emphasized finding ways for boosting bilateral cooperation between Iran and Ukraine and said that cooperation between the two countries can be pursued in three levels. He added that in the first level, cooperation will be to meet current and immediate needs of Ukraine, noting that in the second level, it will be for reconstruction of Ukraine because of the war and the third level of cooperation will be in the post-construction era to improve trade ties.

He then pointed to the current needs of Ukraine like fuel, tomato, salt and sodium carbonate, added that Ukraine needs humanitarian aids of Iran especially food stuff.

Burdiliak went on to say that after the war ends, his country will need construction materials, glass and bitumen for its construction, stating that since Russia and Belarus were the main supplier of bitumen to Ukraine, now it is good opportunity for Iran to replace them.

He stressed that in the next step, Iranian companies can participate in reconstruction of Ukraine especially in reconstruction of refineries, oil reservoirs and industrial centers.

He then pointed to talks for export of Iran's crude oil to a port in Poland, adding that since oil products from the exported crude to be sent to Ukraine, his country has started correspondence with the U.S. treasury for issuing license for Iran's exports.

Burdiliak reiterated that President of Ukraine intends to hand over reconstruction of each province to one country and he suggests construction of Kherson Province which has important port for imports and exports to be given to Iran after its liberation.

Then Shafei pointed to Iran's good capabilities in supply of construction material, bitumen, technical and engineering services and welcome the idea of choosing one country for reconstruction of one Ukrainian province.

LSEZ Seeks Growth And Elevation of Country

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – On the occasion of National Day of Industry and Mine, Managing Director of Lamerd Special Economic Zone (LSEZ) Mr. Ehsan Ansari in a message felicitated the day and hailed hardworking industry activists with their endeavors try to keep the sacred tri-color flag of Iran hoisting.



Ansari in his message said with great industrial developments in the Lamerd Special Economic Zone, national day of industry has become different in Lamerd today comparing to the past and since the name of Lamerd has interwoven with industry it has different color and smell.

He added that with endeavors of officials of the sacred Islamic Republic establishment and his colleague in Lamerd Special Economic Zone and they have turned the zone into one of the biggest industrial and economic poles of the country and the ground for it has been provided to some extent and hurdles are being removed through prudence of elites of the country.

He noted the zone due to its huge God-blessing reserves and talented and hard-working industry activists, Lamerd deserved to become industrialized zone, adding that statesmen's attention to this zone can make Lamerd as "Mineral Asaluyeh."

He concluded his message with felicitating those who are involved in industry and mine sectors who work for the greatness of the country specially for those who play great role in progress of Lamerd zone and wished them success.

Operation for Installation of Power Transmission Powers Starts

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The manager of Mehdi Abad Lead and Zinc Complex announced the start of operation for installing the 132-kilovolt power transmission line powers of Bahadoran substation to the complex.

Hamid Reza Hemayat said that this line with capacity for transmission of 80 megawatts is under construction which is aimed at supplying electricity for plants of Mehdi Abad.

He added that the length of transmission line from Bahadoran power substation to the complex is 27 kilometers and 85 towers are to be



installed on this route.

Hemayat added that construction of substation 400 to 132 is the first and most important step of the complex for provision of electricity for processing plants of Mehdi Abad that is underway by investment of Mehdi Abad Mining Complex which is 27 kilometers away from the complex and its construction has progressed 98% and is in its final stages.

He reiterated that in line with supporting domestic producers, major parts and equipment of the project for transmission of electricity from Bahadoran have been provided by the domestic companies.

MSC Figures Out a Great Happening in the Country

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

ISFAHAN – The CEO of Mobarakeh Steel Company (MSC) says the company should figure out a great happening in the country and this big economic happening is without oil and through turning into a group to be strong point of reliance of the country and to this end, all small and big capacities are required to be utilized.

Speaking in the second day of workshop for design of model of business and subsidiary companies of Atieh Foulad Naghshe Jahan Holdings, Mr. Mohammad Yaser Tayebnia said that today enemies of the country with full strength have stood against it, adding that although the country has become rich in some fields, in some fields it needs to work hard.

He went on to say that the country should concur borders of knowledge and technology in the field of industry in order to win in the current war, adding that since this year is year of production, knowledge-based and job creation, it is duty of all of us to move ahead in this field.

Tayebnia added that today the country is facing with two phenomena of rivals and enemies, adding that in one side rivals should be our driving force and in other side enemies should not be able to hinder activities.

He stated that one of the strong points of MSC is the service centers and their presence in different geographical regions of the country, noting that this will help the company to discover regional talents sooner than others.

He reiterated that the main factor behind company's success is unity and cohesion as well as synchronizing resources and using the existing capacities.



EPEDC Operationalized 80% of Its Consumption Management

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – In the meeting on managing peak load which was held in Tavanir Company with presence of deputy energy minister Mr. Homayoun Haeri and some other officials of the ministry which was held on Tuesday, participants emphasized consumption management of electricity and constant electricity supply with good quality.

After Esfahan Province Electricity Distribution Company (EPEDC) was selected regarding methods of consumption management and its applied methods, Mr. Haeri asked the official of the company on the performance of the company in the field of lighting.

The caretaker of EPEDC Eng. Alireza Keshani in response to the question said that for controlling the lighting of passages and green spaces in the city, the company has saved 20.05 megawatts in lighting of the city of Isfahan.

He added 67,000 lights of the passages have been used one after the other which has led to consumption drop of 10 megawatts per hour in the nights, adding that with replacing 38,000 energy saving 125-watt lightbulbs with the 20-watt LED lightbulbs, some 3.9 megawatts of electricity per hour has been saved in the nights.

Keshani then pointed to other measures of the company for reducing electricity consumption. He then pointed to the obligations and performance of the company, adding that the company has fulfilled 80% of its obligations.

MAPNA Group Rehabilitates Part of Power Plant in Aleppo

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN (PressTV) - An Iranian company has managed to put part of the thermal power plant in Syria's northern city of Aleppo back into operation, in a sign that the Islamic Republic is playing a major role in the reconstruction of the war-ravaged Arab country and trying to revive the electricity grid destroyed during the years-long conflict.

MAPNA Group, which is active in development and execution of thermal and renewable power plants, oil & gas, and railway transportation, has reportedly repaired the fifth unit of the plant, bringing over 200 megawatts back to Aleppo's power grid. The station, which has five units, produced more than one thousand megawatts before the foreign-sponsored Syria conflict. It is one of the biggest plants in the country. Back in September 2017, Syria's official news agency SANA reported that MAPNA Group had signed a contract with the Syrian government to build five 25MW gas-fired power plants in Aleppo.

The contract, worth \$155.6 million at the time, was awarded to the Iranian firm as part of an agreement between Damascus and Tehran to involve Iranian companies in the rebuilding of basic infrastructure in Syria.

Memorandums of understanding were also signed between electricity ministries of both countries to build five plants with a combined capacity of 540MW as well as wind and solar power plants in the northern coastal province of Latakia. The agreements included projects to restore power plants in Dayr al-Zawr and Homs.

MAPNA Group began working in Syria more than a decade ago. Despite the Syrian conflict it didn't stop operating in the country.

French Court Jails Serial Rapist for 20 Years

DOUAI (Dispatches) - A French court jailed a man for 20 years over dozens of rapes and sexual assaults he committed over a 30-year period along the border with Belgium.

Dubbed the "Rapist of the Sambre" for the river running through the region where he operated, 61-year-old Dino Scala will serve at least two-thirds of the sentence behind bars.

A former janitor and family man seen as a pillar of the community, his 2018 arrest and subsequent trial for 17 rapes, 12 attempted rapes and 27 assaults shocked France.



Assange Lodges UK Appeal Against U.S. Extradition

LONDON (Dispatches) - WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange filed an appeal against his extradition to the United States, as supporters denounced the British government.

Assange, who turns 51 on Sunday, has been held in a high-security prison since 2019.

On Friday his wife Stella was among dozens of people who demonstrated outside Britain's interior ministry to demand his release.



Russian Missile Attack Kills 21 Near Ukraine's Odesa



SERHIIVKA (Dispatches) - Russia flattened part of an apartment building while residents slept in missile attacks near Ukraine's port of Odesa that authorities say killed at least 21 people, hours after Russian troops abandoned the Black Sea outpost of Snake Island.

Locals in the resort village of Serhiivka helped workers pick through the rubble of the nine-storey apartment block, a section of which had been completely destroyed in the early-morning strike.

Walls and windows of a neighboring 14-storey apartment block were also damaged by the blast wave. Nearby holiday camps were also hit.

"We came here to the site, assessed the situation together with emergency workers and locals, and together helped those who survived. And those who unfortunately died. We helped to carry them away," said Oleksandr Abramov, who lives nearby and had rushed to the scene when he heard the blast.

Serhiy Bratchuk, spokesman for the Odesa regional administration, said 21 people had been confirmed killed, including a 12-year-old boy.

Among the fatalities was an employee of the Children's Rehabilitation Center set up by Ukraine's neighbor Moldova in the resort. Five others were injured.

"These peaceful people made the days of the children of Moldova more beautiful, they took care of their rehabilitation with great love and devotion," Moldovan Health Minister Alla Nemerenco said on her Facebook page.

The regional governor said the missiles had been fired from the direction of the Black Sea.

The Kremlin denied targeting civilians.

"I would like to remind you of the president's words that the Russian Armed Forces do not work with civilian targets," Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said.

The attack came just four days after Russia struck a crowded shopping mall in central Ukraine, killing at least 19 people.

Kyiv says Moscow has escalated its long-range attacks, hitting civilian targets far from the frontline in what Ukraine says are war crimes. Russia says it has been aiming at military sites.

Thousands of civilians have been killed since Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24. Russia calls the invasion a "special operation" to root out nationalists. Ukraine and its Western allies say it is an unprovoked war of aggression.

The strike on Serhiivka took place shortly after Russia pulled its troops off Snake Island, a strategically important outcrop about 140 km (85 miles) southeast of Odesa that it seized on the war's first day. They had used it to control the northwestern Black Sea.

In his nightly video address, President Volodymyr Zelenskiy hailed what he described as a strategic victory at Snake Island. "It does not yet guarantee security. It does not yet ensure that the enemy will not come back," he said. "But this significantly limits the actions of the occupiers. Step by step, we will push them back from our sea, our land and our sky."

Russia has used its control of the sea to impose a blockade on Ukraine, one of the world's biggest grain exporters, threatening to shatter Ukraine's economy and cause global famine.

Moscow denies it is to blame for a food crisis, which it says is caused by Western sanctions hurting its own exports.

Russian President Vladimir Putin met the president of Indonesia on Thursday and spoke by phone on Friday to the prime minister of India, promising both major food importers that Russia would remain a big supplier of grain.

Ukraine said a Russian-flagged cargo ship, the Zhibek Zholy, had left the Russian-occupied port of Berdyansk with a cargo of Ukrainian grain. Kyiv requested that Turkey detain the vessel, according to a Ukrainian official and document seen by Reuters.

No Reason to Change Hong Kong's 'One Country, Two Systems' Formula

HONG KONG (Dispatches) - There is no reason to change Hong Kong's "one country, two systems" formula of governance, Chinese President Xi Jinping said on a rare visit to the global financial hub after swearing in the city's new leader, John Lee.

Britain returned Hong Kong to Chinese rule on July 1, 1997, with Beijing promising wide-ranging autonomy, unfettered individual rights and judicial independence at least until 2047.

China's critics, including Western nations, accuse authorities of trampling on those freedoms with a sweeping national security law imposed by Beijing on the city in 2020 in the aftermath of mass pro-democracy protests the year before.

China and Hong Kong reject the accusations, saying the law "restored order from chaos" so that the city can prosper. Xi said the security law was beneficial for the "democratic rights" of the city's residents and that the "one country, two systems" formula would remain in place.

"For this kind of good system, there is no reason at all to change it. It must be maintained over the long term," Xi said.

At the swearing-in ceremonies, all officials, including Xi, wore masks and stood at least one metre apart. They did not shake hands.

Former security chief Lee, who is sanctioned by the United States over his role in implementing the security law, takes charge at a time when the city is facing an exodus of people and talent amid some of the toughest Covid-19 restrictions in the world.

Authorities deployed a massive security force, blocking roads and the airspace around the picturesque Victoria Harbour, where the last colonial governor, Chris Patten, tearfully handed Hong Kong back to China at a rain-drenched ceremony in 1997.

Red lanterns and posters declaring a "new era" of stability decorated main roads and walkways close to the convention center Xi did not attend the traditional flag-raising ceremonies today, with media reporting he stayed overnight across the border in Shenzhen after arriving in Hong Kong yesterday.



Sudan Security Forces Skirmish With Demonstrators After Protest Deaths

KHARTOUM (Dispatches) - Sudanese security forces fired tear gas at protesters near the presidential palace in Khartoum, a day after nine people were reported killed during the largest anti-military rallies for months.

Protest groups demanding a return to democratic rule have said they will organise an open-ended campaign of sit-ins and other peaceful actions in response to the deaths.

Medics aligned with the protesters said the nine people were mostly killed by gunfire from security forces in Khartoum and the adjoining cities of Omdurman and Bahri. Sudan's ruling council and government did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

"The sit-in can develop but we must fortify it properly," Al-Reda al-Rasheed told Reuters as he stood with other protesters drinking tea and writing out slogans in central Khartoum on Friday.

"Those who have come from Omdurman can join our sit-in and others from surrounding areas as well can join."

Footage posted on social media showed protests continuing on Friday afternoon in Omdurman, Bahri, and in Madani, southeast of Khartoum.

The rallies came after more than eight months of demonstrations against military leaders who staged a coup last October, ending a power-sharing arrangement with civilians agreed following the 2019 overthrow of Omar al-Bashir.

Khartoum State police said in a statement they had used tear gas and water cannon and made arrests on Thursday after protesters equipped with stones and metal bars moved against their positions.

Dozens of members of the security forces had been injured, some of them seriously, the statement said. A separate statement from the interior ministry

said there would be an investigation into the case of a protester who was shown on unverified social media videos purportedly shot in the street as armed security forces advanced.

Ecuador Gov't, Indigenous Leaders Sign Deal to End Protests

QUITO (Dispatches) - Thousands of Indigenous protesters left the Ecuadorian capital of Quito evening after their leaders and the government signed a deal that would cut fuel prices and end their cost-of-living demonstrations that largely paralyzed the country for 18 straight days.

The agreement, mediated by the Catholic Church and signed in Quito, provides for a five-cent-per-gallon reduction in the price of diesel and gasoline on top of a 10-cent cut already conceded by the government.

"Very likely we are tired... so it's time to go home," protest leader Leonidas Iza told a crowd of some 4,000 demonstrators after announcing an end to the protests earlier in the day.

The Indigenous protesters funneled out of the city peacefully in buses and trucks, many of them waving Ecuadorian and Indigenous multi-color wiphala flags.

President Guillermo Lasso, for his part, said on Twitter that the parties had achieved "the supreme value to which we all aspire: peace in our country."

Later, in a radio and television broadcast, he said it was "time to heal wounds, to overcome the division between Ecuadorians and unite in a single objective: to rebuild Ecuador."

Fast-rising fuel prices were the catalyst for the protests called by the powerful Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities (Conaie) and marked by burning roadblocks and sometimes violent clashes with the security forces.

Five civilians and a soldier have died since the protests started on June 13, hundreds were injured on both sides, and some 150 people have been arrested.

Signed by Conaie leader Iza and government minister Francisco Jimenez, the agreement foresees further negotiations between the two sides, an end to the disruptive roadblocks erected countrywide, and the lifting of a state of emergency in four of Ecuador's 24 provinces.

It also provides for a review of government decrees on oil exploitation and mining in Indigenous lands.

An estimated 14,000 Ecuadorians — most of them in Quito — took part in the mass show of discontent against deepening hardship in an economy dealt a serious blow by the coronavirus pandemic.

The agreement provides for "the cessation of the mobilisations and the gradual return (of the demonstrators) to the territories" where they came from to join the protest.



Taliban Leader Hails Afghan Victory

KABUL (Dispatches) - The reclusive supreme leader of the Afghan Taliban hailed the

Islamists' 2021 takeover of Afghanistan during a meeting called to forge national unity and attended by religious leaders from around the country.

Taliban spokesmen confirmed that Haibatullah Akhundzada, who is based in the southern city of Kandahar, had come to the capital Kabul for the all-male gathering of some 3,000 participants.

After receiving pledges of allegiance from participants raising their hands, Akhundzada praised the Taliban's victory last August, which marked the end of a 20-year struggle to overthrow a Western-backed government and drive U.S.-led forces out of the country.

"The success of the Afghan jihad is not only a source of pride for Afghans but also for Muslims all over the world," he said according to state-run Bakhtar News Agency, using the Arabic word signifying a spiritual struggle.

When the Islamist movement announced its interim government in September, Akhundzada retained the role he has held since 2016 of supreme leader, the group's ultimate authority, but he is rarely seen publicly.

His address to the gathering comes a week after a deadly earthquake hit eastern Afghanistan, exposing the lack of support the Taliban can count on from the international community.

The Afghan economy has plunged into crisis as Western governments have withdrawn funding and strictly enforced sanctions, saying that the Taliban government needs to change course on human rights, especially those of women.

In Thursday's speech, Akhundzada asked traders to return and invest in the country, saying overseas aid could not build the economy and would make Afghans more dependent on foreign money.

"Thank God, we are now an independent country. (Foreigners) should not give us their orders, it is our system and we have our own decisions," he said according to Bakhtar.



Astronauts Struggle to Regain Bone Density



PARIS (Dispatches) - Astronauts lose decades' worth of bone mass in space that many do not recover even after a year back on Earth, researchers said Thursday, warning that it could be a "big concern" for future missions to Mars.

Previous research has shown astronauts lose between one to two percent of bone density for every month spent in space, as the lack of gravity takes the pressure off their legs when it comes to standing and walking.

To find out how astronauts recover once their feet are back on the ground, a new study scanned the wrists and ankles of 17 astronauts before, during and after a stay on the International Space Station.

The bone density lost by astronauts was equivalent to how much they would shed in several decades if they were back on Earth, said study co-author Steven Boyd of Canada's University of Calgary and director of the McCaig Institute for Bone and Joint Health. The researchers found that the shinbone density of nine of the astronauts had not fully recovered after a year on Earth -- and were still lacking around a decade's worth of bone mass.

The astronauts who went on the longest missions, which ranged from four to seven months on the ISS, were the slowest to recover.

"The longer you spend in space, the more bone you lose," Boyd told AFP.

Boyd said it is a "big concern" for planned for future missions to Mars, which could see astronauts spend years in space.

"Will it continue to get worse over time or not? We don't know," he said.

"It's possible we hit a steady state after a while, or it's possible that we continue to lose bone. But I can't imagine that we'd continue to lose it until there's nothing left."

A 2020 modelling study predicted that over a three-year spaceflight to Mars, 33 percent of astronauts would be at risk of osteoporosis.

Boyd said some answers could come from research currently being carried out on astronauts who spent at least a year onboard the ISS.

Guillemette Gauquelin-Koch, the head of medicine research at France's CNES space agency, said that the weightlessness experienced in space is "most drastic physical inactivity there is".

"Even with two hours of sport a day, it is like you are bedridden for the other 22 hours," said the doctor, who was not part of the study.

"It will not be easy for the crew to set foot on Martian soil when they arrive -- it's very disabling."

The new study, which was published in Scientific Reports, also showed how spaceflight alters the structure of bones themselves.

Boyd said that if you thought of a body's bones like the Eiffel Tower, it would as if some of the connecting metal rods that hold the structure up were lost.

"And when we return to Earth, we thicken up what's remaining, but we don't actually create new rods," he said. Some exercises are better for retaining bone mass than others, the study found.

Deadlifting proved significantly more effective than running or cycling, it said, suggesting more heavy lower-body exercises in the future.

But the astronauts -- who are mostly fit and in their 40s -- did not tend to notice the drastic bone loss, Boyd said, pointing out that the Earth-bound equivalent osteoporosis is known as "the silent disease".

Canadian astronaut Robert Thirsk, who has spent the most time in space, said that for him bones and muscles took the longest to recover after spaceflight. "But within a day of landing, I felt comfortable again as an Earthling," he said in a statement accompanying the research.

Apple Eyes Fuel Purchases From Dashboard



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Apple Inc wants you to start buying gas directly from your car dashboard as early as this fall, when the newest version of its CarPlay software rolls out, accelerating the company's push to turn your vehicle into a store for goods and services.

A new feature quietly unveiled at Apple's developer conference this month will allow CarPlay users to tap an app to navigate to a pump and buy gas straight from a screen in the car, skipping the usual process of inserting or tapping a credit card. Details of Apple's demo for developers have not previously been reported.

But Dallas-based HF Sinclair, which markets its gasoline at 1,600 stations in the United States, told Reuters that it plans to use the new CarPlay technology and will announce details in coming months.

"We are excited by the idea that consumers could navigate to a Sinclair station and purchase fuel from their vehicle navigation screen," said Jack Barger, the company's senior vice president of marketing.

Fuel apps are just the latest in a sustained push by Apple to make it possible to tap to buy from the navigation screen. It has already opened up CarPlay to apps for parking, electric vehicle charging and ordering food, and it also is adding driving task apps such as logging mileage on business trips.

Fuel is a major expense for car owners. The U.S. Energy Information Administration estimated in April that the average U.S. household will spend about \$2,945 on gasoline in 2022, or about \$455 more than last year.

Apple currently does not charge automakers, developers or users for CarPlay; the business interest is putting Apple at the forefront as cars transform into rolling computers, said Horace Dediu, an analyst with Asymco and founder of Micromobility Industries. The new feature will hit hundreds of car models already compatible with CarPlay when Apple releases software updates this fall.

"Forget about Apple Car - Apple CarPlay is a bigger deal," Dediu said. "It's very likely to scale to millions and millions of cars, if not hundreds of millions."

To use the new CarPlay feature this fall, iPhone users will need to download a fuel company's app to their phone and enter payment credentials to set up the app. After the app is set up, users will be able to tap on their navigation screen to activate a pump and pay.

"It's a massive marketplace, and consumers really want to take friction out of payments," said Donald Frieden, chief executive officer of Houston-based P97 Networks, which makes the digital plumbing that many fuel companies will use to connect their apps to cars.

Frieden said he has fielded calls from oil companies that are interested to make their apps work with CarPlay. BP, Shell and Chevron Corp did not respond to requests for comment about whether they plan to make their iPhone apps work with CarPlay.

Apple's latest move is likely to increase tensions with automakers that have their own ambitions for commerce in the car.

For example, vehicle makers have tried - and failed - to popularize gasoline purchasing from the car before. General Motors Co rolled out a system for doing so in 2017, but shuttered it earlier this year "due to a supplier exiting the business," GM told Reuters in a statement.

Beyond apps for fuel and other purchases, Apple is also seeking to expand CarPlay further into the car's driving systems by accessing speed and fuel gauge data.

But automakers are not likely to hand over that data to Apple without making demands of their own in talks that analysts believe are likely already under way.

Speaking at the Reuters Automotive Europe conference in Munich on Wednesday, Mercedes Benz CEO Ola Kaellenius said the company's goal "is to have a complete, holistic, Mercedes experience."



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Novartis to Cut Up to 8,000 Jobs Globally

ZURICH (Dispatches) - Novartis said a previously announced restructuring program could lead to 8,000 jobs being cut, or about 7.4% of its global workforce, including up to 1,400 in Switzerland. The job cuts, previously projected by Chief Executive Vas Narasimhan to be in the "single digit thousands", are part of a restructuring program the Swiss pharmaceutical group announced in April, targeting savings of at least \$1 billion by 2024. Novartis said in an emailed statement it had made good progress in implementing its new organizational structure that involved integrating its pharmaceuticals and oncology business units and would lead to eliminating roles across the organization. The statement confirmed an earlier report by Swiss newspaper TagesAnzeiger on the cutbacks.




UK Economy Faces Double Threat of Inflation Surge, Recession Risk

LONDON (Dispatches) - Britain's economy is struggling under the strain of two major risks in the form of double-digit inflation and a possible recession, leaving the Bank of England in a dilemma about how much further it should raise interest rates.

The BoE has raised borrowing costs five times since December and its next scheduled rates announcement is on Aug. 4.

The central bank has said it will act "forcefully" - in other words, increase rates more steeply - if inflation pressures turn more persistent. But it also expects almost no economic growth over the next three years.

Below is a summary of the conflicting challenges facing BoE Governor Andrew Bailey and his colleagues and finance minister Rishi Sunak. Consumer prices leapt by 9.1% in the 12 months to May, the most in 40 years, and the BoE has forecast that inflation will top 11% in October when energy bills go up again.

The BoE says there is little it can do to stop inflation in the short term and its priority is to stop the jump in prices from pushing up longer-term inflation expectations, which would make the problem much harder to fix.

One of the most widely watched measures of inflation expectations - the Citi/YouGov poll - increased sharply in recent months but has shown signs of stabilising or falling.

The main way that higher inflation expectations could become embedded in the economy would be through higher pay deals.

Workers' salaries have been growing more quickly than usual, mostly because of one-off bonuses paid by employers in an effort to retain and recruit staff amid a severe shortage of candidates to fill vacancies. Total pay, which includes bonuses, grew by almost 7% in the most recent official figures for the three months to April, up from about 3% shortly before the COVID-19 pandemic. Regular pay has increased just over 4%.

Both measures are lagging behind inflation, representing a cut in the real income of most workers.

Separate figures from XpertHR, a pay and personnel data publisher, show annual pay rises agreed at British workplaces steadying at a historically high rate.

A combination of the pandemic and Brexit has left Britain's employers in many sectors facing an acute shortage of staff, another worry for the BoE as this adds to pay pressures.

The official measure of vacancies has hit record highs month after month although the pace of increases has slowed, one of several signs that the inflationary heat in the jobs market has started to cool. read more

The BoE is also watching how many people remain outside the jobs market. This inactivity rate has edged down, contributing to the first rise in the headline unemployment rate since late 2020 in the most recent figures, potentially easing the inflation pressure in the jobs market.

Normally, a jump in inflation would reflect strong growth in the economy, but not this time. Prices were already rising around the world as the global economy struggled to reopen after coronavirus lockdowns, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine has compounded the problem by pushing up energy and food prices further.

Britain's economy contracted in April and March and showed zero growth in February, the first time since the start of the pandemic that it failed to grow in a three-month period. It is about 5% below the size it would have been had the pandemic not happened.

Spain's 12-Month Inflation Surpasses 10% in June

MADRID (Dispatches) - Spanish 12-month inflation rose to 10.2% in June, the first time it has surpassed 10% since April 1985, from 8.7% in the previous month, preliminary data from the National Statistics Institute (INE) showed on Wednesday.

The reading was higher than the 9.0% forecast by analysts in a Reuters poll.

Core inflation, which strips out volatile food and energy prices, rose to 5.5% year-on-year from 4.9% a month earlier, the highest since August 1993, the INE data showed.

Spanish European Union-harmonised inflation was 10.0% in the 12 months through June, up from 8.5% a month earlier.

"The news of the last few weeks is not positive ... Russia's gas and oil export cuts are accelerating rising energy prices," Economy Minister Nadia Calvino told parliament on Wednesday.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the subsequent pressure on energy and food markets has stoked inflation, which was already accelerating as the global economy reopened after the coronavirus pandemic.

In Spain, INE said, this evolution in prices is mainly due to the rise in fuel prices, bigger this month than in June 2021, and of food and non-alcoholic beverages, which were flat in June last year.

Also influencing the increase in national consumer prices are the costs of hotels, cafes and restaurants, which all rose from last year, INE said.

The soaring cost of living in Spain is putting pressure on the government of Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, which passed on Saturday a second series of measures, worth 9 billion euros (\$9.45 billion), to help poor households cope with inflation.

Rising consumer prices "show the severity of the situation and the measures we are taking are appropriate," Sanchez said on Wednesday morning on local radio station Cadena SERA.



World Bank's Reinhart Skeptical Global Recession Can Be Avoided

MADRID (Dispatches) - World Bank chief economist Carmen Reinhart said she is skeptical that the U.S. and global economies can dodge a recession, given spiking inflation, sharp hikes in interest rates and slowing growth in China.

Reinhart, who returns to Harvard University on July 1 after a two-year public service leave, said it was historically a tall order to reduce inflation and engineer a soft landing at the same time, and recession risks are clearly a "hot topic" at the moment.

"What worries everybody is that all the risks are stacked on the downside," Reinhart told Reuters in a remote interview, citing a series of adverse shocks and moves by the Federal Reserve to raise interest rates after a decade and a half of ultra-low and negative rates.

The global financial crisis of 2008-2009 affected mostly a dozen advanced economies and China at that time was a big engine of growth, but this crisis is far broader and China's growth is no longer in the double digits, she said.

The World Bank this month slashed its global growth forecast by nearly a third to 2.9% for 2022, warning that Russia's war in Ukraine had added to damage from the COVID-19 pandemic, and many countries now faced recession.

It said global growth could fall to 2.1% in 2022 and 1.5% in 2023, driving per capita growth close to zero, if downside risks materialized.

Asked if a recession could be avoided in the United States or globally, Reinhart said, "I'm pretty skeptical. In the mid-1990s, under (Fed) Chairman (Alan) Greenspan, we had a soft landing, but the inflation concern at the time was around 3%, not around 8.5%. It's not like

you can point to a lot of episodes of significant Fed tightening that haven't taken a toll on the economy."

Reinhart said the Biden administration was not alone in misjudging the extent of the inflation risk, noting that the Fed, International Monetary Fund and others had shared that view, although the World Bank early on called it a "real risk."

"The Fed should have acted - and I've been saying this for a long time - sooner rather than later and more aggressively," she said. "The longer you wait, the more draconian the measures you have to take."

India Central Bank May Need to Tweak FX Strategy



MUMBAI (Dispatches) - India's central bank may need to change the way it seeks to slow the rupee's decline, analysts and traders say, with its current method of intervention in the forwards market now only accelerating the currency's fall.

The rupee has hit a series of record lows this week and is within striking distance of the psychologically important 79-to-a-dollar level, as concerns around growth, portfolio outflows, high global crude prices and sustained inflation weigh.

To control the tumble, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has sold dollars in the spot market and simultaneously bought and sold in the forwards market.

However, traders say the RBI's actions in the onshore forwards market have led premiums to crash sharply with the 1-year annualised forward premium now below 3%, levels last seen in November 2011, wiping out carry trade gains and pressuring the spot rupee price lower.

"Maturing forward contracts are suspected to be weighing on the currency this week, besides an unresponsive macro backdrop of a portfolio outflows, high oil and bid dollar," said Radhika Rao, senior economist with DBS Bank.

Those technical conditions have made forward market intervention a less-than-ideal tool for managing rupee volatility and left the RBI with fewer options to reduce the risks of capital flight.

RBI could make greater use of spot market intervention - which would run down central bank reserves - or may just opt to let the rupee weaken according to macroeconomic fundamentals.

"In the short-term, intervention strategy might return to the spot to meet dollar demand, in light of a sharp fall in forward premiums," Rao said.

At \$590.6 billion, the reserves give RBI enough firepower to halt the slide in the currency but it is unlikely to intervene aggressively against fundamentals.

The rupee was market-determined, but the RBI would not allow "runaway depreciation" in the currency, its chief Shaktikanta Das said last month.

The rupee has held up relatively better than its Asian peers on account of the central bank intervention but with a widening trade and current account deficit (CAD) and sustained foreign portfolio outflows, the downward pressure has intensified.

OPEC+ Sticks to Oil Output Policy

LONDON (Dispatches) - OPEC+ said it would stick to its planned oil output hikes in August but avoided discussing policy from September onwards even as prices have risen on tight global supplies and worries that the group has little ability to pump more crude.

Thursday's meeting of the group that includes Saudi Arabia, Russia and other major oil producers was held days before U.S. President Joe Biden travels to the Middle East, including Riyadh where he is expected to press the kingdom for more oil.

At its last gathering on June 2, OPEC+ decided to increase output each month by 648,000 barrels per day (bpd) in July and August, up from a previous plan to add 432,000 bpd per month.

Washington welcomed the June 2 decision for a faster production rise, following months of Western calls for more oil from OPEC+, which includes the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries.

Oil prices rocketed to their highest levels since 2008, climbing above \$139 a barrel in March, after the United States and Europe imposed sanctions on Russia over its invasion of Ukraine, which Moscow calls a "special military operation".

Prices have slipped since then but were still above \$115 on Thursday because of tight supplies and concerns that OPEC+ states had little extra capacity to raise output swiftly. Analysts said those fears outweighed worries about an economic downturn.

"Supply scarcity fears outweigh recessionary fears. Globally, we are running on extremely thin spare capacity," said Ehsan Khoman from MUFG bank said.

"OPEC+ is mulling firing its last crude production bullets as it runs out of capacity to pump more, whilst refining capacity for oil products ... which drives the real economy, has declined markedly," he said.

French President Emmanuel Macron said this week he had been told Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, the only two OPEC states considered to have significant spare capacity, could barely raise output.

On top of worries about oil supply, Europe is struggling to manage a gas shortage because of lower Russian deliveries. "The likelihood of gas rationing in Europe has increased significantly. A technical recession in the eurozone is now an increasing possibility," Fitch Ratings said.

Chip Exports to Russia Plunged by 90% After Curbs

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Global exports of semiconductors to Russia have plummeted by 90% since the United States and allies slapped export controls on Moscow over its invasion of Ukraine, U.S. Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo said.

Raimondo, speaking at an annual Commerce

Department conference, also said that controls placed on Russia's aerospace sector were hammering its ability to generate revenue and support military aviation.

"Russia may be forced to ground between half and two-thirds of its commercial aircraft in the next four years in order to cannibalize them for spare parts," she added.

The remarks came a day after U.S. President Joe Biden's administration added five companies in China to a trade blacklist on Tuesday for allegedly supporting Russia's military and defense industrial base, flexing its muscle to enforce sanctions against Moscow.

The United States has worked with allies to punish Russian President Vladimir Putin for the invasion, which Moscow calls a "special operation", by sanctioning a raft of Russian companies and oligarchs and adding others to a trade blacklist.

While U.S. officials had previously said that China was generally complying with the restrictions, Washington has vowed to closely monitor compliance and rigorously enforce the regulations.

On Wednesday, Raimondo also doubled down on threats to "shut down" China's top chipmaker SMIC if it is found to be supplying chips to Russia.

"What if SMIC or other Chinese-based semiconductor companies are found supplying chips to Russia?" she said. "We will shut them down and we can, because almost every chip in the world and in China is made using U.S. equipment and software and I intend to make good on that commitment if it's necessary."

Number Of Injuries in Iran's Quake Increases

TEHRAN (IFP) - The number of people injured in Saturday's earthquake in southern Iran has increased to nearly 90. The death toll is so far 5.

Local officials say most of the wounded were treated on an outpatient basis. According to officials, the health situation is under control in the quake zone.

Iran is a quake-prone country. Much of the country's territory including the city of Tehran is crisscrossed by fault lines.

The country has been hit by several deadly tremors, with the last massive one happening in 2003 in the city of Bam. The incident killed tens of thousands and flattened most the city.



NATO's Plan to Vastly Increase Combat-Ready Forces to Counter Russia

MADRID (Dispatches) - NATO leaders have agreed to put over 300,000 troops on high alert from mid-2023, up from 40,000 currently, to counter Russia, the country designated by the alliance as posing the greatest threat over the next decade. read more

Here are details of the current force "posture" and the plans to update it to deter any future Russian attack on NATO's eastern flank, as well as to react to other crises on the alliance's southern borders.

CURRENT FORCE POSTURE

- NATO has four multinational battalions in the three Baltic states and Poland, which from 2017 comprised some 1,000 troops each and were set up in response to Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea from Ukraine.

- That force presence has grown since Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24. NATO also activated its 40,000-strong Response Force, while the United States sent some 20,000 more troops to Europe, taking the number of U.S. military personnel on the continent to 100,000.

- Taking into account those multinational battalions and parts of the NATO Response Force, NATO's Supreme Allied Commander in Europe (SACEUR) has more than 42,000 troops under his command in Europe, with fighter jets on high alert and ships ready to respond.

- SACEUR is also the commander of U.S. European Command, increasing the number of allied troops under his control.

- NATO also has national forces, but many are underfunded and lack the ability to deploy to conflicts quickly.

SHORT-TERM ENHANCEMENTS

- NATO is in the process of setting up four more multinational battalions in Hungary, Bulgaria, Slovenia and Romania, with around 1,000 troops each.

- It has also increased the number of aircraft in the southeast of alliance territory to patrol the skies and protect NATO airspace.

LONG-TERM POSTURE

- NATO will hugely increase the number of troops that are combat-ready and at higher readiness, meaning they are able to move quickly to defend allied borders in case of conflict in Europe.

- NATO will create a three-tiered system of readiness: 100,000 troops will be able to move to a conflict within 10 days; 200,000 troops can be deployed within 30 days; 500,000 troops can move within 180 days.



- The three tiers rely on the following concept: tactical forces in Europe first; operational reserves follow; finally NATO draws on U.S. and Canadian forces from across the Atlantic, known as strategic reserves.

- These forces already exist within NATO but need more investment, training and equipment to be deployed quickly. The higher readiness forces will also include - and supersede - the NATO Response Force.

- Crucially, for the first time since the Cold War, the forces will be assigned to specific regions, so that the SACEUR has an overview of available troops at any one time. Previously NATO troops had to be ready for any threat at any time, complicating preparedness.

- The designation of forces to specific regions is already underway. German forces will be assigned to Lithuania, for instance. A new headquarters in the Baltic nation will allow German soldiers that are stationed in Germany to spend limited periods during peacetime in Lithuania, which borders on the sensitive Russian Baltic exclave of Kaliningrad.

- British troops are being assigned to Estonia and Canadian troops to Latvia, both states that share borders with mainland Russia. Other allies have yet to come forward.

Rude and Pint-Size...

FROM PAGE 1

Iran has reaffirmed its good neighbor policy in dealing with regional countries, reassuring its neighbors that Tehran's missile and nuclear programs are civilian in nature and serve the security of the region.



Tehran's influence and the power of the Islamic

Revolution is the main concern of Bahrain and even Egypt because those countries are concerned about spread of the Islamic Revolution's ideology and principles in the Muslim world and their leaders fear their fates and uprising of their nations.

The Islamic Republic of Iran since its foundation in 1979 has tried to promote Islamic values among the Muslim states and it has been to some extent successful and this is the point which frightens Bahrain and Egypt which are in power by military power rather than election.

Bahrain and Egypt are run by un-elected rulers although Egyptian President runs the country after winning in a one-sided election by imprisoning major contenders. So the rulers of these two countries fear about their future and awakening of their nations in pursuing the path of the Islamic Revolution in gaining independence and fighting with the Zionists.

The influence of the Islamic Revolution is fully clear for every person and Tehran does not need to interfere in the domestic affairs of Arab countries because its ideology finds its way and it needs no physical presence or interference. So the tiny Bahrain is better to mind its own business and stop accusing Tehran because it is too weak to mess with Tehran. Bahraini rulers by normalization of ties with Israel have shown their dependence on the West and the Zionists, and they act what the Zionists dictate.

Of course whenever Iran's nuclear talks reach its climax, we can expect such baseless claims from any hostile country and what came from Manama was not surprising and more will come but these rubbish claims cannot jolt the pillars of the Islamic Revolution and countries like Bahrain act in a way to please their lords and Western allies.

Bahrain like some other undemocratic rulers do not sleep the nights well because of awakening among their nations which any moment can bring their rulers down and countdown has begun for the full awakening of Muslim nations and they will win because of the global achievements of the Islamic Revolution and its worldwide influence.

So influence of the Islamic Revolution and its ideals have turned into a thorn in the eyes of some hostile countries and Bahrain is the one with sleepless nights of popular uprising. It is just a matter of time.

Tehran to Coordinate...

FROM PAGE 1

At the end of the talks on Wednesday, Iran and the EU said they would keep in touch "about the continuation of the route and the next stage of the talks."

The two-day negotiations in the Qatari capital to discuss how to remove sanctions on Iran have ended, with the two sides saying they will keep in touch "about the continuation of the route and the next stage of the talks".

The EU is tasked with coordinating indirect negotiations between Iran and the United States during the process. Iran does not sit down with the US as it is no longer a party to the deal.

Iranian, Russian Deputy...

FROM PAGE 1

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian, too, said in a Twitter post Bagheri Kani pursues the negotiations in full coordination with him, logically, relying on strong reasons, and dynamically, aimed at removal of sanctions.

America's rationalism and offering a sustainable guarantee to ensure Iran's full economic benefit from the agreement can lead to being fruitful of the negotiations, he added.

Iran, Russia...

FROM PAGE 1

The two sides also exchanged their views on proposing for joint ventures in the fields of manufacturing home appliances, automobiles, shipbuilding and power plants construction.

Investing in automotive industry as joint venture was of the other issues raised between Iranian and Russian officials.

Accordingly, preliminary talks have started between Russian and Iranian companies for joint cooperation and it is scheduled that automotive parts would be exchanged between the two countries.

Tesla's Run of Record Deliveries May Be Reaching The End of the Road



SAN FRANCISCO (Dispatches) - Tesla Inc is expected to end its nearly two-year-long run of record quarterly deliveries as a prolonged COVID-related shutdown in Shanghai hit its production and supply chain, and it slowly ramps up new factories.

While Tesla Chief Executive Elon Musk has been pursuing the acquisition of social media platform Twitter Inc, his crown jewel, Tesla, has grappled with production glitches in China and slow output growth at new factories in Texas and Berlin.

Analysts expect Tesla to report deliveries of 295,078 vehicles for the second quarter as early as Friday, according to Refinitiv data. Several analysts have slashed their estimates further to about 250,000 due to China's prolonged lockdown.

This would be down from its record deliveries of 310,048 the preceding quarter, marking Tesla's first quarter-on-quarter decline in deliveries since the first quarter of 2020.

The world's most valuable automaker has posted record deliveries every quarter since the third quarter of 2020, weathering pandemic and supply-chain disruptions better than most automakers.

China has been instrumental in Tesla's rapid increase of vehicle production and Musk has praised workers there for "burning the 3 a.m. oil."

But China's prolonged zero-COVID lockdown - Wedbush analyst Dan Ives called it Tesla's "albatross" this quarter - caused deeper disruptions to output than Musk predicted. Tesla's low-cost, lucrative Shanghai factory produced roughly half of the company's total cars delivered last year, and Ives estimated the shutdown wiped out about 70,000 units in the quarter.

Musk said in April that Tesla's overall vehicle production in the second quarter would be "roughly on par" with the first quarter, driven by a China rebound. But he recently said Tesla had a "very tough quarter," citing production and supply-chain challenges in China.

Musk also said Tesla's new factories in Texas and Berlin are "gigantic money furnaces" losing billions of dollars as they struggle to increase production quickly. He said the carmaker's supply-chain problems are not over and keeping the factories running remains a concern.

"The key question is the magnitude of the (China production) decline and whether the Fremont (California) factory was able to help support volumes," CFRA Research analyst Garrett Nelson said.

Africa in Need of Test Kits, Vaccines as Monkeypox Spreads

GENEVA (Dispatches) - Africa has no vaccines for monkeypox and test kits are in short supply, international health agencies said on Thursday, warning that richer countries already appeared to be hoarding vaccines.

Monkeypox is a viral disease that causes flu-like symptoms and skin lesions. It is endemic in parts of Africa but has also recently been reported in countries with no history of human transmission, including Ghana, Morocco and South Africa.

"The geographic spread of monkeypox to parts of Africa where cases have never been detected before is a worrying sign," said Dr Matshidiso Moeti, the World Health Organization (WHO) director for Africa.

"What happened in the early days of the COVID-19 vaccine rollout when Africa watched on the sidelines as other countries snapped up limited supplies must not be allowed to recur. There are some signs that this is already happening," she said.

Monkeypox vaccines are in short supply globally and there have been no donations to countries in Africa, the WHO said.

There are no specific vaccines for monkeypox, but smallpox jabs protect against the virus.

Monkeypox is not yet a global health emergency, the WHO ruled on Saturday, although Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said he was deeply concerned about the outbreak. read more

The Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) is treating the outbreak as an emergency, its acting director, Ahmed Ogwell Ouma, said.

"Monkeypox is an emergency here on the continent and we are calling on all our friends and partners to join us in controlling this outbreak... including making available test kits and vaccines," he said.

The lack of testing capacity has resulted in a high number of suspected cases that cannot be confirmed, he said. More than 1,821 cases have been reported in 13 countries but only 109 are laboratory confirmed.

In recent weeks around 40 countries where monkeypox is not endemic have reported outbreaks, with more than 4,300 confirmed or suspected cases mostly in Europe.

Europe to See High Levels of Covid-19 This Summer

GENEVA (Dispatches) - The World Health Organization said Thursday it expected "high levels" of Covid-19 in Europe this summer and called on countries to monitor the spread as cases tripled in the past month.

"As countries across the European region have lifted the social measures that were previously in place, the virus will transmit at high levels over the summer", WHO Europe regional director Hans Kluge told AFP.

"This virus won't go away just because countries stop looking for it. It's still spreading, it's still changing, and it's still taking lives."

With the milder but more contagious Omicron subvariant BA.5 spreading across the continent, the 53 countries in the WHO European region are currently registering just under 500,000 cases daily, according to the organisation's data.

That is up from around 150,000 cases daily at the end of May.

Austria, Cyprus, France, Germany, Greece, Luxembourg and Portugal were the countries with the highest incidence rates, with almost all countries in the region seeing a rise in cases.

After registering around 4,000 to 5,000 deaths per day throughout most of the winter, Europe is currently seeing around 500 deaths per day, about the same level as during the summer of 2020.

"We hope that the strong vaccine programmes most member states have implemented together with prior infection will mean that we avoid the more severe consequences that we saw earlier in the pandemic", Kluge said.

"However, our recommendations remain," he stressed.

Massive Fire...

FROM PAGE 1

The increase in reports of such incidents which were particularly common among female soldiers is attributed to the fact that troops now know that they can lodge complaints.

This comes as the actual number of sexual harassment and assault is thought to be much higher than what has been announced.

Kan also said the number of requests for psychological support as a result of sexual assaults in the Israeli army has also doubled, and now stands at 542 cases.

Back in February, an Israeli officer was indicted on several counts of sexual assault against three of his subordinates.

According to Kan network, a female soldier filed a complaint against the officer after she was released from the military. The Israeli army then located two other enlisted soldiers who were also allegedly sexually assaulted by the officer.

Sampaoli Leaves Marseille Because Of Differences With Bosses

MARSEILLE (Dispatches) - Argentinian coach Jorge Sampaoli said he had left Marseille because of differences with the club's hierarchy after guiding them back to the Champions League. Sampaoli, 62, arrived at the Stade Velodrome in March 2021 and took Marseille to second in Ligue 1 last season.

In May, colourful former Argentina and Sevilla boss Sampaoli, who led Chile to the 2015 Copa America title, said he needed further funds to make the most of competing in Europe's top tournament.

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Crystal Palace Sign England Goalkeeper Johnstone

LONDON (Dispatches) - Crystal Palace signed England goalkeeper Sam Johnstone on a free transfer today after his departure from West Brom.

Johnstone agreed a four-year contract with the Eagles as he returned to the Premier League after a season in the second tier with West Brom. The 29-year-old started his career at Manchester United and has played three times for England.

He moved to West Brom for £6.5 million in 2018 and made 167 appearances for the Baggies in all competitions.

Djokovic Cruises Into Wimbledon Last 16

LONDON (Dispatches) - Three-time defending champion Novak Djokovic reached the Wimbledon fourth round for the 14th time with a straight-sets demolition of Serbian compatriot Miomir Kecmanovic.

Djokovic, looking to pull level with Pete Sampras as a seven-time Wimbledon champion, triumphed 6-0, 6-3, 6-4.

Friday's win was the 330th of Djokovic's Grand Slam career.

"It means that I've been playing for quite a few years, which I'm very grateful for and I'm very blessed to be in the position to compete at the highest level and secure more wins in Grand Slams," said the 35-year-old top seed.

"I'm proud of the consistency at this level."

After dropping one set in his opening win over Kwon Soon-woo, the Serb then only lost seven games against Thanasi Kokkinakis.

"Honestly I think I have been playing better and better as the tournament progresses, which is something you always wish for," said Djokovic.

"You want to raise the level of tennis up a notch each match so that's what's happening."

"I know I can always do better and I always expect the highest from myself but so far, so good and I look forward to the next round."

The win was Djokovic's 22nd in a row on grass.

He has not lost a grass-court match since falling to Marin Cilic in the final at Queen's four years ago.

"I started very well, very strong with a lot of intensity and focus," added Djokovic, whose only blip was being broken when he served for the match at 5-2 in the third set.

Waiting in the fourth round will be Dutch wild card Tim van Rijthoven.



Playing in his debut Grand Slam main draw, the world number 104 defeated 22nd seed Nikoloz Basilashvili of Georgia, 6-4, 6-3, 6-4.

Meanwhile John Isner found his serving groove early in his Wimbledon match against Italy's Jannik Sinner to set a new record for the number of aces on the ATP Tour.

The giant American, 37, started his match against the 10th seed four aces behind Croatia's Ivo Karlovic, who has served 13,728.

Isner, who dumped Andy Murray out in the previous round, broke the record in the third game of his match on Court Two with his fifth ace.

Record-keeping began in 1991.

"It's actually really cool," Isner said ahead of the match, looking ahead to breaking the record. "It's something I'm really proud of. I will be the all-time leader. I'll keep playing, keep adding to my total... I don't know if (the record) will get broken. I could be up there for a long time."

Isner, who stands six feet 10 inches (208 centimetres) tall, is also in the record books for taking part in the longest match in tennis history in 2010, against Frenchman Nicolas Mahut.

A plaque was unveiled outside Court 18 at Wimbledon to commemorate the contest, which lasted 11 hours and five minutes.

"Give him another plaque," U.S. tennis great John McEnroe said on ESPN.

Salah Signs Long-Term Contract Extension



LONDON (Dispatches) - Liverpool forward Mohamed Salah signed a long-term contract extension, putting an end to a lengthy saga about his future at the Premier League club.

The Egypt international has signed an extension until 2025, with the deal coming after strike partner and Senegal forward Sadio Mane left to join German Bundesliga giants Bayern Munich on a three-year deal last month.

"I feel great and (I am) excited to win trophies with the club. It's a happy day for everyone," Salah said in a statement on the club website. "It takes a little bit of time, I think, to renew, but now everything is done so we just need to focus on what's next. 'I think you can see in the last five or six years the team was always going (upwards). Last season we were close to winning four, but unfortunately in the last week of the season we lost two trophies.'"

Salah scored 23 league goals for Liverpool last season to share the Premier League golden boot with Tottenham Hotspur's Son Heung-min.

Nuggets, Jokic Agree To Record \$256m Deal

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Nikola Jokic and the Denver Nuggets agreed Thursday to a five-year deal worth \$256 million, the richest contract in NBA history, according to The Athletic.

Jokic signed the deal on Friday, the start of the NBA league year, with the base contract covering the next four years. The Athletic reported the fifth year of the deal is a player option for the 2027-28 season worth US\$60 million.

Jokic edged 76ers center Joel Embiid in voting for the 2021-22 MVP award, becoming the 13th back-to-back winner, and was again named All-NBA First Team.

Jokic averaged 27.1 points, 13.8 rebounds, 7.9 assists and 1.47 steals in 74 games last season for the Nuggets. He led the NBA with 19 triple-doubles and became the first player in NBA history to record at least 2,000 points, 1,000 rebounds and 500 assists in a season.

"I don't know what else you can say about Nikola at this point," Denver coach Michael Malone said. "He's consistently improved his game, he's consistently proven people wrong when they doubt him and he's consistently the best player on the floor night in and night out. I've said it many times before, I'm extremely grateful to coach Nikola Jokic and just as grateful for the bond that we've built off the court in our seven years together." The others to win consecutive MVPs are Antetokounmpo, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Larry Bird, Wilt Chamberlain, Stephen Curry, Tim Duncan, LeBron James, Magic Johnson, Michael Jordan, Moses Malone, Steve Nash and Bill Russell.

Jokic typically downplays his success but he is well aware he is now running with great company after a second MVP award.

"Right now, I don't think about it," Jokic said of winning the award. "But when I'm old, fat and grumpy, hopefully I'm going to remember and tell my kids that back in the day I was pretty good at playing basketball."

Man City Sign German Goalkeeper Ortega



MANCHESTER (Dispatches) - Stefan Ortega said he is living the dream after the German goalkeeper secured a move to Manchester City.

The 29-year-old was a free agent after his contract at Arminia Bielefeld expired and is expected to provide back-up to first-choice stopper Ederson.

"This is a fantastic move for me," said Ortega.

"Manchester City are an amazing team — a squad with world-class quality in every area. 'To be given the chance to join this group

of players and help continue the club's success is a dream for me."

Ortega is likely to take the place of American goalkeeper Zack Steffen, who is reportedly set to join Middlesbrough on loan in a bid to get more first team football ahead of the World Cup.

"This is a very good deal for City," said City's director of football Txiki Begiristain.

"Stefan has excellent pedigree — his career speaks for itself.

"We are signing a goalkeeper who has vast experience, and he will help us in our quest for more trophies."

Ortega is City's second signing of the transfer window after the arrival of Erling Haaland from Borussia Dortmund.

The Premier League champions are also reportedly on the verge of buying England international midfielder Calvin Phillips from Leeds.

Hamilton Says F1 Must Listen to Younger People

LONDON (Dispatches) - Lewis Hamilton asked why 'older voices' in Formula One are still given a platform for offensive and out-dated views.

In the wake of reports this week that Nelson Piquet's used a racial slur to describe Hamilton last year, the British driver said the issue was not one person's use of an offensive term.

"It's not just about one individual," the Mercedes driver told a news conference at Silverstone, ahead of this weekend's British Grand Prix. "It's not about just that one use of that term."

"It's more about the bigger picture.

"I don't know why we are continuing to give these older voices a platform -- because they're speaking upon our sport and we're looking to go somewhere completely different. "And it's not representative, I think, of who we are as a sport now and where we're planning to go.

"If we're looking to grow in the US and other countries, in South Africa, and grow our audience, we need to look into the future and give the younger people a platform that will be more representative."

"It all comes back down to F1 and the media and we shouldn't be giving these old voices a platform."

Piquet, whose daughter Kelly is the girlfriend of world champion Max Verstappen, was condemned for a term he used in a Brazilian podcast in November, discussing a controversial collision between Hamilton and the Dutchman during last year's British Grand Prix.

Piquet, 69, has apologised. He said he did not mean any offence with the Brazilian-Portuguese term.

Hamilton said he was grateful for the support he had received from the sport, particularly from the drivers.

"It's been two years since many of us took the knee at the first race in Austria and, of course, we are still faced with the challenges," he said.



Barcelona Sell 10% of Liga TV Rights To U.S. Fund

BARCELONA (Dispatches) - Barcelona announced they had sold 10 percent of their Liga television rights for 25 years to U.S. investment group Sixth Street for 207.5 million euros (\$215.5 million).

"Sixth Street will initially invest €207.5 million and in return will receive 10% of the Club's LaLiga TV rights for the next 25 years," Barca said in a statement.

The deal will allow Barcelona, beset by financial problems, to end the fiscal year that closes this Thursday in profit.

Catalan sports daily Sport reported that otherwise Barca "would have ended the financial year with a loss of 150 million euros."

"With this transaction, FC Barcelona generates a total capital gain of €267 million for the current season," said the club statement.

Barcelona, along with Real Madrid and Athletic Bilbao, opted out of a deal in January with another American fund, CVC, to buy between 8 and 11 per cent of the broadcasting and commercial rights for the top two Spanish divisions for 50 years.

In May, Real agreed a deal with Sixth Street and Legends which it called "a premium experiences company for sports and live venue organizations, for 30 percent of revenue "sports and live venue organizations" at the Bernabeu Stadium, which is being redeveloped, for 20 years for 360m euros.

Last August, Joan Laporta, who returned as Barcelona president the previous November, said an audit had uncovered total club debts of 1.35 billion euros. The club had let Lionel Messi leave last June saying they could not afford to keep him even at a reduced salary.

On Thursday, Laporta welcomed his club's deal in a statement.

"We are activating economic levers and executing on our patient, sustainable, and efficient strategy to strengthen the club's financial footing," he said.

Sixth Street CEO Alan Waxman, was also quoted in the statement.

"We believe in the strategy Joan Laporta and FC Barcelona are implementing and are proud that one of the most celebrated clubs in football has chosen us to be its partner and capital solutions provider," Waxman said.

