

**Health Minister Saeed Namaki
Says the Process for Producing
COVID-19 Vaccine Domestically Is
Progressing Well and the Ministry
Next Week Will Issue the License
For Its Human Trial**

IRAN NEWS

**Commander of the Iranian Army's
Ground Forces Said That the Force
Always Monitors the Developments
In the Region and Builds
Necessary Defense in Proportion
To Leading Threats**

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Leader Hails Basij Role In Defending Iran, Facilitating its Growth

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution in Iran Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei has highlighted the role of Iran's Basij volunteer force in both defending the country and facilitating its growth, praising it as a "great asset" and the "God-given reserve" for the Iranian nation.

Ayatollah Khamenei made the remarks in a message issued on Wednesday on the occasion of the 41st anniversary of the Basij force's creation under the direction of the late founder of the Islamic Republic, Imam Khomeini.

The message was read out by Brigadier General Mohammad Shirazi, the head of the Leader's Military Office, in a video conference call with Basij headquarters in provincial capitals.

"Basij is a great and brilliant relic of the late Imam as well as a manifestation of national authority and an exhibition of purity, sincerity, insight and struggle," it read.

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Iran Records Highest Daily Coronavirus Infections

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran registered on Wednesday a daily record high of 13,843 new coronavirus cases, the health ministry said, pushing the national tally to 894,385 in the Middle East's worst-hit country.

Ministry's spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari told state TV that the death toll rose by 469 in the past 24 hours to 46,207.

Iran's health officials have voiced alarm over a surge in infections, urging the nation to adhere to the health protocols, including wearing face masks and social distancing.

Spokeswoman announced in her presser that 894,385 people in the country have been infected with the coronavirus, and 625,606 of the total infected people have recovered.

According to definitive laboratory findings from yesterday to November 25, 2020, newly diagnosed patients with COVID-19 reached 13,843 cases out of whom 2,370 patients were hospitalized," Sima Sadat Lari stated.

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End of Trumpism Era Manifestation of Iran Victory



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - President Hassan Rouhani says the end of the "Trumpism" era is close at hand, and that is one of the clear manifestations of the Iranian nation's victory and a sign of the enemy's resounding defeat in the economic war. President Rouhani on Wednesday touched upon the crimes committed by U.S. President Donald Trump against the Iranian nation.

"This person committed the worst crimes in U.S. history against independent nations, especially the people of Iran, Palestine and other nations which were under his oppression, and his defeat is due to his failure at international circles and legal bodies as well as his failure by moral criteria and before the public opinion both in the U.S. and across the world," said the president in a weekly cabinet session.

"This man took anti-human, terrorist and savage actions against the Iranian nation even during the coronavirus pandemic, and kept increasing his pressure against our country until White House rulers opposed the IMF move to lend Iran \$5 billion in loans to buy medical equipment and tackle the coronavirus pandemic," he said.

"The reasons behind his failure were his wrong foreign policy and medical policies as well as his racist moves and unreliability," President Rouhani said.

Rouhani said the next U.S. administration should make great moves in order to be able to make up for past mistakes and compensate for all actions that have tarnished the United States' image.

"We hope the future U.S. administration will, in its first steps, openly condemn Trump's policies toward Iran as well as his anti-rights and terrorist moves, and make up for the wrong policies that his administration has adopted over the past four years," he said.

Rouhani noted that if the next U.S. administration has the resolve required, it would be easier to resolve the problems. The two countries can both announce that they will return to where they were before January 20, 2017, he added. Rouhani stressed that Iran's policy is compliance for compliance, action for action, and de-escalation for de-escalation.

U.S. Claims Iraq Could Limit Dependence on Iranian Energy Imports

DUBA (Dispatches) - Iraq's federal government could wean itself off Iranian energy imports by taking advantage of gas production in the semi-autonomous Kurdistan region, a U.S. official said, as OPEC's second largest oil producer continues to come under pressure from Washington to part ways with Tehran.

"The U.S. remains a steadfast champion of Iraqi sovereignty and continues to oppose Iran's efforts to undermine it," Mark Menezes, U.S. Deputy Secretary of Energy, told a virtual Kurdistan conference organized by the U.S.-Iraq Business Council. "The more that Kurdistan develops its gas resources and the closer it gets to being a regional energy hub the less dependent federal Iraq will be on Iranian gas imports."

Former Iraqi oil minister Thamer Ghadhbani and officials from the Kurdistan region in northern Iraq, which is self-sufficient in gas, had discussed in April Baghdad's potential use and investment in Kurdish gas. However, talks didn't lead to any concrete steps because a new government was appointed in May and the Kurdistan Regional Government continues to have issues with Baghdad over its oil sales and receiving its share of federal revenues.

Iraq relies on Iranian electricity and gas imports due to chronic power shortages that have in the past led to deadly protests and extensive flaring of associated gas. Iraq is the world's second worst flaring nation after Russia, burning some 18 billion cu m (632 billion standard cubic feet) in 2019, according to a World Bank study published July 21.

Associated gas production is further restricted by the country's adherence to OPEC+ cuts.

The country has been receiving U.S. waivers to continue to import Iranian gas and electricity since Washington re-imposed sanctions on Tehran's energy sector in 2018. The U.S. State Department said on November 20 it granted a 45-day waiver extension to Iraq allowing it to keep paying for electricity imports from Iran, however the period was reduced from the prior 60-day extension. The State Department has touted the waiver extensions as a sign of diplomatic success between Washington and Baghdad. The governments signed several energy agreements during Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi's visit to Washington in August.

Kurdistan Regional Government is ready to export gas to the rest of Iraq, its Prime Minister Masrour Barzani told the virtual conference. "We hope to become a regional hub for gas production and storage with plans to export to other parts of Iraq and beyond," Barzani said. "We are now exporting electricity to other parts of Iraq."

Erbil will continue to hold talks with Baghdad to resolve outstanding issues, including their share of the federal revenues, he said.

"We are working hard to ensure that our relationship with the federal government in Baghdad is fair and delivers a real outcome," Barzani said. "This is not always straight-forward and we have our differences. But, I am committed to resolving our outstanding issues including around the KRG's share of the federal budget."

Iran Warns UN Chief Over Humanitarian Catastrophe in Yemen

TEHRAN (IP) - In a letter to United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres, President of Iran's Academy of Medical Sciences (IAP), Alireza Marandi stated that the UN must be held accountable for the crisis in Yemen.

Marandi in a letter to UN Secretary-General Guterres on the humanitarian catastrophe and famine in Yemen, stated that no action had been taken to lift the blockade and help the starving people of Yemen and the UN must answer to a history regarding the Yemeni crisis.

He stressed that the coalition attacks led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates against the Yemeni people, with Western material and logistical support, continue amid the disgusting silence of international organizations.

He added a simple cure to prevent the world's biggest humanitarian crisis, which is the starvation of millions of oppressed women, children, and men in Yemen. Still, no real and practical action has been taken.

President of Iran's Academy of Medical Sciences continued that Yemen is facing the biggest humanitarian crisis globally, and 80% of the 30 million people in this country are in dire need of foreign aid.

With the support of the United States, the United Arab Emirates, and several other countries, Saudi Arabia has invaded Yemen since March 2015 and besieged this country by land, sea, and air.

So far, the war killed more than 16,000 Yemenis, injured tens of thousands, and displaced millions of others.

Resistance Will Lead To Enemies' Decline

TEHRAN (MNA) - The commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) says the Iranian nation is solely standing against the external pressures, underlining that such resistance will lead to the decline of enemies.

"The enemy has changed the position of its animosity; it has targeted our people's religion, culture, livelihood and health," Major General Salami said on Wednesday, in a speech on the occasion of Basij Week.

However, he added, the Iranian nation, along with selfless Basij volunteer forces, will continue their steadfastness against such pressures, till the enemies' hegemonies decline.

"We will stand firm till the end... Basij is also continuing this path to defend the high values of the nation under the instructions of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution."

UAE Halts New Visas to 13 States Including Iran

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The United Arab Emirates has stopped issuing new visas to citizens of 13 mostly Muslim-majority countries, including Lebanon, Iran, Syria and Somalia, according to a document issued by a state-owned business park.

The document, which was sent to companies operating in the park and was seen by Reuters, cited an immigration circular that came into effect on Nov. 18.

It said applications for new employment and visit visas had been suspended for nationals, who are outside the UAE, of the 13 countries, including Afghanistan, Libya and Yemen, until further notice.

The visa ban also applies to citizens of Algeria, Kenya, Iraq, Pakistan, Tunisia and Turkey, the document says.

It was not clear if there were any exceptions to the ban. A source briefed on the matter said the UAE had temporarily stopped issuing new visas to Afghans, Pakistanis and citizens of several other countries over security concerns.

The source did not say what those concerns were but said the visa ban was expected to last for a short period.



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Tehran Condemns Terrorist Attack in Bamyan of Afghanistan

TEHRAN - Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh Wednesday condemned Tuesday's terrorist attack in Bamyan of Afghanistan, which killed and injured dozens of civilians, including innocent women and children.

Khatibzadeh expressed his condolences to the Afghan government and the people. Local officials in Afghanistan's Bamyan province said on Tuesday evening that two explosions in this city had killed 17 people and injured 50 others.

Gov't Needs to Empower Iranian People to Withstand Sanctions

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Majlis Speaker Mohammad-Baqer Qalibaf on Wednesday stressed the need to empower all Iranian people to withstand the sanctions.

Speaking at the Majlis formal session this morning, Qalibaf said that making the sanctions ineffective will lead to lifting them.

He made the remarks while referring to November 24 guidelines of the Supreme Leader to the Supreme Council of Economic Coordination meeting.

Ayatollah Khamenei offered a roadmap for three branches of Government to thwart the economic problems caused by the sanctions.

Qalibaf said that foiling the sanctions is the main strategy, adding that Majlis has taken measures in a bid to thwart impacts of the sanctions on people.



Lawmakers have focused on making boost in markets and creating job opportunities, said Qalibaf, noting that Majlis has various plans to achieve the goals.

The speaker called on the Majlis agricultural commission to examine the reasons behind rise in prices in recent days, and give related report to the parliament.

Supreme Council of Economic Coordination was founded on the order of the Supreme Leader more than two years ago to follow up ways to counter the US sanctions, and thwart the economic difficulties caused by the US sanctions.

In November 2018 and just few months after the US unilateral withdrawal from the July 2015 nuclear deal, outgoing US president Donald Trump imposed the highest level of sanctions against Iran.

JCPOA Not Negotiable



TEHRAN (MNA) – President's Chief of Staff underlined that Iran is not optimistic about any of the US administrations and will hold no new round of talks about the JCPOA.

Making the remarks on the sidelines of the Wednesday Cabinet meeting, Mahmoud Vaezi assured that there will be no new negotiations over the JCPOA.

"President Rouhani announced today that if the other JCPOA parties return to January 20, 2017, the day Trump came to power, Iran is also ready to step back to the same date," he said lamenting about the lack of commitment of the Europeans to their JCPOA obligations.

Vaezi noted that Trump has disturbed the international order and ruined international relations, including those in the Middle East.

"He has put intense pressure on the Iranian people over the past three years," he added.

Addressing U.S. elections, he said Iran welcomed Trump's defeat but it is not optimistic about any of the U.S. administrations unless that administration acts differently.

He underlined that despite the remarks of the upcoming US administration officials about their policy towards Iran, which as they say would be totally different from that of Trump, and their claims about getting connected to Iran, there has been no direct or indirect contact between Iran and the U.S.

Spokesman Dismisses Sweden's Stance on Iranian Inmate

TEHRAN (Tasnim) –Foreign Ministry rejected as deficient and incorrect the Swedish foreign minister's information about an Iranian inmate convicted of security charges.

In a statement on Tuesday evening, Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Saeed Khatibzadeh reacted to Swedish Foreign Minister Ann Christin Linde's tweet posted after her telephone conversation with Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif.

Khatibzadeh expressed regret that Swedish officials have deficient and incorrect information about the situation of Ahmad Reza Jalali, who is in jail for security-related crimes.

"As Dr. Zarif, the Iranian foreign minister, explained to Ms. Linde in the conversation, the Judiciary of the Islamic Republic of Iran is independent, and any interference in the issuing or enforcement of judicial verdicts is rejected and unacceptable," the spokesman added, according to the Foreign Ministry's website.

Jalali was arrested in 2016 upon traveling to Iran. Based on his confession, he was convicted of spying for Mossad and complicity in murdering Iranian nuclear scientists. Iran's Supreme Court upheld Jalali's death sentence in December 2017.

In February 2018, Stockholm said the Iranian had been granted Swedish citizenship.

Tracking Infected Patients to Combat COVID-19

TEHRAN (IFP) - The Iranian president says among the main strategies to combat the coronavirus outbreak is to conduct tests on a large scale and track infected individuals.

President Hassan Rouhani said that an increase in the number of tests will greatly help contain the disease.

"Increasing the number of tests to 100 thousand per day and tracking infected people and their relatives will be the most important step toward reducing fatalities, and I hope these measures will soon cut off the chain of infection," he said.

The president further expressed gratitude to people and business owners for their cooperation to stem the spread of the disease.

"Despite sustaining economic and financial losses, business owners shut down their activities for the sake of people's health during the time restrictions were enforced," he said at a meeting of specialized committees of the National Coronavirus Headquarters.

In the meeting, the president instructed the committees to make every effort in order to keep the COVID-19 infection from surging again when restrictions end.

Elsewhere in his remarks, President Rouhani appreciated efforts to develop a vaccine for coronavirus and purchase vaccines from other countries.

"Incontrovertibly, given the scientific and technological capabilities in the country, Iran will be able to produce a vaccine in the country with reliance on its scientists," he noted.

"Given that the necessary infrastructure has been provided, Iran will be able to mass-produce the vaccine in the country as well," he said.

AEOI Ready to Increase Percentage of Enrichment With New Centrifuges

TEHRAN (IP) - Spokesman of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) Behrouz Kamalvandi said the organization was ready to increase production capacity and enrichment percentages if necessary to manufacture industrially advanced machines.

Kamalvandi, regarding the strategic action plan for lifting the sanctions proposed by the National Security Commission of the parliament, said: "The strategic action plan is being considered in the parliament, and the National Security and Foreign Policy Commission has asked us to comment on technical aspects."

The spokesman added: "Regardless of the political

aspects of the plan and what the country's decision will be, we will comment on the technical considerations of the plan. Issues in various fields of enrichment, reactor design, and research and development (R&D) are an important part of which is applicable to the AEOI, especially given the advances we have made in advanced machine development in recent years."

The spokesman of the Atomic Energy Organization noted: "We are trying to see the technical considerations of the AEOI in the plan so that if the organization approves, there will be no problem in its implementation."

Khaf-Herat Railway to Come on Stream in Few Weeks

TEHRAN (MNA) –Minister of Roads and Urban Development said that Khaf-Herat railway between Iran and Afghanistan will become operational before the termination of the Iranian month of Azar (Dec. 20).

Speaking on the sidelines of the Cabinet's meeting on Wed., Mohammad Eslami said that this giant railway project would be inaugurated in the presence of high-ranking officials of the two countries.

Landlocked countries, especially Afghanistan, are always trying to access free waters, he said, adding, "This railway has helped Afghanistan transit its products via Islamic Republic of Iran, while it can also have an increasing effect on Iran's transit sector."

Construction operation of Khaf-Herat railway project has been completed. According to the scheduled program made, Iranian and Afghan railways would be connected to each other by Dec. 20, Roads minister added.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Eslami pointed to the outbreak of coronavirus pandemic in the country and added, "Following the implementation of tough transit restrictions across the country, road travels in the country has decreased by 45 percent."

Turning to observing social distancing at inbound and outbound flights, he said, "Accordingly, social-distancing plan is observed strictly in all flights."

Khaf-Herat railway, which is part of the Iran-Afghanistan rail corridor, connects Iran's eastern city of Khaf to Afghanistan's western city of Ghoryan.

Zarif Urges Europe Not to Sacrifice Independence for U.S. Bullying

TEHRAN (MNA) - Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif called on the European countries not to sacrifice their independence in the face of the US' hawkish policies.

Zarif held a telephone conversation with his Swedish counterpart, Ann Linde, on Tuesday afternoon.

During the phone call, the two sides conferred on the latest international developments, regional issues, JCPOA-related issues,

and bilateral and consular relations between Tehran and Stockholm.

Foreign Minister Zarif referred to the United States' unlawful and unfair sanctions against the Islamic Republic of Iran, and criticized European countries for their failure to fulfill their commitments under the JCPOA.

He also advised the Swedish top diplomat not to sacrifice their independence and sovereignty for the bullying and cruel policies of the U.S.

U.S. Trying to Destroy Afghan Legal Institutions

KABUL (IRNA) - Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said that Washington is clandestinely trying to destroy Afghanistan's legal institutions with its irresponsible pullout to create room for its return to the country.

Khatibzadeh said that the U.S. is trying to leave Afghanistan in a way that once again the country gets stuck in armed conflict.

He added that what the U.S. has done in Afghanistan is that it invaded Afghanistan, killed its people and now it leaves behind an ominous heritage by destroying its legal institutions upon leaving – hoping that one day it will return to the country.

The U.S., as an invader, must follow the international law and not to follow the "scorched earth policy" upon leaving, he said.

Regarding the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and the continuation of armed conflict in the country under the circumstances that peace has not been reached, he said the fact is that Iran believes in real peace talks; all parties and groups in Afghanistan should be able to negotiate in a totally inter-Afghan process, adding that Iran tries its best for that to happen.

Regarding the goal of his visit to Kabul, he said that Afghanistan is a high priority for Iran's foreign policy and the ties between the two countries are based on good neighborliness. He said that officials of Iran and Afghanistan have regular visits to the other country, adding that a couple of days ago Afghanistan deputy foreign minister paid a visit to Tehran and discussed the comprehensive document on strategic cooperation between Iran and Afghanistan.

He said that he had had a meeting with Chairman of Afghan Peace Council Abdullah Abdullah and discussed cultural and public diplomacy issues.

He said that he was present in the meeting with Afghanistan deputy foreign minister to discuss bilateral issues, expansion of cultural and media and general diplomacy.

Khatibzadeh added that Iran tries to be effective and help the peace process in Afghanistan.

Iran Backs Independence, Development of Bosnia-Herzegovina

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's ambassador in Sarajevo said on Wednesday that Iran supports independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of Bosnia-Herzegovina and stands by the Bosnian people.

Reza Qelichkhan made the remarks in separate meetings with Deputy Chairman of the House of Representatives Denis Zvizdić and Deputy Chairman of House of Peoples Dragan Čović of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Qelichkhan expressed hope in the meetings that the parliaments of Iran and Bosnia-Herzegovina will help expand relations between the two countries in all fields.

He said that since the independence of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Iran has respected its territorial integrity, sovereignty, and unity, as well as the ethnicities living in the country.

Congratulating the successful local elections in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Qelichkhan said that Iran respects all ethnic groups of the country, including Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats as the top agenda of diplomatic relations with Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Thanking Iran for its helps to Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 1990s, Zvizdić welcomed expansion of ties between Tehran and Sarajevo in recent years, adding that when the coronavirus epidemic is over, exchange of delegations at highest levels, holding joint economic commissions, and meetings of investors should go on.

Referring to various capacities of the two countries, Qelichkhan called for implementation of small economic plans, adding that they are effective ways for expansion of cooperation.

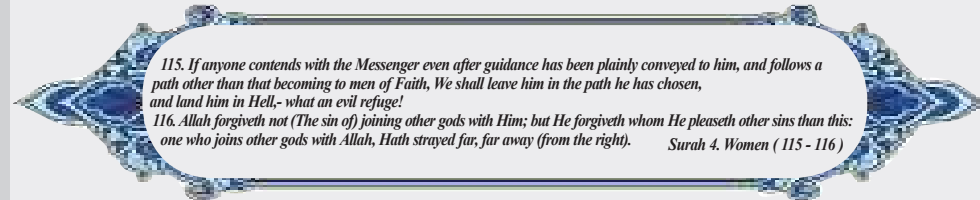
Čović hoped that exchange of parliamentary delegations would resume after the coronavirus epidemic goes away, adding that relations between Iran and Bosnia are based on mutual respect and good faith.

Qelichkhan welcomed the idea of Bosnia-Herzegovina joining the European Union and said that Iran will support independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and development of Bosnia-Herzegovina and will always stand by the Bosnian people.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	11:51
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:11
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:24
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:52



Iran Needs Resolving Banking Problems Than Removal of Sanctions

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Behrooz Olfat, head of Trade Promotion Organization's Europe and North America Department, says even if today U.S. President-Elect Joe Biden lifts imposed sanctions, we will enjoy no major gain as long as our banking problems are not resolved.

Speaking to ILNA, Mr. Olfat gave more details on the upcoming Iran-Europe Business Forum which is to be held in December. He said since two years ago the TPO has kicked off a joint project with the trade center of the UN and with support of EU. He added that the first part of the project which was national export strategy has ended, noting that in the framework of national export strategy, there are six sections of auto parts, fruits and vegetables, petrochemicals, tourism and industrial goods which are noticed as the developmental sections.

Olfat said that during the conducted studies, there are series of actions which are related to holding conferences and webinars, and the upcoming webinar is in line with these actions. He noted that from December 1, talks between companies will start online and it will continue for 20 days. He reiterated that the forum will be held on December 14-18 with presence of 8 specialized panels.

He further said that talks between companies in these online 20-day meetings can be useful for enterprises, and companies can easily, due to the launched platform, find their European counterparts as this issue will cost them nothing and it is a very good opportunity for initiation with these enterprises.

Olfat admitted that 90 percent of European and even Iranian participants in this webinar are small and medium-sized companies especially start-ups, knowledge-based companies and even companies which have no major international trade experiences.

He added that those companies which are in favorable condition in terms of technical knowledge but lack connection with overseas companies especially with Europe can take advantage of this opportunity.



On the export capacity of Iran to Europe, Olfat said that in the normal condition when there is no sanction and no banking problem, with the current level of the production in the country Iran can have annual exports worth of 8 to 10 billion dollars to Europe, adding that but if the capacity of steel, petrochemical and other sections are added, this figure will grow.

He noted that of course international condition will not be so easy or Iranians, adding let's suppose the sanctions have been lifted, the country is still facing banking restrictions that some part of it is for the FATF.

Olfat stated if the country stays firm on not joining the FATF, banks in the international level and especially in Europe will have problems for cooperating with their Iranian counterparts. He further said that if today U.S. President-Elect Biden lifts the imposed sanctions, as long as the banking system problems are not solved, it will be in vain.

He reiterated if one looks at it realistically, he finds the country can return to its post-JCPOA level and have annual exports worth of \$2b to Europe which has unfortunately declined by one-third.

On the problems of the SWIFT, he said the SWIFT was part of the sanctions but the FATF is a protocol which links the banks in the world, adding whether we like or dislike it, as long as the country is not removed from the FATF black list, it will face restriction for communicating with international banks and even with banks in the neighboring states.

Olfat said although removal of sanctions is a positive happening and foreign companies will have no restrictions in doing business with Iran, the key point lies in banking and financial relations.

9 New Thermal Power Plants To Be Launched by Yearend

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian said on Wednesday that nine thermal power stations are planned to come on stream in various provinces across the country and are going to go operational by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2021).

According to Iranian Ministry of Energy, Ardakanian said that all parts of the country can use the electricity produced by the 9 thermal power plants, which are slated to be inaugurated in various provinces.

The plants' electricity will be connected to the national grid, he said, adding, "Utilizing energy resources is the right of all people of a country and we are working to materialize this important goal."

These power plants will be inaugurated under the framework of a program called "A-B-Iran" based on which several energy projects go operational across the country every week.

The nominal capacity of electricity generation at Iranian power plants has exceeded 86,000 megawatts with the inauguration of several new power plants over the past two years.



Kish-Istanbul-Abadan Flight to Operate Soon



KISH (IRNA) - Flights to take passengers from Kish and Abadan to Istanbul and vice-versa will operate soon, IRNA reported on Wednesday.

Kish Free Zone Organisation (KFZO) and Arvand Free Zone Organization (AFZ), and Kish Air signed an Memorandum of understanding (MOU) to launch new Kish-Istanbul- Abadan flights.

According to the Public Relations and International Affairs of KFZO, the tripartite memorandum of understanding envisaged to launch air flights to encourage businessmen and tourists of the two regions.

Operation of the news flights will help expand trade activities and tourism.

In order to connect Kish Free Zone Organisation (KFZO), and Arvand Free Zone Organization (AFZ) to the international passenger transit hub, new Kish-Istanbul- Abadan flights will operate after corona pandemic.

Kish Free Zone Organization is the first Iranian free zone to be admitted a member of World Free Zones Organization.

Arvand Zone is located northwest of Persian Gulf covering the cities of Abadan, Khorramshahr and Minooshahr.

The free zone is of special significance as it is on neighborhood of Iraq and Kuwait.

Over \$140m of Investment Made For Greenhouse Establishment

TEHRAN (MNA) - Over six trillion rials (about \$142.85 million) of investment has been made for the establishment of greenhouses in Iran's northeastern Golestan Province during the past two years, according to a provincial official.

Navid-Reza Farahani, the deputy head of the province's agriculture department, said the greenhouses have been set up in 280 hectares of lands, creating 14,000 job opportunities.

The official noted that competition of such projects will flourish the agriculture sector of the province.

While the agriculture sector plays a significant role in the promotion of the Iranian economy, drought in recent years has prevented this sector from being developed as expected.

To tackle this condition, the Agriculture Ministry has taken some measures and defined some programs, such as the improvement of irrigation systems.

One of the major programs that the ministry has defined and is seriously pursuing is the development of greenhouses throughout the country.

Tehran, Doha To Forge Closer Economic Cooperation



TEHRAN (IFP) - Iran and Qatar have reiterated their determination to further enhance their economic cooperation.

The two countries discussed closer collaboration on the economic front at the 7th Meeting of the Iran-Qatar Joint Economic Cooperation Commission held in the city of Isfahan in central Iran.

Speaking on the sidelines of the event, Iranian Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian said the meeting was held with a delay due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The session was scheduled to be held [some time] in the past months and to be attended by a large number of economic activists of both countries, but unfortunately, due to the outbreak of the virus and the restrictions imposed on travel and holding gatherings accordingly, the seventh meeting of the two countries' joint economic cooperation commission was held on a limited scale," said the minister.

"After the U.S., Britain and France, the Qatari government sent its commercial attaché to Iran, and today, Iran is the fourth country where Qatar has sent its commercial attaché to boost commercial ties, which means the two countries are seriously determined to promote their cooperation on different fronts," he said.

The minister said Qatar has gone through difficult times recently, and at the same time, Iran has been facing an economic war launched by enemies, making mutual economic cooperation all the more significant.

He said the two sides can also work together in the areas of water, technical and engineering services, energy and transportation.

Tehran, Brasilia Seek Expanding Trade Ties

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Senior Iranian and Brazilian officials held talks in Brazil on upgrading deep-rooted relations between Tehran and Brasilia in the post-pandemic era.

The talks were held between Iran's Ambassador to Brazil Hossein Qaribi and Brazil's Minister of Institutional Security five-star General Augusto Heleno.

During the talks, the two sides stressed the importance of continuation of political consultations and reviewed ways to widen mutual cooperation.

They also called for development



in trade relations in the post-pandemic era.

Reportedly, Iran and Brazil enjoy great capacities for cooperation in various areas.

The volume of direct and indirect relations between the two countries had been over four billion dollars in 2019.

Since its outbreak in December 2019, the coronavirus pandemic has postponed many world events, meetings and sports contests as it has killed over 1,400,000 people worldwide.

The number of the dead in Iran has passed 45,000.

Azerbaijan's Trade With Iran Hits \$274m

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Azerbaijan's trade with Iran amounted to \$274 million, thus making Iran Azerbaijan's largest trading partner among the Persian Gulf countries in January-October 2020, the State Customs Committee has reported.

Out of the total turnover, export from Azerbaijan to Iran amounted to \$34.5 million, while the import from Iran amounted to \$239.4 million. It should be noted that the trade between the two countries resulted in \$422.6 million during the corresponding period of 2019. Thus, there was a decrease in trade between the two countries by \$148.6 million.

Moreover, during the reported period, the United Arab Emirates was Azerbaijan's second largest partner among the Persian Gulf countries with the trade amounting to \$33.4 million. Export amounted to \$8.3 million, while import amounted to \$25 million. It should be noted that the trade amounted to \$56.7 million between Azerbaijan and the United Arab Emirates during the same period of last year. Thus, there was a decrease in the trade of the two countries by \$23.3 million.

Furthermore, Saudi Arabia, with the trade of \$10.7 million, was Azerbaijan's third largest partner among the Persian Gulf countries during the first ten months of the year. Out of the total turnover, export amounted to \$1.4 million, while import to \$9.2 million. It should be noted that the trade between the two countries amounted to \$9.6 in January-October 2019. Thus, there was an increase in the trade between Azerbaijan and Saudi Arabia by \$1 million during the reported period.

Likewise, these countries are also the three leaders among the Persian Gulf countries, in terms of Azerbaijan's import. In the meantime, Iran, the United Arab Emirates and Iraq were three leaders among the Persian Gulf countries, in terms of Azerbaijan's export.

Thus, the export of Azerbaijani products to Iran amounted to \$8.9 million, while the import to \$243,710. The trade between the two countries resulted in \$9.2 million during the reported period.

Tehran Province Exports 1b Euro Worth of Goods in 6 Months

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's Tehran province has exported one billion euro's worth of different types of commodities during the first six months of the Iranian calendar year (started March 20, 2020).

The figure shows 18 percent increase while being compared with the previous year's corresponding period, managing director of industrial complexes in Tehran Saber Parnian said.

Increase in quality of Iranian products are tangible compared with past five years ago, Parnian added.

After imposition of the US sanctions against Iran, the indigenous companies could produce foreign-like commodities by relying on domestic capabilities and technologies, the official noted.

U.S. President Donald Trump reimposed as he claimed the highest level of sanctions against Iran in November 2018, just months after his unilateral withdrawal from the Iran Deal in May.

Parnian went on to say that the indigenous products can now compete with their foreign-made rivals.

Zuma Still Popular Despite Graft Scandals

JOHANNESBURG (AFP) - Over the course of his scandal-tainted career, South Africa's ex-president Jacob Zuma accumulated 16 fraud charges, faced court over alleged rape and built a fervent fan base that continues to rattle politics.

He now faces a police investigation after walking out last week on a panel probing rampant state corruption during his nine-year reign.

The former anti-apartheid resistance fighter is accused of overseeing mass looting of state assets.



Thai Pro-Democracy Leaders Summoned

BANGKOK (Dispatches) - Twelve Thai pro-democracy protest leaders have been summoned by police to answer charges of royal defamation, the first use of the draconian law in almost three years, as Bangkok gears up for another major rally.

Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha last week gave the green light for authorities to lay lese majeste charges, which bar any criticism of the royal family, against demonstrators who could now face up to 15 years in prison.

Thailand has for months been rocked by youth-led protests demanding a new constitution, reform of the untouchable monarchy, and for Prayut to resign.



Foreign Aid to Afghanistan Could Reach \$12b Over Four Years



GENEVA (Reuters) - Foreign donors pledged a projected \$12 billion in civilian aid to Afghanistan over the next four years at a conference on Tuesday, but many made it conditional on protecting human rights and making progress on peace talks in a major shake-up for the country's economy.

Ville Skinnari, Finland's minister for development cooperation and foreign trade whose government co-organised the conference, said donors had pledged \$3 billion for next year, with annual commitments expected to continue at roughly the same level through to 2024, adding: "This would amount to \$12 billion."

That preliminary figure was a drop from \$15.2 billion pledged in 2016 for four years, despite coming at a time when Afghanistan's needs are growing due to rising violence and the coronavirus pandemic.

Many donors also put strict conditions on future funding and some officially committed for just the next year. Diplomats said keeping financing for Afghanistan on a tight leash could provide foreign governments with some leverage to inject a greater sense of urgency into a halting peace process.

The United States said it had pledged \$300 million in civilian aid to Afghanistan next year and would make available another \$300 million based on progress in peace talks.

"We stand ready to support Afghanistan and to that end we've made available \$600 million for civilian assistance needs in 2021. We're pleased to pledge today \$300 million of that money with the remaining \$300 million available as we review progress in the peace process," U.S. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs David Hale said via video link at the conference in Geneva.

The United States has contributed roughly \$800 million a year in civilian aid in recent years.

Another top donor, Germany, pledged 430 million euros (\$510.88 million) in 2021 and signalled it would keep contributing until 2024 but also stressed that progress towards ending almost 20 years of war was needed.

Talks in the Qatari capital Doha between the Afghan government and Taliban insurgents began in September but have been mired in procedural wrangling as violence has resurged around the country.

But Hale said "significant progress" had recently been made, including a tentative agreement on ground rules that could allow negotiators to proceed to the next stage of forming an agenda.

Afghanistan's Foreign Minister Mohammad Haneef Atmar said the "legal basis" for talks was one issue that still had not been resolved, though he expected progress soon. Officials have previously told Reuters the main dispute is over whether a February U.S.-Taliban agreement should form the basis of talks.

Biden Says America Is Back

WILMINGTON (Reuters) - President-elect Joe Biden said on Tuesday the United States will be "ready to lead" again on the global stage, turning the page on Republican President Donald Trump's "America First" policies as he pledged to work together with the nation's allies.

Introducing his foreign policy and national security team, the Democratic former vice president signaled he intended after taking office on Jan. 20 to steer the United States away from the unilateralist nationalism pursued by Trump.

Biden also signaled that two former, more liberal, rivals for the Democratic presidential nomination, Senators Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren, were not under consideration for Cabinet appointments, saying he needed their votes in the closely divided Senate. Trump over four years unsettled many U.S. allies, in Europe and elsewhere, with an antagonistic approach toward the NATO alliance and trade relations, abandonment of international agreements and warm relationships with authoritarian leaders.

Biden said his team, which includes trusted aide Antony Blinken as his nominee for U.S. secretary of state, would shed what the president-elect described as "old thinking and unchanged habits" in its approach to foreign relations.

"It's a team that reflects the fact that America is back, ready to lead the world, not retreat from it, once again sit at the head of the table, ready to confront our adversaries and not reject our allies, ready to stand up for our values," Biden said at the event in his hometown of Wilmington, Delaware.

The world is much changed since Democrats were last in the White House four years ago. China is on the rise and emboldened, Russia has sought to further assert its clout, U.S. influence has waned as it has pulled out of various accords and American moral authority has been dented by turmoil at home.

U.S. foreign policy under a Biden administration is likely to take more of a multilateral and diplomatic approach aimed at repairing Washington's relationships with key allies and pursuing new paths on issues such as climate change.

His promise to embrace alliances, including in the Asia-Pacific region, follows a deterioration in bilateral ties between the United States and China, the world's top two economies, that has triggered comparisons with the Cold War.

Pakistan Gives U.N. a Dossier on India

NEW YORK (Reuters) - Pakistan gave U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres a dossier on Tuesday accusing India of stoking terrorism in Pakistan, a day after India provided a dossier to some U.N. Security Council members accusing militants from Pakistan of attempting an attack in the disputed Indian territory Kashmir.

The tit-for-tat moves come ahead of India joining the 15-member council for a two-year term starting Jan. 1, 2021.

Pakistan's U.N. Ambassador Munir Akram accused India of violating international law, the U.N. Charter and Security Council resolutions by sponsoring terrorism.

He said Pakistan called on Guterres and the international community "to take note of Indian terrorism and subversion against Pakistan and to prevail on India to desist from these illegal and aggressive activities."

A spokesperson for India's mission to the United Nations in New York denied the charges.

"Pakistan can cry hoarse from the rooftops. But they cannot change the fact that they are the epicenter of terrorism," the spokesperson said. "Their lies have no takers."

The Himalayan region of Jammu and Kashmir has long been a flashpoint between nuclear-armed neighbors India and Pakistan, with both claiming Kashmir in full but ruling it in part. U.N. peacekeepers have been deployed since 1949 to observe a ceasefire between India and Pakistan in Jammu and Kashmir.

India said on Monday that four militants, belonging to the Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammad, made their way into Indian Kashmir through a tunnel last week and opened fire when their truck was stopped for a routine inspection. [L4N2I92VF]

Pakistan has rejected allegations of any involvement in the alleged attack and said they were aimed at diverting attention from India's repression of the people of Kashmir.

The U.N. Security Council blacklisted the head of the Pakistan-based militant group Jaish-e-Mohammed in May last year after China dropped its objection to the move, ending a decade-long diplomatic impasse.

Azerbaijan Army Moves Into Second District Handed Back by Armenia

BAKU (AFP) - Azerbaijan said Wednesday its forces had entered the second of three districts to be handed back by Armenia as part of a deal that ended weeks of fighting over the region of Nagorno-Karabakh.

The defence ministry in Baku said in a statement that "units of the Azerbaijani army entered the Kalbajar region on November 25" under the deal signed earlier this month by Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia.

Wedge between the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region and the territory of Armenia, Kalbajar was initially scheduled for handover on November 15 but the deadline was postponed by Azerbaijan for humanitarian reasons.

"Engineering work has been completed to ensure the movement of our units in this direction, the difficult mountain roads along the route of the troops' movement are being cleared of mines and prepared for use," the ministry statement said.

Armenia agreed to hand over three districts around Karabakh -- Aghdam, Kalbajar and Lachin -- as part of the deal that stopped an Azerbaijani offensive that had reclaimed swathes of territory lost to Armenian separatists in a 1990s war.

Aghdam was ceded on November 20 and Lachin is to be handed over by December 1.

In the days before the handover, residents of Kalbajar packed all they could take, determined to leave nothing to their long-term foe.

AFP journalists saw locals collecting electric cables, loading parts of a hydroelectric power station into a truck and even cutting down trees to take with them as they left.

Azerbaijanis who fled the region nearly 30 years ago are expected to return and local bricklayer Gagik Yakhshibekyan said the Armenians did not want to leave anything behind for them.

"So they burn them (their houses), trees are cut down and people are taking everything away," the 43-year-old told AFP.

Clashes between the ex-Soviet rivals over Nagorno-Karabakh broke out in late September, reigniting the long-simmering conflict over the mountainous region.

The ethnic Armenian enclave broke away from Baku's control in the 1990s war and declared independence, though it remained internationally recognised as part of Azerbaijan.

The peace deal was reached after six weeks of heavy fighting that saw Azerbaijan's military overwhelm Armenian separatist forces and threatening to advance on Karabakh's main city Stepanakert.



Tigrayans Accused of Massacre in Ethiopia War



ADDIS ABABA (Reuters) - Ethiopia's state-appointed rights watchdog accused a Tigrayan youth group on Tuesday of killing hundreds of civilians as federal and local forces both claimed advances in a three-week war in the country's mountainous north.

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's government said enemy soldiers were surrendering as it advanced towards the regional capital, but the Tigrayans reported they were resisting and had destroyed a prestigious army division.

The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission published findings into a Nov. 9 attack in Mai Kadra in southwest Tigray - first reported by Amnesty International - where it said a youth group called Samri killed an estimated 600 civilians, mainly of Amharic descent.

They were beaten to death, stabbed, set on fire and strangled with ropes, the report said, though some residents protected neighbours by hiding them in homes. The commission accused local forces of colluding in the "massacre".

The Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) was not immediately available but has previously denied involvement. Reuters has been unable to verify statements made by either side since phone and internet connections to Tigray are down and access to the area is strictly controlled. Since fighting began on Nov. 4, hundreds have been killed, more than 41,000 refugees have fled to Sudan, and there has been widespread destruction and uprooting of people from homes.

The war has spread to Eritrea, where the Tigrayans have fired rockets, and also affected Somalia where Ethiopia has disarmed several hundred Tigrayans in a peacekeeping force fighting al Qaeda-linked militants. The government said the peacekeepers were being investigated for links to the TPLF.

Abiy's government said many Tigrayan combatants had responded to a 72-hour ultimatum to lay down arms before a threatened offensive against Mekelle city, with half a million inhabitants. The deadline expires on Wednesday.

The battle-hardened TPLF, which had ruled the region of more than 5 million people, gave a different version, saying their troops were keeping federal forces at bay and scoring victories.

Shanon
(adviser)

Farmanieh Apt (\$3000)
360sq.m, 4bdrs
S/p, Sauna
J, balcony
marble fl
Fully Furn

Darrous Villa (\$4000)
1000sq.m
5bdrs, S/p
S, J, & pkg
green yard
Fully Furn

Parsian

Pasdaran Apts
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(\$ 6 00) 2bdrs, 220sq.m
Both with S/p, S, J, F.F

Elahieh bldg (\$7000)
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enough pkg lots, & storages
brand new, balcony, & yard

Jordan (\$1200)
3bdrs, 150sq.m, F.F

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Bitcoin Climbs Towards All-Time High

LONDON (Reuters) - Bitcoin moved to within a whisker of its all-time high on Tuesday, after hitting \$19,000 for the first time in nearly three years.

The world's most popular cryptocurrency was last up 4.8% at \$19,225, just shy of its all-time record of \$19,666 hit in December 2017. Bitcoin has gained around 25% in the last two weeks alone, and is up around 160% this year.

Fuelling its rally have been demand for riskier assets amid unprecedented stimulus programmes to counter the COVID-19 hit; hunger for assets perceived as resistant to inflation; and expectations cryptocurrencies will win wider acceptance as a method of payments.

Bitcoin's 12-year history has been peppered with vertiginous gains and equally sharp drops. Its markets and price discovery is highly opaque compared with traditional assets such as stocks or bonds,



World Economy Risks Buckling Into 2021 Despite Vaccine Nearing

LONDON (Bloomberg) - The surging coronavirus is stoking fears of a fresh downturn for the world economy, heaping pressure on central banks and governments to lay aside other concerns and do more to spur demand.

Hopes are mounting that COVID-19 vaccines will become available as soon as December, but widespread delivery will take months and infections are rising again in many large economies. Authorities are responding with more restrictions to limit the virus's spread at the price of weaker economic activity.

Wall Street economists now say that it wouldn't take much for the U.S., euro area and Japan to each contract again either this quarter or next, just months after they bounced from the deepest recession in generations. Bloomberg Economics gauges of high-frequency data point to a double-dip downturn, with European factory indexes on Monday justifying that worry, though a U.S. measure of business activity was upbeat.

That leaves policymakers hearing calls for more stimulus, even when central banks are already stretched and starting to worry about froth in financial markets. Meantime, politicians from the U.S. to Europe are clashing over just how much they can and should do with fiscal policy.

"While there is much excitement over the progress of vaccine development, it will not be the quick fix that many expect it to be," Singapore's Trade & Industry Minister Chan Chun Sing told reporters on Monday. "Manufacturing enough doses, then distributing and vaccinating a significant population of the world, will take many months, if not years."

Against such a backdrop, the European Central Bank is set to ease monetary policy again next month, while the Federal Reserve could concentrate more of its bond purchases on longer-term securities to push down interest rates.

But there are concerns the central banks have run out of room to act decisively and that even easier financial conditions won't translate into an economic boost. The International Monetary Fund is among those also warning elevated asset prices potentially point to a disconnect from the real economy and so may pose a financial stability threat.

"There is a glut of savings and a shortage of investment," which is the core problem facing developed economies, former Fed Chair Janet Yellen, who is set to be nominated for Treasury Secretary by President-elect Joe Biden, told Bloomberg's New Economy Forum last week. "We have to have fiscal policy, structural policy other than just relying on central banks to achieve healthy growth."

The problem is fiscal policy in the U.S. and Europe isn't racing to the rescue. Lawmakers in the U.S. are at loggerheads over how much more to spend as Biden prepares to take office. President Donald Trump's Treasury Department last week reduced the Fed's ability to aid some credit markets.

In Europe, \$2 trillion in aid is being held up by a fight over political control.

For the U.S., the pace of infections prompted JPMorgan Chase & Co. analysts to forecast an economic shrinkage next quarter as various states impose social distancing curbs and some government benefits expire. Recent data show more people filing for unemployment benefits and fewer dining out at restaurants.

In Europe, further evidence arrived on Monday that a double-dip recession is on the way, with a survey of purchasing managers dropping sharply.

German Economy Grows by 8.5% in Q3

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Germany's gross domestic product grew by a record 8.5 percent in the third quarter as Europe's largest economy partly recovered from an unprecedented plunge caused by the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in spring, the statistics office said on Tuesday. The stronger-than expected rebound was mainly driven by higher household spending and soaring exports, the office said.

The stronger-than expected rebound was mainly driven by higher household spending and soaring exports, the office said. "This enabled the German economy to make up for a large part of the massive decline in gross domestic product caused by the coronavirus pandemic in the second quarter of 2020," it added.

The reading marked an upward revision to an earlier flash estimate of 8.2 percent growth, and followed a 9.8 percent plunge in the second quarter.

The outlook is clouded by a second wave of coronavirus infections and a partial lockdown to slow the spread of the disease.

Restaurants, bars, hotels and entertainment venues have been closed since Nov. 2, but shops and schools remain open.

Chancellor Angela Merkel and regional state premiers are planning to extend the "lockdown-light" on Wednesday until Dec. 20, according to a draft prepared for their meeting.

A contraction in the service sector is expected to weigh heavily on gross domestic product in the fourth quarter, while lockdown measures in other countries are likely to hit export-oriented manufacturers as well.

DIW economist Claus Michelsen said a decline in economic output was therefore on the cards, with initial estimates indicating a GDP drop of around 1 percent in the final quarter.

"Germany and many important trading partners are likely to slide back into recession," Michelsen said.



China, Japan Vow to Boost Trade Ties

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Tokyo and Beijing pledged cooperation on trade and defence Tuesday, but locked horns on disputed islands as China's foreign minister visited Japan for the first time since the coronavirus pandemic began.

The two countries had been working to improve historically tense relations before the pandemic erupted, and China's President Xi Jinping had been expected for a state visit in the spring.

But with Beijing embroiled in increasingly bitter diplomatic and trade spat with Japanese allies from the United States to Australia, Tokyo's diplomatic outreach appeared to take a backseat.

Wang Yi's visit had been repeatedly postponed, as Tokyo angrily protested against what it says has been an unprecedented number of Chinese incursions into the area around the disputed Senkaku islands.

China calls the islands the Diaoyu and claims they are part of its territory.

Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi said he "strongly urged" China to prevent intrusions by Chinese vessels into waters near the islands.

In response, Wang claimed that Japanese fishing boats were repeatedly entering "sensitive waters".

"Our Chinese stance is clear. Of course, we will continue to protect our country's sovereignty," he said.

Wang also said the two countries would try to set up a hotline of their defense authorities by the end of this year, but did not give further details.

The rhetoric from the ministers was otherwise largely warm, with pledges to cooperate on trade -- particularly after this month's signing of the RCEP, a massive agreement that groups 15 Asia-Pacific countries, including Japan and China.

They said also they would work together on tackling the coronavirus, with plans to allow business travel to resume between the two countries.

There was no mention of whether Xi's visit was back on the agenda.

S.Korea Small Businesses Suffer From New Restriction Rules

SEOUL (Dispatches) - The new social distancing rules has dealt a huge blow on small businesses outweighing the optimism for economic revival.

"I feel like I've been left alone in the dark," said Jung Gong-dan, a business owner near the capital's Itaewon district, saying she has lost hope after a ban on dining in restaurants after 9 p.m.

South Korea, Asia's fourth-largest economy grew in the third quarter due to the stimulus injected into the economy and major trading partners easing virus curbs.

However, the financial growth isn't reflecting in the real economy as entrepreneurs were forced to lock up again.

"I'm planning to launch a takeout drink sale with discounts, which is the only way to head off a cash crunch, given revenue drops throughout the year," said a bar owner, who runs two stores in downtown Seoul.

As residents ease into the new restrictions, the hustle and bustle of the streets of Seoul were missing on Monday.

According to Jung, a business owner, lack of government aid might force a lot to shut down permanently following the losses suffered at the beginning of the year.

"I hope the government will provide practical measures to help us because constantly suspending night operations virtually means no business," she added.

The government is yet to announce stimulus plans but the opposition party called on diversion of money from 2021's budget to help the pandemic hit the economy.

Health authorities have warned the current wave of infections might be harder to limit than before, as most occur in the wider general community around Seoul.

Singapore Economy to Return To Growth Next Year

SINGAPORE (The Straits Times) - Singapore's economic growth will rebound in 2021 by the most in a decade, helped by a low base, but gross domestic product will probably not return to pre-Covid-19 levels until the end of next year.

The economy will also contract by 6.5 to 6.0 per cent in 2020, compared to the previous estimate of -7 to -5 per cent, the Ministry of Trade and Industry said while presenting the Economic Survey of Singapore.

The forecast for 2020 has been narrowed due to Singapore's better than expected economic performance in the first three quarters, said Gabriel Lim, Permanent Secretary for Trade and Industry, in his opening remarks at a virtual press briefing on Monday.

The economy is expected to grow by 4.0 to 6.0 per cent in 2021 -- the highest since at least 2011 when the economy expanded by 6.3 per cent - helped by continued expansion of trade and manufacturing and a gradual recovery in construction and aviation- and tourism-related sectors, he said.

"While growth is expected to rebound from the low base this year, our economic recovery is expected to be gradual, with GDP not likely to return to pre-Covid levels until the end of 2021," Lim noted.

"Furthermore, there remains uncertainty over how the Covid-19 situation will evolve globally in the year ahead, which will depend in part on the progress in vaccine development, production and distribution," he added.

In the third quarter this year, the economy expanded by 9.2 per cent on a quarter-on-quarter seasonally adjusted basis, a turnaround from the 13.2 per cent decline in the second quarter, latest data in the Economic Survey showed.

On a year-on-year basis, the economy shrank by 5.8 per cent, a smaller contraction than the 13.3 per cent slump in the second quarter. That was also better than the previous estimate of a 7 per cent contraction, though slightly worse than the 5.5 per cent drop tipped by economists in a Bloomberg poll.

The improved performance came on the heels of the phased resumption of activities in the third quarter following the circuit breaker that was implemented from April 7 to June 1, as well as the rebound in activity in major economies during the quarter as they emerged from their lockdowns.

The economy has contracted by 6.5 per cent on a year-on-year basis in the first three quarters of the year.

For 2021, the economy is projected to return to growth amid improved growth outlook for key external economies, as well as a further easing of global travel restrictions.

Trade-related services sectors such as wholesale trade are expected to benefit from the pick-up in external demand.

At the same time, the manufacturing sector may to continue to expand, with growth in the electronics and precision engineering clusters boosted by robust semiconductor demand from the 5G market. Likewise, growth in the information and communications, and finance and insurance sectors is expected to remain healthy.

IMF Tells Russia to Cut Rates, Lowers 2021 Growth Forecast



MOSCOW (Reuters) - Russia should consider cutting interest rates even further in the coming months as inflation is on track to undershoot its target in 2021 amid lower-than-expected economic growth, the International Monetary Fund said on Tuesday.

Russia has slashed rates to record lows this year as the economy was hit by the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns to contain it and by lower prices for oil, its main export.

"We project below-target inflation for some time and hence recommend policy easing in the coming months," the IMF said in a report after regular consultations with Russian authorities.

The central bank could even lower the rate below 4%, its inflation target, Jacques Miniane, IMF Mission Chief for Russia, told an online media briefing.

The central bank holds its next rate-setting meeting on Dec. 18. A Reuters poll of analysts conducted in late October predicted it will keep its benchmark interest rate at 4.25%.

The IMF said it expected annual inflation in Russia to stay in the range of 3-3.5% in the second half of 2021.

The IMF said it welcomed the extension of public support measures but said authorities should stand ready to do more, given that signs of economic recovery are now under threat from a sharp rise in new coronavirus infections.

In the past few weeks, Russia has been reporting record increases in COVID-19 cases almost on a daily basis but authorities have said they will not impose a nationwide lockdown as they did earlier in the pandemic.

The IMF said it sees Russia's economy shrinking by 3.9% in 2020 before growing by around 2.5% next year "assuming the COVID-19 situation gradually normalizes". In October, the IMF predicted the Russian economy would grow by 2.8% in 2021.

South Pars Strategic Condensate Storages to Be Inaugurated Soon

TEHRAN – The project for the construction of Iran’s South Pars strategic storage facilities is nearly finished and the storages will be officially inaugurated in near future, Shana reported.

With a nominal capacity of 640,000 cubic meters (four million barrels), the mentioned storage facilities and gas condensate measuring stations have been constructed at Pars 1 site, southern Iran, to store gas

condensate produced by South Pars refineries.

Implemented by Pars Oil and Gas Company (POGC), the mentioned project includes eight storages each with a capacity of 80,000 cubic meters equipped with floating roofs and also two fire tanks and fuel tanks, piping network and electrical and instrumentation systems, measuring systems, and condensate transfer boosters and pumps as well as office buildings.



Iraq Seeks \$2b Upfront for Oil Supply Contract

BAGHDAD (Bloomberg) --Iraq is seeking an upfront payment of about \$2 billion in exchange for a long-term crude-supply contract, the latest sign of Baghdad’s growing desperation for cash as its economy unravels.

The Middle Eastern country is grappling with a crisis brought to a head by low oil prices and OPEC+ output cuts. As state coffers dwindle and school teachers go unpaid, the country risks a repeat of upheaval last year that brought down the government and saw hundreds of protesters killed.

In a letter to oil companies seen by Bloomberg News, the Iraqi government sought to mitigate its dire financial position by proposing a five-year supply contract delivering 4 million barrels a month, or about 130,000 barrels a day. The buyer would pay upfront for one year of supply, which at current prices would bring in just above \$2 billion, according to Bloomberg calculations.

The letter from SOMO, the Iraqi state-owned agency in charge of petroleum exports, was first reported by the Iraq Oil Report.

“SOMO, on behalf of the Ministry of Oil, has the interest to propose a long-term crude-supply deal in exchange for prepayment for a fraction of the total allocated quantity,” according to the letter, which was marked strictly confidential. It asked potential buyers to respond by Nov. 27, which may be too soon for some companies to get internal approvals.

Cash-strapped oil producers have often relied on pre-payments deals to raise money, but Baghdad hasn’t done so until now. The semi-autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government in northern Iraq has used similar contracts in the past, as have Chad and the Republic of Congo.

In a pre-payment deal, the oil buyer effectively becomes a lender to the country. The barrels are a security for the loan, much as borrowers use their homes as collateral for a mortgage.

For Iraq’s federal government, the loan could help Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi, who came to power in May and has warned that the government will struggle to pay civil servants without raising more debt.

“They need the money,” said Ahmed Mehdi, an expert on the Iraqi petroleum industry at the Oxford Institute for Energy Studies. “On a monthly basis, the government is short around \$3.5 billion to pay for salaries, imports, pensions and debts.”

Iraq’s monthly revenue has shriveled to roughly \$4 billion this year, barely half what it was in 2019.

All OPEC+ countries have suffered economic hardship, but Iraq’s position is among the weakest. Although crude prices have recovered from the worst of this year’s slump, they are still down 30% this year at around \$46.50 a barrel.



Members of OPEC+ -- an alliance of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries and others such as Russia -- also have less oil to sell because of deep production cuts the cartel agreed to in April during the height of the coronavirus pandemic. Iraq, along with other nations such as Nigeria, has pumped above its quota on several occasions since then, angering OPEC’s de facto leader, Saudi Arabia.

Iraq’s gross domestic product will contract 12% this year, more than that of any other OPEC member under a production quota, according to International Monetary Fund forecasts. The country pumped 3.87 million barrels a day last month, according to data compiled by Bloomberg. Average output of 4.18 million barrels daily so far this year is down 12% from last year.

In the letter, Baghdad asked the potential buyer to pay, on signature of the contract, for 48 million barrels to be shipped between July 2021 and June 2022. It sweetened the proposal by allowing the crude to be shipped to any facility in the world during that one-year period.

Traditionally, Middle Eastern nations restrict where buyers can deliver their crude, limiting the ability of traders to exploit price disparities between Asia, Europe and the U.S. They also limit re-selling, forcing buyers to refine the barrels themselves, which can also curb potential profits.

Vaccine News Boosts UK Economic Outlook



LONDON (Dispatches) - Breakthroughs in developing coronavirus vaccines have made the UK’s economic outlook brighter than the Bank of England forecast earlier this month, according to its chief economist.

In evidence to the House of Commons Treasury select committee on Monday, Andy Haldane took a more positive view than colleagues on the bank’s monetary policy committee, saying his personal view was that the vaccine news had already helped to boost confidence, which should in time lead to a pick-up in economic activity.

On balance, he said, the news was “to the positive side” of the assumptions that underpinned the BoE’s latest forecasts.

At the end of the third quarter the UK economy was 9.7 per cent smaller than it was in final three months of 2019. The Monetary Policy Committee said last month that it expected UK output to shrink again in the fourth quarter of 2020, remain “materially lower” than its 2019 level in the first quarter of 2021, and then recover slowly to regain pre-pandemic levels in 2022. It had made a broad assumption that improved treatments for the virus would be phased in over the course of next year.

Mr Haldane said he had felt “that if anything, people were a little too fearful of the future”, damping their willingness to spend — and the vaccine news could offset “some of that excess caution and excess gloom”. Meanwhile, for businesses, the prospect of an end to the “stop-go cycle” of lockdown measures could make “all the difference in the world . . . between viability and non-viability”.

IMF Urges Lebanon Tourism Rethink as Big Economic Slump Looms

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The IMF urged Lebanon to redouble efforts toward diversification to lower the country’s heavy dependence on tourism

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has warned that nominal GDP and employment growth for tourism-dependent Lebanon could decrease by 5 percent each in 2020.

The IMF said the crisis-hit country would see lingering effects for up five years, as Covid-19 containment measures expose services, especially travel and tourism, to severe disruption and losses.

The organization urged Lebanon to redouble efforts toward diversification to lower the country’s heavy dependence on tourism.

Tourism spending slumps in Lebanon amid coronavirus, economic crisis

“Lebanon, in particular, remains in a difficult situation, with a projected contraction of 25 percent for 2020... Deterioration of local currency (whose black-market rate has lost 80 percent of its value since the end of 2019), imposition of informal capital controls by individual banks, and foreign exchange shortages caused a hyperinflationary spiral, resulting in food and electricity shortages and increasing poverty,” the IMF said in its latest report.

The 25 percent figure is in real GDP terms once inflation has been taken into account.

Amid strong opposition from businesses, a two-week general lockdown (November 14-30) was imposed to contain the second wave of the coronavirus.

The country registered 13,869 new coronavirus cases and 104 deaths in nine days of lockdown, bringing the total to 116,476 cases and 900 deaths as of November 22.

Lebanon entered the pandemic with essentially no assessed fiscal space. The deterioration in access to market financing, together with the debt outlook and the consolidation plans for Lebanon, underscore the unsustainability of the debt.



Preliminary data, showed a deterioration of financial soundness indicators in Lebanon, where the nonperforming loans ratio increased to 20 percent.

The IMF said banks with eroded capital and liquidity buffers may be assisted by a mix of private and official support - including capital injections, emergency liquidity assistance and guarantees - considering

fiscal space, contagion risks, and enhanced supervision.

The IMF comments come as inflation rose to 131 percent in September from a year earlier, while Lebanon’s central bank’s efforts to support the exchange rate and subsidise basic goods further depleted foreign currency reserves, with liquid foreign assets declining from \$36 billion two years ago to less than \$20 billion currently.

On August 4, a massive explosion at the Beirut port caused sizable loss of life and physical damages. The event also led to the resignation of the government and renewed protests, exacerbating the country’s difficulties and uncertainties.

Lebanon central bank’s efforts to support the exchange rate and subsidise basic goods further depleted foreign currency reserves

The IMF also called on Lebanese authorities to restore the solvency of public finances and ensure debt sustainability; to restore the soundness of the financial system; to pass a legislation that formalises capital controls and to reduce the losses of state-owned enterprises.

Int’l Community Urged to End Shadow Pandemic of Gender-Based Violence

TEHRAN (UNIC) – United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in his message on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, 25 November 2020, urged the international community to work to end the shadow pandemic of gender-based violence once and for all.

The full text of his message reads:

Violence against women and girls is a global human rights challenge. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exposed this issue as a global emergency requiring urgent action at all levels, in all spaces and by all people. The social and economic fallout from the pandemic is disproportionately pushing women and girls into poverty, and the risk of violence against them is rising.

In April this year, I urged the international community to work to end the shadow pandemic of gender-based violence once and for all. I reiterate and relaunch that appeal today.

The global community needs to hear the voices and experiences of women and girls and take into account their needs, especially survivors and those who face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. We must also prioritize women’s leadership in finding solutions and engage men in the struggle. Action must involve predictable and flexible funding for women’s rights organizations, who so often act as first responders during crises. It is critical that services for survivors of violence remain open, with adequate resources and measures in place to support health, social and justice responses.

These measures should not only focus on intervening once violence against women has occurred. They should work to prevent violence occurring in the first place, including through addressing social norms and power imbalances, and police and judicial systems need to increase accountability for perpetrators and end impunity.

On this international day, let us redouble our efforts to eradicate gender-based violence forever.

Leader Hails Basij...

FROM PAGE 1

“The name of Basij is mentioned everywhere and its presence is evident when it comes to defending the country, its independence and stability, to [offering] vital services on a nationwide scale, to [promoting] pioneering scientific activities and new technologies, to [adopting] value-based approaches, and to creating a spiritual atmosphere,” it added.

The Leader described “faith, determination, responsibility, and self-confidence” as the “building blocks” of Basij’s capabilities and problem resolution efforts, saying “these are themselves the God’s blessings and gifts” that need to be preserved.

“Basij is the great asset and God-given reserve of the Iranian nation,” said Ayatollah Khamenei, warning that the enemies have been “thinking of destroying or rendering it ineffective.”

Ayatollah Khamenei called on the organization’s officials and members to “see themselves duty-bound “to nullify the enemy’s deception and proceed with trust, sincerity and planning.”

Iran Records...

FROM PAGE 1

She added that in the past 24 hours, 469 COVID-19 patients had lost their lives, bringing the total death toll to 46,207.

5,832 COVID-19 patients are in critical condition.

“So far, 5,913,229 COVID-19 diagnosis tests have been conducted across the country,” the Health Ministry spokeswoman noted.

She pointed out that Provinces of Tehran, Isfahan, Qom, East Azerbaijan, South Khorasan, Semnan, Qazvin, Lorestan, Ardabil, Khuzestan, Kermanshah, Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad, Gilan, Bushehr, Zanjan, Ilam, Khorasan Razavi, Mazandaran, Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari, Alborz, West Azerbaijan, Markazi, Kerman, North Khorasan, Hamadan, Yazd, and Kordestan are regarded as red zones.

Hormozgan, Fars, Golestan, and Sistan and Baluchestan provinces are also regarded as orange and yellow zones.

Oman Returns to Debt Market

MUSCAT (Dispatches) - Oman, one of the weakest sovereigns in the Persian Gulf Arab region, has returned to the dollar debt market as a rally in its bonds that were issued about a month ago enabled it to lock in cheaper rates.

The cash-strapped sultanate raised \$500 million in a tap of its bonds due in 2027 and 2032. The securities were originally issued in October and yields have fallen more than 70 basis points since then, as advances in the push for a coronavirus vaccine boosted demand for riskier assets around the world.

Oman sold \$200 million in bonds maturing in 2027 at a 6.30 percent yield, and \$300 million in bonds maturing in 2032 paying 6.90 percent. The initial guidance was 6.45 percent and 7.05 percent respectively.

The sultanate has started to send the right signals to investors concerned about its dwindling reserves after lagging most of its neighbours in implementing fiscal reforms.

It plans to start taxing the income of wealthy individuals in 2022 - breaking a regional taboo - and introduce a delayed value-added tax in April.

Oman to tap investors to plug budget deficit

In the meantime, it’s in talks to win fiscal support from some regional neighbors, easing concerns about any risk of devaluation pressure on its currency peg.

The International Monetary Fund estimates Oman’s budget deficit could reach almost 19 percent of gross domestic product this year. The government raised \$2 billion selling bonds in October.

India Bans 43 More Chinese Apps in Latest Salvo at Beijing

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India banned 43 more Chinese apps on Tuesday including some from e-commerce giant Alibaba, saying they threatened its “sovereignty and integrity” as tensions remain high between the nuclear-armed neighbors following a deadly border clash.

New Delhi previously pulled 59 Chinese apps -- including the wildly popular video-sharing platform TikTok -- from its huge domestic market, weeks after the high-altitude battle in the Ladakh region in June when 20 Indian soldiers were killed. A further 118 Chinese mobile applications, including the hit shoot ‘em up game PUBG, were banned in September.

The latest tranche of banned apps include Alibaba’s AliExpress, delivery service Lalamove as well as dating and live-streaming apps.

Everton, Crystal Palace Eyeing Mariano Diaz

LONDON (Dispatches) - Everton and Crystal Palace are among clubs eyeing Real Madrid striker Mariano Diaz. Sport says Everton and Palace are looking to sign the striker, who has no future at the Bernabeu despite so far resisting Zinedine Zidane's efforts to sell him. Atletico Madrid have joined the race for his signature, where coach Diego Simeone is a fan. Mariano has struggled in his two seasons in Madrid after an outstanding year with Lyon, having joined the French giants as a Castilla player.

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Kubo Ready to Quit Villarreal in January

MADRID (Dispatches) - Takefusa Kubo is ready to quit Villarreal in January. The Japan midfielder is on-loan at Villarreal this season from Real Madrid, but has seen little action under coach Unai Emery. This is in contrast to his loan with Mallorca the previous season where he was a regular. El Periódico Mediterráneo says Kubo is seriously considering a change of scenery. Though it's a possibility that right now has not been transferred to the Castellón club, where they claim to have "no request from anyone to study a possible departure for the player".

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SPORTS

THURSDAY NOVEMBER 26, 2020

Barcelona, Juventus In Champions League Last 16

TURIN (Dispatches) - Juventus, Chelsea and Sevilla all claimed last-gasp wins as they qualified for the Champions League last 16 on Tuesday, while Martin Braithwaite grabbed a double in Barcelona's 4-0 victory at Dynamo Kiev as they also secured a place in the knockout rounds.

They are the first teams to make it out of the group stage, doing so with two games to spare, on a night which saw Erling Braut Haaland, Neymar, Cristiano Ronaldo and Bruno Fernandes all get among the goals.

There was no Lionel Messi for Barcelona, with the Argentine rested for the trip to Ukraine, but Ronald Koeman's side got the job done to make it four wins from four in Group G.

All the goals came in the second half, with Sergino Dest opening the scoring before Danish striker Braithwaite added another and then converted a penalty to make it 3-0.

On as a substitute, Antoine Griezmann wrapped up the win on the night young centre-back Oscar Mingueza, Brazilian midfielder Matheus Fernandes and teenage American winger Konrad de la Fuente were all blooded in the first team.

"We've achieved our objective," said Koeman. "We looked hungry and scored four goals. Important players were able to rest and the youngsters deserved their minutes."

Juventus joined Barcelona in qualifying from Group G but the Italian champions needed a stoppage-time header by substitute Alvaro Morata to beat Ferencváros 2-1 in Turin and seal their progress.

Albanian international Myrto Uzuni put the Hungarians ahead but Ronaldo drilled in the equaliser before half-time, meaning he has scored in 15 consecutive Champions League seasons.

Chelsea are through from Group E after edging Rennes 2-1 in France, with Olivier Giroud coming off the bench to head in an injury-time winner. Serhou Guirassy had cancelled out Callum Hudson-Odoi's breakaway opener.

Last season's Europa League winners Sevilla will not get to defend their trophy as they advanced to the last 16 of Europe's elite club competition and did so with a 2-1 win over Krasnodar in Russia, in a rare game played before a sizeable crowd.



Ivan Rakitic's drilled strike put the Spaniards in front only for the Brazilian Wanderson to equalise, but Munir El Haddadi won it for Sevilla five minutes into added time.

Sevilla and Chelsea are level on 10 points but Frank Lampard's side go to Spain next week, when the winner will secure top spot.

Manchester United are in pole position in Group H after a first-half Fernandes brace set them on their way to a 4-1 victory over Istanbul Basaksehir that made up for a 2-1 defeat in Turkey last time out. The opener by Fernandes was a thunderous strike from outside the box, while the second was a tap-in after a horrible error by Mert Gunok in the away goal.

Marcus Rashford added a penalty, but there was a fightback from the away side, with Deniz Turuc's free-kick crossing the line before David de Gea could claw it away.

Edin Visca crashed a shot off the bar, but Daniel James made sure of the victory on the counter-attack. Solskjaer's side are three points clear of both Paris Saint-Germain and RB Leipzig, after an early Neymar penalty gave the French side a 1-0 win over their German visitors.

PSG go to Old Trafford next week. Borussia Dortmund need just one more point to qualify from Group F following a 3-0 win over Club Brugge as the prolific Haaland netted twice either side of a Jadon Sancho free-kick in Germany.

Haaland has 16 goals for the season, and has now scored 16 Champions League goals in just 12 appearances -- Messi had two goals and Ronaldo none after the same number of appearances. In the group's other game Ciro Immobile was on target twice, including from a penalty, as Lazio beat Zenit Saint-Petersburg 3-1 in Rome, a result which eliminated the Russians. Marco Parolo also netted for Lazio, with Artem Dzyuba scoring for Zenit.

Eriksen Set For Inter Milan Exit

MILAN (AFP) - Christian Eriksen's dream move to Inter Milan looks over with the former Tottenham Hotspur playmaker requesting to leave the Italian giants after just 10 months.

The Danish international arrived on a four-and-a-half-year contract worth 20 million euros (\$23 million) plus 7.5 million euros in bonuses in January.

But during a year overshadowed by the coronavirus pandemic, the 28-year-old has been unable to reproduce his form with Spurs, where he scored 69 goals and had 89 assists in 305 appearances, or recently with Denmark.

"It wasn't what I had dreamed of," admitted Erikson, who has fallen down the pecking order under coach Antonio Conte. "People would like to see me play and I would like to do the same, but the coach has different ideas and I have to respect them."

The Dane has played seven times this season -- four as a starter -- with no assists or goals. In total he has scored four goals for Inter in 33 games.

"We must never hold back a player who asks to be transferred," club CEO Giuseppe Marotta said Sunday, confirming Eriksen's impending exit.

Conte insisted Eriksen "has had many opportunities and played more than others". "My choices are always made for the good of Inter," said the former Chelsea coach.

Pakistan Invite

Afghan Neighbors

On First Official Cricket Tour

KARACHI (Dispatches) - Pakistan have invited Afghanistan's national cricket team on a recognised tour for the first time, officials said Tuesday, following a visit to Kabul by Prime Minister Imran Khan -- one of the game's greatest players.

"We'll try to look for a possible window for this tour -- and if not 2021, we'll definitely try to plan a series in 2022 season," said Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chief executive Wasim Khan.

"A cricket series between Pakistan and Afghanistan could be a harbinger of love and peace between the two countries," he told AFP.

An Afghan national side toured Pakistan in May 2011, although they only played a second-string side and matches were not given first-class status.

Pakistan premier Khan visited Afghanistan on Thursday, where he vowed to help reduce spiralling violence and push for a ceasefire between the Taliban and Afghan forces.

Before entering politics, the Oxford-educated Khan was one of the world's leading cricketers -- a destructive all-rounder with a devastating ability to swing the ball and brutally attack the opposition's bowling.

As a member of world cricket's second tier, Afghanistan's usual opponents are teams such as Ireland, Scotland and Hong Kong.

But Afghanistan beat Pakistan last year in a friendly ahead of the World Cup in England, sparking wild scenes in Kabul where jubilant fans fired machine guns into the night sky, triggering security lockdowns in foreign embassies.

Most Afghans only became familiar with the game from the 1980s, when millions were exiled as refugees near the Pakistan city of Peshawar, just 50 kilometers (36 miles) from their border.

The two countries have played only a single official one-day match and one Twenty20 international -- both in the United Arab Emirates.

Relations between the two national cricket bodies are strong, however.

"A strong Afghanistan means a strong Asian block... so Pakistan will continue to play its part and help Afghan cricket," said Wasim.



Mel Morris and Derventio Holdings, who are set to complete a takeover of the club. "Steve McClaren has agreed a contract to act as an advisor to the board with immediate effect," said a statement on Derby's official website.

McClaren Returns to Derby as Technical Director

LONDON (Dispatches) - Struggling English Championship club Derby on Tuesday announced the appointment of former manager and ex-England boss Steve McClaren as technical director.

McClaren, 59, who had two spells as Derby manager, has returned to Pride Park following an agreement between owner

"In this capacity he will assume the role and duties of both advisor and technical director, a position which has been identified by agreement between Mel Morris and Derventio Holdings as important to the future of the club."

Derby chief executive Stephen Pearce said McClaren's experience would be "invaluable" at the club, rooted at the bottom of the second-tier Championship.

McClaren, who was England head coach for 18 months until November 2007, was Derby boss from September 2013 to May 2015 and spent five months in charge during a second spell before being sacked in March 2017.

Earlier this month, Derby confirmed a deal had been agreed "in principle" for the sale of the club to Derventio Holdings, which is owned by Sheikh Khaled bin Zayed Al Nahyan, a member of the Abu Dhabi royal family.

Mueller Focuses on Bayern Despite Calls For Germany Recall

BERLIN (AFP) - Thomas Mueller admitted he watched Germany's humiliating loss to Spain with horror, but insists his focus remains on European champions Bayern Munich despite demands the playmaker be recalled to the national side.

At 31, Mueller proved he is in his prime with a Bundesliga record 21 assists last season, serving as the perfect foil to Bayern striker Robert Lewandowski.

The pair will be hunting more goals at home to Red Bull Salzburg on Wednesday as Bayern chase their 15th straight win in Europe and a fourth victory from four games in Group A.

Mueller created two goals and Lewandowski netted twice in a 6-2 win at Salzburg earlier this month.

Yet in the wake of Germany's record 6-0 defeat by Spain last week, pundits and former players insist Mueller can provide the impulse the national team is lacking.

With five Bayern teammates in the Germany side routed in Seville, Mueller admitted the debacle made painful viewing.

"Of course, you suffer along with your fellow players in the club and former national team colleagues as much as the fans," he said after Saturday's 1-1 draw against Werder Bremen.

"German football fans long for things to go well again.

"At the moment there is a lot of negativity around the topic, it hurts, but my main focus is on the club."

In March 2019, Germany coach Joachim Loew told Mueller and fellow 2014 World Cup winners Mats Hummels and Jerome Boateng that their international careers were over.



Man City Will Not Rush Aguero Back

LONDON (Reuters) - Manchester City striker Sergio Aguero has trained ahead of Champions League clash at Olympiakos but the Argentine will not be rushed into action from hamstring and knee issues, manager Pep Guardiola said on Tuesday.

Aguero sustained a hamstring injury in City's 1-1 Premier League draw at West Ham United last month a week after making his first start of the season following knee surgery.

The 32-year-old was on the bench in City's 2-0 league defeat by Tottenham Hotspur on Saturday and Guardiola stressed that he was prepared to wait for the striker to return to match fitness.

"Today he trained again. What we want is for him to feel a good feeling in his knee," Guardiola told a news conference before the team's departure to Greece.

"I know it's not his injury but we wait for him and there is still time, we have many games to play and we will need him. We want him in the best condition."

The Spaniard said almost all his players, including Ferdinandinho and Benjamin Mendy, were fit for the clash with only Nathan Ake set to start training on Friday after a thigh injury.

City have a perfect record in Group C after three games and Guardiola said the clash offered them the opportunity to return to winning ways and take a step towards the next phase of the competition. "It's important... also to recover our feelings. To be able to win games is important. We can leave this competition until February and focus on others, especially the Premier League," Guardiola added.

"At the same time we know how difficult it is and if we're able to get results we travel to Porto and then have (Olympique de) Marseille here. One step at a time but at the same time to recover, to come back and create good feelings."

