

**Health Ministry Spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari Said on Saturday That Some 386 More Iranians Have Died From COVID-19 Over The Past 24 Hours as the Death Toll Mounted to 34,864**

# IRAN NEWS

**The Republic of Azerbaijan Announced the Reopening of Several Border Stations on the Border With Iran After the Liberation of These Areas From The Control of Nagorno-Karabakh**

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## IRGC Provides Support to COVID-Affected Families

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – Commander of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Major General Hossein Salami said that 54,000 Basij Bases in the country should be turned into health care centers.

“Our goal is to be able to identify the coronavirus infected cases and follow up on the treatment guidelines and protocols, related to COVID-19,” Salami said.

“If the disease is diagnosed quickly and the sick people are quarantined, the transmission chain of the disease will be cut naturally,” he said.

The commander then made a reference to scientifically-proven medical findings that early detection of coronavirus and keeping the positive cases in quarantine would cut off the chain of spread of the disease, saying, “We should try to separate healthy people from the infected as soon as possible, while distributing health packages among low-income families and advising them to follow health instructions is one of the issues that all provincial officials should address,” he pointed out.

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## Foreign Powers, Main Cause of Regional Crises

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iran's Army Chief Commander said that foreign powers are the main cause of crises in the region.

Speaking at 34th International Islamic Unity Conference “In Webinar of Religious and Spiritual Foundations and Challenges in Facing Disasters and Calamities” on Sat., Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi said that the Islamic world has spread over vast geography and extends from the shores of the Atlantic Ocean to southeast Asia and from northeast Central Asia to the southeast of the ancient continent.

Given the strategies of arrogant powers and wrong policies of some Islamic countries, today, the Islamic world is facing serious crises, he said, adding, “Palestine, Yemen, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and Kashmir and Caucasus regions are struggling with unrest and violence.”

Evil powers have occupied a part of land of Islam with their Zionist extremists and are committing the most heinous crimes against Islamic lands and territories, Major General Mousavi emphasized.

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# Gov't Sets New Restrictions To Curb COVID-19



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - President Hassan Rouhani announced on Saturday that new COVID-19 related restrictions will be applied in the capitals of 25 provinces and 46 cities of the country for ten days from Wednesday, as the virus cases are on the rise.

Speaking at the National Task Force for Fighting Coronavirus on Saturday, Rouhani stated: “Under this restriction, all activities, mainly related to educational activities and gatherings on various occasions, will be banned for ten days until next Friday.”

Rouhani added: “Restrictions that were previously approved for 43 cities have been extended in this meeting.” He stressed the need for public cooperation and observing health protocols to contain the disease successfully. Iranian authorities have blamed a sharp increase in cases on people failing to follow restrictions, and Rouhani said an operations headquarters will be set up to ensure compliance with the health protocols.

Stressing the need for strict implementation of the new restrictions, he said those violating the ban on gatherings, including wedding and mourning ceremonies, will face punishment.

He also noted that detection of the coronavirus patients and analysis of the data on the spread of the disease will be carried out by the Health Ministry in cooperation with the Ministry of Information and Communications Technology.

The president also emphasized the need for “neighborhood instructions” to fight against the contagious disease in every neighborhood and district, saying the local Basij forces can assist in tackling the pandemic.

The President also extended his congratulations on the birth of the Holy Prophet of Islam (PBUH) and the arrival of Unity Week.

Meanwhile the official IRNA news agency said Tehran police had extended by one week the closure of businesses including beauty salons, teahouses, cinemas, libraries and fitness clubs.

Police will make unannounced visits to other high-risk businesses, and those that violate health protocols will be shut down, IRNA quoted police official Nader Moradi as saying.

Deputy Health Minister Alireza Raisi said in a televised press briefing that the new restrictions from next week in the 25 provinces and 89 counties will include the closure of institutions such as schools, universities, libraries and mosques.

## French Freedom of Speech Based on Double Standards

BEIRUT (PressTV) - The secretary-general of the Lebanese Hezbollah resistance movement condemns the French president's Islamophobic remarks, saying the freedom of expression is based on double standards there.

Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah made the remarks in a televised speech on the occasion of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) birthday on Friday, a day after an assailant waged a knife attack at a church in France's southern city of Nice, beheading a woman and stabbing to death two other people.

The deadly attack came days after another assailant decapitated Samuel Paty, a history teacher, who had used offensive cartoons of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in a civics class in the capital Paris.

The Paris attack prompted French President Emmanuel Macron to say that he would fight against “Islamist separatism,” which according to him threatens to take control in some Muslim communities across France. The French leader also defended showing the insulting cartoon in schools across the European country and considered the highly provocative move in line with freedom of expression, a move that has infuriated Muslims across the globe.

“What is the message which the French authorities want to send to the Muslims by insisting on allowing the cartoons which insult Islam?” Nasrallah said, the Hezbollah-linked al-Manar television network reported.

“Instead of addressing the root causes of the problem, the French authorities waged a war of this sort, claiming that it is a matter of freedom of speech,” he added. The chief of Hezbollah strongly rejected Macron's use of the “Islamic terror” term, saying religions cannot be blamed for crimes committed by individuals. He also said that no one blamed Christianity for the crime committed by the French military in Algeria or the atrocities of the US military across the globe.

Nasrallah also emphasized that Takfiri terrorist groups in the Middle East have been protected by the Western states. He further called on the French authorities to reconsider the kind of freedom of speech which infringes on human dignity, saying that freedom of expression is restricted by political considerations, citing the example of French philosopher Roger Garaudy who was persecuted for denying the Holocaust.

Nasrallah also called on the French authorities and public opinion to avoid blaming Islam and all Muslims for the Nice or similar attacks elsewhere, stressing that such acts are illegal and immoral, and that only the culprits must be punished. Nasrallah also called on the French authorities to bear in mind that Muslims can never accept any humiliation and insult against their Prophet. “The insults against the Prophet can never be tolerated by Muslims. Even the political regimes cannot cover up such abuses. So, you have to withdraw the excuses and stop this violation,” Nasrallah said, addressing the French authorities.

## Iran Initiative to Cover Weaknesses of Minsk Group's Plans

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iran says its initiative to help find a sustainable solution to the ongoing Nagorno-Karabakh dispute is a supplementary approach to the previous solutions, not a substitute.

Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araçchi made the remarks on Saturday after a meeting with his Turkish counterpart, Sedat Onal, in Ankara. During the meeting, he discussed a proposal that foresees the Islamic Republic, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Russia boosting a standing Minsk Group that has failed to resolve decades of the territorial dispute between Baku and Yerevan.

Referring to the features of Tehran's initiative, which includes a ceasefire, discontinuation of attacks on residential areas and civilians, as well as the return of the displaced to their homes, Araçchi pointed to the inability of the previous approaches to providing a final solution to the ongoing crisis.

“We do not reject other mechanisms such as that of the Minsk Group; in fact, our initiative does not replace the Minsk initiatives, but it complements it, and we seek to support the current efforts of the Minsk Group and cover its weaknesses through a regional approach and the use of collective efforts in the region to resolve this crisis.”

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## Herd Immunity Morally Unconscionable

VIENNA (Dispatches)- The COVID-19 natural herd immunity strategy is morally unconscionable and unfeasible, the chief of the World Health Organization (WHO) said on Friday.

Speaking at a press conference, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the WHO director-general, shared stories he heard from people who are facing mid- to long-term effects of the COVID-19 infection.

“What's really concerning is the vast spectrum of symptoms that fluctuate over time, often overlapping can affect any system in the body. From fatigue, a cough and shortness of breath, to inflammation and injury of major organs - including the lungs and heart. And even neurological and psychological effects. Although we're still learning about the virus, what's clear is that this is not just a virus that kills people. To a significant number of people, this virus poses a range of serious long-term effects. While people do recover, it can be slow - sometimes weeks or months - and it is not always a linear route to recovery,” said Ghebreyesus.

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## China Urges Self-Reliance To Counter U.S. Efforts to Harm Economy

BEIJING (Dispatches)- Chinese leaders have called for “self-reliance” to counter the US' efforts to hamper the world's second largest economy, as officials in the ruling party issued a blueprint for manufacturing strategies in the next five years.

The Chinese Communist party wrapped up an important annual planning meeting on Thursday evening with a communique that outlined Beijing's main goals for the next five-year plan.

The summary document from the central committee's annual plenum emphasized the importance of “scientific and technological self-reliance,” and a “strong domestic market” to counter efforts by the US to hamstring many of China's leading technology companies.

The Chinese government set an average annual growth target of 6.5 percent for its five-year plan in a bid to double the size of its economy between 2010 and 2020.

The blueprint also called for “sustained and healthy” growth marked by “significantly improved quality and efficiency” during the next five-year period, which is expected to be the scene of a protracted trade war between the United States and China.

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# Iran Ready to Help Turkey After Quake

TEHRAN (ILNA) - Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif sympathized with Turkish people and government over a deadly earthquake that struck western Turkey on Friday, expressing Tehran's readiness to assist the neighboring country.

In a message for his Turkish counterpart Mevlut Cavusoglu, Zarif expressed deep sympathy over the tragic earthquake that struck Izmir.

He also wished a speedy recovery for the injured and informed his Turkish counterpart of Iran's preparedness for providing any kind of assistance in that regard.

## U.S. Targeting Iran's Vital Infrastructures

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

**TEHRAN - Washington which has grown disappointed at military war against Iran is now resorting to attacks against the country's infrastructures via different means, including cyberattack, Head of Civil Defense Organization Brigadier General Gholamreza Jalali said.**

"The Americans have gone after war against Iran's vital infrastructures after being disappointed in the military front," General Jalali said on Saturday.

He added that most attacks against Iran's infrastructures are cyberattacks, explaining that the culprit behind such attacks is not known.

General Jalali said that cyber systems now play a major role in Iran's vital infrastructures due to their rapid development, stressing the need for strengthening the cyber defense infrastructures in the country.

Jalali had said in February that the U.S. had likely been behind the large-scale cyberattack that targeted the Islamic Republic's infrastructure in the same month.

On February 8, the Iranian internet service suffered hours of disruption in what telecoms authorities said was the result of DDoS cyberattack that was dealt with



swiftly. The "powerful" distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attack caused users to experience connection issues, according to officials.

Brigadier General Jalali declared, in a televised interview, the unsuccessful DDoS attack probably originated from the US. "It's very difficult and time-consuming to trace the source of a cyberattack. The Telecommunication Infrastructure Company is currently studying and looking for the source of the recent cyberattack against the country ... but our analysis is that the U.S. was the origin," Jalali said.

"The Americans' cyberattack has been foiled by our cyber defense unit," he said, but at the same time warned that the recent attack might have been carried out to study the feasibility of a bigger attack.

"Since Americans failed to give a military response to our recent shoot-down of their unmanned aerial vehicle in the Iranian waters as well as our missile attack on Ain al-Assad base [in Iraq], they are responding to our country through continued economic pressure and cyberattacks," Jalali noted.

## No One Civilized Brags About Stealing

TEHRAN (IP) - Foreign Ministry Spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh in response to a recent statement of the U.S. Department of Justice stated that the pirates of the Caribbean openly boasting their booty, no one civilized brags about stealing.

In response to a recent statement by the U.S. Department of Justice about selling Iranian oil seized on its way to Venezuela, Foreign Ministry Spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh stated in a Twitter message on Friday, "The Pirates of the Caribbean openly boasting their booty. Only, as we said before: it wasn't ours. But somebody else's oil has certainly been stolen. No one civilized brags about stealing."

"To U.S. rogue regime: your toolbox, unlike ours, is shrinking by the day. Ask Robert Cobrien," Khatibzadeh added. The United States claimed on Thursday that it had sold Iranian oil seized on its way to Venezuela for more than \$40 million.

## General Soleimani's Path Must Be Portrayed at Int'l Level

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Majlis Speaker's Special Aide for International Affairs said the great path of Iran's top anti-terror commander should be depicted on the international level.

"We are in the weeks leading to the anniversary of the assassination of General Soleimani at Baghdad International Airport, which was carried out by the direct order of the president of the United States as the number one terrorist in the world," Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said during the first press conference of General Soleimani's martyrdom anniversary in Tehran on Saturday.

Noting that "we honor the memory of the hero of the fight against terrorism, Martyr Qasem Soleimani, and his companions," the senior advisor said General Soleimani's school and his thoughts and approach should be portrayed for the current and next generations, not only in Iran and the region but also across the world.

In this regard, he said that non-governmental institutes under the name of the Martyr Soleimani Foundation



have been formed in Iran.

"For months, those cherishing the path of General Soleimani in Iran, the region and even in Latin America, the United States and Europe, have been following their popular ideas to commemorate General Soleimani and his first anniversary."

Stating that it is important to pay attention to the various dimensions of General Soleimani's personality, Amir-Abdollahian added, "General Soleimani was not merely a military general."

In fact, he said, the characteristics of General Soleimani created a school that was in line with the school of pure Islam of the great Prophet (PBUH) as well as the ideas of the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Leader of the Islamic Revolution.

"From this perspective and due to the importance of the issue, today we officially announce that the Martyr Soleimani Foundation seeks to promote the pure ideas of the Soleimani school and is supposed to prevent distortions about the character of this great commander," he said.

## Nearly 200,000 Houses to Be Taxed Under Vacancy Tax Law

TEHRAN (MNA) - Roads and Urban Development Minister Mohammad Eslami said that the ministry has referred a list of 194,000 vacant housing units to Iran National Tax Administration (INTA) to be taxed under the new vacancy tax law.

The minister said that the owners of these houses have been informed in this regard via receiving SMSs.

Last month, Deputy Transport Minister for Housing and Construction Affairs Mahmoud Mahmoudzadeh had said that in the first stage of the implementation of the program for collecting tax from the country's vacant housing units, only units belonging to natural persons are targeted.

Back on July 12, the Iranian parliament (Majlis) had approved the double-urgency plan of the vacancy tax law.

The mentioned plan is mainly aimed at lowering the housing rental rate in the country.

Expressing his agreement over the approval of the mentioned plan, Hossein Hossein-Zadeh Bahraini, a member of the Majlis Economic Committee, said, "Our problem in the housing sector is not the demand higher than the supply, while the number of residential units is more than required."

## Tehran Ready to Send Medical Aid to Izmir Quake-Hit Areas

TEHRAN (MNA) - President Rouhani expressed Iran's readiness to send any kind of relief, medical aid, and assistance to the Turkish people in the earthquake-stricken areas.

Addressing his counterpart, Recep Tayyip Erdogan in a message on Saturday, Iranian President Hasan Rouhani expressed his deep sorrow over the Friday 6.6 magnitude earthquake in Turkey's Izmir, which left much causality in this country.

Offering the deep sympathy of the Iranian people and the government to the Turkish nation and government, Rouhani wished a speedy recovery for the injured and patience for the families of the people who lost their lives in this tragedy.

In this message, the Iranian President expressed Iran's readiness to send any kind of relief, medical aid, and assistance to the people of the earthquake-stricken areas in this neighboring country.

## Tehran, Ankara Have "Undeniable Role" in Regional Peace

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi described Iran and Turkey as two important regional players that have undeniable roles in peace and stability of the region.

In a twitter message on Saturday, Araqchi wrote that he had had "frank and productive discussion with Deputy Foreign Minister Sedat Onal in Ankara."

He added, "Iran and Turkey are two major players with undeniable role in peace and stability of the region."

Araqchi, Iran's special envoy for Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, traveled to the regional states to present Iran's initiative to end the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

He arrived in Ankara late on Friday on a regional tour that had

already taken him to Azerbaijan Republic, Russia and Armenia. Iran has put forward an initiative for settlement of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which is based on humanitarian principles and attention to the demands of the warring parties, Araqchi noted while leaving Russia.

The dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh started in 1988 and led to military conflict in 1992. Armenia and Azerbaijan resumed clashes on the border in early October, blaming one another for the violence. Nagorno-Karabakh has been a centerpiece of dispute between the two countries over the past decades.

## Tehran City Council Calls for Extending Lockdown

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Following the increase of Coronavirus spread in Iran's capital, Tehran City Council suggested an extension of lockdown for two more weeks to the National Headquarter to Fight Coronavirus, said the spokesman of Tehran City Council.

"Tehran Municipality and City Council implemented limitations to prevent the infection and our definite suggestion to the National Headquarter to Fight Coronavirus is lockdown extension," said Ali Ata. "Although the City Council's sessions and meetings are an important part of city management and could not easily be closed or held in another location. The council will decide over the possible reduction of meetings while press and journalists should follow the council's meetings online to reduce infection risk" he noted.

## Iran to Give Crushing Response to Any Threat

TEHRAN (MNA) - Head of the Iranian Army's Strategic Studies warned Iran enemies over facing Iran Armed Forces' crushing response if they threaten the country's interests.

Addressing the Iranian nation in his remarks Brigadier General Ahmadreza Pourdestan reassured that Iran Armed Forces including Army, IRGC, and Police are equipped with the most high-tech defense equipment and all enemy threats are monitored with such equipment.

Hailing that all needed equipment of the Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran is produced by Iranian scientists and specialists, he said, "If enemies intend to do any malicious act against the Iranian nation, they will face the crushing and decisive response of Iran Armed Forces."

He also stressed that any organs in the Islamic Republic of Iran should make any effort to stand against any threats and sanction and economic problems under the wise guidelines of the Leader.

## Tehran, Sarajevo Seeking Expansion of Ties

TEHRAN (IP) - Iran's Ambassador to Sarajevo and Head of Bosnia and Herzegovina's Ministers Council stressed the importance of expanding the relations between the two countries.

In a meeting with Zoran Tegletia on Friday, Reza Qalichkhan put emphasis on providing the necessary bases to facilitate the cooperation of the private sectors of the two countries.

Iran's Qalichkhan referred to the approach of the Islamic Republic of Iran to support stability in the Balkan region and said that country has always been a supporter of Bosnia's independence and territorial integrity as well as the peaceful coexistence of all Bosnian tribes.

He also pointed to Iran's outstanding actions in the fight against extremism in Western Asia and noted: "Iran, with the cooperation of some countries in the region, has been a pioneer in the fight against extremism and Daesh, and in this way has provided many services to the international community."

The Head of Bosnia and Herzegovina's Ministers Council welcomed the comprehensive expansion of his country's ties with Iran and expressed hope that with the corona restrictions removed, Iranian businessmen and traders in Bosnia and Herzegovina will continue to work.

## Tehran, Minsk Term Shia, Sunni Unity as Influential Force

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Belarus Saeed Yari and the Mufti of the Muslim Religious Association in the Republic of Belarus Abu-Bekir Shabanovich emphasized the Shia, Sunni unity as influential forces in world and condemned the remarks against Great Prophet Mohammad (PBUH).

In a meeting with the Abu-Bekir on --m the Ambassador expressed solidarity with Belarus Muslims and said that strengthening unity within Islamic world is the principled policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Yari discussed issues pertaining to the the affairs of the Muslim world with the Belarus Muslim official.

He stressed the importance of forging unity between the Shia and Sunni Muslims, particularly during the present sensitive regional and international circumstances.

In this meeting, both sides condemned the remarks against Great Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) on the pretext of freedom of expression.

The Mufti of the Muslim Religious Association in the Republic of Belarus, too, emphasized the need for enhancing unity between the Shia and Sunni Muslims and termed Islam as a religion of rationality and kindness.

He also condemned the remarks against Great Prophet Mohammad (PBUH).

## Macron, Main Culprit of Events in France

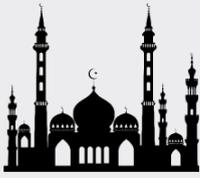
TEHRAN (IP) - The advisor to the leader of the Islamic Revolution of Iran on defense affairs blamed the French president for the recent events in France.

Brigadier General Hossein Dehghan, advisor to the leader of the Islamic Revolution on defense affairs, tweeted in French on Friday that the main culprit of events in France has been President Emmanuel Macron.

He added that no Muslim uses violent ways to express his/her opinion. Brigadier General Dehghan highlighted that a terrorist act is not just killing citizens, but insulting the merciful Prophet of Islam.

"Macron must apologize immediately because there is no double standard in freedom," he noted.

French President Emmanuel Macron has accused Muslims of separatism and vowed not to give up cartoons depicting Prophet Mohammad.



## PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	11:47
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:27
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:02
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:27

78. "Wherever ye are, death will find you out, even if ye are in towers built up strong and high!" If some good befalls them, they say, "This is from Allah.; but if evil, they say, "This is from thee" (O Prophet). Say: "All things are from Allah." But what hath come to these people, that they fail to understand a single fact? 79. Whatever good, (O man!) happens to thee, is from Allah, but whatever evil happens to thee, is from thy (own) soul, and We have sent thee as an apostle to (instruct) mankind. And enough is Allah for a witness. Surah 4. Women (78 - 79)

## High Consumption to Make Iran Gas Importer in 20 Years

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN – The managing director of Iranian Fuel Conservation Company (IFCO) says with the current trend of gas consumption in the country, Iran may become a gas importer in 20 years and it may import 500m cubic meters of gas per day.**

Speaking in a press conference, Ali Mobini Dehkordi said that currently the capacity of the country is incomparable with the past two decades, adding that capabilities and physical infrastructures have become stronger and bigger and if the country has good organizing and uses public capacity, and then it can cheat the impossible.

He then touched upon the outbreak of Coronavirus and sanctions, adding that these two issues have toughened the condition for the country, and unemployment has increased and it has also restricted and affected transfer of technology or financial resources, demand and supply and other factors in the business.

Mobini Dehkordi went on to say that country has currently big capacities for generating financial resources which can be materialized through saving the energy waste and conservation.

He further said that energy consumption should be managed in the country in order to generate financial resources.

He stipulated that currently private power stations have been activated in the country but the country should first find solution for managing the challenges.

Mobini Dehkordi noted that conservation of energy can be equal to 3 to 3.5 million barrels of crude oil and if we calculate every barrel of crude oil with the current price of \$43 and



post Coronavirus price of \$65, it will become a noticeable amount of money which can be used in creating jobs and exploiting the resources.

He said that Iran in terms of offering energy is close to Germany but its consumption is six times more than this European state, adding that GDP of Germany, regarding its purchasing power is three times more than Iran, is six times more than Iran and it shows energy consumption in Iran serves the non-productive sector.

He further reiterated that energy consumption in Iran is three times more than the UAE, Turkey and China and two times of Saudi Arabia and Iraq, stating Iran's energy consumption is even more than Russia.

Mobini Dehkordi said in the recent decade, Iran's initial offering of energy has grown by 3 percent on average annually and due to its Gross Domestic Product, initial energy consumption has witnessed uptrend growth while the energy consumption growth in the world has been declining.

He noted that currently the energy consumption in the country is equal to 6.3m oil barrels per day, reiterating that by taking conservation plans, the country can save 50 percent in energy consumption. He reiterated that if the current trend in gas consumption in the country continues with the same speed, then the country will have to import 500m cubic meter of gas per day in the next 20 years.

He noted that the amount of energy consumption in Iran is three times more than world average while the energy consumption is declining in the world and Iran should take serious measures in this regard.

## Countdown Starts for Drilling In South Pars Phase 11

TEHRAN (Shana) -- The CEO of Petropars Group announced the movement of the drilling rig to the location of phase 11 of South Pars Gas Field in the Persian Gulf waters.



According to the Petropars Group, Hamidreza Masoudi said on Friday evening that the drilling operation of the last phase of the South Pars joint field would begin in the coming days with the installation of a drilling rig.

Despite the cruel sanctions, financial shortages and the outbreak of the coronavirus, it is hoped that with the efforts of local engineers and specialists and with the planning done, the initial production of phase 11 of South Pars will begin soon.

The development plan for Phase 11 of South Pars has been completely handed over to Petropars due to sanctions after the withdrawal of France's Total and the international branch of the CNPC.

## NIGC Plans for 800 mcm/d Gas Output in Winter

TEHRAN (Shana) – The CEO of the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) said with the development of gas supply to the cities, villages and industries of the country, the daily production of natural gas this winter would reach 800 million cubic meters per day.

Hassan Montazer Torbati, speaking in a televised interview, emphasized the need to save natural gas consumption in the country, adding: "Iran is the second country in the world with the largest natural gas reserves. But this does not mean that we can consume as much as we want."

He continued: "A reservoir like Assaluyeh is unique in the world, but we do not have more than one Assaluyeh and now we have maximized its production and all subsequent efforts are to keep production at this level. However, with the development of gas supply in the country, we will see an increase in consumption."

The CEO of the National Iranian Gas Company predicted that the country's natural gas production capacity would reach 800 mcm/d in the winter which had reached 700 mcm/d last summer.

## Phase 1 of Goreh-Jask Pipeline Project 76% Complete

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN (Shana) - The progress of the first phase of the Goreh-Jask crude oil transfer project has reached 76.5 percent, and this national project is progressing according to the plan.



Ali Jafarzadeh, deputy director of the Goreh-Jask crude oil transfer project at the Petroleum Engineering and Development Company (PEDEC), told Shana about the latest progress of the project.

"Currently, the progress of the first phase of the project has reached 76.5 percent and all facilities and forces have been mobilized to launch the strategic plan by the end of the current [calendar] year (which began on March 21) to allow the transfer of more than 300,000 barrels of crude oil from Goreh to Jask," he said.

He said the construction of pipelines, pumping stations 2 and 4, 2 pigging stations and electricity supply are among the goals of the first phase of the Goreh-Jask national project, and said: "By the end of the year, 2 million barrels of Jask reservoir capacity will become operational."

The deputy director of the Goreh-Jask crude oil transfer project, stating that construction of the project's pipeline has reached more than 62%, adding: "So far, nearly 700 km of pipeline has been delivered to the site and more than 300 km of pipe laying has been done. According to the master plan, the entire pipeline stretch, which is about a thousand kilometers, will be tested, installed and operated by the end of this year."

The 1000-km pipeline project is primarily aimed at diversifying Iran's oil export hubs. Currently, the country exports almost all of its oil from Khark Oil Terminal in the Persian Gulf.

## Call for Boosting Tehran-Tbilisi Trade Ties



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Board of Director of Georgia-Iran Chamber of Commerce and Industry met on Saturday and during the meeting ways of bolstering trade between both countries were explored.

In the meeting some issues like holding business forums and conferences, launching joint brokerage for offering consultation services, holding educational courses and signing agreement were discussed.

Vice-Chairwoman of the chamber Maryam Soltani in the meeting called for restoring continuous ties between the chamber and Iran's embassy in Tbilisi and termed these relations necessary for improving and strengthening the level of trade between Iran and Georgia.

She noted that exchange of views between the chamber and Iran Embassy in Georgia with an eye on updating the latest data and information about capacities and regulations in any country, is the most important need of private sector for investment and presence in the target market.

Hossein Vosough, a member of the board of directors, also raised the issue of signing preferential trade agreement with Georgia and noted that the agreement can make competitive the presence of food stuff and dairy industry in Georgia's market.

He also pointed to the importance of holding specialized exhibitions in Georgia especially exhibitions on agro, tourism and construction fields. Meanwhile Iran's new ambassador to Georgia Mr. Akbar Ghasemi, reacting to the raised problems by the members of the board, elaborated his programs, saying that the embassy is assigned to cooperate with the chamber and resolve its problems for progressing goals of the country.

He expressed hope that a new chapter of ties and exchanges between both states in the framework of mutual respect and interests would be shaped and the level of ties would reach its real position.

The meeting was presided by Georgia-Iran Chamber of Commerce and Industry Seyedeh Fatemeh Moghimi.

## Tehran, Moscow Clinch New Agreement To Build Sirik Power Plant

TEHRAN (MNA) – New agreement was clinched between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Russian Federation for the construction operation of Sirik Power Plant in southern Hormozgan province.

Commissioner of Steam Power Plant Projects of Thermal Power Plants Holding Company broke the news on Sat. and pointed to the agreement of this company made with new Russian contractor for building this power plant and added, "Construction operation of this giant power plant project will begin soon using state-owned loan of the Russian Federation."

Behnam Khaefinejad added, "Given the introduction of new contractor by the Russian Energy Ministry for the construction of 1,400-MW Sirik Power Plant in Hormozgan province, negotiations for conclusion of contract started with this company since the beginning of the current year (started March 21, 2020)."

After holding 90 expert-level sessions, necessary agreement was finally reached with the Russian Company and the contract was inked between the two sides, he added.

After finalization of this contract in the presence of representatives of employer, consultant and representatives of the Energy Ministry of Iran and Russia, the land area for construction of the power plant, as large as about 200 ha, was provided to the new contractor, Khaefinejad underscored.

Presently, feasibility studies for constructing the first phase of this project have been completed, he said, adding, "Feasibility study for the launch of the second phase of this power plant has been put atop agenda."

According to the scheduled plan, construction operation of this giant power plant will start in near future after receiving final approval of the Russian Ministry of Finance and consequently, opening Letter of Credit (L/C).

He put the credit needed for the construction operation of Sirik Power Plant at over €1.4 billion which will be provided out of loan granted by the government of Russian Federation to the Islamic Republic of Iran.

With the agreement made, the executive part of this project will be completely carried out by Iranian contractors, he said, adding, "Capability of domestic manufacturers will be used for supplying relevant parts and equipment."



## IME Witnesses Growth in Weekly Trading Volume and Value

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - While over 561,359 MT of commodities worth over \$204m were traded last week on the Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME), the trading volume and value experienced growth of %40 and %7, respectively.

According to the report from IME International Affairs and PR, on the domestic and export metal and mineral trading floor of IME, 204,628 MT of various products worth close to \$89m were traded. On this trading floor, 201,878 MT of steel, 730 MT of aluminum, 1,060 MT of copper, 120 MT of molybdenum concentrates, 840 MT of zinc ingot as well as 5 kg of gold bar were traded by customers.



The report declares that on domestic and export oil and petrochemical trading floors of IME, 356,350 MT of different commodities with the total value of \$117m were traded.

On this trading floor, 183,600 MT of VB feed stock, 57,196 MT of bitumen, 63,568 MT of polymer products, 32,216 MT of chemical products, 11,500 MT of lube cut oil, 1,100 MT of insulation, 2,678 MT of base oil, 150 MT of argon as well as 4,280 MT of sulfur were traded.

Furthermore, 378 MT of commodities were traded on the side market of the IME.

Moreover, the agricultural trading floor of the IME experienced trading of 63 kg of saffron strands.

## Iran Eyes Boosting Non-Oil Exports by 15% in H2

TEHRAN (MNA) - Head of Trade Promotion Organization of Iran said that the country eyes surging export of non-oil commodities by 15 percent in the second half of the current Iranian calendar year.

Hamid Zadboum broke the news and added, "Although spread of the coronavirus global pandemic, COVID-19, has reduced international foreign trade as much as 15 percent, it is predicted that export of non-oil commodities in the country will register a 15 percent growth in the second half of the current year (from Sept. 21, 2020 to March 20, 2021) by overhauling and renovating export processes." He went on to say that exports growth in the second half of the current year will compensate a part of the reduced 34 percent decline in export of non-oil commodities of the country in the first six months of the current year (from March 21 to Sept. 20, 2020).

Then, Zadboum pointed to the export of products to neighboring states and added, "We have focused on exporting products to 15 neighboring states and also two countries of China and India in the current year."

The aforementioned 17 countries accounted for 89 percent of Iran's total export share in the first six months of the current year, Head of Trade Promotion Organization of Iran Zadboum underscored.

## COVID Tests Should Play Bigger Role in Int'l Travel

GENEVA (Reuters) - COVID tests should be more widely used in international travel than quarantines, the chair of the World Health Organization's Emergency Committee, Didier Houssin, said on Friday.

Top emergency expert Mike Ryan earlier said that travelling was now "relatively safe" with a "relatively low" risk.

He also said it was difficult to do scientific work on the origin of the virus, first identified in China last December, in a "politically toxic" environment.



## U.S. Coronavirus Cases Cross Nine Million

NEW YORK (Reuters) - U.S. coronavirus cases crossed the 9 million mark on Friday, rising by 1 million in two weeks as the world's worst-affected country faces a resurgence in the pandemic just ahead of elections.

Cases are rising faster than ever before. The previous record for 1 million new cases was during a surge in infection in July and August - when it took 16 days. Now the country has recorded over 1 million cases in 14 days with no sign of the outbreak slowing. (Graphic: tmsnr.rs/3jI3SCG)



## Muslims Protest Across Asia Against France



PARIS (Reuters) - France stepped up security nationwide on Friday to guard against new Islamist attacks following the fatal stabbings at a church in Nice, while Muslims in other countries protested in the streets over perceived French slights to the Prophet Mohammad.

President Emmanuel Macron deployed thousands of soldiers to protect sites such as places of worship and schools, and France's security alert was at its highest level in response to the second deadly knife attack in its cities in two weeks. Police were holding a 21-year-old Tunisian migrant, named as Brahim al-Aouissou, over the attack in which a man shouting "Allahu Akbar" (God is Greatest) decapitated a woman and killed two other people in Notre Dame Basilica in Nice on Thursday.

The attack took place at a time of swelling anger among many Muslims across the globe over the issue of French cartoons of the Prophet Mohammad which they deem insulting and blasphemous. It occurred about two weeks after Samuel Paty, a school teacher in a Paris suburb, was beheaded by an 18-year-old Chechen who was apparently incensed by the teacher showing such cartoons in a civics class.

France, home to Europe's largest Muslim community and hit by a string of militant attacks in recent years, has defended the right to publish such cartoons. Macron has insisted France will not compromise on its basic freedoms of belief and expression.

In Pakistan, Bangladesh and Palestinian territories, tens of thousands of Muslims staged anti-French protests after Friday prayers.

In Pakistan, police briefly fired tear gas at protesters who broke through security blockades in Islamabad in a failed attempt to demonstrate at the French Embassy against the printing in France of images depicting the Prophet Mohammad.

In Bangladesh, marchers in the capital Dhaka chanted "Boycott French products" and carried banners calling Macron "the world's biggest terrorist". Some burned effigies of Macron.

"Macron is leading Islamophobia," said Dhaka demonstrator Akramul Haq. "The Muslim world will not let this go in vain. We'll rise and stand in solidarity against him." Protests also took place in India, Lebanon and Somalia.

Interior Minister Gerald Damamin said France was engaged in a war against Islamist ideology and more attacks on its soil were likely. "We are in a war against an enemy that is both inside and outside," he told RTL radio.

"Any symbol of the republic or Christianity is a potential target," Nice Police Chief Richard Gianotti told Reuters. "We have to be vigilant, we have to be attentive." French embassies were also told to step up security.

In Nice, residents mourned the victims of what was the second attack in the Mediterranean city in recent years. In July 2016, a militant drove a truck through a seafront crowd celebrating Bastille Day, killing 86 people.

## Strong Quake Kills at Least 24 People In Turkey and Greek islands

ISTANBUL (Reuters) - Fourteen people were killed in Turkey and Greece after a strong earthquake struck the Aegean Sea on Friday, bringing buildings crashing down and setting off tidal waves which slammed into coastal areas and islands.

People ran onto streets in panic in the Turkish city of Izmir, witnesses said, after the quake struck with a magnitude of up to 7.0. Neighbourhoods were deluged with surging seawater which swept debris inland and left fish stranded as it receded.

Turkey's Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) said 12 people died, one due to drowning, while 419 people were injured. On the Greek island of Samos two teenagers, a boy and a girl, were found dead in an area where a wall had collapsed. Search and rescue operations continued at 17 collapsed or damaged buildings, AFAD said. Izmir's governor said 70 people had been rescued from under the rubble.



## EU Urges Quick WHO Reform

BRUSSELS (Reuters) - The World Health Organization (WHO) should be quickly overhauled, get more powers to handle pandemics and expose its member states' shortfalls in health emergencies, European Union officials said on Friday.

The comments were made at a video conference of EU health ministers that endorsed an EU document on the reform of the U.N. agency which for the first time outlines a series of sweeping changes needed to boost WHO's powers and resources, as exclusively reported by Reuters in September.

The moves followed criticisms that China and other countries did not share information on the COVID-19 pandemic in a timely fashion at its onset. "The current pandemic challenges us very acutely ... but it is very important that the (WHO) reform debate is held in parallel," German Health Minister Jens Spahn told a news conference.

He did not say when the reform process should begin, but stressed that as a result of the overhaul the WHO should become faster in its reaction to health crises, while its member states should share more information in emergencies. "We greatly appreciate the EU's strong leadership in global health and its steadfast support for WHO, including support for strengthening the organization," the WHO said, declining to comment specifically on the EU document.

"It is extremely important we move ahead with this reform," EU Health Commissioner Stella Kyriakides told the same news conference.

After months of international pressure, an independent panel was set up in September to review the global handling of the pandemic. The process to reform the WHO would begin after that, officials had said.

The EU draft document, which will represent the EU's position at a WHO assembly in mid-November, urges the U.N. agency to make public more quickly how and whether its member states respect their obligations on sharing information on health crises. The United States has accused the WHO of being too close to China in the first phase of the pandemic, when critics say Beijing was slow in sharing crucial information on the new coronavirus which first appeared in the city of Wuhan.

## Armenia, Azerbaijan Agree to Defuse Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

GENEVA (Reuters) - Armenia and Azerbaijan agreed on Friday to refrain from deliberately targeting civilians in a conflict over the mountain enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh, where hundreds have been killed in more than a month of fighting.

The agreement, which falls short of what would have been a fourth ceasefire, was reached during talks in Geneva between the countries' foreign ministers and envoys from France, Russia and the United States, co-chairs of the group created to mediate.

The co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group said in a statement that Armenia and Azerbaijan had also agreed to exchange the bodies of fighters and to provide within a week lists of detained prisoners of war, with the aim of an eventual exchange.

Human rights groups called earlier for an immediate halt to the use of banned weapons by both sides after confirming the use of cluster munitions either fired or supplied by Armenian forces in an attack this week on the Azeri city of Barda.

The worst fighting in the South Caucasus for more than 25 years has brought into sharp focus the increased influence of Turkey, an ally of Azerbaijan, in a former Soviet region considered by Russia to be within its sphere of influence. Nagorno-Karabakh is internationally recognised as part of Azerbaijan, but is populated and

controlled by ethnic Armenians. About 30,000 people were killed in a 1991-94 war in the region.

Azeri President Ilham Aliyev said on Twitter the country's troops had taken under their control nine more settlements. The regions to which he referred are in the southern part of the conflict zone, close to the border with Iran.

Azerbaijan's military gains since fighting began on Sept. 27 make a negotiated settlement more difficult. Aliyev has rejected any solution that would leave Armenians in control of territory claimed by both countries as part of their historic homeland.

In comments published on the prime ministerial website, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, responding to questions from foreign media, said he believed "the principle of 'remedial secession' should be applied to Nagorno-Karabakh".

Remedial secession refers to the secession of a sub-group from its parent state as a remedy of last resort.

Three ceasefires have failed to halt the latest fighting, the most recent brokered in Washington last Sunday by U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

Sporadic fighting continued on Friday. Azerbaijan's defence ministry said military positions and settlements in the Aghdere, Khojavend and Gubadli regions had come under fire.



## Three Thai Pro-Democracy Leaders in hospital



BANGKOK (Dispatches) - Three prominent Thai pro-democracy leaders were in hospital on Saturday after chaotic scenes outside a Bangkok police station overnight as officers tried to slap them with further criminal charges.

A court on Friday ordered the release of Panupong "Mike" Jadnok, Panusaya "Rung" Sithijirawattanakul and Parit "Penguin" Chiwarak who have been in custody since mid-October on sedition charges -- but police sought to question them over outstanding arrest warrants.

For months, protesters have staged almost daily rallies demanding reforms to the country's monarchy and for Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha -- the former military chief who staged a 2014 coup -- to resign.

The student-led demonstrations are also calling for a rewrite of the military-scripted constitution and an end to alleged government harassment of political opponents.

Panupong appeared to be unconscious as he was loaded into an ambulance outside the police station Friday night after being transported in a police van from jail. Local media said he fainted after being subjected to a "chokehold" by plainclothes police.

Parit and Panusaya were allowed to mingle with about 300 supporters outside the station for several hours until police from Ayutthaya, 80 kilometres (50 miles) north of Bangkok arrived to question them in the early hours of Saturday morning.

"The iron bars can imprison the stars but not the starlight. In my heart, I still have faith in the people. The wind of change, the wind of democracy has arrived in Thailand," Parit told the crowd, who sang songs.

Tosaporn Sererak, a doctor and former lawmaker, was with the pair as they were loaded into an ambulance around 4:30am.

"After questioning, both Rung and Penguin were feeling weak and have been sent to hospital where they are expected to stay for two-three days," Tosaporn told AFP, adding Parit has shards of broken glass in his skin from a scuffle in a police van.

**Shanon**  
(adviser)

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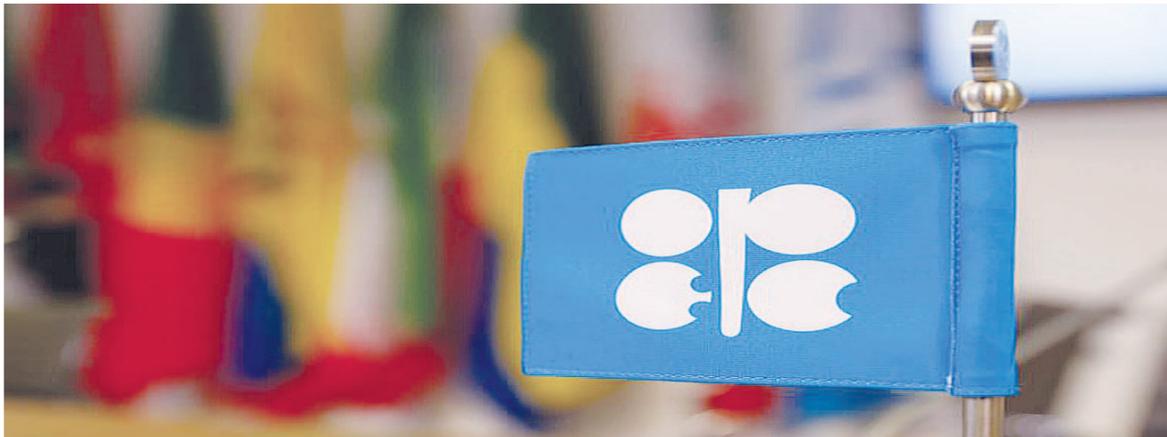
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## Indian Oil Profit Beats Estimates on Inventory Gains

BENGALURU (Reuters) - Indian Oil Corp Ltd, the country's top refiner, reported an eleven-fold rise in second-quarter profit on Friday that beat analysts' estimates on higher inventory gains and a jump in refinery margins.

The company, along with subsidiary Chennai Petroleum, controls about a third of the country's 5 million-barrels-per-day (bpd) refining capacity.

Net profit for the state-owned company rose to 62.27 billion rupees (\$842.14 million) in the three months ended Sept. 30, from 5.63 billion rupees a year earlier.



## Kuwait Supports Any OPEC+ Supply Decision as 2021 Curbs Loom

DUBAI (Reuters) - Kuwait said on Thursday it would support any decision made by OPEC and its allies on future oil supply policy after OPEC and industry sources told Reuters some producers would prefer to pump more from January rather than extend output curbs.

De-facto OPEC leader Saudi Arabia and non-OPEC Russia are in favour of extending existing oil production cuts of around 7.7 million barrels per day (bpd) into next year. They want to maintain cuts because fuel demand worldwide remains depressed due to the coronavirus pandemic's impact on population movement and economic activity.

Extending existing curbs would mark a change from the existing pact between the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and allies, a group known as OPEC+. The producers had previously agreed to raise output by 2 million bpd in January.

"Kuwait fully supports the joint OPEC+ efforts to restore balance to the oil market, and going forward we will also support whatever necessary joint decisions will be agreed to under the OPEC+ framework," Kuwaiti Oil Minister Khaled al-Fadhel said in a report published by state news agency KUNA.

OPEC and industry sources briefed on the matter had earlier told Reuters that Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and Iraq would like to find ways to increase supply by reviewing their output targets.

OPEC+ next meets in November to decide on production policy. Debate about targets and how they are calculated would complicate policy discussions on balancing supply with weak demand. The UAE and Kuwait typically support Riyadh's position, but both believed their output cut targets against their capacity were too deep to sustain into 2021, the sources said. Both have made big investments in boosting capacity.

"The countries are being suffocated with those cuts, it is very tough to continue with them next year too," said one OPEC source.

The UAE is finding the cuts challenging because of its deals with international oil companies. When the country cuts, foreign oil companies have to contribute.

The UAE is cutting around 33% of its output potential, pumping 2.59 million bpd, down from around 3.9 million bpd in April before the deal, according to OPEC data. The UAE had pumped more than its target in August but pledged to compensate for the rise by reducing its oil supply in the coming months.

Kuwait's production cap is at 2.297 million bpd after it had boosted its output to around 3.1 million bpd before the deal, meaning it is cutting about 26% of its output capacity, the data shows.

Iraq, OPEC's second largest producer, is required to cut about 850,000 bpd. Baghdad, which needs oil revenue to rebuild after years of war and sectarian violence, has previously raised the possibility in talks with OPEC+ of exemption from the reductions next year, sources said.

"Iraq will stay committed to OPEC+ cut deal and we will keep respecting our pledge, not only to cut production but also to compensate for the missing months until end year," said a senior Iraqi oil official who attends OPEC meetings.

## Air France-KLM Warns of Bigger Losses Amid Lockdowns

PARIS (Reuters) - Air France-KLM AIRF.PA unveiled a 1.05 billion-euro (\$1.24 billion) quarterly operating loss and warned of worse to come as a resurgent coronavirus brings new travel curbs.

Shares in the Franco-Dutch airline group fell after it reported a 67% drop in third-quarter revenue to 2.52 billion euros on Friday, as France returned to full lockdown for at least a month.

New COVID-19 outbreaks pose a threat to network airlines already weakened by the crisis and long-haul travel collapse. "The gradual closure of international borders in the second half of August and the resurgence of the pandemic strongly impacted our results," Chief Executive Ben Smith said.

Air France-KLM has 12.4 billion euros in liquidity, thanks largely to a French and Dutch government-backed bailout, a cash cushion comparable to those of European peers Lufthansa and, owner of British Airways, vowed on Friday to continue slashing costs after posting a 1.3 billion-euro loss for the three months to Sept. 30.

Net debt at Air France-KLM increased by 1.34 billion euros over the quarter to 9.31 billion.

The financial pressure will intensify with a further collapse in traffic, Chief Financial Officer Frederic Gagey cautioned.

Air France is expected to operate less than 35% of its year-earlier capacity in the fourth quarter, with KLM running about 45% of its schedule.

And the group's 1.22 billion-euro quarterly operating cash burn would have been 582 million euros worse without payment delays agreed with suppliers and tax authorities - the benefits of which will now begin to wear off.



Air France-KLM shares were down 3.5% at 2.69 euros. The stock has fallen 72% since the start of the year. The operating loss was better than the 1.24 billion euros expected by analysts on 2.79 billion in revenue, according to the median of 16 estimates in a company consensus poll. Earnings before interest, tax and depreciation came in at a negative 442 million euros and will be "substantially lower" in the fourth quarter, Air France-KLM said.

Some 565 million euros in restructuring charges swelled its bottom-line net loss to 1.67 billion.

By year end, the group expects to reduce headcount by 8,800 full time-equivalent positions, or 10% of its pre-crisis level, with more cuts due in 2021 at Air France - which accounted for 78% of the group operating loss.

## German Economy Grows At Record Pace Before Second Wave of Pandemic

BERLIN (Reuters) - The German economy grew by a record 8.2% in the third quarter as higher consumer spending and exports helped Europe's largest economy to recover partly from its worst-ever recession caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, data showed on Friday.

The jump in output from July to September was the biggest since the Federal Statistic Office began collecting quarterly growth data in 1970 and was stronger than the 7.3% increase predicted by economists in a Reuters poll.

The jump followed an unprecedented plunge of nearly 10% in the second quarter, when household spending, company investments and trade collapsed during the first wave of the pandemic.

"The deeper you push a ball under water, the higher it jumps out of it. That also applies to the economy," DekaBank analyst Andreas Scheuerle said.

An aggressive second wave of infections and a new partial lockdown to slow down the spread of the disease are now clouding the growth outlook for the fourth quarter and beyond.

The bigger-than-expected rebound in the third quarter was driven by higher private consumption, rebounding investments in equipment and strong exports, the statistics office said.

The preliminary data did not include a lot of details, but car companies and engineering associations have pointed to surprisingly strong demand from China in recent months. Separately, the German government on Friday revised upwards its estimate for gross domestic product this year. It now expects GDP to shrink by 5.5% in 2020 compared with a previous estimate for a 5.8% decline. Adjusted for calendar effects, it sees the economy shrinking by 5.9%.

The government confirmed its 2021 forecast for the economy to grow by 4.4% despite the second wave of infections and the partial lockdown. Bars, restaurants, cinemas and gyms will close from Monday until end of November. Schools and shops will stay open under certain conditions.

The government is planning to compensate companies affected by the lockdown by paying them up to 75% of their sales from last year's November. Finance Minister Olaf Scholz has earmarked 10 billion euros for this new aid package.

The government has since March unleashed massive rescue and stimulus measures, including cash handouts for parents and a temporary value-added tax cut that together seem to have stabilized domestic demand.



## ECB Survey See Lower Growth, Inflation Next Year

FRANKFURT (Reuters) - The euro zone economy may shrink less this year than feared but its rebound is also likely to be more shallow, the European Central Bank's Survey of Professional Forecasters showed on Friday.

The quarterly survey, done in early October before the most severe pandemic-related lockdown measures were implemented, sees the economy shrinking by 7.8% this year, less than its July prediction for an 8.3% drop, while next year's growth is seen at 5.3%, below a previous forecast for 5.7%.

Although these surveys are often an integral part of the ECB's policy deliberations, its role has likely diminished this time since the economic outlook is rapidly deteriorating as governments implement lockdown measures to contain the rapid spread of the coronavirus.

Indeed, the ECB on Thursday flagged even more policy easing at its December meeting as fears of a double-dip recession grow and the only question is just how big its move will be.

Inflation in the survey is now seen at 0.3% this year, below a previous forecast for 0.4% while in 2021, it is expected to average 0.9%, down from 1% predicted in July, both well below the ECB's target of almost 2%.

In 2025, deemed as the "longer-term", inflation is seen at 1.7%, above the last forecast for 1.6%, while the longer-term growth projection was left unchanged at 1.4%.

## IMF Tells UK to Increase Public Investment and Welfare Support

LONDON (Dispatches) - Britain can afford to ramp up its already massive spending push to counter the effects of the coronavirus pandemic on the economy, the head of the International Monetary Fund said on Thursday.

The British government should increase public investment and bolster its welfare support for people who lose their jobs because of the crisis, said Kristalina Georgieva, the IMF's managing director.

For more coronavirus news, visit our dedicated page.

It should also continue supporting companies and protecting workers until the economic hit eases, Georgieva said at the end of a review of Britain's economy by the Fund.

"My main message today is that continued policy support is essential to address the pandemic and to sustain and invigorate a recovery," Georgieva said in an online presentation alongside British finance minister Rishi Sunak.

"We welcome that the authorities have committed to deliver it as long as necessary to boost expectations and confidence. The policy space exists to do this," she said.

The IMF has estimated that Britain is on course to rack up a budget deficit of 16.5 percent of gross domestic product this year, dwarfing the damage wrought on the country's public finances by the global financial crisis.

Georgieva said fixing the public finances could not be ignored but should only happen "once the private sector has durably picked up steam."

IMF staff said increases in the rate and scope of major taxes would be almost inevitable.

Sunak welcomed the IMF report, which he said endorsed his economic policies and his warnings that there would need to be action in future to reduce borrowing.

"Let me be clear on what the Fund is saying today. It's right to support the economy in the short term, but over time, - and in line with other major economies - we must get our public finances back on a sustainable path," he said.

The IMF released more pessimistic forecasts for the British economy which it now saw contracting by 10.4 percent in 2020 and then growing by 5.7 percent in 2021, down from estimates published just a few weeks ago.

Georgieva said the Bank of England should continue to keep monetary policy accommodative because of the "significant risk" that would come in weaker than its 2 percent target.

## China to Set Detailed Economic Targets for 2021-2025



BEIJING (Reuters) - China will set detailed economic targets for the 2021-2025 to help promote higher quality growth, following a meeting of top Chinese leaders, the vice head of the country's state planner said on Friday.

Ning Jizhe, vice head of the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), told a news conference the state planner will "put forward corresponding quantitative targets and specific indicators" for the 14th five-year plan (2021-2025), in line with leaders' recommendations.

The government dropped its annual gross domestic product (GDP) growth target in 2020 for the first time since 2002 because of the uncertainty caused by COVID-19, but it still set targets for employment, inflation and the fiscal deficit. China aims for sustained and healthy economic development in the next five years, with an emphasis on higher quality growth, the ruling Communist Party's Central Committee said in a communique published on Thursday, after a conclave.

The communique did not give a specific percentage growth target for the world's second-largest economy. Targets are expected to be announced when the five-year plan is approved at the annual parliament meeting in early 2021. Government think tanks and economists had made recommendations for average annual gross domestic product (GDP) growth targets including around 5%, 5.5% to 5.6%, policy sources have said.

The communique did say China plans to boost its GDP per capita to a level on par with moderate developed countries by 2035. Analysts at OCBC said that implies China will need to grow by an average 3-4% per year over the next 15 years.

China also will seek to keep residents' income growth in line with economic growth over the 2021-2025 period, and will boost the incomes of low-income groups and expand middle class, Ning said, adding that it aims to let consumption play a basic role in supporting economic growth. At the same conference, Han Wenxiu, a senior Communist Party official, said China will expand market access for foreign investors, and a complete decoupling between China and the United States is unrealistic.

## Pipeline Attack Halts Oil Exports From Iraq's Kurdish Region

BAGHDAD (IP) - Iraq's Kurdish region said an attack on an oil pipeline on October 28 has halted oil exports to Turkey.

The Iraqi Kurdistan Region said in a statement on Saturday that an oil export pipeline from the region to Turkey was targeted on Wednesday (October 28th), which led to a halt in oil exports.

The pipeline transports oil from northern Iraq to the Turkish city of Ceyhan.



## EU Set to Deny Gas Power Plants a Green Investment Label

BRUSSELS (Reuters) - Power plants fuelled by natural gas will not be classed as a sustainable investment in Europe, unless they meet an emissions limit that none currently comply with, according to draft European Union regulations seen by Reuters.

The landmark EU rules, due to be finalised this year, will force providers of financial products to disclose from the end of 2021 which investments meet climate criteria, and can therefore be marketed as "sustainable".

The aim is to steer billions of euros in much-needed private funding into low-carbon projects to help the EU hit ambitious climate goals, and limit so-called greenwashing by stopping the labelling of investments that do not meet the criteria as "green".

The draft rules say that to be classed as a sustainable investment - one that makes a "substantial" contribution to curbing climate change - gas power plants must not produce more than 100 grams of CO2 equivalent per kilowatt hour.

Even Europe's most efficient gas plants produce more than three times this limit, according to estimates by industry and independent climate think tank Ember.

To comply, plants could use carbon capture and storage (CCS) technology - currently, no European gas plants do so, although companies such as Equinor EQNR.OL and Shell RDSa.L are developing local CCS projects in industrial sectors.

"The gas lobby has had its core request conclusively rejected," said Rebecca Vaughan, an analyst tracking industry lobbying for InfluenceMap.

Gas industry groups ramped up lobbying efforts after most gas plants and pipelines were excluded from a provisional list published in March. Companies including BP, Total and Equinor signed an open letter to EU leaders this month calling for the green finance rules to build on the existing gas market and network as the backbone of the bloc's future energy system.

The Commission declined to comment on the draft rules, which are subject to change before publication.

The rules would not ban companies from investing in projects that don't meet the EU's "sustainable" criteria but industry groups have warned that excluding gas plants could mean they will struggle to raise finance - even for investments to reduce emissions.



The EU rules use a tighter emissions limit than the 250g of CO2 per kwh threshold used by the European Investment Bank to screen investments. The EIB will stop financing unabated fossil fuel projects by end-2021.

"Having a threshold that is not in line with the EIB suggests a lack of joined up rules between public and private lending, which is perverse," Eurogas Secretary General James Watson told Reuters.

The draft rules would label certain pipeline investments as sustainable - including refurbishments to enable gas pipelines to carry more low-carbon gases like hydrogen, or repairs to plug methane leaks.

However, investments in new pipelines would only count as sustainable if they are dedicated to transporting low-carbon gas.

Rules on nuclear power investments will be added following a Commission

## France Economy Bounces Back in Third Quarter



PARIS (Dispatches) - Economic activity in France bounced back strongly in the third quarter following the lifting of the coronavirus lockdown, data showed on Friday, but the government still expects Europe's second-biggest economy to remain deep in recession for the year as a whole.

French gross domestic product expanded by 18.2 percent in the period from July to September compared with the preceding three months, the national statistics office Insee calculated in preliminary data.

Nevertheless, economic output was "sharply lower than it had been before the crisis," with GDP down by 4.3 percent on a year-on-year basis, the statisticians said.

And while Insee did not provide a forecast for the fourth quarter, Economy Minister Bruno Le Maire insisted that the country would remain mired in recession across the whole of 2020 as it re-enters lockdown to try to stem the second wave of virus infections.

The government is projecting economic contraction of 11 percent for this year, a slight downward revision from an earlier forecast of 10 percent, Le Maire told France Inter radio shortly after Insee published the third-quarter GDP data.

"It's a moderate revision, simply because we've had a very strong third quarter," he said. The French economy has considerable capacity to bounce back."

The recovery in GDP in the July-September period was driven primarily by a jump of 17.3 percent in household spending, Insee calculated.

Public spending also increased, investment rebounded sharply, and French exports jumped by 23.3 percent quarter-on-quarter, the data showed.

## Poll Finds Majority of Europeans Would Vote for Biden

PARIS (Dispatches) - Joe Biden would hammer Donald Trump in the upcoming U.S. presidential election if it were Europeans heading to the ballot box, a poll showed Friday, underscoring the incumbent's unpopularity across the Atlantic.

Among five countries surveyed by pollsters BVA -- Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Spain -- the Germans were the most enthusiastic Biden supporters, with 66 percent saying they would back the Democrat if allowed to vote.

Just eight percent of Germans said they would vote Trump, while 27 percent were undecided or said they would abstain. Trump's best score was in Italy, where 15 percent would make their mark for the Republican candidate.

But Biden's score was close to three times as high there, at 42 percent.

Across Europe, Trump's decision to withdraw the US from the 2015 Paris climate agreement was one of his least popular moves of the last four years, with single-digit approval ratings everywhere but Spain, where 11 percent agreed.

His plan to build a wall along the U.S. border with Mexico was almost as unpopular, with Brits the biggest fans at only 17 percent approval.

A large majority of Europeans say they are interested in the election, with Germans following the race for the White House most closely at 85 percent, while other countries clustered around the 70-percent mark.

Asked their opinion of the US more generally, just 22 percent of Germans said they viewed the country positively, 12 points behind than the next-most-sceptical Brits.

Italy was the most favorable to the U.S., with 38 percent saying they had a good opinion.

BVA said it surveyed a total of 11,737 people across 10 countries in October to compile the survey.

## Xiaomi Grabs Smartphone Marketshare in Q3 as Huawei Wobbles

SHANGHAI (Reuters) - Chinese smartphone maker Xiaomi Corp grabbed market share in China and Europe in the September quarter as rival Huawei Technologies' dominance slipped due to U.S. sanctions, market data showed.

Xiaomi took third spot on the global leaderboard. It sold 47.1 million handsets in the third quarter, a 45% surge from a year earlier, according to market research firm Canalys.

The global smartphone market contracted 1% year-on-year in July-September with shipments down to 348 million units, but rose 22% from the pandemic-pummeled second quarter.

Samsung Electronics Co Ltd regained the top spot, helped by sales in India, where Chinese brands suffered due to political tensions.

Huawei slipped to number two globally, and Apple, which only launched the new iPhone earlier this month,



took the number four spot in the September quarter.

Still, the iPhone 11 was the quarter's best-selling phone in China despite having no 5G technology, market research firm Counterpoint said in a note on Thursday.

The iPhone 12 release timing drove down Apple's sales in Greater China by 29% in the September quarter, the company said on Thursday. It expects to return to growth in China in the current quarter.

In China, Xiaomi was the only brand that recorded growth, according to Counterpoint, with sales up 8% year-on-year. The overall Chinese smartphone market continued to shrink, with shipments falling 14%.

"Xiaomi executed with aggression to seize shipments from Huawei," Canalys analyst Mo Jia said in a note on Friday. In Europe, Huawei's shipments slumped by a quarter while Xiaomi's jumped 88%, he said.

## China Urges...

FROM PAGE 1

Andrew Batson at Gavekal Research Company in Hong Kong said, "US sanctions on Chinese technology leaders were game-changing events for China's leadership," adding, "The moves showed that the US had enormous leverage over China due to its dominance of core semiconductor technologies, and that the US was willing to deploy that leverage for geopolitical goals."

Han Wenxiu, a senior party finance official, said at a press briefing on Friday morning that, "Only by being technologically self-sufficient can we support high-quality development."

Qu Hongbin, chief China economist at HSBC, said, "There will be more of a policy push for higher R&D spending in the coming years, especially in strategic sectors such as biotechnology, semiconductors and new energy vehicles."

Qu added that the government's official research and development target could be raised to three percent of gross domestic product compared with just 2.2 per cent at present.

According to the data released by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) on Saturday, China's manufacturing sector continued growing in October as its purchasing managers' index (PMI) was operating above the expansion level of 51.4 percent.

The PMI, a key gauge of manufacturing activity in China, has largely bounced back after plunging in February as a result of tough pandemic-control measures. The index level was 0.1 percentage less than the previous month.

The NBS said that the PMI has been at 51.0 percent and above since the beginning of July and it has been in the expansion range for eight months running since the beginning of March.

## IRGC...

FROM PAGE 1

"The production and distribution of masks is an important issue," he said. "The Basij forces should provide masks in busy places."

"Providing livelihood packages to families who have financially suffered from coronavirus is currently being done by different sections of the IRGC," said Salami.

He also ordered the IRGC provincial offices to distribute hygienic packages among the low-income households and promote the health protocols for tackling the coronavirus infection.

## Foreign Powers...

FROM PAGE 1

He reiterated that the Islamic Republic of Iran, which is considered as Axis of Resistance against the enemy, has been attacked by the enemy with political pressures, military threats, cruel and tough economic sanctions.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Mousavi pointed to the presence of foreign powers in the region and added, "A major portion of factors behind formation of these crises is due to the role of foreign powers. Unfortunately, some factors are also the result of divergent policies and behaviors within the Islamic world, which are far from rational and religious principles."

One of the most important reasons behind spread of current crises in the Islamic world is the lack of convergence and weakness of movement towards the proximity of Islamic religions as well as lack of sufficient attention to the unity, amity and solidarity of Muslims, he said, adding, "Thus, Unity, Amity and empathy as well as convergence in the Islamic world is more essential than ever in the contemporary world of today."

According to the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, the issue of unity today is at the top of Islamic issues and strengthening the movement towards Islamic convergence is the first necessity of Islamic world in the current situation, he added.

## Iran Initiative...

FROM PAGE 1

The Iranian diplomat added, "We are waiting for the response by the four countries [Azerbaijan, Armenia, Russia, and Turkey] in a short time in order to pave the way for resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh in a way that is accepted by all."

"Immediate implementation of the plan is not easy, but we are not disappointed and we will continue our efforts," Araqchi noted. He embarked on a regional tour on Tuesday, which first took him to Baku and then to Moscow, Yerevan and Ankara to present Iran's initiative for solving the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis peacefully.

## Herd Immunity...

FROM PAGE 1

The director-general said that the strategy of natural herd immunity is morally unconscionable and unfeasible, adding that safe and effective vaccines are the only way to make it possible.

"It also reinforces to me just how morally unconscionable and unfeasible the so-called natural herd immunity strategy is. Not only would it lead to millions more unnecessary deaths, it would also lead to a significant number of people facing a long road to full recovery. Herd immunity is only possible with safe and effective vaccines that are distributed equitably around the world. And until we have a vaccine, governments and people must do all that they can to suppress transmission, which is the best way to prevent these post-COVID long-term consequences," said Ghebreyesus.

Ghebreyesus stressed that governments and people should try their best to curb the spread of the virus before the vaccine is developed, which is the best way to prevent long-term consequences of the virus. The WHO Emergency Committee on COVID-19, after a two-day meeting, unanimously agreed on Friday that the pandemic still constituted a public health emergency of international concern.

The meeting was convened by Ghebreyesus under the International Health Regulations to review the pandemic situation and progress made on the temporary recommendations. The pandemic continues to require a coordinated international response, according to the committee.

## Koeman Not Worried About Barca Future

MADRID (Reuters) - Barcelona president Josep Maria Bartomeu's resignation has not left coach Ronald Koeman fearing for his job. Bartomeu and the entire board of directors resigned on Tuesday rather than facing a vote of no confidence, which was scheduled for next month. It was Bartomeu who appointed the Dutchman in the close season, after sacking Quique Setien. Yet despite a promising start Barca have lost their last two league games and go into Saturday's meeting with Alaves trailing Real Madrid, who beat their rivals 3-1 last week, by six points.

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## CAF President Ahmad Tests Positive for Covid-19

PARIS (AFP)- The president of the Confederation of African Football Ahmad learned on Friday that he had tested positive for Covid-19, he said on his Twitter account. "This morning, I've been declared positive to #Covid19. I have mild symptoms, but I'm well," he wrote. A CAF press release said Ahmad, who had been in Morocco for the Confederation Cup final on Sunday, had arrived in Cairo on Wednesday and started to present mild flu symptoms. He underwent a test on Thursday which came back positive on Friday.

# Arsenal and United Clashes No Longer Title Deciders

LONDON (Dispatches) - The days when the winners of the two league matches between Arsenal and Manchester United decided where the title was destined are over, United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer said Friday.

The former United striker featured in many of those matches when managerial legends Alex Ferguson and Wenger were in charge in games that often boiled over both on and off the pitch.

Such fireworks are unlikely on Sunday at least off the pitch as 15th-placed United host Arsenal, who are two points better off than their opponents having played a game more. Solskjaer and his Gunners counterpart Mikel Arteta are very different personalities to Ferguson and Wenger.

"When I played it was between us both to win the league, so that was a fierce rivalry," said Solskjaer.

"There were all sorts of old stories -- the passion, the excitement and the importance of those games.

"We knew if we took six points off them we'd more or less win the league, or vice versa.

"There's still the rivalry, the history, but now we don't think about them as our rivals or anyone as our rivals.

"We just need to put points on the board."

Solskjaer, whose side have shown character in rebounding from their 6-1 humiliation at home to Tottenham Hotspur earlier this season, said Arteta was clearly making his mark at Arsenal.

The Spaniard played under Wenger at the Gunners before having a spell as assistant to Pep Guardiola at Manchester City.



However, he left last season to take over at Arsenal replacing compatriot Unai Emery, and guided the club to FA Cup success.

"You can see what he's doing; he's got his own ideas," said Solskjaer.

"He's worked under a top manager (Wenger) before.

"It's a great foundation to build from."

Solskjaer said it was hard for him to judge himself on how far he had brought United since replacing Jose Mourinho in December 2018.

"We want to develop, we want to improve," he said.

"It's not up to me to say how far we've come.

"I've been very pleased with the response after the start of the season.

"We had to hang in early on and try to get points on the board.

"Now we feel fit and strong and competitive in every game."

United's home thrashing by Spurs is one of a number of surprising results this season already -- Aston Villa whipped champions Liverpool 7-2 -- and this makes Solskjaer feel it will be a much more competitive title race.

"So many clubs have developed strength in depth and ability to challenge for trophies," the 47-year-old Norwegian said.

"The top two (Liverpool and Manchester City) have run away with it in the last two seasons but this year a lot of us would hope to put up a challenge.

"Back then (when Solskjaer played) it was Arsenal, then Chelsea (who challenged United).

"Now it's more exciting and interesting for the fans. Anything can happen, as this season has shown."

## Alaba Future at Bayern Still Unclear



BERLIN (Reuters) - Bayern Munich defender David Alaba's future at the European champions is in doubt, coach Hansi Flick said on Friday, with months-long contract talks having made no progress towards a new deal.

The 28-year-old Austria international has been at Bayern since his youth days in 2008 and has been a key defender for many years, with his current deal running out in 2021.

But several rounds of contract talks between the player and the club have so far failed to reach an agreement.

With Alaba becoming a free agent in the summer, Bayern could decide to sell him in the winter transfer window in their last chance to cash in on a move if there is no new deal.

"I really hope that he signs a new deal with Bayern because I think he knows what the current situation is in Munich," said Flick who led the Bavarians to five titles in 2020, including the domestic double and the Champions League, after taking over a year ago. "We have a lot of fun, it is a good atmosphere in the team and we play successful football. It is a club that belongs among the best in the world.

## Hulkenberg Not Stressed as He Considers F1 Future

ROME (Dispatches) - Formula One super-sub Nico Hulkenberg said this week he is staying cool as he ponders his future in the sport -- not knowing if he could be racing for Red Bull next year or watching from the stands again.

The 33-year-old German driver has produced outstanding performances when called up at short notice as a reserve driver for Racing Point this year, but knows his hopes of landing a permanent seat rely on other team decisions. "The situation in Formula One is that there are 20 seats and that is super limited," he told The ESPN F1podcast.

"Very few numbers... This is a thing that is out of my control and other people make the decision for me -- or about me, but I'm not too stressed."

Hulkenberg said he had produced competitive performances when called up this year. "When I had the chance -- and that's the one thing, if you are not doing a full season, that is kind of difficult... You're not that visible and people tend to forget quickly.

"They always tend just to remember the last race so it's not easy to make an impression. I was happy to be able to have some races and to perform well. I think I did what I had to do and now it's up to them."

Hulkenberg has been linked with a potential vacancy at Red Bull where London-born Thai driver Alex Albon has struggled as team-mate to Max Verstappen this year.

The outfit has said it will consider Albon's future after this weekend's two-day Emilia Romagna Grand Prix at Imola with team chief Christian Horner stressing it is Red Bull's preference to keep him.

Hulkenberg is likely to be in competition with Mexican Sergio Perez, the man he stood in for with Racing Point at both Silverstone races in July, for that seat if Red Bull decide to switch to a more experienced and reliable points-scoring driver alongside Verstappen.

Both Alfa Romeo and Haas, two teams powered by Ferrari, have yet to confirm their 2021 driver line-ups, but Hulkenberg is only an outsider as a candidate for those seats as they are almost certain to go to Ferrari-approved drivers.

# Djokovic Suffers Heaviest Loss in Vienna



VIENNA (Dispatches) - Novak Djokovic shrugged off his heaviest defeat on Friday by insisting he had achieved his goal of wrapping up the year-end world number one spot for a record-equalling sixth time.

Djokovic was stunned 6-2, 6-1 by Italian lucky loser Lorenzo Sonego in the quarter-finals of the Vienna ATP tournament.

But having won two rounds in the Austrian capital, 33-year-old Djokovic is virtually guaranteed equalling Pete Sampras's record of securing the year-ending top ranking for the sixth time.

"Climbing the year-end number one had an effect on me," Djokovic told a news conference.

"I have done what I came here for, securing the number one. And I'm completely fine with today's result.

"I'm healthy and looking forward to a strong finish in London (the season-ending ATP Finals)".

Italian Sonego, ranked 42 and who had initially lost in qualifying last weekend, is the first lucky loser ever to beat Djokovic. The only other time Djokovic had won just three games was at the 2005 Australian Open at the hands of Marat Safin in a best-of-five set encounter.

"He just blew me off the court, that's all," Djokovic told aptour.com.

"He was better in every segment of the game. It was a pretty bad match from my side, but amazing from his side. "He definitely deserved this result," added the Serb star who was playing his first tournament since his Roland Garros final defeat to Rafael Nadal three weeks ago.

Djokovic can only be denied the end of year world number one ranking if Nadal takes an unlikely wild card into the Sofia tournament next month.

The Spaniard has already said, however, that travelling to Bulgaria after next week's Paris Masters and before London is not on his agenda.

## Van Dijk's Knee Surgery A Success



LONDON (Dispatches) - Virgil van Dijk has undergone successful knee surgery and will begin rehabilitation, Premier League champions Liverpool said on Friday.

The club would not say how long the 29-year-old central defender would be out. Van Dijk, who was pivotal in both Liverpool's Champions League success in 2019 and their title triumph last season, suffered cruciate ligament damage after a tackle from Everton goalkeeper Jordan Pickford earlier this month.

"Virgil van Dijk has undergone surgery on the knee ligament injury he sustained earlier this month," read a club statement.

"The Liverpool defender's planned operation took place in London and was conducted successfully.

"Van Dijk will now immediately focus on the beginning of his rehabilitation with the support of the Reds' medical department.

"No timeframe has been placed on the Dutchman's return to action."

Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp told his press conference on the eve of their Premier League home game with West Ham that Van Dijk was doing okay.

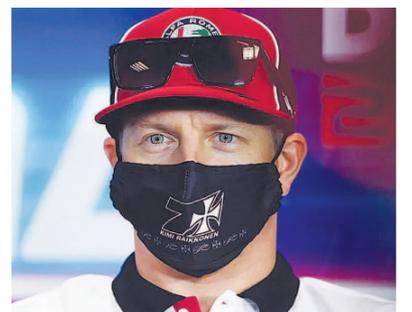
"This time (after a operation) is always unpleasant. He is good as good as can be," said Klopp.

The 53-year-old German said it was time to move on even though Liverpool have spoken to referee chief Mike Riley about why VAR was not referred to.

Pickford's challenge has been labelled as "stupid" by Liverpool midfielder Georginio Wijnaldum but Klopp drew a line under it.

"I don't want to talk about this anymore. I would immediately if it would change anything but it doesn't," he said.

## Raikkonen to Remain With Second Family Alfa Romeo



ROME (Dispatches) - Finland's former Formula One champion Kimi Raikkonen has been retained by the team he calls his "second family" Alfa Romeo for next season along with team-mate Antonio Giovinazzi.

Raikkonen, crowned world champion in 2007 driving for Ferrari, will be able to extend his record number of Grand Prix starts which he set earlier this season.

The 41-year-old known as 'The Iceman' -- who finished runner-up twice in the world championship -- will be competing in his 19th season at the highest level.

Giovinazzi, 26, is Ferrari's reserve driver and they saw enough of his ability this season to give him another campaign -- Ferrari control one of the Alfa seats.

The announcement comes a day after Alfa Romeo confirmed its commercial deal to brand and back the Swiss-based team that started its life in F1 as Sauber in 1993.

Raikkonen, who made his F1 debut with Sauber in 2001, before moving back to them in 2019 after a second stint with Ferrari, said the team was like a home from home for him.

"It is more than a team to me; it is like a second family," he said.

"So many of the faces that were around me when I made my F1 debut in 2001 are still here and the unique atmosphere of this team is what gives me that extra motivation to keep going.

"This is a team that values hard work over words and this fits well with my style."

Raikkonen, who is 17th in the drivers' standings with two points this season, added he hoped he and Giovinazzi could move up a gear next season and challenge for more points.

Alfa Romeo said the line-up highlighted the team's "commitment to continuity".

"I still see the passion and motivation in Kimi every time I see him at work," said team boss Frederic Vasseur.

"He can be trusted to deliver 100% of what the car can produce and he is a true leader for the people working around him.