

Iran Gov't to Continue Supply of Subsidized Essential Goods

The government plans to continue subsidizing essential goods in the next fiscal year (March 2021-22).

According to Vice President Mohammad Baqer Nobakht, who doubles as the chairman of Iran's Plan and Budget Organization, the government will channel earnings from oil exports to import essential goods at the subsidized rate of 42,000 rials per US dollar.

He made the remarks on the sidelines of a meeting of the so-called Budget Headquarters 1400 (the Iranian year starting March 2021), Mehr News Agency reported. The Plan and Budget Organization held the first meeting of the headquarters on Aug. 22. Discussions centered on the makeup of the headquarters, the Joint Commission—a parliamentary body responsible for reviewing the budget bill as well as the five-year economic development plans—and eight specialized taskforces.

These meetings are being held regularly up until Budget Day (the day that the government presents its budget to the legislature for approval), i.e. Dec. 2.

Essential Goods in the Limelight

Also known as necessity goods, essential goods are products consumers will buy, regardless of changes in income levels.

Amid high inflation and diminished purchasing power, the Iranian government has sought to ensure a steady supply of essential goods at subsidized prices.

Following the re-tanking of the national currency in early 2017, the government introduced stringent rules like banning the import of non-essential goods, especially those produced inside the country (known as Group IV goods). It allocated subsidized currency at the rate of 42,000 rials to a dollar to 25 categories of goods (also known as Group I or essential goods) to help protect consumers against galloping inflation, rampant price gouging and hoarding, not to mention the high and rising cost of living. Two other categories of imports were also defined: Group II, which mostly included raw materials, intermediate and capital goods, and Group III consisting of essential consumer goods.

Importers of products in Group II were to meet their forex requirements from the secondary forex market, known by its Persian name Nima. Importers of goods in Group III could buy hard currency from exporters who were not required to offer their forex earnings on Nima. In the last fiscal year (March 2019-20), the government removed five items, namely red meat, butter, pulses, tea and sugar, from the list of basic goods entitled to subsidized currency. So far, vegetable oil, oilseeds, corn, barley, soybean meal, raw materials used in manufacturing tires, heavy-duty vehicle tires, paper pulp and different types of paper are still considered essential goods.

Divided Opinion

Opinion is divided on whether this policy has been effective in keeping consumer prices in check. Data show consumer subsidies have helped prevent a surge in the price of rice, cooking oil and chicken, which have a big share in the food basket of low-income groups.

However, Mohammad Hassan Sabouri Deylami, an economic analyst, university instructor and senior official with the Industries Ministry, this policy is not sustainable. It needs to be rewritten and updated because the government's foreign reserves are depleting rapidly. There are persistent calls from across the board to reduce the ballooning deficit and instill monetary discipline—a need long absent, no matter what government is in office in Tehran.

"Imagine the subsidized forex policy as a tranquilizer to cushion the first blows emanating from the depreciating rial. As time passes, the financial burden of this time-tested policy must be reduced to minimize its adverse effects and the harm it will inflict on the economy in the form of galloping inflation," Sabouri said in an interview with Fars News Agency earlier this year.

The First Bilingual Economic Newspaper In Isfahan Province

► **License Owner & Managing director:** Reza Mahzunieh
 ► **Editor-in-Chief:** Marzie Rabiei
 ► **Assistant Editor-in-Chief of English Section:** Bahare Yousefi
 ► **Isfahan Office:** Hoor Building, Shahid Mofateh Street, Ahmad Abad Square, Isfahan, Iran
 ► **Tel:** 031-32274500
 ► **Public Relations:** 031-32274754

► **Organization of advertisement:** 031-32274517, 32274518, 32274512, 32274505.
 ► **Fax:** 031-32274507, 32274511
 ► **Lithography and printing:** Golriz
 ► **Isfahan subscribers Office:** 031-32274508
 ► **website:** esfahan-news.com
 ► **SMS:** 30007232



ECONOMY
 Wednesday, September 30, 2020, No. 609



What's News
 economy

Iranian Tanker Carrying Fuel Enter Venezuelan Waters: Data

The first of a group of three Iranian tankers carrying fuel for Venezuela entered the waters of the South American nation, according to Refinitiv Eikon data.

The Iran-flagged tanker Forest, transporting some 270,000 barrels of fuel loaded in the Middle East, entered Venezuela's exclusive economic zone around 8:05 a.m. EDT (1205 GMT) on Monday to approach state-run PDVSA's El Palito port later in the day, Reuters reported.

The vessel crossed the Atlantic Ocean and the Caribbean Sea, according to the data.

The two following Iranian tankers, the Faxon and the Fortune, are covering the same route, with estimated dates of arrival in early October.

Although both countries are under US sanctions, Washington has not moved to intercept the vessels, which made previous fuel deliveries to Venezuela from May through June.

Following a virtual meeting between officials of both governments on Monday to discuss trade, Venezuela's foreign minister, Jorge Arreaza, said in a statement that Iran had masterly overcome the "unilateral punitive measures" against it.

Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro aims to form a coalition of countries affected by unilateral sanctions, Arreaza added. The Forest, Faxon and Fortune are together expected to deliver about 820,000 barrels of gasoline and other fuels, helping to ease shortages in Venezuela. Separately, an Iranian very large crude carrier (VLCC) is expected to leave this week from Venezuela's Jose port with 1.9 million barrels of Venezuelan heavy oil for the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC), according to a source and PDVSA loading schedules.

Workers Struggling to Make Ends Meet

With current wages, workers run out of money only 10 days into the month, says Ali Aslani, a member of Supreme Labor Council.



"Prices of goods and services have increased significantly over the past six months, particularly since June.

The living wage of a three-member household has now hit 90 million rials [\$312] per month in large cities, which obviously can't be matched against workers' wages," he added.

A living wage refers to an income level that allows an individual or family to afford adequate shelter, food and other basic necessities. The purpose of a living wage is to help employees have a satisfactory standard of living and to prevent them from falling into poverty. Economists suggest that a living wage should be substantial enough to ensure that not more than 30% are spent on housing.

"Over the past 40 years, the gap between workers' costs of living and income has never been more glaring than in this year. Even up to the year ending March 2019, workers used to



earn enough to live through 26 days of the month without a serious struggle. But in the past two years, particularly in the current Iranian year [started March 20], they have had to wrestle with major issues facing their livelihoods," he was quoted as saying by ISNA. Referring to housing as one of the most fundamental human needs, Aslani said, "Housing has become less available for workers. Today, they cannot afford to rent a dwelling let alone buy one. Not just workers but many people have to move to cheaper neighborhoods.

"Workers can't afford to buy meat, chicken or fish. Some of them even have limitations when it comes to buying cheese, butter

and eggs," he said. "The Social Security Organization [Iran's biggest insurance company that provides coverage to wage-earners and salaried workers as well as voluntary coverage to self-employed persons] has removed 80 medicines from its list of insurance coverage and people have to buy them at open market prices."

The official called on Minister of Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare Mohammad Shariatmadari to convene a Supreme Labor Council meeting for revising the second half of the current year's minimum wage and adjusting it to the new living wage.

This year, the Supreme Labor Council and the

government agreed to raise workers' housing allowance from 1 million rials (\$3.4) to 3 million rials (\$10.39) per month. The council, which consists of representatives of the government, employers and workers, also deducted 750,000 rials (\$2.6) from workers' severance pay base and added the sum directly to their minimum wage. The current year's minimum wage saw a 26% increase compared with last year's to reach 19.11 million rials (\$66). According to Iran's Labor Law, workers' wages must be based on inflation rate and living wage, i.e., the minimum income necessary for a worker to meet their basic needs.

Iran, Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan to form shipping lines

A regular shipping line will be established between the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Russian Federation, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan.

A joint Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) and one of the foreign shipping companies operating in the Caspian Sea area, in which, Ro-Ro

vessels in all northern ports of the country will be subject to discount and regular Ro-Ro shipping line will be launched between Iranian, Russian, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan ports.

Farhad Montaser Kouhsari Deputy CEO of Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) for Ports and Economic Affairs broke the news on Monday in a ceremony of signing and sealing MoU and added, "In this MoU, the four sides emphasized the need for expanding and developing transportation of goods via Ro-Ro vessels in the Caspian Sea."

He pointed to the existing restrictions for the entry and transit of land fleet to the Commonwealth Independent States (CIS) and Caucasus region and reiterated, "Taking advantage of existing maritime capacities and Ro-Ro vessels in ports of Amirabad and Noshahr should be put atop agenda." For the optimal use of capacity of northern ports, a Working Group was formed in the presence of representatives of International Transport Association, Road Maintenance and Transportation Organization's Transit Office, shipping lines and companies in the Caspian Sea.

NO 594

Sudoku

Solution: NO 593

3								2
			7					
4		1						
1						4		
				2			8	
7	6							
2	9		5	3				1
					9			

5	1	2	8	7	3	6	9	4
6	7	9	2	4	5	3	1	8
4	3	8	9	1	6	2	5	7
7	4	3	6	5	2	1	8	9
8	5	6	1	9	4	7	3	2
2	9	1	7	3	8	4	6	5
9	8	7	3	2	1	5	4	6
1	6	4	5	8	7	9	2	3
3	2	5	4	6	9	8	7	1

News

Parl. gives vote of confidence to new industry minister

In a public session on Tuesday, members of the Iranian Parliament gave their vote of confidence to Alireza Razm Hosseini as the new Minister of Industry, Mines, and Trade. Iranian Parliament members held an open session on Tuesday to review the qualification of the Alireza Razm Hosseini, the proposed Minister of Industry,

Mine, and Trade. After hearing the future plans of the proposed minister and reviewing the opinions of his proponents and the opponents, Alireza Razm Hosseini won the vote of confidence of lawmakers as the new Industry Minister through gaining 175 votes in favor, 80 votes against, and 9 abstentions.

Intelligence Forces Arrest COVID-19 Medicine Dealers in Iran

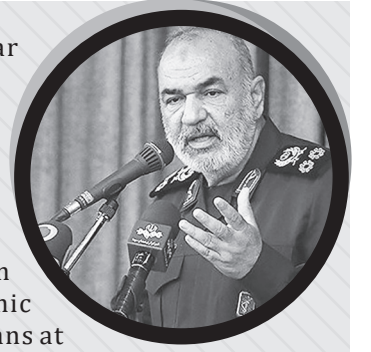
The Iranian Intelligence Ministry busted a ring of dealers illegally selling coronavirus medication. The Intelligence Ministry said it has detected and disbanded an organized network of medicine traders and dealers that used to sell medication for the treatment of COVID-19 illegally and in violation of the official health and medicine regulations. Being in cahoots with a number of wrongdoers in medical centers, those arrested obtained the coronavirus medicines from the quota of products given to the health centers and sold them in the black market at exorbitant prices, it said. Demand for medical supplies and health products has grown in Iran in recent months following the outbreak of the coronavirus. Iran's Judiciary Chief Hojatolislam Ebrahim Raesi has ordered severe punishment for hoarding pharmaceutical and health products as Iranian organizations and government bodies are heavily engaged in efforts to contain the COVID-19 outbreak. The health of people would never be up for bargain, Raesi has said, noting that hoarding medical commodities in the current circumstances is playing with the lives of people and could not be forgiven by any means.

IRGC Chief Rules Out Possibility of US War

The US is unable to take military action against Iran, Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps Major General Hossein Salami said, warning that reconciliation would not stop the US from trying to harm the Islamic Republic. In an address to the Iranian parliament on Tuesday, Major General Salami said there is no possibility of a US war against Iran, since the road to military action on the country is closed.

"We have prepared the capacities for military victory over the enemy, and have sometimes imposed our tactical resolve on them," the commander said. Pointing to the enemy's economic and psychological war against Iranian people, the IRGC commander said the US is neither able nor willing to settle the problems in Iran. "Even if we make up with the US, it will harm us again," he stated, describing the notion of compromise with Washington as a "political deception". Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei has announced repeatedly that Iran will not hold talks with the US, either bilaterally or multilaterally. "If the US backs off from its call, repents,

and returns to the nuclear treaty it has breached, then it will be able to join the gathering of the parties to the deal (JCPOA) who hold meetings and talk with Iran, otherwise no negotiations will take place between the officials of the Islamic Republic and the Americans at any level, not in New York and not anywhere else," Ayatollah Khamenei said in September 2019.



Iranophobia, an old way of US leadership to overcome internal crisis

The editor of Pakistan's renowned Urdu newspaper criticizing the US policy of pressurizing other countries said Iranophobia is an old trick that Trump and his predecessors have always resorted to cope with internal crisis or to win elections.



Rao Khalid, senior journalist and editor of Urdu-language newspaper 92, in an exclusive interview with IRNA in Islamabad on Tuesday, criticized the

White House's selfish stance on Tehran and the claim of re-imposing UN Security Council sanctions on the Islamic Republic of Iran.

He added the world no longer supports American influence, because the trick of pressurizing countries by the White House has discredited the United States.

He said Trump has been discrediting the United States on various issues and these days we are witnessing his tough stance against Iran which is basically an election tactic.

The well-known Pakistani journalist stressed that the project of Iranophobia is a traditional trick that Trump and his predecessors have always resorted to in order to get out of internal crisis or to dominate election campaigns.

"Europeans' approach helping US to pursue unilateralism. Criticizing the poor performance of the United Nations and European countries, the editor of the 92 newspaper added Europeans must speak up against the US unilateralism.

"If the European parties are sincere they can stop the unilateralism of the Trump administration, though they are waiting for the results of the upcoming US presidential elections," he said.

Khalid continued principled behavior in accordance with international norms should be such that if one of the parties unilaterally violates the international agreement, the other parties (Europe) should differentiate between the violator and the abiding one.



**Developing relations with Iran Imran Khan's agenda

Recalling the focus of Pakistan's current policy of strengthening regional ties and using the common capacities of the region and neighboring countries, Rao Khalid said interaction with the countries of the region has a special place for Pakistan and strong ties with Iran is the main feature of Prime Minister Imran Khan's foreign policy.

He added relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan have had ups and downs in past years. "However, in the last two years, the current government has put the development of comprehensive relations with Tehran on the agenda, and we have also experienced two important visits by Imran Khan to Tehran," he said.

The former director of foreign news of Pakistan's official news agency considered the role of the Pakistan army in promotion of ties with Iran as very important and said visits of Pakistani military leadership including Army Chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa to Iran have played an important role in repairing relations with Iran.

He added that we are witnessing significant progress in Iran-Pakistan relations, the most valuable of which is the strengthening of the atmosphere of trust between the two neighboring countries. Khalid considered the fencing of Pakistan's borders with Iran

and the development of border markets as two important factors in strengthening the security of the joint border. He noted that such measures would help to expand economic relations and border trade between the two countries.

He added that strengthening of border infrastructure by Pakistan and Iran would also help in curbing the menace of smuggling and would legalize trade activities between the two countries.

The editor of Pakistan's 92 newspaper said unless we resume banking services between the two countries, it is not possible to make full use of each other's capacities.

He stressed the need to complete the much awaited Iran-Pakistan (IP) gas pipeline project saying Pakistani industries should not be deprived of an easy and economical source of energy for Iran.

**No solution of Afghan problem without Iran Rao Khalid calling for the solution of Afghan problem within the region said that Iran and Pakistan are two major neighbors of Afghanistan and without Iran there will be no peace in the war-torn country. He added: The next goal of the US invasion of Afghanistan was to reach Iran, but they should know that their continued presence in the region will not help peace.

"In fact, the continued presence of the United States in the

region means dictation to other countries," he said.

The senior journalist went on to say Washington must understand the fact that its presence in Afghanistan is problematic, and as long as this situation continues, Afghanistan and other countries will suffer.

He stressed the US selfish approach to Afghanistan must end and in all processes, including the Doha Summit, the Islamic Republic of Iran must be at the forefront of programs and efforts to maintain peace and stability in Afghanistan.

**Betrayal to Palestine ends pressure on Zionist regime Referring to the normalization of relations by some Arabs with the Zionist regime, Rao Khalid said they do not have a high political understanding, they did not show any resistance to US expansionist plans in the name of peace, rather betrayed Palestine.

He added as the unrest and conflict in the Middle East continue, especially in Yemen and Syria, we should not expect a positive result from the action of the UAE and Bahrain for Palestine, but the current conflicts in the region will intensify. The editor of the 92 newspaper strongly supported the Pakistan government's anti-Zionist stance and continued to support the Palestinian people, warning that we must be vigilant and should not fall into the trap of the Arabs.

NEWS

Saudi, UAE, Bahrain 'Planned' to Invade, Occupy Qatar, Minister Says

Qatari Defense Minister Khalid al-Attiyah said that Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain had a two-phase plan to occupy Qatar.

"Actually it was not a mere intention. There was a plan to invade Qatar," Attiyah told Al-Jazeera Arabic news channel on Sunday.

"This plan was set into two phases, imposing the siege with the aim of creating an overall state of panic, which would have a direct impact on the Qatari street, then executing a military invasion," the minister said.

"There was a premeditated intention for an invasion, not just a siege. They wanted to implement the siege phase fully then to invade, things were clear to us... all the intelligence we had and all the available evidence undoubtedly confirmed the theory of an existing plan."

Since 2017, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the UAE and Egypt have imposed a blockade on Qatar.

The Saudi-led quartet severed diplomatic and trade ties with Qatar on June 5, 2017, accusing Doha of meddling in regional affairs and supporting "terrorism."

Qatar has rejected the allegations and said it was targeted because it followed an independent foreign policy.

Iran, Venezuela have right to self-determination: Maduro

Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro said that all countries including Iran and Venezuela have the right to determine their own destiny in peace.

In a Spanish tweet on Monday, Maduro wrote that Cuba, Nicaragua, Syria, Iran and other fraternal countries in the world have the right to self-determination and peace.

These countries stand with their historical dignity and are ready for new challenges and victories, he added.

Referring to the recent US unilateral actions against Iran and Venezuela, he said that the people of these countries are free and independent people who call on stopping of the criminal persecution and siege that threatens the progress and development of them.

Previously, addressing the 75th UN General Assembly, the Venezuelan president described the United States as the greatest threat to world peace and called for an end to all unilateral action against all individuals and countries who defend their sovereignty and independence.

He once again called on the United States to allow people to be at peace so that they can exercise their right to progress and peace.

Maduro's remarks come as the United States has imposed new sanctions on him in recent weeks over its cooperation with Iran.

News

EU alleged human rights violations in Iran amounts to interference: Majlis

Majlis' committee for National Security and Foreign Policy voiced in a statement published on Tuesday that the EU alleged human rights violations in Iran lack legal base and amounts to interference in Iranian domestic affairs. The statement said that according to international law, UN Charter, and principles of international law, no country has the right to directly or indirectly interfere with the domestic affairs of other countries. It asked why the EU so-called human rights advocates take no actions against oppressive sanctions imposed on

80 million Iranians, avoid sending medicine for Iranian children suffering from incurable diseases, participate in massacring Yemeni kids with arming the countries which disregard the war laws, and not accept their international responsibility of violating human rights with their policies in regional states and the international community?

Majlis' Commission for National Security and Foreign Policy noted that such countries do not basically have the right to host the concept of human rights, adding that they had better hear the voice of people of color and Muslims in their own territories and find a way to improve their life. It added that it is a right of each country to formulate its penal code according to the law and no other country has the right to interfere with.

Hence, it is expected that the Iranian government and



diplomatic system of the country to strongly condemn such moves, and use all the existing capacities to counter and deter the EU allegations about violation of human rights in Iran.

ISFAHAN NEWS

The First Bilingual Economic Newspaper In Isfahan Province

20000 Rials

Wednesday, September 30, 2020, No. 609

Iran does not allow transfer of weapons via its soil

Foreign Ministry Spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said the Islamic Republic of Iran, closely monitors the transit of goods via its borders and it never allows weapons and ammunition to be transferred through the Iranian soil. In his remarks rejecting some baseless claims about transit of weapons and military equipment from Iran to Armenia, Khatibzadeh told reporters on Tuesday that commuting of trucks and transit of conventional non-military goods between the Islamic Republic of Iran and its neighboring countries is going on as before. He underlined that all the trucks are carrying non-military goods as they have always done so. The Islamic Republic does not allow the Iranian territory to be used as a gateway for the transfer of weapons and ammunition to other countries, he reiterated.



Headlines

Iranophobia, an old way of US leadership to overcome internal crisis

5

IRGC Chief Rules Out Possibility of US War

5

Parl. gives vote of confidence to new industry minister

4

CALL TO PRAYER TIME IN ISFAHAN

Morning call to prayer:

04:36:48

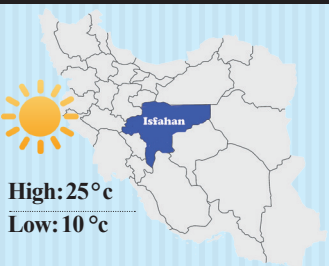
Noon call to prayer:

11:53:10

Evening call to prayer:

18:06:38

WEATHER



Official: Umrah to begin after opening Iranian consulates in KSA

Head of Hajj and Pilgrimage Organization Ali-Reza Rashidian said on Tuesday that Umrah will begin after opening Iranian consulates in Saudi Arabia. Rashidian said Foreign Ministry is now following up diplomatic procedures to upgrade ties between the two countries. He added that Iranian pilgrims should not be dispatched without support for Umrah. He noted that Iranian Hajj operators always support pilgrims. According to the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, the event of Hajj is exercising power against the global arrogance that is the centerpiece of corruption, oppression, and pillage.



Workers Struggling to Make Ends Meet

4

Unknown Hackers Dump Details of UK's Covert Programs in Syria

Hackers have penetrated the computer systems of the UK's foreign ministry and taken hundreds of files detailing the country's controversial propaganda programs in war-torn Syria.

In a security breach of enormous proportions, the hackers appear to have deliberately targeted files that set out the financial and operational relationships between the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and a network of private-sector contractors that have been covertly running media platforms in Syria throughout the nine-year foreign-backed war. The Middle East Eye understands that between 200 and 300 highly sensitive documents are thought to have been acquired by the hackers.

Some of the documents have already been posted on the internet, and Foreign Office ministers and officials are bracing themselves for the possible appearance of more over the coming weeks. While the hackers are not thought to have yet been identified, the sophistication of the cyber-attack has raised concerns at the FCDO that a state actor could have been responsible, with suspicion focusing on Russia.

In 2018, the UK foreign ministry claimed that Russian intelligence officers had attempted to hack into its computer systems. The FCDO became aware of the breach last week, after some documents had been posted by the hacking collective known as Anonymous. Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab had been briefed at the weekend and other ministers were informed on Monday. The documents shed further light on propaganda initiatives known in UK government circles as "strategic communications", whose existence came to light four years ago. The program aimed to promote "attitudinal

and behavioral change" among Syrian audiences by fostering secular values, building resilience among the civilian population and by promoting what the UK government described as the Moderate Armed Opposition.

They show that British government contractors established radio stations, published Arabic- and English-language magazines, newspapers, books and children's comics, designed posters and stickers, and helped to run opposition groups' media offices. One contractor is said to have distributed more than 660,000 printed items across Syria in six months.

The hacked documents also show how the "strategic communications" program has influenced the reporting of many major media organizations, with one contractor claiming to be in contact with 1,600 international journalists and other individuals able to help influence public opinion. At the heart of the propaganda initiatives was a large network of Syrian citizen journalists, who were provided with training, equipment and encouragement by UK contractors - without the role of the British government being made explicit.

The documents posted on the internet in recent days identify not only private-sector contractors working for the Foreign Office, but also a number of the individuals who are running those companies. However, the report said senior FCDO officials are less concerned about the contents of many of the documents - as the existence of the propaganda program had already been made public - than they are about the apparent ease with which the department's computer systems were broken into.

Similar programs have been run in Syria by the UK's Ministry of Defense, which does not appear to have been hacked.

EU and Britain far apart as key week of Brexit talks begins

The European Union and Britain both said a post-Brexit deal was still some way off and differences persisted on Monday over putting in place their earlier divorce deal as they began a decisive week of talks in Brussels.

"The UK's positions are far apart from what the EU can accept, a deputy head of the bloc's executive Commission, Maros Sefcovic, said on Monday after talks with Michael Gove, the minister handling the divorce deal.

Britain left the EU last January and is locked in negotiations on a new trade deal from 2021, as well as on implementing the divorce, as set out in the Withdrawal Agreement, especially on the sensitive Irish border.

EU national leaders will assess the state of play at a summit next month, with a no-deal Brexit still possible.

Negotiations have stumbled over fisheries, fair competition and settling disputes, and Brexit descended into fresh chaos this month when London proposed draft laws that would undermine the earlier agreement.

"The UK's positions are far apart from what the EU can accept, a deputy head of the bloc's executive Commission, Maros Sefcovic, said on Monday after talks with Michael Gove, the minister handling the divorce deal.

"We maintain that the bill, if adopted in its current form, would constitute an extremely serious violation of ... the Withdrawal Agreement and of international law," he said, urging speedy progress before he meets Gove again in mid-October.

Gove said the clauses of the Internal Market Bill that undercut the Withdrawal Treaty would remain.

"We want to make sure that the Withdrawal Agreement is implemented in full," Gove told reporters. "But those clauses are there, they're in legislation ... And those clauses will remain in that bill."

TRADE TALKS

Prime Minister Boris Johnson's spokesman said in London that Britain's focus was on progress in trade talks.

"Although the last two weeks of informal talks have been relatively positive there remains much to be done," he said.

"We simply want the standard free trade agreement ... we continue to be asked to accept provisions that do not reflect the reality of our status as an independent country."

Trade talks resume in Brussels on Tuesday. Lasting until Friday morning and also due to cover energy links and transport, they are the final round of negotiations scheduled so far.

EU leaders meeting in Brussels on Thursday and Friday are expected to authorise more talks before their next summit on Oct. 15-16. They will then assess whether to try push a deal over the line or prepare for the most damaging Brexit at the end of the year.

European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen told reporters at a news conference in Lisbon late on Monday that a post-Brexit deal was still possible, saying the EU was "working hard" on it.

"Our economies, on both sides of the Channel, were severely hit by the pandemic and we should do everything possible to find an agreement that is manageable so we do not increase the negative impact on our economies," she said.

The EU says negotiators must seal an agreement by the end of October or early November, to leave time for ratification by the European Parliament and some national parliaments in the EU so that it can take effect from 2021 when Britain's standstill transition ends after Brexit.

Otherwise, the delicate peace on the island of Ireland as well as an estimated trillion euros worth of annual EU-UK trade would be at risk as the sides would fall back on general World Trade Organization rules that include tariffs and quotas.

At the heart of the propaganda initiatives was a large network of Syrian citizen journalists, who were provided with training, equipment and encouragement by UK contractors - without the role of the British government being made explicit.

