The Kabul Times
facebook.com/thekabultimes
INTERNATIONAL
Saratan 19-1400 Saturday 10 July 2021 INo: 91- Vol: LIX
www.thekabultimes.gov.af

USD	GBP	INR	PKR	EUR	IRR	AED
01	01	1000	1000	01	1000	01
AFN 81.92	AFN 112.03	AFN 1098	AFN 508	AFN 96.79	AFN 0.37	AFN 21.22

UK plans to scrap quarantine for vaccinated visitors in weeks

Britain plans to scrap quarantine for fully-vaccinated arrivals from other countries in the coming weeks, transport minister Grant Shapps said on Friday, a day after announcing a rule change for those in Britain who had had both shots.

"We want to be able open that up for people. We're actively working on it," Shapps told Sky News. "In the next couple of weeks I'll be able to come forward and say more about other locations in the world."

He announced on Thursday that fully vaccinated British residents arriving in England from medium risk amber countries would no longer have to self-isolate on arrival.

Shapps said the process of recognizing vaccination status would focus on countries administering WHO-approved vaccines, and said the process was complex because each country has different certification systems.

"It's easier from the EU because they're creating their own digital passport, it's more complicated from other countries - the US for example don't have a digitized system," Shapps said in a separate interview with the BBC.

IMF sees Saudi growth at 2.4 pct this year with non-oil sector leading rebound

The directors also agreed that the Saudi riyal's exchange rate peg to the US dollar "continues to serve the economy well given the current economic structure."

The International Monetary Fund said on Thursday Saudi Arabia's economy is recovering well from the COVID-19 pandemic and the fund expected the non-oil economy to grow by 4.3 percent this year, with overall GDP growth seen at 2.4 percent.

Real oil GDP is expected to shrink by 0.4 percent, the IMF said in a statement, as production is assumed to stay in line with an agreement between the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), Russia and allies, known as OPEC+.

Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest crude exporter, was pummeled by the double blow of last year's historic oil price crash and the COVID-19 pandemic's impact, though the economy showed signs of improvement from late in the year.

Investment by the kingdom's sovereign wealth fund, the Public Investment Fund, is expected to offset government fiscal consolidation's drag on growth, the IMF said. PIF's investments are a central part of the country's economic development program Vision 2030, which aims to wean the economy off oil.

The IMF's executive directors "underscored the importance of monitoring fiscal risks and developing a robust sovereign asset-liability management framework given the growing role of the Public Investment Fund and public-private partnerships (PPP) in the economy."

The directors also agreed that the Saudi riyal's exchange rate peg to the US dollar "continues to serve the economy well given the current economic structure."

"While fully agreeing with this, many directors also encouraged the authorities to review the peg over the medium term to ensure that it remains appropriate given the plans for economic diversification."

Turmoil in Haiti could fuel humanitarian catastrophe

After the arrest of more than a dozen foreigners, including two Americans, who the Haitian authorities said were part of a hit squad that assassinated President Jovenel Moïse this week, there were few clues as to who ordered the attack even as turmoil threatened to engulf the fragile nation.

Political intrigue, gang violence, general lawlessness, a public health crisis driven by the pandemic and difficulties delivering essential international aid have conspired to create the worst crisis in Haiti in years.

The Caribbean nation's interim prime minister, Claude Joseph, says he has taken command of the police and the army. But the president, days before his death, had appointed a new prime minister, Ariel Henry. Mr. Henry told a local newspaper after the assassination that he was the rightful prime minister.

The constitutional crisis has been complicated by the pandemic.

While there are many legal uncertainties, in the past the country's top justice has been the one expected to fill any void in the political leadership. But that justice, René Sylvestre, died of Covid-19 in June.

Haiti, the only country in the Americas with no active Covid-19 inoculation campaign, has virtually no vaccine doses, and public health experts say that the coronavirus is far more widely spread there than publicly reported.

With the prospect of greater turmoil looming, international observers worry that a growing humanitarian crisis could lead to the kind of exodus that has in the past followed natural disasters, coups or other periods of deep instability.

The Pan American Health Organization said in a statement that the crisis was "creating a perfect storm, because the population has lowered its guard, the infrastructure of Covid-19 beds has been reduced, the security situation could deteriorate even further and hurricane season has started."

Briefing reporters on Thursday, a State Department spokesman said that Mr. Joseph was "the incumbent" at the time of the assassination and that the United States would continue to work with him. But the spokesman, Ned Price, added that the United States had been in contact with Mr. Henry, and urged all Haitian officials to work together "to refrain from violence."

The top United Nations official in Haiti also backed Mr. Joseph's claim as the rightful prime minister.

After 24 hours filled with intense standoffs and gun battles, the police said they had identified more than two dozen people involved in the assault, including 26 Colombians and two Americans of Haitian descent.

On Friday, Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that the Haitian police had arrested 11 armed people on the grounds of the Taiwanese Embassy. It was not immediately clear whether they were counted among the arrested suspects, but in a statement the embassy called them "mercenaries."

Reuters

Israel's new PM secretly met Jordan's king last week ahead of new water deal

Israel's new prime minister met secretly with the Jordanian king last week, an Israeli official confirmed Thursday, as the two countries announced new agreements on water and trade.

The agreements, concluded during a meeting between their foreign ministers, signaled improved relations with Israel's new government following years of strained ties under former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Under the deal, Jordan will purchase an additional 50 million cubic meters of water from Israel and increase its exports to the occupied West Bank from $160 million a year to around $700 million, the two countries announced in official statements.

Jordan's Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi and his Israeli counterpart Yair Lapid — the guiding force behind the new government formed last month — met at the King Hussein Bridge between Jordan and the Israeli-occupied West Bank on Thursday.

The deals came in the wake of a secret meeting last week between Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and Jordan's King Abdullah II in Amman, the Jordanian capital. Bennett took office last month, ending Netanyahu's 12-year rule.

The Israeli news site Walla, which broke the story, described the meeting as positive and said the two leaders agreed to open a "new page" in relations. An Israeli official, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to discuss the matter on the record, confirmed the meeting had taken place.

Jordan said technical teams will iron out the details of the trade deal in the coming days, and that talks on implementing the export ceiling will be held among Israeli, Jordanian and Palestinian officials.

Safadi called for renewed efforts to achieve a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and for Israel to halt "illegal" measures that undermine such efforts.

He stressed the importance of maintaining the status quo at the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, a flashpoint holy site in Jerusalem that is under Jordanian custodianship. He also said it would be a "war crime" to evict Palestinian families from their homes in east Jerusalem. Both issues fueled tensions that helped ignite an 11-day war in Gaza between Israel and the territory's militant Hamas rulers in May.

Lapid called Jordan an "important neighbor and partner," and said Israel would work to strengthen ties and expand economic cooperation. He had highlighted the importance of mending fences with Jordan when he took office last month.

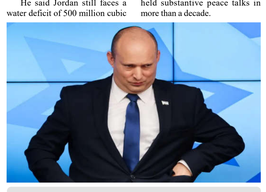
Gidon Bromberg, the Israeli director of EcoPeace Middle East, a Jordanian, Palestinian and Israeli environmentalist group, said the deal marks a "dramatic increase" in water exports from Israel, which he said had not exported more than 10 million cubic meters per year until now.

He said Jordan still faces a water deficit of 500 million cubic meters a year and would have to import considerably more to ensure a continuous supply for all its needs. Jordan is one of the driest countries on earth and its water shortages are expected to worsen with climate change.

Israel and Jordan made peace in 1994 and maintain close security ties, but relations have been strained in recent years over tensions at Al-Aqsa, Israel's expansion of Jewish settlements in war-won lands and the lack of any progress in the long-moribund peace process.

Both Jordan and the Palestinians were adamantly opposed to the Trump administration's Mideast plan, which would have allowed Israel to annex up to a third of the occupied West Bank. Israel captured east Jerusalem and the West Bank from Jordan in the 1967 war, territories the Palestinians want as part of their future state.

Abdullah is set to visit the White House later this month. The Biden administration has called on all sides to take steps that could help lay the groundwork for a resumption of possible peace talks. Israel and the Palestinians have not held substantive peace talks in more than a decade.



Saudi Arabia selects 60,000 people to perform Hajj amid ongoing COVID-19 rules

Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Hajj and Umrah has announced the selection of 60,000 eligible candidates for this year's Hajj pilgrimage, the official Saudi Press Agency (SPA) reported on Thursday.

The ministry said the successful multinational candidates represent 150 countries from inside the Kingdom as it announced the end of the registration period via the online portal.

A total of 558,270 people had applied to perform the Muslim pilgrimage this year.

The ministry said eligible candidates were chosen according to several conditions, including age and those performing the ritual for the first time in addition to "adhering to precautionary and preventive measures," SPA reported.

Of the 558,270 that applied for this year's Hajj, 59 percent were male applicants, while 41 percent were female.

In June, Saudi Arabia announced it will limit this year's Hajj pilgrimage to 60,000 residents and nationals living in the Kingdom due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

The Ministry has also called on all pilgrims who have been granted Hajj permits this year to take the second vaccine dose, as they will be receiving it without booking an appointment in advance.

Nine killed as skydiving plane crashes in Sweden

A small plane carrying skydivers crashed outside the Swedish city of Orebro on Thursday night, killing all nine people on board, police said.

The victims were members of a local skydiving club, according to Orebro County Governor Maria Larsson.

Spokesperson Carl-Johan Linde of the Swedish Maritime Administration, which oversees air traffic, told broadcaster SVT the crash must have occurred "in connection" with the plane's takeoff.

The plane burst into flames upon impact on what appeared to be an open field.

"There were no lives to save," local fire chief Per-Ove Staberyd, who coordinated the work of firefighters and other first responders, said.

Police received word of the crash shortly before 7:30pm local time (17:30 GMT) and quickly knew it was "a very serious incident", deputy regional police chief Niclas Hallgren said on Friday.

He said investigating the accident would be "a difficult job". "It will take its time," Hallgren added.

The officer declined to provide details about the victims or speculate the circumstances leading to the crash. The Swedish Accident Investigation Authority immediately dispatched a team to the crash site outside Orebro, which is located 164km (102 miles) west of Stockholm.

The Dagens Nyheter newspaper identified the plane as a single-engine, propeller-driven De Havilland DHC-2 Beaver.

Prime Minister Stefan Lofven wrote on Twitter that it was "with great sadness and dismay" that he heard about the crash, and he expressed his "deepest sympathy".