

TEHRAN (Press TV) -- Iran on Friday released a South Korean oil tanker, the Iranian Foreign Ministry said, more than three months after the ship was detained for environmental pollution. "Following the completion of an investigation into the violation of the [South] Korean ship and at the request of the owner and the Korean government for the release of the ship, a release order was issued by the esteemed prosecutor," Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said. Khatibzadeh said the fact that the ship and its captain did not have a record of breaching maritime regulations in the region played a role in "the positive view" of the prosecutor. (Continued on Page 7)

# Kayhan International



SANAA (Dispatches) -- Yemen's army and popular committees on Friday carried out a drone attack on Abha International Airport in southwestern Saudi Arabia in retaliation for Saudi-led strikes on their country. According to Yemen's Al-Masirah television network, the spokesman for the Yemeni Armed Forces Brigadier General Yahya Saree said that the attack had targeted a "sensitive site" at Abha airport on Friday afternoon. He added that a Qasef-2k UAV had been used in the strike, which hit the target accurately.

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**Viewpoint**

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**Iran Futsal Remains Sixth in World Ranking**



**No Timetable for U.S. Troops Pullout From Iraq: Pentagon**



## UK Tensions Escalate Amid Protests Old Wounds Fester in Northern Ireland

BELFAST (AP) — Police in Northern Ireland deployed water cannons for the first time in six years Thursday as they tried to disperse protesters who hurled stones, fireworks and gasoline-filled bottles at officers during another night of violence in Belfast.

The violence erupted last week as anger over COVID-19 restrictions and post-Brexit trade rules fueled tensions between the Protestant and Catholic communities in Northern Ireland.

While the crowds appeared somewhat smaller Thursday, police said a further 19 officers were injured, bringing the total over the past week to 74.

The latest violence came despite appeals from UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, Irish Premier Micheal Martin and U.S. President Joe Biden to calm tensions.

Northern Ireland's justice minister, Naomi Long of the centrist Alliance Party, appealed for an end to the "depressing and reckless" scenes. "My heart goes out to those living in the area who are living with this fear and disturbance," she wrote on Twitter. "This needs to stop now before lives are lost."

Earlier Thursday, the Northern Ireland Assembly had unanimously passed a motion calling for an end to the disorder. The region's power-sharing government, which includes representatives from both sides of the sectarian divide, condemned the violence.

Northern Ireland has seen sporadic outbreaks of street violence since the 1998 Good Friday agreement ended "the Troubles" — decades of bloodshed in which more than 3,000 people died.

While the peace accord ended the killing, tensions remain between those who see themselves as British and want to remain part of the United Kingdom, and those who seek reunification with the Republic of Ireland to the south. The two sides of the debate split largely on religious lines, with Protestants generally favoring the status quo and Catholics campaigning for reunification.

Britain's exit from the European Union has heightened those tensions amid concerns about the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic. In an effort to keep the border open, Britain agreed to conduct some checks on goods at ports in Northern Ireland rather than at the fron-

tier, the UK's only land border with the EU.

Those who favor union say the new checks amount to the creation of a border between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom — something they fear undermines their place in the UK.

The unionists are also angry at prosecutors' decision not to prosecute politicians who attended the funeral of a former Irish Republican Army commander in June. The funeral of Bobby Storey drew a large crowd, despite coronavirus rules barring mass gatherings.

The main unionist parties have demanded the resignation of Northern Ireland's police chief over the controversy, claiming he has lost the confidence of their community.

But law enforcement officials warn that sectarian divisions are also being exploited by paramilitary groups that use the violence to further criminal activities.

"There are young people who are being cynically used by older more sinister elements of society, more than likely aligned to what we would call paramilitary (groups), but which anywhere else are criminal organizations, large criminal gangs," Mark Lindsey, chairman of the Police Federation of Northern Ireland, told the BBC on Wednesday.

## Iran Outlines Plan to Verify Removal of Sanctions



A police officer stands guard near the entrance of the Grand Hotel in Vienna where diplomats of the EU, China, Russia and Iran have been holding talks.

VIENNA (Dispatches) -- Iran plans to verify whether the U.S. is actually lifting sanctions through oil exports and via international banking transactions, a member of Tehran's negotiating team said in an interview published Friday.

The team has been holding talks in Vienna with representatives of the other parties to a 2015 nuclear accord on how to remove U.S. sanctions on Iran.

U.S. President Joe Biden has claimed he is ready to reverse the 2018 decision of his predecessor Donald Trump to withdraw from the agreement and reimpose uni-

lateral sanctions, but his pledge has proved hollow in practice.

Tehran's official position, announced Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, is to fall back in line with obligations it suspended only after verifying that "all sanctions" are "truly lifted".

"Verification means that, for instance, the Islamic Republic must be able to sign its oil contracts and export it and bring in its revenues via banking channels or consider other uses for it," said Kazem Gharibabadi, Iran's ambassador to the UN's nuclear agency and a del-

egation member. "Or, in the banking sector, (Iran must) be able to conduct its financial transactions using different financial channels," he said, quoted by Ayatollah Khamenei's official website.

Gharibabadi stressed it was "the only way we can make sure that sanctions have been removed in action" and not only "on paper".

Iran demands the removal of all U.S. sanctions, including those reimposed by Trump, "new sanctions" by the administration, and "sanctions imposed using non-nuclear excuses", he said.

Trump blacklisted dozens of Iranian entities in addition to blocking Iran's oil exports and virtually all banking ties -- sanctions that had been lifted in 2016 under the accord.

According to Gharibabadi, Iran is exploring options in the Vienna talks to prevent a potential repeat of what happened in 2018.

"It is being discussed what should be done regarding Iran's technical commitments, and how they be carried out, in case a party reneges on their promise."

Iran's deputy foreign minister for political affairs also said Tehran will not reverse the reduction of its nuclear compliance before the U.S. removes all its sanctions and returns to the landmark nuclear deal it abandoned under Trump.

Until the United States removes all of its sanctions and returns to the JCPOA, none of Iran's nuclear activities, especially in the field of enrichment, will be halted or even reduced," Abbas Araqchi said late Thursday, according to IRNA.

Back in May 2019, Iran began to scale down its nuclear compliance under Article 36 of the JCPOA, saying the move was a response to the U.S. withdrawal and the remaining parties' failure to protect Iran from U.S. sanctions.

Under a law passed by the Iranian Parliament last December, the Iranian administration started to produce and store enriched uranium with a 20-percent purity level, breaking the 3.67-percent enrichment parameter set by the 2015 nuclear agreement.

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## France Bans Hijab for Girls Under 18

PARIS (AL JAZEERA) -- A bid by the French Senate to ban girls under 18 from wearing the hijab in public has drawn condemnation, with the hashtag #HandsoffMyHijab circulating widely on social media.

The hijab is a headscarf worn by many Muslim women and has been the subject of a decades-long feud in France.

The French Senate's move comes as part of Paris's push to introduce a so-called "anti-separatism" bill which it says aims to bolster the country's secular system, but critics have denounced, arguing it singles out the minority Muslim population.

While debating the proposed legislation on March 30, senators approved an amendment to the bill calling for the "prohibition in the public space of any conspicuous religious sign by minors and of any dress or clothing which would signify inferiority of women over men".

The ban is not yet law, with France's National Assembly required to sign off on the change before it can take effect.

But a backlash to the amendment was swift, with some suggesting the proposed

rule amounted to a "law against Islam".

"Age to consent to sex in France: 15 Age to consent to hijab: 18 Let that sink in. It isn't a law against the hijab. It's a law against Islam. #Handsoffmyhijab #FranceHijabBan," one Twitter user wrote.

The issue also attracted the attention of several high-profile figures.

On Instagram, Olympic athlete Ibtihaj Muhammad shared a post suggesting the Senate's amendment indicated "Islamophobia is deepening in France".

"This is what happens when you normalize anti-Islamic and anti-Muslim hate speech, bias, discrimination, and hate crimes -- Islamophobia written into law," the post said.

Somali-born model Rawdah Mohamed suggested the French Senate's move had put it on "the wrong side of equality".

"The Hijab ban is hateful rhetoric coming from the highest level of government and will go down as an enormous failure of religious values and equality," she posted on Instagram.

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## Coronavirus Cases, Deaths Surge Across World

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — Hospitals in Turkey and Poland are filling up fast. Pakistan is restricting domestic travel to bring a surge in coronavirus infections under control. Even Thailand, which has weathered the coronavirus pandemic far better than many nations, is now struggling to contain a new COVID-19 surge.

Even countries where vaccine rollouts are finally getting some momentum, infections, hospitalizations and deaths are surging. And that leaves even bleaker prospects for much of the world, where large-scale vaccination programs remain a more distant prospect.

The World Health Organization said Friday that it's very concerned as infection rates are rising in all of the world's regions, driven by new virus variants and too many nations and people coming out of lockdown too soon. "We've seen rises (in cases) worldwide for six weeks. And now, sadly, we are seeing rises in deaths for the last three weeks," Dr. Margaret Harris, a spokeswoman for the World Health Organization, said at a briefing in Geneva.

Turkey is among the badly hit countries,

with most new cases of the virus traced to a variant first found in Britain.

Ismail Cinel, head of the Turkish Intensive Care Association, said said ICU units were not yet at full capacity, but that the surge was beginning to strain the nation's relatively advanced health care system.

"Every single day the number of cases is increasing. Every single day the number of deaths is increasing. The alarm bells are ringing for the intensive care units," Cinel said.

"The mutant form of the virus is causing more harm to the organs," he said. "While two out of ten patients were dying previously, the number is now four out of 10. And if we continue this way, we will lose six."

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan eased COVID-19 restrictions in early March, keen to minimize pain to his nation's ailing economy. Yet with this new spike, he was forced to announce renewed restrictions, such as weekend lockdowns and the closure of cafes and restaurants during Ramadan, which starts on April 13.

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