

Iran's Economy Growing Despite Sanctions, COVID-19: Rouhani

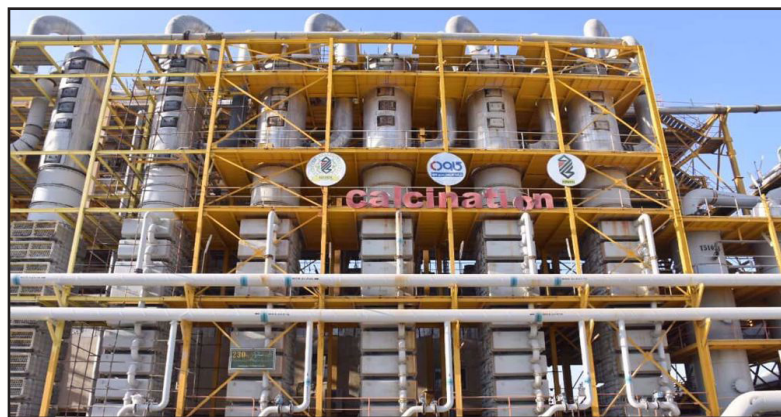


Photo released on July 30, 2020 by Iran's IRNA agency shows a view to installations at Kaveh Sodium Carbonate Plant located to the west of the city of Firuzabad, in the southern Iranian province of Fars.

Tehran (Dispatches) - **The Iranian President Hassan Rouhani says the country is making progress on the economic front despite the pressure caused by sanctions and the Coronavirus pandemic.**

Rouhani said the Iranian nation is standing up to economic hardship and will move forward with domestic production and national development.

"The enemies won't be able to force the great Iranian nation into submission," said Rouhani in a ceremony where several development, production and infrastructure projects were inaugurated.

"As the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has named the current year as the year of "jump in production", the trend of production will move full steam ahead, and as new projects come on stream in the country, we will see more job opportunities created in the country," he said.

Rouhani noted that Iranian people are resisting both the corona-

virus pandemic and sanctions.

"We should all join hands to establish a constructive engagement atmosphere between all branches of government as well as between the private sector and the state sector, so that people's problems will be solved as soon as possible," he said.

He said a close relationship between the private and state sectors coupled with the lifting of restrictions will give fresh impetus to production, boost development and disappoint the enemy.

Major Soda Ash Plant in South Creating Over 1k jobs

Rouhani ordered the opening of a major soda ash plant south of the country that creates over a thousand jobs.

The official IRNA news agency said in a Thursday report that the Kaveh Sodium Carbonate Plant had opened earlier in the day in an area to the west of the city of Firuzabad, in the province of

Fars.

Unconfirmed reports said that the soda ash plant is the biggest of its kind in the Middle East region. IRNA said the plant would employ 1,003 people at its initial output capacity of 320,000 metric tons a year.

Other reports said Kaveh plant's production of sodium carbonate, a raw material used in making glass, soap, detergent, paper, textiles and food products, would reach nearly one million tons a year once a key water reservoir being built in its vicinity comes on line by March 2021.

The plant could generate nearly \$200 million in export revenues once it reaches the 1-million-ton output target, said those reports, adding that soda ash produced in the factory would reach customers in various countries from Indonesia to Greece.

A senior official from Fars governorate's office said Iranian and Chinese manufacturers had supplied the machinery needed for the launch of the plant.

Zafar Afshoun said the plant had taken more than 10 years to build, adding that it would rely on eight nearby mines of salt and limestone for its supply of raw materials.

The opening of the plant comes several days after Rouhani defended his government policies to carry out heavy investments in Iran's petrochemical and mining sectors.

Rouhani said investing in those sectors, even at the time of increased U.S. sanctions, would guarantee that Iran's economy emerges strong once it is relieved of the illegal American sanctions.

of economic terrorism and support the Venezuelan nation at the time of heightened sanctions."

Iran's Embassy in Caracas had announced earlier in June that Iranian Golsan ship would bring food to open the first Iranian supermarket in Venezuela.

Golsan discharged its cargo of food and medical supplies at the Venezuelan northern port of La Guayra on June 21 to supply the Iranian supermarket.

According to reports, the Iranian store is equipped with a kind of high-tech COVID-19 shield --an airport-scanner-like booth that measures shoppers' temperatures and sprays them with disinfectant mist.

Megasis fills a massive warehouse in eastern Caracas, a cross between Home Depot and Costco.

In May, Iran sent five gasoline tankers to Venezuela, easing the severe gas shortage, and a ship with food in June, most of it for the new supermarket.

The company has warned over-capacity will require it to close or restructure four production sites in France and cut 15,000 jobs worldwide, and last month it secured a five-billion-euro emergency loan backed by the French government.

"Although the situation is unprecedented, it is not final," De Meo, a former top Volkswagen executive, said in a statement, confirming that Renault would cut costs by 600 million euros this year, a third of the total targeted by 2022.

with a profit of 970 million euros in the same period last year.

More than half the loss was due to Renault's 43 percent stake in its Japanese partner Nissan, which also reported this week a huge hit from the COVID-19 pandemic that has battered the global economy.

Revenues plunged 34 percent to 18.4 billion euros as demand withered for nearly all its brands in all its markets, including the low-cost Dacia models that have been hugely successful in recent years.

U.S. Second-Quarter GDP Posts Biggest Drop on Record

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - **The U.S. economy shrank by a stunning 9.5 percent from April through June, a historic contraction and a stinging reminder of how much was lost in such a short period.**

The drop in gross domestic product was the fastest the quarterly rate has fallen in modern record-keeping. As the ground beneath the economy buckled amid the coronavirus pandemic, tens of millions of jobs were erased, businesses were gutted and the future of the economy became further intertwined with an uncontrolled public health crisis.

With that pain still fresh for millions of Americans, economists say the second quarter stands as an urgent warning for what is at stake if the vestiges of a recovery from earlier this summer vanish. While Congress clashes over another stimulus bill and the virus forces more states to shut down bars and restaurants again, there is mounting fear that the economy could be held back even more, making a true recovery much more fraught.

On Thursday, the government also reported that jobless claims increased once again last week to 1.4 million, another sign that any recovery is stalling.

GDP shrank at an annual rate of 32.9 percent, according to the Bu-



A man walks by stores in Niles, Ill. The Commerce Department released data Thursday showing that second-quarter gross domestic product plunged by 9.5 percent, the fastest drop in modern record-keeping.

reau of Economic Analysis, the agency that publishes the statistics on quarterly economic activity. Although it usually stresses the annualized rate, that figure is less useful this quarter because the economy is unlikely to experience another collapse like it did in the second quarter.

Still, while a tailspin at the second-quarter rate is unlikely, the nascent recovery that began appearing earlier this summer appears to be in jeopardy.

On Wednesday, Federal Reserve Chair Jerome H. Powell warned that the most recent surge in infections has begun to weigh on the

economy, while reemphasizing that a recovery cannot be sustained unless the virus is under control.

Thursday's report helps explain which parts of the economy suffered as people stayed home, cut back their spending and suddenly overhauled their routines. With retail stores shuttered and people swapping out their work wardrobes for leisurewear, clothing and footwear sales dropped. The pandemic also triggered a collapse in oil prices, exacerbated by lower gasoline sales and dampened transportation services, as Americans stayed home and avoided commutes or basic errands.

Netherlands' Import of Iranian Roses Tops 5 Tons in 3 Months: Customs Office



TEHRAN (Press TV) - **Iran's customs office (IRICA) says exports of rose to the Netherlands, where the flowers are auctioned for resale to other countries, have continued unabated despite growing restrictions imposed across Europe over the spread of the coronavirus pandemic.**

IRICA spokesman Rouhollah Latifi said on Thursday that Iran's exports of rose flowers to the Netherlands had topped five metric tons

in the three months ending June 20. Latifi said total value of flowers and other horticulture products shipped from Iran to other countries in the first three months of the calendar year had reached more than \$5.3 million.

He said Iraq, Vietnam, the Netherlands and Armenia were main buyers of Iranian flowers over the period.

However, the official regretted

that Iran, a major producer of flowers in the world with an output of more than 300 billion items each year, has yet to gain its real share in the global market.

"We are the 17th biggest producer of flower and related plants in the world but when it comes to the exports, we are placed in the 107th position," said Latifi, adding that Iran can generate around \$200 million in annual revenues from flower exports at the current output capacity.

Experts believe that a gradual easing of restrictions imposed over the pandemic on weddings and funerals across Europe could help boost Iran's trade of flowers to countries like the Netherlands.

Latifi said high freight costs have always hindered Iran's plans to increase flower exports to Europe. That comes as those costs have further increased in recent months because of the impacts of the pandemic on airline traffic around the world.

EU GDP Shows Record 12.1% Slump in Q2 2020: Reports

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - **Euro-zone GDP fell by 12.1% in the second quarter of the year, its biggest single quarter drop in history as the coronavirus' true impact on the continent's economy emerges.**

GDP fell by 12.1% in the euro area and 11.9% in the wider EU in the second quarter of the year, data by Eurostat showed Friday.

This is significantly higher than Q1 contraction figures, where GDP fell by 3.6% in the euro area and by 3.2% in the EU.

GDP levels were also 15% lower in the euro area compared to Q2 2019, and 14.4% lower in the EU.

Countries that were most hard hit were Spain, which suffered an 18.5% decline in Q2 compared to the previous quarter, and Portugal which contracted by 14.1%.

Lithuania recorded the lowest decline of 5.1% compared to the previ-



ous quarter.

Spain was one of the countries to be first severely hit by the coronavirus pandemic in Europe, and was one of the first economies to be placed under a lockdown. Spain had a more stringent lockdown compared to other European counterparts, meaning even lower economic activity.

Commenting on the latest figures, las Akincilar, heads of trading at the online trading platform, INFINOX, said: "The fallout from the virus now poses a major challenge not just to the healthcare systems and the economies of the EU member states - it's also a threat to the bloc's integrity."

Renault Hit by Historic €7.3bn Loss

PARIS (AFP) - French automaker Renault reported its biggest half-year loss ever on Thursday, with revenue slashed by a third as dealerships worldwide were emptied by the coronavirus crisis.

The dire results underscored the challenges facing CEO Luca de Meo, who was brought in this month to revamp a company reeling from strategic missteps and the ousting of former boss Carlos Ghosn last year on financial misconduct charges.

Net losses reached 7.3 billion euros (\$8.6 billion), compared