

# Jordan jobs safeguards fail to stop companies laying off staff, World Bank claims

Tue, 2022-04-12 21:02

AMMAN: Industrial companies in Jordaa have laid off staff to help cope with accumulated losses as a result of the global pandemic, despite government measures put in place to safeguard jobs, a World Bank report claims.

At the height of the coronavirus outbreak, the government introduced regulations to contain the virus and protect workers affected by nationwide lockdowns that have had a deep impact on the kingdom's economy.

Under the sixth defense order, which has been in effect since April 2020, companies are unable to lay off employees but, instead, can lower their salaries according to rules outlined by Jordan's Social Security Corporation.

The SSC also offers incentives to economic sectors classified as the hardest hit by the pandemic under a list that it periodically updates.

Under the regulations, the SSC pays up to 70 percent of employees' salaries, with the remainder covered by the company. However, firms must have their employees covered under social security and also prove they have been badly affected by coronavirus measures.

Prime Minister Bisher Khasawneh has said that the regulations helped protect at least 100,000 jobs in various sectors.

During a recent meeting with industrialists in the northeastern city of Mafraq, Khasawneh said that the defense orders have ensured business sustainability for affected sectors through a range of lending and incentives opportunities.

Khasawneh stopped short of giving an exact date for the lifting of the regulations, saying only that they will remain in place as a social protection tool.

Some sectors have demanded that they be exempted from the regulations, especially those related to laying off staff.

Arab News learned that international firms working in the kingdom have lodged petitions to the government, asking for permission to lay off employees.

Meanwhile, the World Bank recently said that a survey it carried out on a number of industrial firms in Jordan revealed that half had to lay off all their employees in order to cope with the "massive cash shock" experienced during the pandemic.

According to the bank, 94 percent of Jordan's industrial companies claimed to

have suffered from a liquidity crisis during the pandemic, while 64 percent said that they failed to pay their financial dues to the government and other parties.

The survey was conducted in December last year.

According to economists, lifting the defense orders would increase the unemployment rate, which reached 23.3 percent in 2021.

The government has allocated 20 million Jordanian dinars (\$28.2 million) for the Social Security Corporation's Estidama program, which targets sectors hit hardest by the pandemic.

The relief program, which was launched last year under a defense order, helps affected institutions pay the full wages of workers.

The Jordan national defense law came into force in mid-March 2020 following a royal decree. The law gives the prime minister wide powers to combat the COVID-19 outbreak in the kingdom.



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Jordan records \$1.4bn rise in local revenue in 2021

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# Khamenei says Iran's future should not be tied to nuclear talks with world powers

Author:

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Tue, 2022-04-12 20:44

DUBAI: Iran's supreme leader said on Tuesday that his country's future should not be tied to the success or collapse of nuclear talks with world powers, Iranian state media reported.

He also added that the negotiations to revive a 2015 nuclear deal "are progressing well."

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who has the last say on all state matters such as Iran's nuclear program, made the comments about a month after almost a year of indirect talks between Iran and the United States stalled. Both countries blame each other for lack of "political will" to settle remaining issues. "Absolutely do not wait for nuclear negotiations in planning for the country and move forward," Khamenei told a gathering of senior officials, state TV reported.

"Do not let your work be disrupted whether the negotiations reach positive or semi-positive or negative results."

In 2018, then-US President Donald Trump left the nuclear deal and reimposed sanctions that have crippled Iran's economy. A year later, Iran started to violate the limits imposed on its nuclear program by the 2015 agreement to make it harder to develop a bomb. Iran says its nuclear program is for peaceful use only.

"The United States broke its promises (by exiting the deal) and now they have reached a dead end while Iran is not in such a situation," Khamenei said, while calling on Iran's nuclear negotiators to continue "resisting Americas' excessive demands."

One of the unresolved issues is whether Washington would remove Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) from the US Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) list, as demanded by Tehran in order for the deal to be revived.

Critics of dropping the IRGC from the list, as well as those open to the idea, say doing so will have little economic effect because other US sanctions force foreign actors to shun the group.

The IRGC, created by the Islamic Republic's late founder Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, is more than just a military force and has enormous political clout. It was placed under sanctions in 2017 and put on the FTO list in April of 2019.

After the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks in the United States, the IRGC was sanctioned as a "specially designated global terrorist" (SDGT) on a separate US list.



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## [Tunisian President Kais Saied promises 'free and fair' elections in talks with EU delegation](#)

Tue, 2022-04-12 18:06

ROME: Tunisian President Kais Saied has told a European Parliament delegation in Tunis that he is determined to hold a referendum and "free and fair" elections in a bid to end political instability in the country.

He also pledged "to preserve the unity, continuity and sovereignty of the state, according to the will of the Tunisian people."

The delegation from the parliament's foreign affairs committee included Michael Gahler, Javier Nart, Jakop Dalunde and Andrea Cozzolino.

According to a statement from the Tunisian presidency, Saied expressed his "full determination to end this exceptional period by launching initiatives to prepare the organization of a referendum, and free and fair legislative elections on Dec. 17."

Tunisia has been in a state of political upheaval since Saied declared a state of emergency on July 25, 2021, dismissing Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi and suspending Parliament, which last month was finally dissolved.

An EU spokesman last week expressed "serious concern" over recent developments in Tunisia and warned that continued support depends on the country "returning to a democratic course."

The European delegation also met Prime Minister Najla Bouden and local representatives to discuss support for political reforms.

"We paid special attention to the country's economic situation and on how to better support the Tunisian authorities in implementing reforms for the benefit of the entire population, in the context of the economic crisis and food security, the pandemic and the consequences of Russian aggression against Ukraine," Cozzolino told Arab News.

The Italian MEP added that the delegation stressed "the need to respect the principles of popular participation, pluralism and representation."



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## [Iran summons Afghan envoy after protesters throw rocks at diplomatic missions](#)

Author:

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1649766963687770300

Tue, 2022-04-12 12:26

DUBAI : Iran summoned the Afghan envoy to Tehran on Tuesday, Iranian state TV reported, a day after protesters threw rocks at Iranian diplomatic missions in Kabul and Herat over what they called “mistreatment of Afghan refugees” in the Islamic Republic.

The protests began after videos posted on Twitter in recent days showed young Afghan refugees in Iran being harassed and humiliated by ordinary Iranians. Reuters could not verify the authenticity of the videos.

Iranian officials on Monday denied there was any mistreatment of Afghan refugees in Iran, state television reported.

“The Afghan charge d’affaires in Tehran was summoned in protest over attacks on the Iranian embassy in Kabul and the Iranian Consulate in Herat in Afghanistan on Monday,” state TV reported.

Footage on social media, which could not be verified by Reuters, showed a small group of Afghan protesters throwing rocks at Iran’s diplomatic missions in Kabul and in the western Afghan city of Herat on Monday.

Iran’s embassy in Afghanistan, in a statement issued on Tuesday, said the Taliban, which rules Afghanistan, are responsible for the security and safety of Tehran’s diplomats and said it would halt consular services in the neighboring country “until further notice,” Iranian state media reported.

But later Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Saeed Khatibzadeh contradicted the embassy’s statement by saying: “All missions of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Afghanistan are open and continue to operate,” Iran’s Students News agency ISNA reported.

Although Iran’s clerical establishment has had generally good relations with the Taliban, there have been longstanding tensions along the two countries’ 900-km (560 miles) joint border, which has active smuggling routes.

Over five million Afghans, both documented and undocumented, live in Iran,

Iran's state news agency IRNA quoted Iranian Foreign Minister Amirabdollahian as saying last week.



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## [Italy to increase Algerian natural gas imports by nearly 50%](#)

Mon, 2022-04-11 20:58

ROME: Italy will increase Algerian natural gas imports by nearly 50 percent after Prime Minister Mario Draghi signed an agreement with Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune.

The agreement comes as Italy tries to compensate for a possible decrease in supplies of Russian gas amid the Ukraine conflict.

“Our governments signed a declaration of intent on bilateral cooperation in the energy sector,” Draghi told the press at El-Mouradia presidential palace, adding that Italian and Algerian energy companies Eni and Sonatrach have agreed to increase gas supplies to Italy.

Speaking after his meeting with Tebboune, who is due to visit Rome at the end of May, Draghi said “relations between Italy and Algeria have deep roots,” and Algeria “is Italy’s first trading partner in Africa, with a bilateral exchange increasing fast.”

Draghi added that Italy “is ready to work with Algeria to develop renewable energy and green hydrogen” in order to “accelerate the energy transition and create opportunities for development and employment in both countries.”

A source in Italy’s Ministry of Energetic Transition told Arab News that the export boost agreed in Algiers “would make Algeria Italy’s top natural gas supplier to replace Russia by increasing its shipments by an additional 9-10 billion cubic meters per year by the end of 2022.”

Last year Italy received around 21 billion cubic meters of gas from Algeria, compared to around 29 billion from Russia, which currently supplies nearly 40 percent of Italy’s needs.

Italy imports about 95 percent of the gas it consumes, and is one of the European countries most dependent on Russian gas.

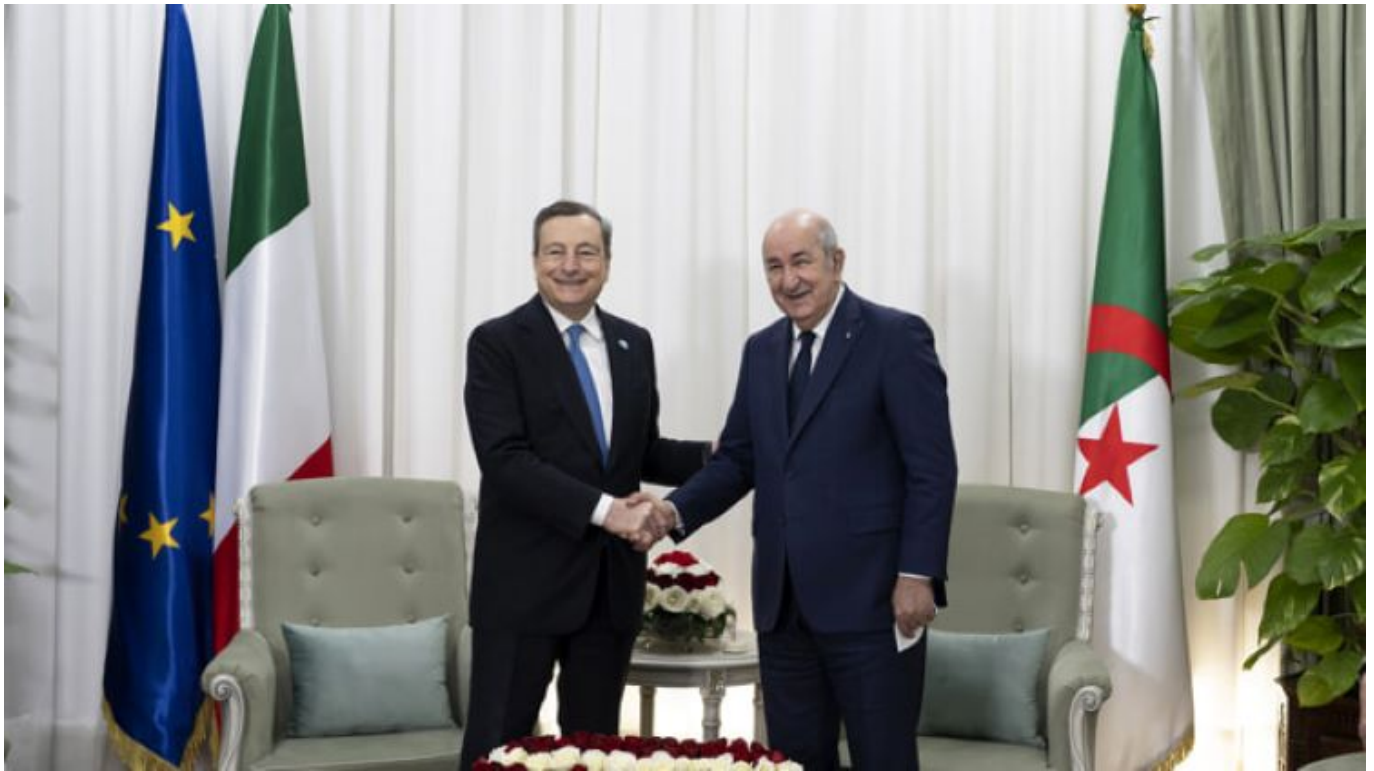
The Italian delegation in Algiers included Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio, Eni CEO Claudio Descalzi and Minister of Energy Transition Roberto Cingolani, who said last week that Italy is in talks with up to seven countries, including Algeria, to secure gas supplies. Those negotiations, Cingolani added, are at “a very advanced stage.”

Italy has said it would support a ban on Russian gas over the Ukraine conflict if the EU is receptive to the idea.

Di Maio was in Algiers on Feb. 28, where he discussed with his counterpart an increase in the North African country’s gas supply to compensate for a possible decrease from Russia.

In late February, Algeria’s state-owned hydrocarbon giant Sonatrach said it was ready to supply more gas to Europe, in particular by transporting it through the Trans-Mediterranean pipeline connecting Algeria to Sicily.

Sonatrach President Toufik Hakkar said the pipeline “still has unused capacity” that could be used to increase supplies to Europe.



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