

**Health Ministry Spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari Said on Sunday That a Total of 475 More Iranians Have Died From Coronavirus Disease Over the Past 24 Hours Bringing the Total Deaths to 44,802**

# IRAN NEWS

**Iran Says That the North-South Corridor's Maritime Route Under the Cover TIR (Transport International par la Route) Carnet Had Begun by Sending the First Ship From Iran to Kazakhstan**

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## U.S. Not Qualified For Talks

TEHRAN (FNA) - Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Quds Force Commander Brigadier General Esmacel Qa'ani underlined that the U.S. officials do not deserve talks with Iran, warning that Washington is just after containing Tehran's missile and regional power.

"All wise people working for the enemies have understood and some of them say, although some do not, that the time for showing the same behavior they had with the Islamic Republic on the first days of the Revolution has ended. Today all hues and cries of enemies are aimed at preventing (controlling) our speed (of progress)," General Qa'ani said.

He added that all enemies' hostilities and deployment of forces in the region are aimed at preventing Iran's development of its missile and regional power, and stressed, "The time when they attacked us and we defended has ended."

General Qa'ani warned of enemies' various plots against Iran and their disloyalty to the deals and treaties that they have endorsed (alluding to Trump's unilateral withdrawal from the nuclear deal), and said, "You witness every day that all leaders sit to the table and sign a paper and then they violate their signature before the eyes of the world people with full rudeness and shamelessness. They are not qualified for negotiations."

His comments came after U.S. media reports claimed that Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araqchi has tried to contact President-elect Joe Biden's advisers.

## Iran Attracted Some \$4b In Foreign Investment

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance said that from March 20th to September 22nd, 2020, 3 billion and 800 million dollars of foreign resources have been attracted for investment in Iran.

Speaking with Iranian TV channel one on Saturday night, Iran's Economic Minister Farhad Dejpsand stated: "We expect these investments to be fully in use in Iran by the end of this Iranian year and for the next two years."

Referring to the efforts of Iranian knowledge-based companies to meet domestic needs, Dejpsand stressed: "Due to the efforts made by the knowledge-based companies, we have become an exporter of equipment needed to combat with the coronavirus outbreak, in which once we were only an importer."

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## Iran-China Trade Volume Hits \$11.1b Amid Pandemic, Sanctions



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - According to the latest statistics released by General Administration of Customs of the People's Republic of China (GACC), the trade volume between Iran and China has declined 38.5 percent in the first three quarters of the current year comparing to the same period in 2019 due to the sanctions and the outbreak of coronavirus, Tasnim news agency reported.

According to the report, Iran and China's trade volume fell to \$11.19b in the first three quarters of 2020 which shows 38.5 percent slump comparing to the same period in 2019. The trade volume of both countries in 2019 and in the same period was \$18.17b.

The report shows that both Iran and China's exports have shrunk but the decline in China's imports from Iran has been more than its exports.

China has exported goods worth of \$6.62b in the first three quarters of 2020 which shows 8.3 percent fall comparing to the same period in 2019 which was around \$7.22b. But China's imports from Iran has seen a considerable decline of 58.3 percent and has hit \$4.57b. The Southeast Asian country had imported goods worth of \$10.19b from Iran in the same period in 2019.

The trade balance of both countries has been \$2.05b in favor of China.

The slump in the oil price, the U.S. sanctions, decrease in fuel consumption in China and above all the pandemic have been the major factors behind the slump in bilateral trade.

The GACC report shows that China's trade with the world has witnessed a single digit slump and it has been 1.8 percent while its trade decline with Iran has been a double digit figure.

Comparing the statistics, one can easily find that China's trade with Iran, comparing to its other trade partners, has insignificant and Iran's share of China's trade in the first three quarters of 2020 was just 0.34 percent.

China's trade with the U.S. has been 35 times more than its trade with Iran in the first three quarters of 2020 and it has been around \$401b despite the pandemic.

Iran has ranked 49th among China's trade partners so far this year. The U.S. has accounted for 12 percent of China's total trade volume in the first three quarters of 2020.

## IAEA Confirms Inspectors Access to All Intended Sites in Iran

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The International Atomic Energy Agency has confirmed the additional access of the organization's inspectors to the sites in Iran.

The latest report of the IAEA confirms the nuclear watchdog's inspectors had additional access to all the intended sites in Iran, emphasizing that the organization is indeed continuing to verify Iran's nuclear activities under the Safeguards Agreement.

The report, published in 40 paragraphs, confirms the verification of Iran's nuclear activities and cooperation with International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors.

Despite Iran's extensive cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency, IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi under pressure from the West called for greater transparency about Iran's nuclear activities on Wednesday.

His remarks came as the Islamic Republic of Iran and the International Atomic Energy Agency issued a joint statement in late August, at the end of Rafael Grossi's two-day visit to Tehran, stating, "Iran has voluntarily provided access to the Agency's two designated sites and will facilitate the Agency's verification activities to resolve these issues." 219

Grossi says the presence of uranium particles at an undeclared location in Iran still needs to be fully and promptly clarified by Tehran. Iran's ambassador to the agency says while it took the IAEA eight months to analyze samples, Iran has only had two and a half months to work on the latest findings of the agency and provide clarifications.

Grossi also reported that Iran has begun feeding uranium gas into a cascade of more advanced centrifuges at its underground enrichment plant at Natanz. The move is part of measures undertaken by Iran beyond the limitations set in the nuclear deal following the US withdrawal in 2018.

The IAEA chief says the operation of these more advanced centrifuges will not lead to a significant increase in the volume of Iran's enriched uranium, currently 12 times the limit mentioned in the nuclear deal.

Iran says it's ready to reverse all the steps it has taken beyond its commitments when sanctions are lifted and the European signatories to the deal comply with their commitment to cooperate in the economic and nuclear fields with Tehran.

## ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

### China Disappointed by Trump, Concerned About Biden

Perhaps it is too soon to have conclusive remarks regarding when and in what condition Joe Biden will take office in the White House, but what is definite is the climate of conceding the defeat in Donald Trump's team is gradually providing the ground for crossing the current tension in Washington.

Of course, in this condition that China has made the most due to Trump's unbalanced behavior, the country is also waiting for a smart, lasting and deep approach regarding way of cooperation with the U.S. President-Elect Biden. Of course, I should mention that in the past, it was usually thought that leaders of Communist Party of China preferred the U.S. Republican Party president-elects for cooperation or in their political ping-pong policy due to this reasoning that Republican Party pays less attention to the human rights issues and pays attention mostly to protecting the economic and trade interests of their country. But it is obvious that Trump has not been a conventional and normal Republican and has not been what the Chinese expected, and without any doubt we can say that he is not even considered as the flag-bearer of declaring the violation of human rights in China.

That unlike the White House strategy in Trump's term, Biden will get close to Europe without any delay is and will be the source of concern for China because close coordination between EU and the U.S., regarding the policies related to rein China in the fields like technology, climate change, trade and human rights, is not in favor of China President Xi Jinping. Of course, it should be noted that so far EU member states have resisted against the Trump Administration demand for their support of the U.S. in its more confrontation with China. But Biden's alignment with Europe will enjoy even deeper cooperation between the U.S. and EU.

During Trump's era the ground for alignment rolled towards a strategic division with Europe insofar as Europe mulled to gear up for forming an army independent from the NATO because of their concern about Trump's re-election. For European countries, which are supporters of confronting with authoritarianism and advancing the five-year and even long-term strategic plans, Trump's policies were an annoying nightmare. But it is expected Biden with employing the past experiences to take more vigorous stances in alignment with Europe regarding Beijing.

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### 3rd Round of Iran-Ukraine Talks to Be Held on Compensation

TEHRAN (MNA) - An informed source announced that the third round of Iran-Ukraine talks over the flight 752 incident will be held in the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv on the compensation issue.

The next round of talks will be held in Kyiv in late November or early December, said an informed source to Mehr News Agency.

It was scheduled to discuss the compensation of the victims in the second round of talks in Tehran, but it was postponed to the next round due to the announcement of the Ukrainian delegation that it was not ready, the source added.

So far, the Foreign Ministry has not announced the exact time of the meeting, and usually one week to ten days before the start of the talks, other members of the Iranian negotiating team will be notified of the time of the talks, the source said.

Answering the question whether the third round is the final round of negotiations or the negotiations may continue, the source said that it depends on the process of the third round of negotiations.

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## Iran to Host 5th Renewable Energy Confab in Mid-December

TEHRAN (FNA) - Vice-Presidency for Science and Technology announced that the 5th Iran Renewable Energy Conference and Exhibition (IRAN REC) and 2nd National Renewable Energy Award will be held in Tehran on December 16.

According to the Vice-Presidency, IRAN REC will be held on December 16, 2020, through videoconference due to the coronavirus pandemic.

This international event is going to focus on exploring challenges ahead in the development of renewable energy and providing solutions to improve the business environment in this area during the coronavirus conditions.

## No Easy Future For Iran-U.S. Ties

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN – Foreign Ministry Spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh believes there is no easy future for Iran-U.S. ties.

Speaking at a presser, the spokesman was also asked about the likelihood of the next U.S. administration's return to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) - an international nuclear accord between Iran and world countries that Washington deserted under Trump in 2018 - and potential U.S.-Iranian interaction in such event.

He said it was too early to pass any comments in this regard given the fact that the next administration was yet to take over in the United States.

However, what Iran was concerned with was Washington's behavior not its words, he said.

Besides, any future interactive process between the countries would not be an "easy" one given the litany of the U.S.'s atrocities against the Iranian nation since the 1979 victory of Iran's Islamic Revolution, the official said.

"Iran will never forget such antagonism. Our demands from the U.S. stay the same," Khatibzadeh noted.

Amid news of Israeli adventurism targeting Iranian interests in Syria, he the Foreign Ministry warned that Iran would deliver a "crushing response" to any party seeking to trouble the Islamic Republic's presence in the Arab country.

Khatibzadeh refused to verify media reports alleging Israeli strikes against the Iranian targets or confirm any Iranian casualties, but asserted, "Iran has never compromised with anyone over [the issue of] its national security."

"Anyone, who could try to obstruct Iran's advisory presence in Syria will be served with a crushing response," the official added. The Israeli regime, he said, "knows this that the era of hitting and running is far over. It [therefore] treads carefully."

However, Tel Aviv's aggressive attitude is "irremediable" and can only be confronted with comprehensive resistance on every front where it seeks to create disturbances, Khatibzadeh said.

The Islamic Republic was the first country to rush to Syria's assistance after the Arab nation came under the scourge of the Takfiri terrorist group of Daesh in 2014.

The outfit is widely believed to have received logistical backing from the US. Ever since emerging in Syria and neighboring Iraq, it has also been boosted on numerous occasions thanks to Israeli airstrikes targeting Syrian defenses and Damascus' allies.

Syrian media have reported that the country's air defenses intercepted a number of Israeli rockets which were fired from the occupied Golan.

Separately, Khatibzadeh commented on Mike Pompeo's recent visit to the occupied territories, his last in his capacity as the US secretary of state, and the



remarks that he made during the visit.

Speaking to Israeli paper The Jerusalem Post, Pompeo boasted during the visit about US President Donald Trump administration's brokering of "peace deals" between Tel Aviv and regional Arab states. The top diplomat alleged that the raft of "normalization" deals had led to "isolation" of Iran.

Khatibzadeh regretted the "treachery" of the Arab regimes – the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Sudan – in their entering the détente with Tel Aviv.

Without their betrayal, he said, Pompeo would not have been able to go about "whitewashing inhumane Israeli action" today.

"Those who created such [enabling] atmosphere for the US should be held accountable," the spokesman said, calling the betrayal and the White House's unabashed defense of the Tel Aviv regime "two sides of the same coin."

The spokesperson said the Arab states were no more than a handful of "notorious" regimes that were isolated even among their own peoples, calling it unlikely that they could draw much benefit from endearing themselves to the US and Israel.

Khatibzadeh, meanwhile, referred to reports about the United States' potential designation of Yemen's Houthi Ansarullah movement as a "terrorist organization."

The popular defense group has been fending for Yemen since 2015, when Saudi Arabia and its allies started a U.S.-backed invasion of the impoverished country. The invasion has killed tens of thousands of Yemenis and turned the entire country into the scene of the world's "worse humanitarian crisis."

Khatibzadeh said the Saudi support for the blacklisting "comes as no surprise" as Riyadh has been stonewalling efforts aimed at ending Yemen's crisis.

He cited some instances of the kingdom's atrocities against the Arab world's poorest nation such as the use of cluster bombs against civilians and bombarding some areas of Yemen on more than 17 occasions.

The Islamic Republic, however, considers respect for the Yemeni people's demands, intra-Yemeni negotiation and adherence to standing international conflict-resolution mechanisms as the only viable solution for the crisis, Khatibzadeh stated.

## Zarif, UN Envoy Discuss Syria Developments

TEHRAN (IFP) - Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif had a meeting with United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen on the latest developments related to the Syria crisis.

In the Sunday meeting, the top Iranian diplomat touched upon attempts by certain countries to torpedo the trend of the political settlement of Syria issues.

"Good opportunities emerged in recent years to end the Syria crisis, but each time we saw some countries try to neutralize the attempts made and to ruin those chances," said Zarif.

The Iranian foreign minister also highlighted the necessity of lifting cruel and unfair sanctions against the Syrian government and people, particularly amid the coronavirus outbreak.

Pedersen, in turn, presented a report on the latest status of the Syrian Constitutional Committee as well as his efforts for the committee to hold its next meeting.

Pedersen referred to Iran-UN cooperation in resolving the decade-long Syria crisis, stressing the importance of Iran's role in that trend.



## Tehran, Minsk Keen on Inter-Parliamentary Diplomacy

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iranian Ambassador in Minsk Saeed Yari and Chairman of Belarus Parliament Commission on International Affairs Andrei Savinykh discussed ways to develop inter-parliamentary diplomacy.

In the meeting between Saeed Yari and Andrei Savinykh, discussed the latest developments of bilateral and multilateral relations between Iran and Belarus and other issues such as parliament, politics, and economic cooperation.

The two officials also discussed the methods to expand and strengthen trade ties and international cooperation between the two countries.

Stressing the role of Iran in the Middle East, Savinykh said that Iran is an important partner of Belarus in the region.

Iran's ambassador Yari referred to the consultation and cooperation between Tehran and Minsk in international organizations, and called for expansion of relations in every field, especially economic and trade ties in the framework of Eurasia Economic Union (EAEU).

The two parties had beneficial talks about a wide range of issues, including the road map for exchange of parliamentary delegations and video-conference consultations at the level of parliament speakers, heads of commissions of international affairs and foreign policies, and the heads of parliamentary friendship groups as well.



## Basij Forces Ready to Thwart Enemies' Conspiracies, Plots

TEHRAN (MNA) – Army of the Islamic Republic of Iran issued a statement on Sun. on the occasion of Basij Week, calling the Basij forces at the level of Iranian nation and one of the effective institutions for foiling conspiracies of enemies.

*The full text of the statement is read as follows:*

Today, "Basij" is a driving force for growth, progress, development and achieving sublime goals of the Establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, inspiring the sincere and loyal forces of the country and has been turned into a symbol of realizing the slogan of "We Can".

Basij has proven its legitimacy in all fields, ranging from production to services, protection of the country against enemies' plots and ill-wishers of this nation, presence in scientific, technical fields and access to modern sciences, etc.

"Basij" was established on Nov. 25, 1979, at the decision of the great founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran the late Imam Khomeini (RA) who saw the threats and hostilities of ill-wishers of the Establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran. On this day, the late Imam Khomeini (RA) ordered the formation of Basij and the army of a 20-million people to confront enemies' plots. Since then, Basij was turned into one of the eternal and efficient institutions of the Islamic Revolution of Iran.

While congratulating the Basij Week to the zealous Basiji Volunteer Forces of the country, the Army of the Islamic Republic of Iran considers Basij forces as the powerful and strong arm of the Establishment who are ready to stand against soft- and hard attacks of enemies under the auspices of the leadership of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution in line with thwarting all conspiracies of enemies and ill-wishers of the Establishment.

## NIDC Drills 82 Wells in 8 Months

TEHRAN (Shana) – The National Iranian Drilling Company (NIDC) drilled 82 oil and gas wells over the course of the first 8 months of the current Iranian calendar year which began on March 21.

According to NIDC, Saeed Akbari, head of the company's drilling operations, said: "Of these, 23 were development/appraisal wells, 57 were workovers and two were exploratory wells."

He added 63 of the wells were spudded in the operational scope of the National Iranian South Oil Company (NISOC), seven in fields operated by the Iranian Offshore Oil Company, seven for the Petroleum Engineering and Development Company, two for the Iranian Central Oil Fields Company, one in the form of a project and two were drilled and completed in the exploration management projects of the National Iranian Oil Company.

The Deputy Head of Drilling Operations at NIDC further stated: "From March 21 to November 20, as a result of continuous and effective cooperation and interaction between the company's specialists and employer companies, drilling operations and completion of 14 wells were achieved 256 days earlier than planned."

Akbari stated that the company's fleets had drilled 45,406 meters during the period, adding this company has the largest drilling fleet in the country and the region with 70 light, heavy and super heavy drilling rigs for offshore and onshore operations.

## Iran-Afghanistan Cooperation of Particular Importance

TEHRAN (MNA) – Appreciating the role of Iran FM's in developing relations between Iran and Afghanistan, Foreign Minister Mohammed Haneef Atmar said that the two countries' cooperation is of particular importance.

In a tweet on late Saturday, Atmar wrote, "I would like to thank my dear friend and brother Dr Zarif for congratulating me on receiving Afghan Parliament members' votes of confidence."

"Our friendship and cooperation are of particular importance for the further development of relations between our countries," he added.

"I appreciate the role of His Excellency in this regard," he said.

## U.S. Power Fading in Face-Off With Iranian Resistance

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN (MNA) – Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps Major says the Islamic Revolution's resistance power has managed to weaken the U.S.' strategic position.

"The United States is in dire financial crisis, and its military power is exhausted as a powerful resistance [Iran] has driven it out of its strategic position within 40 years," General Hossein Salami said on Sunday.

Referring to the Iranian nation's awareness and insight in the face of the United States and its allies, the IRGC chief said, "While the enemy has targeted the health, security, livelihood, religion and culture of the Iranians, their malicious plans will never be realized as the Iranian nation has chosen patience and perseverance in the face of all the maximum pressures."

"This is just the beginning as this nation has never relied on the oppressive enemy even for a moment," Major General Salami added.

The IRGC chief also pointed to the Basij Week, which marks the anniversary of the Basij force's creation nearly a year after the country's 1979 Islamic Revolution under the direction of the late founder of the Islamic Republic, Imam Khomeini.

Major General Salami said that Basiji thinking has no geographical limitations as it spread through the furthest points in the world.

"Basij discourse has proliferated in Yemen, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq; it has even spread to Latin America and parts of Africa," he added.

"Imam Khomeini with his miracle turned the mobilization on earth into a transcendent truth and by the will of God planted this noble lineage in the land of faith and belief of all people," the IRGC chief said.

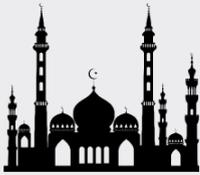
"Basij is a blessed lineage that has its roots in the faith of the people and its branches in the spiritual world," the top commander added.

Referring to the spiritual and sincere approach of the Basij in serving the people, he said, "The Basij forces are in fact the true fighters in the path of God."

"History has proved over the past 41 years the Basij has always been helping the nation in any seemingly insurmountable difficulty; it is a thought that breaks deadlocks and opens the way for battle in the path of God."

He added, "Today, the Basij is a point of reliance, trust and inner peace of the people because in times of crisis, such as floods, earthquakes and poverty, it is the Basij that is present among the people."





## PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	11:50
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:12
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:21
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:49

109. Ah! These are the sort of men on whose behalf ye may contend in this world; but who will contend with Allah on their behalf on the Day of Judgment, or who will carry their affairs through?  
110. If any one does evil or wrongs his own soul but afterwards seeks Allah's forgiveness, he will find Allah Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful.  
Surah 4. Women (109-110)

# Iran Exports to EU Soar by 13%

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN - Iran exported 563 million euros worth of commodities to the European Union member states in the nine-month period from January to September 2020, registering a 13-percent rise compared to the same period in 2019.**

The trade between Iran and European Union countries during the said period stood at €3.345 billion, 11 percent less than the figure in the previous year's same nine months, data released by Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (TCCIMA) showed.

Meanwhile, the Islamic Republic imported €2.783 billion worth of goods in the mentioned time span, a 15-percent decline compared to the corresponding period in 2019.

As reported, Iranian exports to the EU stood at €81 million in September to register a 94-percent increase compared to the previous month.

Imports in the mentioned month reached €322 million, 28 percent more than August. Valued at €222 million, foodstuff and livestock groups had the biggest share of the Iranian exports to the EU during the period under review, followed by chemicals and related products with about €110 million of exports.

Meanwhile, the highest value of Iran's imports from the EU during the said nine months was related to machinery and transportation equipment with €887 million of imports.

Among the European countries, Germany was the top destination for Iranian commodities during the first 9 months of 2020, accounting for about 36 percent of the total value of Iran's exports to the EU.



The Netherlands, Italy, and Spain were other top destinations for Iranian exports. Germany and Italy were also among the top exporters of goods to Iran in the mentioned period.

The trade between Iran and the EU nations has decreased in the current Iranian calendar year due to the outbreak of the coronavirus and also as a result of the U.S. sanctions.

The data provided by Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) indicate that in January 2020, when the coronavirus had not been widespread in different parts of the world, trade between Iran and Europe grew by more than 17 percent, but this figure decreased in the next month and fell to negative since March.

According to the mentioned data, the biggest drop in the trade between the two sides was reported for July when the trade fell by about 20 percent.

As reported, Iran's exports to the EU increased by 45 percent and 42 percent in the first two months of 2020, respectively, however, the trend became negative in the following months.

## Demand for Turkish Cement In Iran Declines

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The export of cement from Turkey to Iran dropped by 34.24 percent from January through August 2020 compared to the same period of 2019, making up \$9.3 million, the Turkish Trade Ministry announced.

In August 2020, the export of cement from Turkey to Iran increased by 4.75 percent compared to August 2019 and surpassed \$1.82 million, added the ministry.

Turkey's export of cement to world markets from January through August 2020 increased by 2.3 percent compared to the same period in 2019, exceeding \$2.3 billion.

The cement export from Turkey amounted to 2.3 percent of the country's total export for the reporting period.

In August 2020, Turkey's export of cement to international markets amounted to \$319.6 million, which is 12.5 percent more compared to the same month of 2019.

Turkey's export of cement to foreign markets in August this year amounted to 2.6 percent of the country's total export.

During the last 12 months (from August 2019 through August 2020), Turkey exported cement in the amount of more than \$3.5 billion.

## Transit of Goods Via Chabahar On the Rise



TEHRAN (IRNA) - A 70-percent discount on tariffs and lowering the cost of transit of goods through Chabahar Port have been so effective that Chabahar loading and unloading figure has reached to two million tons while it was merely 200,000 tons just few years ago, a senior port and maritime official said.

Deputy Head of Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization Farhad Montaser-Kouhsari said that those now customers choose Chabahar Port, southeastern Iran, to ship their imported and exported goods, as well as raw material.

Noting that the cost price for each ton is very important for traders, Montaser-Kouhsari said if costs become reasonable, the market will be attractive.

He added that the biggest cost of goods pertains to transportation, but generally speaking, port transportation is one of the least expensive choices.

Montaser-Kouhsari went on to say that the goal of the port is now to attract regional markets and that India and Afghanistan are Iran's big trade partners, adding that countries of the CIC region can use Chabahar Port with an average of 70 percent discount.

He added that the reduction of tariffs has caused loading and unloading goods increase from 200,000 tons few years ago to two million tons this year and that transit has increased 190 percent.

Montaser-Kouhsari went on to say that the costs of using Chabahar was lowered and at the same time the infrastructure of the port was improved so that it could unload all varieties of goods in a reasonable time.

Although Chabahar is not on the US list of sanctions, it has been affected by the sanctions, he said adding that however, the customers are recognized and discounts are offered so that they choose Chabahar as their main base.

Chabahar is Iran's only ocean port, which is located on the southeastern of the country near the Indian Ocean. The port provides unique opportunities of investment of the private sectors of Iran and other regional countries.

## Jobless Rate Rises 2.5-Fold in March-June

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iranian parliament's research center have disputed government figures on joblessness in the country, saying in a report that the number of inactive workers increased between March and June because of the spread of the coronavirus.

The report covered by the semi-official ILNA agency on Saturday said that official unemployment rate decreased in the first quarter of the Iranian calendar year beginning March 20 by 1.1 percent compared to the similar period in 2019.

However, it said the real jobless rate for the quarter could be 24 percent if the self-employed workers who had lost their jobs because of the pandemic were included in the government calculations.

"In such circumstances, the (official) jobless rate is a completely misleading indicator when it comes to assessing the impacts of the spread of the coronavirus on the job market," said the report.

The report further criticized government's lack of support for businesses that avoided laying off workers during the pandemic, saying jobless claims picked up in the first quarter mainly because the government failed to implement a sound policy to protect jobs.

Official figures released by Statistical Center of Iran (SCI) shows unemployment declined in the first quarter to June 20 to 9.6 percent.

The government in March introduced an economic rescue package to help businesses affected by the pandemic. The emergency funding included cheap loans amounting to 1,000 trillion rials (\$5 billion at the then exchange rate) to help businesses recover from more than a month of pandemic-related restrictions and closures.

That has come on top of hundreds of millions of dollars in funding for unemployment benefits and other direct payments to households to cushion the economy against the disease.

## FAO Supporting Iran in Its Fighting Against Desert Locust

TEHRAN (FAO)- As part of concerted actions coordinated by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to support the locust control in the five countries of Pakistan, Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia and the Islamic Republic of Iran, FAO delivers the 4th shipment of pest control equipment to Iran's Plant Protection Organization.

According to a press release published by the FAO Representation in Iran, this consignment includes 28 units of vehicle-mounted Ultra Low Volume (ULV) sprayers, worth around USD 81,000.

Funded by the Government of the People's Republic of China, this delivery is part of the FAO-China South-South Cooperation Program Support to FAO's Global Action on the Control of the Desert Locust Project,

which aims to curb the spread of the desert locust in the focus countries by sharing modern technologies, applying effective techniques and proved solutions to control the locusts.

Together with the previous three shipments, so far FAO has provided 110 ULV sprayers and 10.4 metric tons of ULV Deltamethrin pesticides, amount over USD 305,000, to support the national capacity.

FAO, also, is implementing an emergency Technical Cooperation Program project in the country to assist the Plant Protection Organization to combat this migratory pest by providing requisite technical knowledge and skills and equipment to detect, track, monitor, report on and rapidly respond to the desert locust infestations in the country.

## Iran Province to Regulate Border Trade With Afghanistan

MASHHAD (IRNA) - Northeastern Iranian province of Khorasan Razavi is to review ways to regulate border trade and economic cooperation with the neighboring Afghanistan at an economic commission meeting slated for the near future.

The joint economic commission meeting will be held in Mashhad, Khorasan Razavi Province, soon, an economic official at the provincial Governor General's office announced on Sunday.

Ali Rasoulian told IRNA that provincial officials have recently held talks with their Afghan counterparts and respective Foreign Ministry official on trade ties.

During the talks, they reached good agreements on border trade and exports, Rasoulian said.

Khorasan Razavi's 830-km border with Afghanistan and Turkmenistan has created great export opportunity for the Iranian province, the official said.

He added that border problems have also been reviewed, and some of them have been removed.

Allocation of parking area for cars, use of private sectors' capacities to develop facilities on border areas, launch of Khaf-Herat railroad and the railway development in borders with Turkmenistan are on the northeastern Iranian province's agenda, the official stated.

Making progress in setting up industrial complexes can help achieve export goals, Rasoulian concluded.

## Isfahan WWC Tops National PRs In Water and Power Industry



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The public relations office of Isfahan Province Water and Wastewater Company (IWWC) by winning six awards ranked first among the public relations of Iran water and electricity industry.

According to reports, IWWC for the second consecutive year won the accolade among the affiliated companies of the energy ministry.

In the closing ceremony of the festival on public relations of national water and electricity industry which was held online, Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian hailed the public relations of Isfahan Province Water and Wastewater Company, saying that support of managing directors is the key for success of the public relations offices in the water and electricity industry.

He then pointed to the important function of the public relations, their contacts with the public, answering them as well as developing this communication, emphasizing that the public relations are the most important tool for communication of the organization with the public and it is necessary that they improve their methods and have major share in shaping the public opinion and a resistance and hopeful society.

Meanwhile the CEO of IWWC Mr. Hashem Amini as representative of the top selected water and electricity industry companies in the festival pointed to the role of managers in the success of public relations.

He then said that the public relations of Isfahan Water and Wastewater Company could attract the grounds for winning public trust through transparency and it had considerable effect in promoting the efficient water consumption in the society.

Director of the public relations of IWWC Mr. Seyed Akbar Bani Taba, for his part, said that creativity and innovation has been one of the important factors which has been on the agenda of the public relations of the company in recent years, adding that these innovations through employing creative mechanism have led to drastic change in the public approach and behavior.

He noted that in recent years the public relations of the company by conducting polls have created a climate for reinforcing the general and organizational culture by using the viewpoints of its staff.

## Lebanese Police Hunt Dozens After Mass Jailbreak

BEIRUT (Dispatches) - Police in Lebanon on Saturday hunted for 44 fugitive prisoners who escaped from a detention center on the outskirts of Beirut, calling on local residents to be on alert.

Despite tight security, 69 people broke out of a detention facility near the presidential palace in Baabda, east of Beirut, a police statement said.

Five were killed in a car accident, when they lost control of the stolen vehicle as they rushed away and crashed into a tree. One other person was taken to hospital. By early afternoon on Saturday, 15 had been recaptured, and another four had handed themselves back in, leaving 44 on the run.



## Russia Bars Entry to 25 British Citizens

MOSCOW (Reuters) - Russia has banned entry to 25 British citizens in retaliation for similar measures by Britain, Russia's foreign ministry said on Saturday, without providing their names.

Britain brought sanctions against 25 Russians and 20 Saudis in July as part of post-Brexit measures foreign minister Dominic Raab said were aimed at stopping the laundering of "blood money". The British list includes Russian nationals Britain has said were involved in the mistreatment and death of lawyer Sergei Magnitsky.

Magnitsky was arrested in 2008 after alleging that Russian officials were involved in large-scale tax fraud. Magnitsky died in a Moscow prison in 2009 after complaining of mistreatment.



## Pompeo Meets Afghan Gov't, Taliban Negotiators in Qatar



DOHA (Dispatches) - U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo met negotiators from the Afghan government and the Taliban in Doha Saturday, amid signs of progress in their talks as Washington speeds up its withdrawal.

Pompeo's visit comes in the wake of a deadly rocket attack which struck densely populated areas of Kabul, killing at least eight people in the latest outbreak of violence in the Afghan capital.

The Taliban denied responsibility and the Islamic State group claimed the deadly strike.

Pompeo met separately with the Afghan government and Taliban negotiation teams in a luxury hotel in the Qatari capital. "I would be most interested in getting your thoughts on how we can increase the probability of a successful outcome," Pompeo said as he met the Afghan government side, noting the shared interest in such a scenario.

He also met Qatar's ruler, Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, and Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani, the foreign minister, on his stop in Doha, which is the Taliban's base for diplomacy.

The outgoing top U.S. diplomat is on a seven-nation tour of Europe and the Middle East, as President Donald Trump shores up late-term priorities.

Earlier this week, the Pentagon said it would soon pull some 2,000 troops out of Afghanistan, speeding up the timeline established in a February agreement between Washington and the Taliban that envisions a full U.S. withdrawal in mid-2021.

Trump has repeatedly vowed to end "forever wars", including in Afghanistan, America's longest-ever conflict that began with an invasion to dislodge the Taliban following the September 11, 2001 attacks.

President-elect Joe Biden, in a rare point of agreement with Trump, also advocates winding down the Afghanistan war, although analysts believe he will not be as wedded to a rapid withdrawal.

The Taliban are speaking to Afghanistan's government for the first time.

The talks started on September 12 in Doha but almost immediately faltered over disagreements about the agenda, the basic framework of discussions and religious interpretations.

Several sources told AFP on Friday that the two sides appear to have resolved some of the issues, however.

Among the sticking points so far, the Taliban and the Afghan government have struggled to agree on common language on two main issues. The Taliban, who are Sunni hardliners, are insisting on adherence to the Hanafi school of Sunni Islamic jurisprudence, but government negotiators say this could be used to discriminate against Hazaras, who are predominantly Shiite, and other minorities.

Another contentious topic is how the US-Taliban deal will shape a future Afghan peace deal and how it will be referred to. The Doha peace talks opened after the Taliban and Washington signed a deal in February, with the US agreeing to withdraw all foreign forces in exchange for security guarantees and a Taliban promise to start talks.

## Trump Bid to Overturn Election Stumbles

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - President Donald Trump's desperate bid to overturn the U.S. election was dealt a new setback on Saturday when a federal judge threw out his campaign's attempt to invalidate millions of votes in Pennsylvania.

U.S. District Court Judge Matthew Brann ruled that the Trump campaign's efforts to stop Pennsylvania officials from certifying Democrat Joe Biden as the winner in the state was "unsupported by evidence."

"This Court has been presented with strained legal arguments without merit and speculative accusations," Brann wrote.

"In the United States of America, this cannot justify the disenfranchisement of a single voter, let alone all the voters of its sixth most populated state," he wrote. The lawsuit sought to stop officials from certifying Biden's victory in the state, arguing that some counties wrongly allowed voters to fix errors on their mail ballots.

Republican Senator Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania said Trump had "exhausted all plausible legal options" to challenge the result in Pennsylvania. He called on Trump to concede the election and congratulated Biden on his victory.



## Thai Students and Dancing Dinosaurs Rally in Bangkok

BANGKOK (Dispatches) - Thousands of high school students upset about Thailand's lackluster education system rallied alongside protestors dressed as dancing dinosaurs in Bangkok on Saturday.

It was the first mass gathering in the kingdom since Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha warned authorities would use all laws, including harsh royal defamation charges, to crack down on pro-democracy protestors.

Since August, emboldened by a broader political protest movement sweeping Thailand, a group called the "Bad Students" have campaigned for the resignation of Education Minister Nataphol Teepsuwan, demanded cultural change, equality, a curriculum overhaul and relaxation of strict rules.

Ahead of Saturday's rally three student leaders were summoned for police questioning and Thai Lawyers for Human Rights said there were now four juveniles facing potential prosecution. But despite the threats the youngsters remained defiant as they danced alongside half a dozen T-Rex characters representing Thailand's "political dinosaurs" and bounced around giant "asteroid" balls.

"We have to come out and make our voices heard to force change," Leaf, 15 told AFP.

Many students wore colored wrist bands to indicate they were underage, so older protestors could protect them.

"School is not a safe place (for girls)," one student's placard said.

Hundreds of protestors at the rally wore rubber duck hair clips, a reference to pro-democracy protestors using inflatable pool toys to shield themselves from police water cannon and tear gas on Tuesday.

Many protestors were upset families have to fork out extra money on tutoring because of the poor quality of teaching.

"I spend so much for my daughter's tutoring fees and need to enroll her in a faraway school so that she could get a good education.

It should not be like this," said Supaporn Pratumrat, 41, who attended the rally with her daughter.

## Thousands Protest Against French Bill To Curb Identification of Police

PARIS (Reuters) - Several thousand people protested in Paris on Saturday against a bill that would make it a crime to circulate an image of a police officer's face with the intention that they should be harmed.

Supporters say police officers and their families need protection from harassment, both online and in person when off duty.

Opponents say the law would infringe journalists' freedom to report, and make it harder to hold police accountable for abuses such as excessive use of force - a growing public concern. The offence would carry a maximum penalty of one year in jail and a 45,000-euro (\$53,000) fine.

On the Trocadero Square in western Paris, rights activists, trade unionists and journalists chanted "Everybody wants to film the police!" and "Freedom!", as police wearing riot gear stood by around the square.

Many demonstrators wore the high-visibility jackets of the "Yellow Vest" movement that started a wave of anti-government protests two years ago.

Some held signs that read "We'll put down our (smart) phones when you put down your weapons".

Similar demonstrations were planned in Marseille,

Lille, Montpellier, Rennes, Saint-Etienne and Nice.

In Paris, police clashed with demonstrators at the end of the protest. By 7:45 p.m., 23 people had been arrested and a police officer slightly injured, the police prefecture tweeted.

Edwy Plenel, chief editor of the investigative news website Mediapart, said the proposed legislation was "a green light for the worst elements in the police".

"Those in power are increasingly trying to prevent citizens, journalists and whistleblowers from revealing the failures of the state. When this happens, democracy fades away," he added.

Last Tuesday, two journalists were detained in a protest that led to clashes with police as lawmakers in the National Assembly began debating the bill, which is backed by President Emmanuel Macron's party and its parliamentary allies.

The bill passed its first reading on Friday and there will be a second reading on Tuesday. It then goes to the Senate for further debate before it can become law.

An amendment drafted by the government and approved on Friday modified the article in question, 24, to add the phrase "without prejudice to the right to inform".



## Armenia PM Urges Stronger Military Links With Russia

YEREVAN (AFP) - Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan called Saturday for greater military cooperation with Russia, a day after Azerbaijani troops began moving into disputed territory previously held by Armenian separatist forces.

"We hope we can reinforce cooperation with Russia not only in the security sector but also military and technical cooperation," he said, according to his press service. "Of course, there were hard times before the war but the situation today is even more difficult."

Pashinyan was speaking during a meeting in Yerevan with Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu after Azerbaijani troops Friday moved into the Aghdam district bordering Nagorno-Karabakh.

Armenia and Azerbaijan agreed to a Russian-brokered ceasefire on November 9 after six weeks of fighting over the self-proclaimed republic. Under the agreement, Azerbaijan will regain control of three districts that have been controlled by the separatists since the 1990s.

Around 2,000 Russian peacekeepers have deployed in the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh under the terms of the deal and Shoigu said Saturday they had secured the return of 7,000 refugees to the disputed territory who were displaced during the recent fighting.

"For us, the main thing is to prevent bloodshed," Shoigu said Saturday. He was part of a major Russian delegation in Yerevan that also included Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. Lavrov described the visit as a signal of Russia's "support" for Armenian authorities, who have come under growing pressure from the opposition for ceding territory to Azerbaijan.

Armenia replaced its defence minister Friday in an effort to placate demonstrators who stormed government buildings after the deal was announced and have taken to the streets almost daily since.

Lavrov said that "attempts to question this agreement both domestically and internationally are unacceptable."

Several thousand people gathered again in Yerevan Saturday to voice their opposition to the deal and demand Pashinyan's resignation.

The prime minister was responsible for "a crisis of dignity in our society, a social, moral and economic crisis," former rights ombudsman in Nagorno-Karabakh Ruben Melkonyan said at the rally.



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## Russia's Economy Plunges 4.7% y/y in October

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia's gross domestic product fell 4.7 per cent year-on-year in October, after a 3 per cent decline in September, the economy ministry said. Economic contraction was mostly driven by a drop in output in the manufacturing and agriculture sectors, the ministry said, putting the January-October GDP contraction at 3.6 per cent.

Economic contraction was mostly driven by a drop in output in the manufacturing and agriculture sectors, the ministry said, putting the January-October GDP contraction at 3.6 per cent. The ministry revised September's GDP contraction figure from the 3.3 per cent reported a month ago.



## China Has Given Debt Relief of \$2b to Developing Countries

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China has extended debt relief to developing countries worth a combined \$2.1bn under the G20 framework, the highest among the group's members in terms of the amount deferred, the country's finance minister Liu Kun said.

Liu's comments come as African countries, struggling with the COVID-19 pandemic, face another debt crisis, and will need more long-term help than the latest G20 Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI) offers them to ward off trouble and keep much-needed investments coming in. The China International Development Cooperation Agency, the country's aid agency, and the Export-Import Bank of China, the official bilateral creditors, have suspended debt service payments from 23 countries, worth a total of \$1.353bn, Liu said in a statement on the ministry's website.

The China Development Bank, as a commercial creditor, signed agreements with developing countries involving \$748m by the end of September, the statement added.

However, that is tiny compared with the debt developing countries owe China. The poorest countries' official bilateral debt to G20 countries reached \$178bn in 2019, with 63 per cent of the total owed to China, a World Bank study showed.

A third of the \$30.5bn of public debt service payments due in 2021 by DSSI-eligible sub-Saharan African nations is owed to official Chinese creditors while a further 10 per cent is linked to the China Development Bank, according to the Institute of International Finance.

The United States, China and other G20 countries have offered the world's poorest countries - many of which are in Africa - relief until at least mid-2021 and will decide if another six months of extension is needed in April next year.

Liu said China was willing to step up financial help for developing countries and more support will be given to those hardest hit by the pandemic and under heavy stress. It will also prioritize the supply of any COVID-19 vaccine to poor economies.

China will also consider making donations to a multilateral debt relief facility if the World Bank decides to set one up, Liu said.

## Trump Administration to Add Four More Chinese Firms to Pentagon Blacklist

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Washington is poised to designate four more Chinese companies as backed by the Chinese military, sources said, curbing their access to U.S. investors as the Trump administration seeks to cement its hawkish China legacy in its waning days.

The designations, which have not been previously reported, could be released by the Department of Defense as soon as Friday but may be unveiled next week, said one U.S. official and one person familiar with the matter who declined to be named.

The White House and the Chinese embassy in Washington did not immediately respond to requests for comment. The additions would bring the number of Chinese companies affected to 35. They include giants like Hikvision China Telecom Corp and China Mobile, which were added earlier this year.

The list of "Communist Chinese Military Companies" was mandated by a 1999 law requiring the Pentagon to compile a catalogue of companies "owned or controlled" by the People's Liberation Army, but the defense department only complied this year.

The latest move would come just days after the White House published an executive order, first reported by Reuters, that sought to give teeth to the list by prohibiting U.S. investors from buying securities of the blacklisted companies from November 2021. The move "helps ensure no American is unwittingly subsidizing the (Chinese Communist Party)'s campaign to dominate the technologies of the future," said Republican Congressman Mike Gallagher, who has introduced legislation to ban blacklisted Chinese companies from U.S. capital markets.

## Japan Consumer Prices Fall at Fastest Pace in a Decade

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japan's core consumer prices fell in October at the fastest annual pace in nearly a decade as the boost from last year's sales tax rise petered out, heightening concerns of a return to deflation as the country battles record cases of COVID-19.

Analysts expected consumer prices to continue falling in the coming months due to sluggish consumption, casting doubt on the central bank's view Japan will eventually see prices bounce back towards its elusive 2 percent inflation target.

A resurgence in coronavirus infections also clouds the outlook, as it may hurt consumption and dent the boost to growth from the government's stimulus measures, they said.

"Even when stripping away one-off factors, the trend of consumer prices is weak," Yoshiaki Shinke, chief economist at Dai-ichi Life Research Institute, told Reuters News Agency.

"If restrictions on dining and travel are reimposed, that could derail Japan's fragile economic recovery," he said.

Core consumer prices, which exclude volatile fresh food costs, fell 0.7 percent in October from a year earlier, government data showed on Friday, matching a median market forecast.

It was the third straight month of declines and the biggest year-on-year drop since March 2011, according to the data.

The decline was largely a result of the high base effect of a boost to inflation last year, following a sales tax increase to 10 percent from 8 percent, as well as a more recent government discount campaign for domestic travel aimed at reviving tourism.

Energy costs also fell, weighing on overall prices, the data showed.

Some analysts said core consumer prices may suffer annual declines of about 1 percent in coming months, which could stoke fears of deflation and encourage households to put off spending.

Japan's economy grew at the fastest pace on record in the third quarter, rebounding sharply from its biggest post-war slump, as exports and consumption recovered from the devastating damage caused by the pandemic.

But analysts expected growth to slow again amid a resurgence in infections not only worldwide but also in Japan. Authorities in Tokyo, home to some 14 million people, raised the city's alert level for the virus to the highest on the scale on Thursday.

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga has instructed his cabinet to compile a fresh stimulus package, although the renewed rise in infections could affect the fate of government campaigns encouraging households to travel and dine at restaurants.

## U.N. Chief Warns Developing World On Precipice of Financial Ruin



UNITED NATIONS (Reuters) - U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned that "the developing world is on the precipice of financial ruin and escalating poverty, hunger and untold suffering" as the world struggles to combat the coronavirus pandemic.

His message came ahead of a meeting of the leaders of the Group of 20 rich nations and big emerging powers this weekend.

"We cannot let the COVID pandemic lead to a debt pandemic," Guterres told reporters.

He has been pushing the G20 to further extend and expand debt service suspension to help developing and middle-income economies recover from the pandemic and for the allocation of Special Drawing Rights (SDR) and a voluntary reallocation of existing Special Drawing Rights.

In excerpts of a draft G20 communique on Friday, leaders note that the coronavirus crisis had hit the most vulnerable in society the hardest, and said some countries may need debt relief beyond a temporary freeze in official debt payments that ends in June 2021.

"I am pushing for a further extension through the end of 2021 and, critically, to expand the scope of these initiatives to all developing and middle-income countries in need," Guterres said.

A final statement will be released by leaders from the United States, China and other Group of 20 nations after they meet by video conference on Saturday.

"We face epic policy tests. But ultimately, there is a moral test. The trillions of dollars needed for COVID recovery is money that we are borrowing from future generations. Every last penny," Guterres said.

"We cannot use those resources to lock in policies that burden them with a mountain of debt on a broken and dangerous planet," he said.

## UAE Reaffirms OPEC+ Commitment After Exit Buzz

DUBAI (Dispatches) - The United Arab Emirates tried to lower the temperature in a dispute with OPEC+ allies, after the country's officials privately questioned the benefit of its membership in the oil alliance.

After a day of public silence following press reports the nation was considering its position in OPEC, Energy Minister Suhail Al-Mazrouei said the UAE "has always been a committed member." But he did not address whether the government was assessing its future in the group.

"We have demonstrated this commitment through our compliance to the current OPEC+ agreement,"

Al-Mazrouei said in a short statement, much of it written in the past tense. "As a reliable and long-standing member of OPEC, we have always been open and transparent in all our decisions and strategies in support of OPEC."

The UAE - the biggest producer in the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries after Saudi Arabia and Iraq - has not said publicly it's debating its membership, let alone planning to exit. And officials briefed the media on Wednesday under condition they would not be named, allowing room for maneuver if they want to distance themselves from such comments.

Tension between Riyadh and Abu Dhabi has grown since late summer, when the UAE breached its OPEC+ output quota and got a stern warning from its larger neighbor. Emirati policy makers seem increasingly frustrated by what they see as an unfair allocation of production caps and as the UAE economy reels from shriveling oil revenue and the coronavirus pandemic.

It comes at a delicate moment for OPEC+, a partnership between OPEC and other exporters such as Russia. It propped up oil prices with an historic agreement in April to cut supply and offset the pandemic's impact on demand. Any cracks in the alliance - let alone push-back from a producer as big as the UAE - would undermine an already fragile market.

The dissent is unusual. The UAE has long avoided public clashes, preferring to solve disputes quietly behind closed doors. It's unclear whether the private comments were designed to force a negotiation over output levels with OPEC+'s leaders Saudi Arabia and Russia, or if they represent a genuine policy debate. Any decision to leave OPEC would need the approval of Mohammed bin Zayed, the UAE's de facto ruler and Abu Dhabi's crown prince.

OPEC+ is meant to decide at its next meeting on Nov. 30-Dec. 1 whether to go ahead with a January production increase as set out in the April agreement, or delay it. So far, Riyadh and Moscow have signaled they are prepared to delay the hike as the virus continues to sap demand for energy.

This week, a panel of OPEC+ ministers said the group needed to be cautious despite a rally in oil prices. "All participating countries need to be vigilant, proactive and be prepared to act, when necessary, to the requirements of the market," the panel said in a statement.

Al-Mazrouei, the UAE's energy minister, sounded more circumspect and took a line unusually distant from that of Saudi Arabia. He said everyone must first be convinced of the need to delay the production increase. Oil rose to its highest since early September on Wednesday on further signs of stronger demand in China, India and other Asian nations, and with pharmaceutical companies making progress on Covid-19 vaccines.

## UK Gearing Up to Maintain Tariffs on U.S. Goods in Aircraft Subsidy Case

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Britain is gearing up to continue imposing retaliatory tariffs on U.S. goods over subsidies provided to Boeing Co BA.N as it completes its withdrawal from the European Union at the end of the year, a UK official familiar with the matter said on Friday.

Although Britain left the trade bloc on Jan. 31, it joined Brussels in slapping tariffs on \$4 billion (3.01 billion pounds) of U.S. goods earlier this month under a transitional arrangement with Brussels that expires at the end of the year.

Technically that means Britain would no longer be bound to impose EU trade remedies, but it is taking steps to continue the tariffs until the 16-year dispute over aircraft subsidies is settled, the official told reporters.

"Whether we reach a further trade agreement with EU in next days, weeks, or not, we will leave the transition period on the 31st of December, and we will not be bound by EU trade remedies decisions. And we will need to assert our own right to do so," said the official, who was not authorized to speak publicly. "And yes, we are preparing to be in a position to be able to do that."

Britain and Brussels are pushing hard to resolve the dispute even before U.S. President Donald Trump leaves office on Jan. 20, arguing that both sides will face increasing competition from China, Brazil and even Canada in coming years.

The World Trade Organization authorized the EU tariffs against U.S. goods in October, following U.S. tariffs on \$7.5 billion of EU products that went into effect a year ago after a parallel WTO case against Airbus AIR.PA.

The issue comes at a sensitive time when Britain is trying to negotiate a U.S. trade deal after leaving the EU.

The UK official said Democratic President-elect Joe Biden was not expected to take a "radically different view" on the aircraft subsidy issue regarding the previous behavior by Airbus, or its wish to help Boeing, the top U.S. exporter.

"It is clear that these companies are strategically important both to Europe and to the U.S.," said the official. "We need to find a way of supporting them legitimately in WTO rules, and they need to find a way of getting out from under the tariff retaliation against each other, which we think is doing considerable damage to other industries."

Britain is also seen as anxious to avoid facing ongoing U.S. tariffs against its Scotch whisky producers and farmers over European aid for Airbus without being able to strike back.



## Iran-Kazakhstan Discuss Health Cooperation Via Webinar

TEHRAN (IRNA) - A Video conference was held on health cooperation between health ministries of Iran and Kazakhstan on Sunday.

During the video conference, deputy ministers of Iran and Kazakhstan discussed and exchanged views on health cooperation between the two countries, exchange of experience in dealing with COVID-19, and practical academic cooperation between the

two countries in medical fields.

The conference was attended by the first deputy minister of healthcare of the Republic of Kazakhstan Marat Shoranov, Director General of the International Cooperation Department of the Iranian Health Ministry Mohsen Asadi Lari, Iranian ambassador to Kazakhstan Majid Samadzadeh Saber.



# Britain, Canada Sign Post-Brexit Rollover Trade Deal

LONDON (Reuters) - Britain and Canada struck a rollover trade deal on Saturday to protect the flow of \$27 billion-worth of goods and services between them after Brexit, and vowed to start talks on a bespoke agreement next year.

As Britain prepares to end its transition out of the European Union on Dec. 31, it has negotiated multiple rollover bilateral deals to maintain trade, with many simply replacing the terms the bloc had already agreed.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson joined Canada's Justin Trudeau and their respective trade ministers on an online call to mark the deal, which paves the way for a tailor-made agreement covering more areas such as digital trade, small businesses, the environment and women's economic empowerment.

"Today's agreement underpins 20 billion pounds worth of trade and locks in certainty for thousands of jobs," Liz Truss, the UK's international trade secretary, said in a statement.

Her Canadian counterpart Mary Ng said the transitional agreement "largely replicates" the EU deal on tariff reductions and provisions for labour and environment.

"We do want an ambitious, high level comprehensive trade agreement with the UK," Ng said, signalling Canada wanted similar terms to the EU deal.

Britain is Canada's fifth largest trading partner after the United States, China, Mexico and Japan.

Johnson is trying to shape a new "global Britain" that can strike out alone and negotiate better trade agreements than the EU as part of what he says is the benefits of its historic decision to leave the world's biggest trading bloc.

In less than two years it has agreed trade deals with 53 countries, accounting for



164 billion pounds (\$217.82 billion) of British bilateral trade. Johnson's critics point out that many are largely the same as the EU deals.

The UK-Canada Trade Continuity Agreement will be subject to final legal checks before it is formally signed. "This is a good moment," Trudeau said.

## China Disappointed by Trump, ...

FROM PAGE 1

China could pursue its interests very well against Washington's haplessness and indecisiveness by gradual reinforcing its strategic position in the Southeast Asia, reinforcement of Communist Party in China and taking decisive policies in Hong Kong and Xinjiang.



The most key offensive attitude of China in Southeast Asia region has been the U.S. uncertainty in taking any retaliatory action and ultimately letting down the strategy leading to weakening of the transatlantic unity and decline in the U.S. world leadership influence that China has made most of it in favor of itself.

The U.S. during Trump presidency has been obsessed with domestic economic woes, the outbreak of devastating COVID-19 and political party conflicts. Hence, it provided China with a golden opportunity to bring back normal life to restaurants and theaters in Beijing. On the other hand, the competition between superpowers of Beijing and Washington has increased heavy pressure on China's economy. Trump's undiplomatic stances advanced insofar as it might have led to confiscation of China's strategic reserves in the U.S., and above all, a physical war between both states. The leadership of China Communist Party probably was very sensitive regarding who was to take office in the White House.

As I explained, considering all developments in recent years, sudden drastic changes in the U.S. policies have never been favorable for China. It is expected the relation of both countries in Biden's era to become colder and even to reduce diplomatically. By the way, Biden's victory will be an essential turn on course to improve the current transatlantic relations. This point will have great impact on the U.S. and Europe relation.

Europeans have always believed that perhaps seemingly Beijing liked Trump to be re-elected for more four years in office and their reasoning is based on this point that China had made the most out of the U.S. confusion regarding protection of its global hegemony in the past four years. So re-election of Trump could be a proof for Beijing's claim that western democracy had declined morally and it had no capability to confront the environmental problems, laying the diplomatic grounds and even being unable to manage a contagious disease in the country.

Anyway, today China with failure of Trump in his re-election has become disappointed and is concerned about the behavior of the next U.S. government and it will actually draw up different scenarios to prevent any development which may happen in the future. And that we, as the Islamic Republic of Iran, tend to have more cooperation with China in our future strategy is in line with safeguarding and reinforcing the resistance axis and weakening the West in the West Asia which will be itself a spotless strategy.

## Iran Attracted...

FROM PAGE 1

The Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance of Iran stated that the enemy seeks to halt Iran's export of goods or prevent the import of their resources. "In this economic war, many exporters and the private sector have been the main players in the national economy of Iran."

Dejpasand stressed that in Iran's economy, exporting the products with more added value to different world countries is a priority, and knowledge-based companies play an essential role in this regard.

Elsewhere in his remarks, he referred to the outbreak of the novel coronavirus, COVID-19, in the country and added, "Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance managed to ease problems of entrepreneurs and those who are active in the economic sector in line with settling problems caused by the adverse effects of coronavirus."

However, giant steps were taken in the country in the field of boosting economic indicators in a way that "We managed to thwart malicious objectives orchestrated by enemies against the country in terms of economy."

U.S.' tempts to bring Iran's economy into its knees doomed to failure, Dejpasand underscored.

Instead of crude-selling of products, the country managed to export its products to various countries in the world with more added value, so that knowledge-based companies played a very important role in this respect, Dejpasand added.

## Turkey Determined to Carry Out Reforms



ANKARA (Dispatches) - The Turkish government is determined to bring about a new era for Turkey's economy and democracy, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said, pledging to roll out new reforms.

"Now we are making preparations for new reforms and breakthroughs. We are determined to put our country in a new period of rising," Erdoğan said in his speech at a trade fair in Istanbul.

"We are working on both strengthening our economic policies and raising the bar of democracy and freedoms while easing the daily life for our citizens," he stated.

Noting that the support of the business circle and citizens is crucial to achieve the economic goals, Erdoğan said: "First of all, we must bring overseas savings to our country."

He urged business circles to put money in investment, employment, production and exports.

Investments that spur production and employment will be accelerated by mobilizing domestic and international entrepreneurs, Erdoğan added.

"We should enhance the trust of our nation and investors in our national currency, the Turkish Lira, thus reduce the weight of foreign exchange currency in deposits," he noted.

"In order to look at the future of our nation with confidence, we will implement whatever measures we need to take today," Erdoğan said.

He reiterated his negative assessment on interest rates but said the Central Bank decision to hike the rates was part of this approach.

Erdoğan added that his new economic team will focus on avoiding the negative consequences of higher interest rates.

"We are also aware that we have to drink some pain medications at this stage if necessary. I evaluate yesterday's interest rate hike decision within this framework," he said, noting that the government's main goal is to reduce inflation to single digits as soon as possible, then to the level of our medium-term targets, and to ensure that interest rates fall accordingly.

He stressed that they have to remove Turkey from the "spiral of interest, inflation, exchange rate."

"Otherwise, we will have to pay for these costs. Interest [rate] is the cause. Inflation is the result," he stated.

Preparations for new judicial packages are continuing, the president also said. He vowed to bring them to the agenda of parliament as soon as possible. "We will conclude and implement the human rights action plan with a much wider consultation," Erdoğan stated.

## Biden's Tax Plan Will Likely Make Companies Leave the U.S.

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - President-elect Joe Biden has promised to raise taxes on America's richest corporations "on day one" of his presidency.

Morris Pearl, a former managing director at BlackRock, writes that the Biden tax plan could be one of the most progressive the country has ever had that "maps out an equitable future for America."

Billionaire businessman John Catsimatidis disagrees. As CEO of Red Apple Group, Catsimatidis owns the largest supermarket chain in New York City, in addition to owning and operating assets in the energy, real estate, finance and insurance industries.

"Giving the government more money to spend the government way — is pretty dumb. I don't think the government has been spending money the right way in the last few years, and I believe low taxes has attracted companies to come back to the United States," Catsimatidis told Yahoo Finance Live. "[If they raise taxes] all they're going to do is find a way to leave again."

President Trump's 2017 tax cuts reduced the corporate rate to its current 21% from 35%, one of the highest in the world. Biden wants to raise the rate to 28%, which is still lower than it's been anytime between World War II and Trump's tax cuts. Biden also supports a so-called "Amazon Rule," which involves a 15% minimum tax rate on net annual income for corporations making over \$100 million a year. It's a way to prevent companies including Netflix, Starbucks and the rules' namesake from dodging their tax bill because of loopholes and special tax breaks.

On individuals, Biden proposes raising the income tax rate on people who earn over \$400,000 a year from 37% to just under 40%, as well as raising the capital gains tax rate for the nation's highest earners.

Catsimatidis said the problem with American politics is that, unlike CEOs of corporations, politicians don't know how to effectively cut costs and only know how to "raise, raise, raise" taxes.

A vocal Trump supporter and campaign donor, Catsimatidis said Trump should not concede the presidency to Biden until all votes are counted.

"The electoral college doesn't meet until the middle of December," said Catsimatidis. "Let's go through the process. Let the Justice Department do their job. Let the FBI do their job. Let the lawsuits, the Supreme Court do their job. And whoever is elected president of the United States on December 14, I will salute him as Mr. President"

Catsimatidis has his own political aspirations. He ran for mayor of New York City as a Republican in 2013 and lost the party nomination to former Metropolitan Transportation Authority head Joe Lhotka.

"I am very concerned about New York City. I've talked to Cushman and Wakefield. A lot of big companies, if they have 10,000 employees in Manhattan or in New York City, they're looking to cut it in half. So I think New York could have a permanent problem because of this. A common sense mayor will be able to fix it," he said.

Catsimatidis said his supporters are urging him to run for New York City mayor in 2021, in what's already shaping up to be a crowded race to succeed Mayor Bill de Blasio.

"I haven't made up my mind. You know, I'm enjoying my life. And I'm enjoying my children. I'm enjoying showing my children how to run our companies," Catsimatidis said. "See me in January."

## Saudi Arabia, Russia in Tight Race to Become China's Top Oil Supplier in 2020

SINGAPORE (Reuters) - Saudi Arabia and Russia are in a tight race to become China's top oil supplier in 2020, with both countries boosting crude exports to the economic powerhouse even as the coronavirus pandemic hit global demand for oil this year.

Saudi Arabia, which was China's top supplier last year, has exported between 1.6 million and 1.7 million barrels per day (bpd) of crude from January to November 2020, as deep price cuts gave Saudi oil exports a boost this month, according to analytics firms Refinitiv, Vortexa and Kpler.

It was catching up with Russia which has exported about 1.7 million bpd of oil to China so far in 2020, with Iraq at a third place with about 1.2 million bpd.

The oil industry has been hard hit this year as the coronavirus pandemic hurt business activity and ground the travel industry to a virtual halt.

China, the world's top crude importer, is one of the few countries to have boosted purchases in 2020, as buyers made the most of low prices earlier this year, while fuel demand recovered from the second quarter along with the broader economy.

"It looks like Russia has displaced Saudi Arabia to clinch the top spot this year," said Serena Huang, analyst at Vortexa. "It is a neck-and-neck race and it remains to be seen as to who will be the ultimate winner."

The volume of Saudi crude arriving in China in November is expected to hit between 2.13 and 2.24 million barrels per day, compared with a record high of 2.1 million to 2.14 million bpd in May, estimates from the three

companies showed. That would be nearly double their volume estimates for October.

The rise comes as state oil giant Saudi Aramco 2222.SE sharply cut crude prices for Asian customers in October, trade sources said. It takes about a month for cargoes to be shipped.

By comparison, 1.49 million bpd of Russian crude is expected to enter China this month, down from 1.55 million bpd in October, Vortexa said.

The bulk of the incremental crude arriving from Saudi Arabia, the world's top oil exporter, into China in November is entering via ports in the cities of Quanzhou, Zhanjiang, Zhoushan and Ningbo, Refinitiv analyst Emma Li said.

"Congestion is starting to increase again off Chinese ports, so there may well be some additional slippage into December but the overall picture will remain the same," said Alexander Booth analyst at Kpler, which included shipments via Myanmar in its estimates for China's oil imports.

## 3rd Round of...

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The second round of the related talks over the flight 752 tragedy was held at the place of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tehran in November and the first round of the Iranian delegation's talks about the flight 752 incident in Ukraine ended in early August 2020.

On Jan 8, a Boeing 737 belonging to Ukraine International Airlines was mistakenly downed in Tehran shortly after taking off from Iran's Imam Khomeini International Airport (IKIA) with at least 170 passengers and crew, mostly Iranians, onboard.

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## Oliveira on Portuguese MotoGP Pole

LISBON (Dispatches) - Miguel Oliveira will start his home Portuguese Grand Prix from the front of the grid after emerging quickest in qualifying on Saturday to claim his maiden MotoGP pole. The Portuguese KTM-Tech3 rider will be joined on the front row of the season-closer in Portimao by Franco Morbidelli and Australian Jack Miller. Joan Mir's hopes of finishing with a flourish after claiming the world title last week appear slim after he failed to make it into Q2 which determines the make-up of the front four rows.

## Haaland Wins 2020 Golden Boy Award

LONDON (Reuters) - Borussia Dortmund striker Erling Haaland has won the 2020 Golden Boy award after an impressive start at the Bundesliga club, Italian newspaper Tuttosport announced on Saturday. Haaland beat Barcelona teenager Ansu Fati and Bayern Munich winger Alphonso Davies to the award, which is given to the best under-21 player from one of the top-flight European leagues. The Norwegian scored 44 goals in all competitions last season, which included 16 for Dortmund following his mid-season transfer from Austrian club Salzburg.

# Spurs Sink Man City To Take Top Spot

LONDON (Dispatches) - Tottenham powered to the top of the Premier League with an impressive 2-0 win against Manchester City, while Chelsea are up to second place after their victory at Newcastle on Saturday.

Manchester United remain well off the pace in ninth, but did manage a first home win in the Premier League for seven games as Bruno Fernandes's twice-taken penalty saw off lowly West Brom 1-0.

Spurs end the day on top of the table for the first time in six years as goals from Son Heung-min and Giovani Lo Celso saw off a toothless City at the Tottenham Hotspur stadium.

Tottenham took the lead after five minutes as Son ran onto Tanguy Ndombele's lofted pass, beat the City offside trap and slotted a cool finish under Ederson for already his 11th goal of the season.

City dominated possession but struggled to create chances and were cut open again for Spurs' second with just their second shot on target.

Lo Celso came off the bench to score just 35 seconds after his introduction as he raced onto Harry Kane's sublime pass to slot past Ederson.

On the one-year anniversary of Jose Mourinho's appointment, Tottenham are unbeaten in their last eight league games since losing to Everton on the opening weekend, sparking hopes of a genuine title challenge.

Tottenham, who last won the top-flight title in 1961, lead Chelsea by two points with the two set to face each other next weekend.

City are languishing in 11th place, eight points behind the leaders, albeit with a game in hand.

Pep Guardiola extended his contract at the Etihad to 2023 this week, but his side look a shadow of the swaggering outfit that won successive league titles in 2018 and 2019.

Twelve points from eight games is City's lowest total at this stage of a Premier League campaign since 2008-09.

"We had more chances than them but we lost.



Mourinho's teams are like this, you make a mistake and they punish you on the counter attack," Guardiola said.

Chelsea maintained their fine form as Federico Fernandez's first-half own goal and Tammy Abraham's strike sealed a 2-0 win at St James' Park.

Frank Lampard's side are unbeaten in nine games in all competitions and have not lost in their last six league matches.

With five clean sheets in their last six outings in all competitions, Chelsea's third successive league victory was the perfect way to start a hectic period leading up to Christmas.

The visitors' pressure was rewarded in the 10th minute when Mason Mount whipped in a low cross and Fernandez turned it into his own net under pressure from Ben Chilwell.

Chelsea put the result beyond doubt in the 65th minute when Timo Werner accelerated away from the Newcastle defence and slipped a pass to Abraham, who guided his shot in off the post.

United still have a long way to go to claw themselves back into title contention as they again flattered to deceive at Old Trafford despite picking up a long-awaited win.

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's men got two slices of penalty fortune as West Brom were awarded a spot-kick first early in the second-half when Fernandes challenged Connor Gallagher.

However, on review, referee David Coote overturned his original decision.

Moments later, the Red Devils got a penalty for Darnell Furlong's handball.

Fernandes's first effort was saved, but he got a second chance as Sam Johnstone had jumped off his line prior to the Portuguese international's kick.

Fernandes slammed home the reprieve, but was still not happy at missing from the spot for the third time this season.

## Neymar to Start for PSG Against Leipzig



PARIS (Reuters) - Paris St Germain forward Neymar will start Tuesday's crucial Champions League game against RB Leipzig after making his comeback from injury, coach Thomas Tuchel said.

Neymar returned from a three-week hamstring injury layoff when he played half an hour in Friday's 3-2 defeat at Monaco in Ligue 1 as Tuchel sought to give him a bit of match rhythm before the Group H clash at the Parc des Princes.

"Neymar? He is determined. Yes, he will start against Leipzig," Tuchel was quoted as saying by French sports daily L'Equipe on Saturday.

PSG, who wasted a two-goal halftime lead against Monaco, are top of the Ligue 1 standings with 24 points from 11 games, four ahead of the principality club.

But they are in a very uncomfortable position in the Champions League as they lie third in Group H on three points, three behind Leipzig and leaders Manchester United with three games remaining.

PSG, who reached last season's final, lost 2-1 at Leipzig on Nov. 4.

## Australian Open

Crowds at 10%

Capacity Would Be a Boon

LONDON (Reuters) - World number one Novak Djokovic said he hopes fans will be allowed to turn up in numbers for the Australian Open in January even though spectators are still barred from most stadiums amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ever since the tour resumed after the COVID-19 stoppage, the majority of events have been played in empty stadiums, with a select few allowing fans in few numbers to attend with social distancing protocols in place to curb the spread of the virus.

"If Australia happens, I'm hearing that we are going to have at least 50% of the capacity of the stadium. That's a lot, I think even 10% would be huge for us at this stage," Djokovic said after moving into the semis of the ATP Finals in London.

"Just hearing the applause and hearing the fans and sensing their energy and their emotion and their kind of excitement for being there and cheering you on on the court, that's something that I think we're all missing."

Rod Laver Arena is the biggest at Melbourne Park with a maximum capacity of 15,000 followed by Melbourne Arena (9,646) and Margaret Court Arena (7,500).

Defending champion Djokovic, who has won the Australian Open a record eight times, said he hoped the feeling of "walking into an empty stadium" would be temporary but was glad they were able to resume the season this year despite the pandemic.

"Strange is probably the right word to describe the season, but nevertheless I still feel like we played a lot of tournaments considering we had a six-months gap in the middle of the season," he added.

"We still managed to play three out of four Grand Slams and the ATP Finals and some big Masters 1000 events like Cincinnati and Rome."

# Bayern Munich Held at Home



BERLIN (Dispatches) - European champions Bayern Munich remained top of the Bundesliga despite being held on Saturday to a 1-1 draw at home by Werder Bremen, who were only denied a shock win by a string of excellent saves from Manuel Neuer.

Germany goalkeeper Neuer produced great stops to twice deny US forward Josh Sargent as Bremen earned their first point at Bayern for a decade.

Bremen took a deserved lead when midfielder Maximilian Eggestein finished off a superb attack just before half-time.

Bayern drew level in the 62nd minute at the Allianz Arena when Kingsley Coman met Leon Goretzka's cross at the far post.

With time almost up, Neuer again denied Sargent, who had broken clear of the defence, as Bayern held on for a draw.

Hansi Flick's men sit one point clear of Bayer Leverkusen at the top of the table, although RB Leipzig can draw level on points with the defending champions if they beat Eintracht Frankfurt later on Saturday.

## Medvedev Beats Nadal to Set up Thiem Final

LONDON (Dispatches) - Daniil Medvedev sent Rafael Nadal packing after a gruelling slugfest at the ATP Finals in London on Saturday to set up a title match against Novak Djokovic's conqueror Dominic Thiem.

The Spanish world number two, who has never won the elite event in his illustrious career, faltered when serving for the match in the second set and was beaten 3-6, 7-6 (7/4), 6-3.

Earlier, U.S. Open champion Thiem recovered from 4-0 down in the third-set tie-break against Djokovic to win 7-5, 6-7 (10/12), 7-6 (7/5).

Russian giant Medvedev -- who has won nine matches in a row -- put Nadal's serve under intense pressure in the early stages of their evening match at the empty O2 Arena.

But he was unable to make his chances count and a drop in his level allowed the Spaniard to break to love to lead 5-3 before he served out for the set.

Medvedev immediately found his focus at the start of the second set, winning his first service game to love before Nadal, a two-time finalist at the event, double-faulted to give the Russian a 2-0 lead.

Just when it seemed as though Medvedev was cruising, Nadal, 34, broke back twice to take total control and stepped up to serve for the match.

But in another astonishing twist, the 20-time Grand Slam champion played a sloppy game, allowing the Russian back into the match, and Medvedev won the eventual tie-break.

The deciding set hinged on the seventh game -- the Russian produced an overhead winner on his third break point, breaking again to beat Nadal for the first time.

The Spaniard entered the match on a 71-match winning streak after taking the opening set, but 24-year-old snapped that run with a gritty mental and physical performance over two hours and 36 minutes. "I felt really strange until 5-4 for him in the second set, when he was serving for the match," said the fourth seed, who lost all three of his matches on his debut at the season-ending tournament last year.



## Shiffrin Shines To Finish Second On Return

LEVI (Dispatches) - U.S. ski star Mikaela Shiffrin shrugged off a near 10-month absence which she described as "sad and stressful" to finish second behind Petra Vlhova in the World Cup slalom at the Finnish resort of Levi on Saturday.

"It's been 300 days since she was last in the start gate, and she didn't miss a beat," the US Ski and Snowboard Team tweeted.

The three-time overall World Cup winner was all set for a fourth consecutive overall World Cup title when she ended last season abruptly after the sudden death of her father.

A bad back then forced the 25-year-old to skip the season-opener in Soelden.

Shiffrin was just 15 hundredths of a second behind Slovakia's Vlhova in the first run. Vlhova, who capitalised on Shiffrin's absence earlier in the year by claiming the discipline's crystal globe, was quickest again in the second run to finish 0.18 seconds ahead of Shiffrin overall and secure her 15th World Cup victory.

"After everything that has happened it is really cool to just ski a race and get a podium," said Shiffrin who admitted that the 10 months since her father Jeff died had been a dark period.

"It's been busy and sad and stressful and not a lot of training. So it's been really hard to imagine being here again and racing and being on the podium," she said.

"I almost didn't dare to imagine it. I didn't want to be disappointed about that... it seems so stupid about not being on the podium when other really bad things can happen and are happening.

"So I have been trying to keep my priorities straight, a pretty interesting 300 days."

Shiffrin said that over the past months she had wanted to "figure out" whether she wanted to carry on skiing and "move forward" with life.

