

Students, Scholars and the General Public Gathered in Front of the Building of the Supreme National Security Council of Iran, Demanding Revenge for Assassination of the Iranian Nuclear Scientist

IRAN NEWS

A Spokesperson for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of the European Union Issued a Statement on Saturday, Calling the Assassination of Martyr Fakhrizadeh a Criminal Act

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SUNDAY NOVEMBER 29, 2020 - AZAR 9, 1399

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Health Ministry Reports Slowing of Virus Infections

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Health Ministry on Saturday reported a slowdown in coronavirus infections, saying that 89 of 160 cities were out of the designated high risk category.

"I thank our dear people for taking the appropriate precautions and tolerating the restrictions," deputy health minister Alireza Raisi said on state TV, adding that public adherence was 90 percent.

Still, the government on Saturday announced the closure of most non-essential government offices in an effort to stem the spread of the virus. President Hassan Rouhani said in televised remarks that he had instructed Iran's Central Bank to provide the funds needed to import coronavirus vaccines.

Meanwhile Spokeswoman for Ministry of Health announced on Saturday that 935,799 people in the country have been infected with the coronavirus, and 648,831 of the total infected people have recovered.

"According to definitive laboratory findings from yesterday to November 28, 2020, newly diagnosed patients with COVID-19 reached 13,402 cases out of whom 1,824 patients were hospitalized," Sima Sadat Lari stated.

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Leader Orders 'Definitive Punishment' Of Scientist's Assassins



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Supreme Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution has called for those involved in the assassination of prominent Iranian scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh to be brought to justice.

In a Saturday statement, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei urged relevant bodies to pursue the issue.

"All relevant authorities should seriously put two key issues on the agenda," he said in a message.

"First, they should follow up on this crime and mete out definitive punishment for those who perpetrated and ordered it," said the Leader.

"Authorities should also follow up on the scientific and technical efforts made by martyr Fakhrizadeh in all sectors that he was working in," Ayatollah Khamenei said.

The Leader also expressed condolence on the martyrdom of the eminent scientist.

Meanwhile Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Major General Hossein Salami in a message condemned assassination of the outstanding manager in Iran's defense sector, saying that perpetrators of the 'big crime' will certainly be punished severely.

"Such crimes will not undermine determination of the Iranians to continue this glorious and powerful path, and severe revenge and punishment of the perpetrators is on the agenda," he said.

The commander also expressed condolences over martyrdom of the great Iranian scientist in the field of strategic industries in a terror attack designed and directed by the fake, terrorist and child-killing Zionist regime.

No doubt, the valuable efforts of the honorable martyr in the field of defense industry and other strategic areas of the country as well as combating coronavirus will remain in the historical memory of the country and serve as a source of inspiration for the children of the Iranian nation in the universities and higher science and technology centers in creating other honors and amazing progress in future, Major General Salami said.

Mohsen Fakhrizadeh was assassinated by terrorists in a terrorist attack near the capital Tehran on Friday.

During exchange of fires, the security team protecting Iranian scientists were also injured and transferred to hospital. Meanwhile Foreign Minister said that the Martyrdom in the way of God is the art of the men of God and the punishment of the oppressors is a divine tradition.

"The Islamic Republic once again fell victim to a terrorist operation and the scientist of Iran's peaceful nuclear program was martyred by terrorists," Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif tweeted in Arabic on Friday night following the assassination of Iranian nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh.

U.S., Israel Responsible for Fakhrizadeh Assassination

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations (UN) Majid Takht Ravanchi held U.S. and the Israeli regimes accountable for assassination of the Iranian scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh.

Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, Head of the Research and Innovation Organization of the Ministry of Defense was assassinated in a terrorist attack near Tehran on Friday.

In his letter to the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and President of the UN Security Council Inga Rhonda King, Takht Ravanchi said: "The cowardly assassination of Martyr Fakhrizadeh -- with serious indications of Israeli responsibility in it -- is another desperate attempt to wreak havoc on our region as well as to disrupt Iran's scientific and technological development."

In the letter, he said: "I am writing to inform you that today, 27 November 2020 in Absard city of Tehran province, Mr. Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, a prominent Iranian scientist, was assassinated in a terrorist attack.

One of the latest services of Martyr Fakhrizadeh was his outstanding role in the development of the first indigenous COVID-19 Test Kit, which is a great contribution to our national efforts in curbing the COVID-19 pandemic at a time when Iran is under inhumane sanctions of the United States, strictly preventing our access to humanitarian goods including medicines and medical equipment. He was also supervising the development of a COVID-19 vaccine.

Over the current decade, several top Iranian scientists have been targeted and assassinated in terrorist attacks and our firm evidence clearly indicates that certain foreign quarters have been behind such assassinations. The cowardly assassination of Martyr Fakhrizadeh -- with serious indications of Israeli responsibility in it -- is another desperate attempt to wreak havoc on our region as well as to disrupt Iran's scientific and technological development.

While during the past forty years, no amount of pressure and terrorist attacks were able to prevent us from achieving science and technology needed for our socio-economic development.

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Iranian Diplomat Refuses to Attend Political Trial in Belgium

BRUSSELS (PressTV) - An Iranian diplomat, who was arrested back in 2018 on the false charges of being linked to a bomb attack plot in the French capital of Paris, has refused to turn up for trial in Belgium.

In June 2018, Belgian authorities said that Iranian diplomat Assadollah Assadi had been arrested in Germany over suspicions of plotting a bomb attack on a meeting of the terrorist Mujahedin Khalq Organization (MKO) in Paris attended by US President Donald Trump's lawyer, Rudy Giuliani, and several former European and Arab ministers.

The authorities added that Belgian police had intercepted the suspect, along with a 38-year-old man and a 33-year-old woman, in Belgium with 500 grams of the homemade explosive TATP and a detonation device found in their car.

Germany extradited to Belgium the 46-year-old diplomat in defiance of Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations 1961.

Dimitri de Beco, the Iranian diplomat's defense lawyer, said he would be representing his client and that Assadi did not attend the court on Friday as he was seeking diplomatic immunity.

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Navy Planning Dispatch of Forces to Indian Ocean

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The Iranian Navy's commander unveiled plans for the constant deployment of naval flotillas to the Indian Ocean by taking advantage of a new homegrown auxiliary ship.

"Full stationing of the Navy in the Indian Ocean has been put on the agenda," Rear Admiral Hossein Khanzadi said at a press conference on Saturday, held in commemoration of the Iranian Navy Day.

He noted that while Iran used the ports of the "friendly countries" for the deployment of units to the Indian Ocean waters, the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic has prevented layovers at the ports of other states. The commander said Iran is going to take advantage of an auxiliary ship to facilitate the dispatch of flotillas to the Indian Ocean.

The Iranian auxiliary vessel can carry up to seven helicopters and circumnavigate the globe eight to 10 times once fueled up, he added.

Furnished with VTOL drones, the military ship has been equipped with offense and defense equipment, Khanzadi said, adding that the unlimited presence of the auxiliary ship in the Indian Ocean could change the ocean's security equations in favor of the regional countries.

The Iranian Navy is also going to unveil 'Dena' destroyer in early January 2021 and the 'Zereh' (shield) corvette this week, the commander added.

Iranian Steel Industry Outshining World With 12.6% Growth

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iranian steel industry has outshined the world producers in this sector during the first 10 months of 2020, as based on the World Steel Association (WSA) Iran produced 23.8 million tons of the mentioned commodity during the January-October period, 12.6 percent more than the figure in the same 10 months of 2019.

According to the WSA data, the average growth of crude steel production in the world during the mentioned period was negative two percent.

The country also produced 2.66 million tons of crude steel in October, registering an increase of 28 percent compared to the same month in 2019.

The world's 64 top steel producers managed to produce 1.511 billion tons of crude steel in the first 10 months of this year which is two percent less than the production of the same period last year.

The total production of the mentioned countries also reached 161.8 million tons in October, seven percent more than the output for the last year's same month.

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UN Calls for Self-Restraint Following Assassination of Iranian Scientist

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - UN Secretary-General calls for self-restraint in a bid to avoid escalation following assassination of Iranian scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh.

A United Nations (UN) spokesman on Friday called for exercising restraint and avoiding escalation in the Middle East region following the assassination of top Iranian nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh.

"We have noted the reports that an Iranian nuclear scientist has been assassinated near Tehran today. We urge restraint and the need to avoid any actions that could lead to an escalation of tensions in the region," Farhan Haq, the deputy spokesman for UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, said when responding to a question related to the assassination.

In a letter to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and Inga Rhonda King, president of the Security Council for the month of November, Iran's permanent representative to the United Nations Majid Takht Ravanchi expressed strong condemnation against the "criminal assassination" of its nuclear scientist.

Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, Head of the Research and Innovation Organization of the Ministry of Defense, was assassinated in a terrorist operation on Friday at 2:30 PM local time in Absard, Damavand county, near Tehran.

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Majlis to Mandate Gov't to Reduce IAEA Inspections to Zero

TEHRAN (MNA) – An Iranian lawmaker announced that Parliament seeks to mandate the government to reduce the level of IAEA spy inspections of nuclear and military installations to zero.

In a tweet on Saturday, Nasrollah Pezhmanfar wrote, "A statement condemning the assassination of Mohsen Fakhrizadeh will be read out in an open session of Parliament tomorrow, mandating the government to retaliate quickly against U.S. and Israeli terrorist leaders and to reduce the level of IAEA spy inspections of nuclear and military facilities to zero."

President Accuses Mercenary Israel of Killing Top Iran Scientist

TEHRAN (PressTV) – President Hassan Rouhani has accused Israel of killing a high-ranking Iranian nuclear physicist long suspected by the West of masterminding a secret nuclear bomb program, state TV reported.

"Once again, the evil hands of global arrogance were stained with the blood of the mercenary usurper Zionist regime," President Rouhani said in a statement, according to the state TV report on Saturday.

"The assassination of martyr [Mohsen] Fakhrizadeh shows our enemies' despair and the depth of their hatred ... His martyrdom will not slow down our achievements."

Iran's religious and military rulers have threatened revenge for Friday's killing of nuclear scientist Fakhrizadeh, who Iranian media said died in hospital after attackers gunned him down in his car in Ab-Sard, a suburb in eastern Tehran.

He further said that Tehran will not leave the assassination of Fakhrizadeh unanswered, but will respond to it in an appropriate time.



Rouhani said Iran will respond to this terror act at the appropriate time.

"All think tanks and all enemies of Iran should know that Iranian people and officials are so brave that they will not leave this criminal act unanswered," said the president.

"Relevant authorities will respond to this crime at the right time," he underscored. He said the Iranian nation is wise enough not to fall in this Israeli trap.

No More IAEA Inspection If Acts of Terror Repeated

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - A senior IRGC general has called on President Hassan Rouhani to warn the international community about the repeat of terror incidents such as the assassination of Iranian nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh.

Major General Mohsen Rezaei said on Saturday that Iran's national security should be preserved.

"Don't allow Iran's national security to be harmed," said Rezaei, who is also the secretary of Iran's Expediency Council.

"The Ministry of Foreign Affairs should lodge a complaint with international circles and remind them that if another minor act of terror is committed, Iran will block international inspectors' access to its nuclear activities," he noted.

"It goes without saying that a repeat of such terrorist acts would indicate the weakness of the country's intelligence agencies, and efforts should be redoubled to prevent such acts of terror," he said.

Iran in Possession of 3.8 tons of Enriched Nuclear Material



TEHRAN (FNA) - Spokesman of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) Behrouz Kamalvandi said on Saturday that the size of the country's nuclear stockpile has increased to nearly 3,800kg of uranium, adding that the amount is increasing.

"It is obvious that enriched nuclear materials have been reserved in our country based on a plan," Kamalvandi said in an interview with the Persian-language Tahlil Bazar website.

He added that before Iran's decision to decrease its nuclear deal undertakings, the country had undertaken a 300kg ceiling for enriched uranium stockpile and export the surplus production, noting that after breaching the agreement by other parties, specially the U.S. withdrawal, Iran suspended parts of its undertakings.

"Naturally, we boosted production of (enriched) materials and at present we are in possession of nearly 3,800kg of (enriched) materials which is increasing day by day," Kamalvandi said.

His comments came after Iran's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the Vienna-based International Organizations Kazem Qaribabadi voiced surprise at a recent U.S. complaint about the size of Iran's enriched uranium stockpile, saying that the current amount of enriched uranium in Iran is no more than one-third of its reserves before implementing the nuclear deal.

Nuclear Expert's Assassination Not to Affect Iran's Resistance

TEHRAN (FNA) - Chairman of the Iranian parliament's nuclear committee Fereydoun Abbasi said that the Friday assassination of the country's prominent nuclear specialist is aimed at hindering Iran's strategic research, stressing that such moves will not impact the country's stiff resistance against enemies' pressures.

"Such moves have pursued a common target and aimed to cause fear in the Iranian scientific society to stop strategic research and overshadow improvements and achievements," Abbasi said to Press TV.

"They are going to put fear in our community by assassinating some elites, but as of past, we are going to resist these pressures and our country is not dependent on one individual," the former head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization added.

He stressed that Iranian scientists would proceed with their path despite hardships.

The parliamentarian noted that these criminals should realize that their achievements must not depend on the assassination of other peoples and scientists.

Fakhrizadeh's Martyrdom Will Definitely Boost Scientific Achievements

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Judiciary Chief Ayatollah Ebrahim Raeisi in a message late on Friday expressed condolences over martyrdom of Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, saying that his martyrdom will certainly help promote the country's scientific achievements.

Once again, the criminal hand of the ostentatious elements, affiliated with foreigners and international Zionism, with the sinister aim of confronting the scientific progress of the country, targeted and martyred one of the prominent figures, managers and scientists of the Islamic Iran, he said.

The martyred master and combatant Mohsen Fakhrizadeh during the Sacred Defense fought in war fronts sincerely and then entered the scientific and research fields by using God-given genius and talents, helping growth of Islamic Iran in the fields of science and technology.

"Since the occurrence of these unfortunate incidents and the loss of the combatants of knowledge and practice are a sad and irreparable loss for our society, and the action taken is a great crime and the repetition of such incidents is not acceptable at all, the intelligence and security services as well as the relevant judicial authorities are obliged to use all intelligence power as soon as possible to identify and arrest the elements of mercenaries and criminals and punish them," he said.

Iran Knows How to Punish Aggressors of Scientist's Attack

TEHRAN (MNA) – Ali Rabiei vowed that aggressors of the Friday terror attack of Iranian scientists will definitely be punished, and it is Iran that defines where and how the punishment will happen.

Government Spokesman Rabiei tweeted some notes in reaction to the assassination of Iranian scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh.

"I offer my deep condolences over the martyrdom of great Iranian scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh to his family, the scientific community, and the Iranian nation," he said.

"Through such terrorist moves, the enemies are pursuing several goals such as disrupting the people's opinion, creating confusion in Iran's strategy, disrupting regional security, and disrupting the global security with respect to possible future changes in International policies," he said.

Based on a specific strategy focused on national interests and dignity, the Iranian people have the right to give a decisive response to such terrorist attacks, he said and added, "The aggressors will definitely be punished, but not in the battleground that they define to be."

Tehran Ready to Make Joint Efforts to Remove Regional Misunderstandings

ISLAMABAD (IRNA) - Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Pakistan while welcoming Prime Minister Imran Khan's initiative to mediate in region expressed his country's readiness for joint efforts to remove misunderstandings among regional states.

During an exclusive interview with Pakistan's 24 News TV channel, Seyed Mohammad Ali Hosseini said Iran welcomes and supports the initiative of the Prime Minister of Pakistan to mediate between Tehran and Riyadh. However, Islamabad did not receive proper response from Saudi Arabia.

He added Iran is looking for appropriate solutions to resolve misunderstandings, and that is why President of Iran had proposed a peace plan.

Hosseini to a question said Iran and Pakistan have a long common border and both countries' relations have historical, cultural, literary and geographical commonalities.

The ambassador said there are many countries that cannot see Pak-Iran relations growing and terrorist groups and separatist groups are a common threat to both Iran and Pakistan.

"We believe that with the efforts of the leaders of both countries problems and obstacles can be overcome," he viewed. He also announced that Pakistan-Iran 21st Joint Economic Commission and Border Trade Committee will also meet soon.

'Luxury Birth Date' Tragedy Happening Again in Iran as 9/9/99 Looms

TEHRAN (IFP) - Astronomical sums of money are being paid to book operating theatres to have babies delivered at 09:09 am on the 9th day of the 9th month of the year 1399 on the Iranian calendar (corresponding to November 29, 2020).

Forcing the delivery of babies at a specific time just to have a luxury birth date not only results in the birth of preterm infants, but increases health hazards during the coronavirus pandemic.

It has been years that forcing the delivery of babies on round-figure dates has been all the rage, turning into a serious concern for some families.

Dates such as 7/7/1377, 8/8/1388, etc. on the Iranian calendar are among the days on which many would like to have their children born and they pay colossal sums of money for that. The move could result in the birth of babies with deformities.

This has even drawn reaction from some officials.

"Unfortunately, the number of caesarean deliveries considerably increases, by dozens of percentage points up to multiple times as high, at some private hospitals on certain dates and occasions at the request of some families and due to some physicians accepting their request," Deputy Health Minister Iraj Harirchi had said before. "Tampering with the date of birth blows the most severe blow to the infant because the extent of growth and brain development is at its highest during the last three months of pregnancy. This is while caesarean sections are usually performed one week earlier than the date the baby is due. So, the infant will be deprived of one golden week when the development of his or her brain and lungs is completed, and sometimes the infant is born with pulmonary infection and malfunction," the top official added.

Deputy Health Minister for Health Affairs Alireza Raisi had also weighed in on the issue before. "Tampering with the dates of deliveries will raise the number of infants kept at neonatal intensive care units (NICUs) and even increase infant mortality, and families should be prevented from doing this," Raisi had already said.

Tampering with the dates of deliveries has become so widespread that it has turned into a serious concern for the health ministry as an increase in the number of "luxury birth date" deliveries over the past few years runs counter to the health ministry's programs and executive policies to promote natural childbirth and reduce the number elective caesarean births.

This year, concerns have grown amid the coronavirus pandemic. Accordingly, with the date 9/9/1399 on the Iranian calendar (corresponding to November 29, 2020) approaching, Deputy Health Minister for Treatment Qassem Janbabaie, in an official notice, demanded hospitals and doctors present a report on their performance with regards to elective caesarean births on special dates. He also demanded hospitals and doctors with high records of "unmanaged" caesarean deliveries to be dealt with.

This year, 9/9/1399 on the Iranian calendar coincides with days when coronavirus infections and deaths are fast rising in the country, and hospitals are facing problems such as shortages of beds, oxygen, etc. Although several maternity hospitals do not admit coronavirus patients, there are hospitals which admit them along with other patients.

Childbirths on luxury dates increase work pressure on hospitals on those dates. Under such circumstances, preterm infants face more health risks.

Iran to Take Revenge On Blood Thirsty Zionists

TEHRAN (MNA) – Chairman of the Iranian Parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Commission said the Islamic Republic will definitely take revenge of its martyred scientist from criminal Zionists.

In a tweet on Saturday, Mojtaba Zonnour wrote, "The cowardly assassination of martyr Fakhrizadeh will not be left unanswered."

He added that the Islamic Republic will take Fakhrizadeh's revenge from the blood-thirsty Zionists.

Top Iranian nuclear scientist, Mohsen Fakhrizadeh was assassinated on Friday in a multi-pronged attack involving at least one explosion and small fire by a number of assailants in Absard city of Damavand County, Tehran province.

Iran says the terrorist move has serious indications of the Israeli regime's involvement.

First VP to Attend SCO Virtual Summit

TEHRAN (IFP) - First Vice-President Eshaq Jahangiri will attend the 19th meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Council of Heads of Government, which is to be held via videoconference on November 30, 2020.

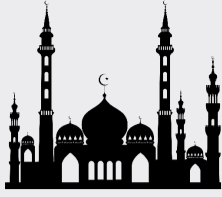
The Monday meeting will also be attended by the Prime Ministers of the SCO Member States of Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Pakistan will be represented by the Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs.

The meeting will also be attended by Afghanistan, Belarus, and Mongolia, which along with Iran are the four observer states taking part in the virtual summit.

The President of Afghanistan, the Prime Minister of Belarus, and the Deputy Prime Minister of Mongolia are the top officials attending the meeting, according to a statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of India, the host of the summit.

Turkmenistan has been invited as a Special Guest of the Host and will be represented by the Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers. The two bodies of SCO will be represented by the SCO Secretary General and the Executive Director of the SCO Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS). The Chairmen of the SCO Business Council and the SCO Interbank Association will also be present.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	11:52
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:11
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:26
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:55

119. "I will mislead them, and I will create in them false desires; I will order them to slit the ears of cattle, and to deface the (fair) nature created by Allah." Whoever, forsaking Allah, takes satan for a friend, hath of a surety suffered a loss that is manifest.
120. Satan makes them promises, and creates in them false desires; but satan's promises are nothing but deception.
Surah 4. Women (119 - 120)

Iraq Accounts for 27% of Iran Total Export Share in 7 Months

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Director General of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization's Office of Arabian and African Countries said that Iraq accounted for 27 percent of Iran's total export share in seven months of current year (from March 21 to Oct. 22).

Farzad Piltan broke the news on Sat. and said that \$5 billion worth of products were exported from Iran to Iraq from March 21 to Oct. 22.

According to statistics, 17.6 million tons of non-oil products, valued at \$5 billion were exported from Iran to Iraq in the seven months of the current year. Iraq, China, United Arab Emirates, Turkey and Afghanistan were ranked from first to fifth respectively in export terms.

Gas, electricity, iron bars, tile and ceramic, fresh water melon, evaporative cooler, tomato, cheese, tomato paste, biscuit and parts of steam turbine were of the major goods exported to Iraq by Iran.



Iran's export volume of non-oil products to neighboring Iraq from March 21 to Oct. 22 indicated a 26 percent growth as compared to the last year's corresponding period, Piltan added.

Elsewhere in his remarks, he pointed to the volume of products exported from the country and added that over 85 million tons of non-oil products were exported from Iran to foreign countries.

He put the country's total trade value at \$38.278 billion.

Iran and Iraq Presidents have agreed to reach \$20 billion in trade balance between the two countries and regarding the economic ties between Iran and the Iraqi Kurdistan Region in the time of Pandemic COVID-19, trade exchanges have continued with all the health protocols on the borders.

Iraq's annual imports stand around \$32b and its exports are valued around \$90b. Its major exports are crude oil, live animal, some food stuff and petrochemical products.

Lowest Monthly Inflation Rate Registered for Tehran

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Data released by the Statistical Center of Iran (SCI) shows that the highest monthly inflation rate for Iranian households in the eighth Iranian calendar month of Aban (October 22-November 20) was registered in Ilam Province with an increase of 8.8 percent and the lowest was related to Tehran with an increase of 3.8 percent.



Based on the SCI data, the Consumer Price Index (Inflation Index) in Iran reached 275 points by end of the mentioned month, 5.5 percent more than the previous month, while the index in the urban areas stood at 272.6, registering a 4.7-percent rise compared to the preceding month.

The point-to-point inflation rate in the country stood at 46.4 percent during the said month. The highest point-to-point inflation rate was related to Kermanshah province (54.5 percent) and the lowest was related to Qom province (42.9 percent).

The inflation rate in the twelve-month period ended on November 20 stood at 29 percent, according to the SCI data.

The center has previously put the inflation rate in the twelve-month period ended on October 21, which marks the end of the seventh Iranian calendar month of Mehr, at 27.2.

Central Bank of Iran (CBI) in a statement in April announced that the annual inflation rate for the current Iranian calendar year (ends on March 20, 2021) is set to be 22 percent.

Emiratis Prefer Iranian Fruits to Israeli Ones

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Chairman of Iran-UAE Joint Chamber of Commerce Farshid Farzanegan believes arrival of Israeli fruits into the UAE markets will have no impact on Iranian fruits because Emiratis prefer Iranian good quality fruits to Israeli ones.



Speaking to ILNA, Farzanegan said that the driving engine of any country is its free trade and although Israeli fruits are seen in the UAE markets with lower prices, they have not received warm welcome. He added that the price of Israeli fruits are even one-third but most people in the UAE prefer to buy Iranian fruits with higher prices.

He said Emiratis believe that Iranian fruits are more natural and organic and they prefer Iranian fruits tastes and they have used to their tastes for years, so changing the taste in the market is not an easy job. He reiterated that Iranians do not need to worry about it.

Farzanegan stated that we should know this point that there is a very tough competition in Iran's export market destinations, and all rivals are trying to push Iran out of those markets and for this reason Iranians should have plans for their productions and exports.

He said if the country makes its economy stronger and its business climate better by reducing bureaucracy, then it will not need to worry.

On the halt for issuing visas by the UAE for Iranians, he said that halt for issuing visas for Iranians is temporary and as he has been informed, this issue will be resolved soon, adding that there are many assumptions on making such a decision but this will be resolved anyway, and it cannot create problem for the business.

Farzanegan went on to say that instead of being worried about such issue, the country should focus on its internal economic issues by boosting quality, packing and marketing of its products as the competition is getting tough, and the government should help exports and traders.

Resistance Cinema Enjoys Long Life as Cinema History

TEHRAN (MNA) - Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance sent a message on the occasion of the closing ceremony of the 16th Resistance International Film Festival.

According to the information headquarters of the 16th Resistance International Film Festival, Seyed Abbas Salehi, Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance issued a message on the occasion of the 16th Resistance Film Festival.

He stated that the Resistance cinema enjoys a long life as the cinema history life.

He said that the issue of resistance and endurance has a special place in our religious literature, adding that the essence of resistance and perseverance in the social arena, refers to stability in principles and goals.

"Resistance cinema has a long life as cinema history life. From the first days of cinema production, cinema and camera established a relationship with what is in the field of stability of right, monotheism and justice," the minister added.

He underlined that the resistance cinema narrates the oppression of the oppressed people who suffer from the occupation, apartheid, racism, and pressure of violence, Takfirist atrocities and those who are exposed to the de-identification of their national and religious identities.



"Also the resistance cinema narrates justice and the truth in the field of genuine and lasting human messages in various fields of human dignity, human rights and what goes back to the fields of self-sacrifice and human dignity," he added.

"In our cinema and post-revolutionary cinema, we have witnessed remarkable events both in the field of feature films, short and documentary ones," the minister added.

He stressed that the Iranian cinema has been connected to the issue of resistance, adding that issue of Palestine and the occupation of the occupiers in different parts of the Middle East and other parts of the world, the regional and trans-regional issues and dozens of other topics have enjoyed a significant place in Iranian feature, short and documentary films.

"At present, the resistance cinema in national and international level has become a style and genre which, along with other styles, have found its own meaning and moves forward," the minister said.

"The resistance cinema should be more active than before in networking the resistance cinema. Authors, producers, directors and others who are in the cinema of the resistance should exchange works and advance the flow of the cinema of the resistance," he added.

Border Diplomacy Can Boost Iran-Pakistan Trade

ISLAMABAD (IRNA) - Consul General of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Pakistan's Karachi says having an about 1000km-long common border, the two neighboring, friendly and brotherly countries of Iran and Pakistan have countless opportunities and potentials for expansion of bilateral relations.

In his article published in local media, Ahmad Mohammadi said, "Yet, the volume of trade between the two countries is not in conformity with these opportunities and potentials."

He added Iran, for making use of these potentials, has adopted 'neighbors first' as its foreign policy, wherein a special preference has been given to promotion and development of relations with the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in all fields, including trade, culture, people-to-people exchanges, diplomacy and security.

He said a vigorous promotion of border diplomacy with Pakistan is one of the most important parts of the 'neighbors first' policy of Iran. The diplomat went on to say it is in line with this policy that the two countries have always put up joint and commendable efforts for opening of border crossings and security of their common borders.

"Today, the expanded borders between Iran and Pakistan have become a golden opportunity and potential for their economic blossoming and people-to-people ties," said the diplomat. He said the inauguration of the Rimdan-Gabd border point can be termed as the first step towards implementation of the two countries' border diplomacy.

The envoy noted this border which is going to bring a huge economic advantage for the two countries, serves as a window to further development of trade and people-to-people exchanges between Iran and Pakistan.

He said for facilitating these exchanges, Iran has so far allotted a sum of more than four million dollars and a land with an area of more than 6000 hectares for development of infrastructure for the Rimdan border, so that the two countries could accrue a maximum benefit from this border only 130 kilometers away from the Chabahar port of Iran. Ahmad Mohammadi said Iran has provided very good technical equipment for this border, specially for trading in cattle and fruits and vegetables, and is also trying to provide at the earliest possible time all necessary facilities for trade in other goods such as construction materials.

He said one of the main features of this border is the availability of all necessary equipment for export of mangoes from Pakistan to Iran. Thus, from now on, export of Pakistani mangoes which are very popular in Iran, would become much easier. On the whole, Iran is trying to turn this border into one of international standard at the earliest.

The diplomat added these facilities, as well as the proximity of this border to the Iranian Port of Chabahar, provide for the Pakistani traders a unique opportunity for an easy and profitable access to markets in Iran, Mideast countries, Turkey and the Persian Gulf and European countries. "Iranian traders will also benefit from this border in getting access to the huge Pakistani and Chinese markets."

Official Terms 16th Int'l Film Fest on Resistance as Festival of Astonishment

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Secretary of the 16th International Film Festival on Resistance Mehdi Azimi Mirabadi described the event as festival of astonishment.

The closing ceremony of the event was held by observing health protocols and in the presence of managers, judges and those selected in various sections.

Azimi Mirabadi said he was surprised by what happened in the event.

Due to the outbreak of coronavirus and the imposed limitations, the festival was held online.

He added that the event was held in eight categories.

Azimi Mirabadi noted that the secretariat of the festival received works in English, Arabic and Persian languages.

Azimi Mirabadi went on to say that the festival experienced about 4-fold growth with regard to number of works compared with its 15th version.

Over 4,000 works from 135 countries were received, he reiterated.

ESCO on Course to Increasing Production, Exports

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

ISFAHAN - The CEO of Esfahan Steel Company (ESCO) Eng. Mansour Yazdizadeh, pointing to the start of preheat at the blast furnace unit No. 1 of the company, said that this gigantic industrial complex is striving to inaugurate its blast furnace No.1 unit in presence of national officials by January 12, 2021 which is the foundation anniversary of ESCO.



He said by inaugurating the blast furnace No.1 unit, some 800,000 tons will be added to the output of the company, and ESCO can materialize its production objectives.

Yazdizadeh further said that the company has moved in direction towards producing industrial products, adding that this gigantic industrial complex seeks protecting its exports in the current year despite restrictions, because in the current condition, the country is seriously needs forex.

He also pointed to the impacts of manual of style for organizing offer and demand of steel chain on this company, saying that regarding to this point that the productions of the company has been offered on Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) for three months till mid-February, the decrease in the base price, from 95 percent of Iran export FOB price to 80 percent CIS region FOB price, for offering on IME, the revenues of the company from sales will decline in March.

He also criticized the manual of style which has ambiguity in the method of pricing iron ore and its effects on the price of the raw material.

Yazdizadeh reiterated that in case of implementation of the manual of style, the company is obliged to observe it and will reveal necessary information for its shareholders.

Gov't to Follow FATF-Related Bills

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN 0 The government is to form a joint working group with relevant institutions to follow the issue of FATF-related bills, said the Vice President for Legal Affairs.

"Following the issue of FATF -related bills are being reviewed and the case has not left behind, said Laya Joneidi.

"The issue of pursuing the case of four bills has not been abandoned since it is a general issue for the country," she said.

"The preparations were done to form a joint working group with relevant institutions to agree on the process of continuing the work. The work of two bills has been done and two other bills that are treaties would be reviewed in the joint working group," Joneidi added.

"Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is not only an organization and countries in the regional and international working group are part of it, but Iran also is observer member in the Eurasian Group in FATF and has not lost its position," she noted.

Hundreds of Syrians Exit Lebanese Town over Tensions

TRIPOLI (Dispatches) - At least 270 Syrian families have left a north Lebanon town, as hostility towards them mounted over a murder allegedly committed by a Syrian national, the UN refugee agency said Friday.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees condemned "collective reprisals against Syrians in the town," of Bsharre, saying many of the families fled in fear without taking their belongings.

"Collective punishment... for a whole community for an incident involving one individual is unacceptable," a UNHCR spokesperson said in a statement.



Norway to Extradite Suspect in 1982 Attack

OSLO (Reuters) - Norway will extradite a man to France who is suspected of taking part in an attack that killed six people in a Jewish restaurant in Paris 38 years ago, the government said on Friday.

At least 20 others were wounded in the bombing and shooting assault on the Jo Goldenberg restaurant in the Marais quarter in August 1982. In 2015, arrest warrants were issued against three former members of the Abu Nidal Organization, a splinter group of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), a source told Reuters at the time.

The suspects were identified long after the attacks because of statements from other former members of the Abu Nidal group under a French judicial process that maintained their anonymity, the source said.



Images of Police Beating Black Man Shameful for France



PARIS (Reuters) - President Emmanuel Macron said on Friday that images showing Paris police beating up a Black music producer were shameful for France, and that government would have to find a way to restore public confidence in the force.

Prosecutors are investigating the violent arrest of Michel Zecler, who said he was also racially abused by the officers, after CCTV footage of the incident was released. The police watchdog is also investigating.

Four police officers were being held for questioning as part of the investigation, the Paris Prosecutor's office said. The beating inside the entrance of a building was captured on closed circuit television and mobile phone footage, which has circulated widely online and has made headlines around Europe. "The images we have all seen of the aggression against Michel Zecler are unacceptable, they are shameful for all of us. France should never allow violence or brutality, no matter who it comes from. France should never let hate or racism prosper," Macron said in a statement on his Facebook page.

He added that the police force should be exemplary. "Those whose job it is to apply the law should respect the law," he said, adding that he has asked the government to urgently make proposals about how to restore confidence in the police.

The beating of Zecler risks inflaming racial tension, with allegations of repeated police brutality against Black and ethnic communities at the forefront of many people's minds after the death of Black American George Floyd in Minneapolis in May sparked the "BlackLivesMatter" movement.

Dominique Sopo, President of anti-racism group "SOS Racisme", told Reuters Zecler had been the target of a "racist attack".

"For police officers to act that way they must have a tremendous feeling of impunity. This situation is a symptom of an impunity that has been going on for too long," he added.

Paris police already faced criticism this week after social media photos and videos showed officers hitting protesters as they cleared out an illegal migrants campsite in a central Paris square.

The music producer told reporters he was set upon by police at his studio in Paris's 17th arrondissement on Saturday.

He said he had been walking in the street without a face mask - against French COVID-19 health protocols - and, upon seeing a police car, went into his nearby studio to avoid being fined. However, he said, the police followed him inside and began to assault and racially abuse him.

Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin told France 2 television on Thursday that the officers would be punished if the alleged wrongdoing was confirmed.

Zecler's arrest came amid fierce debate in France over draft legislation that would limit journalists' ability to document French police officers at work.

Three Killed in Clashes in Iraq



NASIRIYA, Iraq (Reuters) - Supporters of Shi'ite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr stormed an anti-government protest camp in the southern Iraqi city of Nasiriya on Friday, and at least three people were killed and dozens wounded in the clashes, a Reuters witness and a medical source said.

Followers of Sadr carrying pictures of the cleric marched to the central al-Haboubi square, where anti-government protesters have held a sit-in since 2019, after Friday prayers.

They fired gunshots and threw petrol bombs at the protesters' tents, leading the protesters to fight back, the Reuters witness said.

A hospital source said the protesters died from bullet wounds. The clashes were still going on on Friday evening.

Haboubi square, where one of the worst killings of demonstrators took place last year and the last major protest site, had been cleared on Friday night by Sadr supporters, Reuters witness said, another major blow to anti-government protests that have largely lost steam in recent months.

Suicide Bomber Kills Several in Mogadishu

MOGADISHU (Dispatches) - A suicide bomber blew himself up in an ice-cream parlour in the Somali capital, Mogadishu, killing seven people, a police official said.

Ten others were wounded in the attack on Friday, said senior police officer Mohamed Dahir. The death toll could rise as the critically injured were rushed to nearby hospitals, he added.

The Gelato Divino restaurant is located near K4 Junction in the heart of Mogadishu, near the international airport.

This latest attack comes days after five people were killed in Mogadishu on November 17, after a suicide bomber blew himself up in a restaurant near a police academy.

It was not immediately clear who was responsible for the blast on Friday, but the armed group al-Shabab - which is allied with al-Qaeda - frequently carries out bombings in the capital and elsewhere, including the attack on November 17.

Thousands of people have died in the fighting between the armed group and the Somali government forces in the past 30 years.

In August, 10 civilians and a police officer were killed in a gun-and-bomb attack by al-Shabab on an upscale beachfront hotel in the capital.

That same month, four al-Shabab fighters held in Mogadishu's central prison were killed in an encounter with security forces after they somehow managed to get their hands on weapons within the facility.

At least seven people were killed in a separate attack in August when a car bomb exploded at an army base in Mogadishu where members of the Somali National Army (SNA) were stationed.

Indian Police Clash With Farmers for Second Day

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - Indian police fired tear gas and water cannon on Friday in a second day of clashes with farmers marching on New Delhi angry at agricultural reforms they fear will leave them at the mercy of big corporations.

Authorities eventually allowed the farmers, some of whom threw stones and broke barricades, to enter the capital under police escort to stage a demonstration this weekend.

Police had deployed hundreds of officers at different entry points to the capital, parking trucks full of sand and laying barbed wire to block the farmers' path.

The plight of Indian farmers has long been a political hot potato.

Issues such as erratic weather patterns blamed on climate change and mounting debt have been blamed for the suicides of thousands of farmers in recent years.

Laws passed earlier this year mean farmers are now free to sell their produce to anyone at any price, instead of to state-controlled markets at assured rates.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi hailed this as a

"complete transformation of the agriculture sector" that would empower "tens of millions of farmers" and encourage much-needed investment and modernisation.

But the main opposition Congress party, which is in power in the northern state of Punjab where many of the protesters came from, has argued the change will give private corporations free rein to exploit farmers.

"I welcome the (central government's) decision to allow farmers to enter Delhi to exercise their democratic right to protest," Punjab's Chief Minister Amarinder Singh said on Friday.

"They should also now initiate immediate talks to address farmers' concerns on the #FarmLaws and resolve the simmering issue," he tweeted.

The protesting farmers had also blocked the movement of trains in Punjab for the last two months, before yielding to public and government pressure and lifting the blockade.

Thursday's stand-off resulted in a long traffic hold-up on one of India's busiest national highways, linking New Delhi to several northern states.



Spain's Minority Gov't Relies On Controversial Allies

MADRID (Dispatches) - Spain's leftist minority government is managing a delicate balancing act to govern with the support of several smaller regional nationalist parties, including the heirs of the former political wing of armed Basque separatist group ETA.

The strategy has so far paid off for Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, who first came to power in June 2018 and who has governed since January in coalition with far-left party Podemos.

He has in recent days secured enough support to get his 2021 budget plan through parliament.

Spain has since 2018 been functioning with a budget approved by the previous conservative Popular Party (PP) government of Mariano Rajoy.

Podemos negotiated support for the spending plan from Catalan separatist party ERC, Basque nationalist party PNV and Basque pro-independence party Bildu.

Bildu is seen as the heir to Batasuna, banned in 2003 for being the political wing of ETA which is blamed for the deaths of at least 853 people in its four-decade campaign of violence for an independent Basque homeland. ETA was formally dissolved in May 2018.

"This budget will be historic and the alliance even more," said Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias.

Sanchez took office in 2018 with the backing of these parties, prompting opponents to accuse him of forming a "Frankenstein government".

Already vilified by conservatives for forming a coalition with far-left Podemos, Sanchez has faced an outcry from the right over Bildu's support for his budget.

"Could you imagine (President-elect Joe) Biden making a pact with the terrorists who carried out the 9/11 attacks," said PP leader Pablo Casado.

Sanchez rejected the criticism, arguing Bildu's five lawmakers were "legitimately elected by Spaniards."

Cristina Monge, a political scientist at the University of Zaragoza, said the alliances formed by Sanchez were risky but necessary in Spain's deeply fragmented parliament because "otherwise he will find himself without support" to pass legislation. Sanchez wants to rely on the greatest number of possible partners in order to have "alternatives" and not have to pay an "excessive price" in terms of concessions to each party, she added.



Velenjak Apt (\$2500)
250sq.m, 3bdrs
S/p, Sauna
J, balcony
marble fl
Fully Furn

Shanon (adviser)

Jordan Villa (\$4000)
1000sq.m
5bdrs, S/p
S, J, balcony
marble floor
pkg, & F.F

Parsian

Farmanieh (\$2000)
200sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p
Sauna, J, & pkg
Fully Furn

Pasdaran
170sq.m, 3bdrs
S/p, S, J, pkg
(\$1100) F.F

Elahieh bldg (\$5000)
4storey, total 12bdrs
enough pkg lots
Fully Furn

Gheitarieh Apt (\$1300)
200sq.m, 3bdrs, & F.F

Jordan (\$30 per sq.m)
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Brazil Creates Record 394,989 Formal Jobs in October

BRASILIA (Reuters) - Formal job creation in Brazil surged to a record high in October, figures showed on Thursday, as the dominant services sector roared back to life to account for around 40% of new jobs.

A net 394,989 formal jobs were created in October, the economy ministry said, marking the fourth month in a row of gains and significantly more than the 233,500 forecast in a Reuters poll of economists. The economy ministry chart below shows the scale of job growth in October compared with the same month in previous years.



Venezuela Resumes Direct Oil Shipments to China

CARACAS (Reuters) - Venezuela has resumed direct shipments of oil to China after U.S. sanctions sent the trade underground for more than a year, according to Refinitiv Eikon vessel-tracking data and internal documents from state company Petroleos de Venezuela (PDVSA).

Chinese state companies China National Petroleum Corp (CNPC) and PetroChina - long among PDVSA's top customers - stopped loading crude and fuel at Venezuelan ports in August 2019 after Washington extended its sanctions on PDVSA to include any companies trading with the Venezuelan state firm.

Imposition of the sanctions was part of a push by the Trump administration to oust Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, but they failed to completely halt the South American nation's oil exports or to loosen Maduro's grip on power.

PDVSA's customers instead boosted shipments to Malaysia, where transfers of cargoes between vessels at sea have allowed most of Venezuela's crude to continue flowing to China after changing hands and using trade intermediaries.

PDVSA, CNPC, PetroChina and Venezuela's oil ministry did not reply to requests for comment.

A U.S. Treasury Department spokesperson said on Wednesday that "those engaged in activity in the Venezuelan oil sector risk exposure to sanctions."

The first tanker to resume transport of Venezuelan crude directly to China was the Kyoto, identified by shipping monitoring service TankerTrackers.com while loading 1.8 million barrels of heavy crude at Venezuela's Jose port in late August.

At least one other tanker, the Warrior King, is discharging Venezuelan crude at China's Bayuquan port, while two PetroChina-owned vessels loaded oil in Venezuela this month, according to PDVSA's loading schedules and shipping documents, and Refinitiv Eikon data.

The Kyoto, chartered by a company called Wanneng Munay according to an internal PDVSA document, discharged at China's Dalian oil terminal in early November after covering a large portion of its route to Asia in a so-called "dark voyage," with its location transponder offline, Refinitiv Eikon data showed.

Wanneng Munay is among a group of more than a dozen Russian-registered companies with no known prior oil trading experience that have emerged as PDVSA customers in recent months.

The emergence of these firms has allowed PDVSA to continue shipping oil to Asian destinations in recent months despite withdrawals by established customers like India's Reliance Industries and Thailand's Tipco after the U.S. Treasury ended their exemptions to sanctions.

Wanneng Munay could not be reached for comment. The company that registered its webpage, Moscow-based OGG Trading, told Reuters last month the firm had not been able to start trade activities as planned due to the coronavirus.

Monte Nero Management SA, operator of the Kyoto, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The direct shipments come ahead of January's transition of power in the United States from Republican President Donald Trump to Democratic President-elect Joe Biden, whose advisers have said he would retain sanctions but shift the focus of U.S. strategy.

The resumption of direct imports by China comes after Washington earlier this year took action against units of Russia's Rosneft and later went after shipping firms that continued to do business with PDVSA following trade sanctions first imposed in early 2019.

Since its units were hit by sanctions, Rosneft has halted business with PDVSA, the company has said, but the sanctions on its subsidiaries have not been lifted.

The U.S. State Department had no comment about the resumption of direct oil trade between Venezuela and China.

Finland's Third Quarter GDP Grows 3.3%, More Than Expected

HELSINKI (Reuters) - Finland's third-quarter economic output rose 3.3% from the second quarter, Statistics Finland said on Friday, outstripping an earlier flash estimate of a rise of 2.6%.

The new estimate prompted Danske Bank chief economist Pasi Kuoppamaki to call it "an encouraging sign of the Finnish economy's corona resilience".

Statistics Finland also revised its estimate of the decline in Finnish second-quarter gross domestic product to 3.9% quarter-on-quarter, from a previous estimate of a 4.5% drop.

The earlier estimate of the second-quarter GDP drop caused by the COVID-19 pandemic was already the smallest among euro zone economies, according to estimates collected by Eurostat in September.



Year-on-year, Finland's GDP fell 2.7% in the third quarter, Statistics Finland said.

Finland's consumer confidence index recovered in November to -4.8 points but remained below its long-term average level of -1.8 points, Statistics Finland said.

"The corona epidemic has a clear impact on consumers' sentiments, and thus the news on the coming vaccines have likely cheered up the expectations," Kuoppamaki said in a statement.

Even so, the industry confidence indicator increased just one point from October's figure, to -14 in November, well below its long-term average of +1. Production expectations for the coming months remained pessimistic among manufacturers, the Confederation of Finnish Industries said.

Japan, South Korea, Industry Oppose EU Plan to Cut Shipping Emissions

BRUSSELS (Reuters) - Japan, South Korea and a

fleet of international shipping groups have warned the European Union against its plan to add greenhouse gas emissions from the maritime sector to Europe's carbon market.

As the 27-country EU seeks to steer its economy towards "net zero" emissions by 2050, the executive European Commission wants to expand its carbon market to shipping.

Currently, the policy requires power plants, factories and airlines running European flights to buy pollution permits to cover their emissions.

The proposal, formally due by next summer, has already run into opposition.

"The application of EU-ETS to international shipping will have adverse repercussion on both environmental integrity and sustainability of global maritime transport and trade," the South Korean government said in its response to an EU consultation on the policy, which closed on Thursday.

"Extension of EU ETS to international shipping is not the suggested way forward, whether the scope is limited to intra-EU shipping only or not," Japan's government said in public documents submitted to the European Commission.

The countries warned that adding shipping to Europe's carbon market could stoke trade tensions, and cause extra emissions by prompting ships to take longer routes to avoid stops in Europe.

Shipping produces 2.1% of global CO2 emissions, a share expected to rise if left unchecked, threatening global efforts to curb climate change.

The International Maritime Organisation is developing global measures to deliver its pledge to halve shipping greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. It says the EU plan undermines these efforts. Critics say the IMO measures are not ambitious enough and additional action is needed.

"I do not see binding measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions at IMO level any time soon," said Jutta Paulus, a Green lawmaker in European Parliament. Parliament approved in September a proposal by Paulus to add shipping to the EU

carbon market in 2022.

Industry associations BIMCO and the World Shipping Council also said it is too early to add shipping to a carbon market, citing a lack of commercially viable technologies to cut emissions.



Euro Zone Sentiment Drops in November

BRUSSELS (Reuters) - Euro zone economic sentiment fell for the first time in seven months in November as a second COVID-19 wave struck the continent, depressing the mood in all sectors, particularly those hardest hit by lockdowns such as services and retail.

The European Commission's monthly survey showed sentiment in the 19 countries sharing the euro fell to 87.6 points from 91.1 in October, a shade above market expectations of a decline to 86.5 points.

The survey is typically conducted in the first two to three weeks of the month, meaning they relate to the mood after a series of lockdowns were announced, including in the euro zone's two largest economies, Germany and France. "After the partial recovery of sentiment between May and September and the broad sideways movement in October, the drop is the first one since sentiment fell sharply in the first COVID-19 wave," the European Commission said in its report.

The decline of sentiment, it said, was fuelled by diving confidence in retail, services and among consumers. Sentiment in industry and construction, which have been largely spared in lockdowns, suffered only mild declines.

In all cases, the view of future business worsened.

Sentiment in services, the euro zone economy's biggest sector producing some two thirds of gross domestic product, slipped to -17.3 from -12.1. Economists polled by Reuters had expected a fall to -15.5 points.

Sentiment among consumers fell to -17.6 in November from -15.5 points in October, in line with the flash estimate released last week.

Norway Gas Exports Could Be Hit by Strike Escalation

OSLO (Reuters) - The planned escalation of a strike by Norwegian security guards could begin to shut the Nyhamna gas processing plant and two large gas fields from Friday, which would reduce Norway's exports to Europe by a quarter, system operator Gassco said.

Some 2,300 security guards organised by the Norwegian Union of General Workers (NAF) are on strike nationwide over pay, and an additional 85 will go on strike from Saturday unless the dispute is resolved first.

A gradual shutdown would have to start on Friday to prepare for the strike the following day, Gassco's systems operations chief Alfred Hansen said.

"In order to shut down a facility like Nyhamna and to do it in a safe and proper manner, we would have to start a while before," Hansen said. "So we warned our shippers in the transportation system that this potential is now clear and that we are preparing for this scenario tomorrow."

The Norwegian government, which can invoke emergency powers to end workplace conflicts, said it was closely monitoring the situation but declined to say whether it would step in.

Nyhamna processes gas from the Ormen Lange and Aasta Hansteen fields, which would also have to shut because of the strike, Gassco and the Norwegian Oil and Gas Association (NOG) said.

Export capacity from Nyhamna stands at 84 million standard cubic metres (mcm) of gas per day, about a quarter of Norway's expected 330 mcm export volume on Thursday.

The NAF union confirmed that security guards working at Nyhamna were among those who would join the strike, but declined to give numbers. Security guards are also on strike at heliports from which crews and equipment are flown to and from offshore platforms, and the gradual escalation of the conflict could disrupt supply lines, oil major Equinor said.

While governments can end strikes, they are generally reluctant to do so. In 2012, the government ended a strike after 16 days when employers threatened a lockout of workers that would have shut down all oil and gas output.

"The ongoing dispute is for the parties to solve, but the ministry is following the situation closely," a spokeswoman for the labor ministry said.

Germany Plans Nearly 180b Euros in New Debt for 2021



BERLIN (Reuters) - Germany plans to borrow almost 180 billion euros (\$214.60 billion) next year, nearly double the amount initially foreseen, as Berlin extends aid measures to mitigate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Europe's biggest economy, lawmakers told Reuters on Friday.

Germany's parliamentary budget committee of lawmakers agreed on the plans in the early hours of Friday after 17 hours of talks, saying it is the second largest amount of net new borrowing in the history of post-war Germany.

"The new borrowing is the right thing to do. You cannot save your way through a crisis," said Greens lawmaker Sven-Christian Kindler.

Planned new debt of 179.82 billion euros for next year compares to 96 billion euros initially envisaged by Finance Minister Olaf Scholz in September.

Chancellor Angela Merkel's government has taken unprecedented steps to help companies and small businesses get through the crisis, freeing up billions of euros to prevent the economy shrinking further. To fund the measures, it needs to borrow more than planned.

Parliament this year suspended Germany's debt brake in the constitution to allow the government to take on net new debt of up to 218 billion euros to finance rescue and stimulus measures. However, coalition sources have said it was unlikely to need the full amount.

Merkel's government expects the economy to shrink by a calendar-adjusted 5.9% in 2020 and rebound by 4.4% in 2021.

Merkel and state premiers agreed on Wednesday to extend and tighten a partial coronavirus lockdown which will see bars, restaurants, gyms and entertainment venues stay shut until at least Dec. 20.

Financial support for businesses that have been closed since Nov. 2 due to the pandemic will be extended.

West Asia Doesn't Need U.S. Troops to Secure Region

TEHRAN (IP) - Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said that West Asia did not need US soldiers for being safe.

Khatibzadeh told Ariana TV of Afghanistan: "The U.S. military invasion of Afghanistan was a blatant and illegal aggression and what is seen today in the

country and region is the ominous legacy of the U.S. military invasion."

"Certainly, Iran's view of the Afghan government is different from that of the United States, which has treated Afghanistan like an occupying power for the past 20 years," he said.



Modi Sees \$20b Annual Investment in Green Energy Sector

CHENNAI (Reuters) - Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Thursday he expects the energy-hungry country's burgeoning renewable energy sector to require an annual investment of \$20 billion a year.

"Demand for energy in India will keep growing. There are huge renewable energy deployment plans for the next decade," Modi told the third global RE-Invest conference.

India's green energy capacity, which encompasses solar, wind, bio-power, and small and large hydropower, is currently at 136 GW. That is expected to increase to 220 GW by 2022, Modi said.

"These are likely to generate business prospects of the order of \$20 billion a year," he said, adding that the country's green energy sector has attracted investments of \$64 billion over the last six years.

While India has increasingly adopted renewable energy, it is also home to some of the world's most polluted cities due to its longtime heavy reliance on coal and other fossil fuels.

The capital New Delhi has the world's dirtiest air, with millions choking every winter due to a hazy smog arising from burning of farm stubble, coal-fired plants and car emissions.

Modi said the South Asian nation was among the few countries on track to meet a goal of the 2015 Paris agreement of capping the rise in average temperatures to well below 2 degrees Celsius before the end of the century. He did not elaborate.

The virtual conference was also attended by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte and senior government officials from Britain and Denmark.

Solar tariffs in India fell to a record low of 2 Indian rupees (\$0.0271) per kilowatt hour this week, with firms based out of Singapore and Saudi Arabia winning bids to generate power.

Modi also said he expects demand for domestically made solar cells and modules to increase to 36 GW in three years.



India currently imports over 85% of its solar cell and module requirements from China, and its local manufacturing potential is negligible compared to its requirements.

The prime minister also said India was set to launch a "National Hydrogen Energy Mission." "We want to make India a global manufacturing hub in the renewable energy sector."

Turkey Central Bank Lifts Lira by Dumping Another Credit Rule



ISTANBUL (Reuters) - Turkey's central bank scrapped a rule that had nudged banks to lend cheaply, lifting the lira on Friday with another step to simplify and tighten credit channels after hiking interest rates.

The central bank had previously linked reserve requirement ratios and remuneration rates to loan growth, which had spurred lending and economic growth.

But under new Governor Naci Agbal it raised its key rate by 475 points last week and has taken other steps to support the lira and cut inflation, which has been stuck near 12% all year.

The same reserve requirement ratios and remuneration rates will now be applied to all banks, which the central bank said should make its monetary transmission mechanism more effective.

The lira, which touched an all-time low in early November, strengthened as much as 1% against the dollar before slipping slightly to 7.82.

Enver Erkan, economist at Tera Yatirim, said Turkish authorities were meeting market expectations by taking normalisation steps almost daily.

President Tayyip Erdogan sacked the former central bank governor earlier this month and appointed Agbal, who two weeks later hiked the policy rate to 15% in the sharpest monetary tightening in more than two years.

The finance minister also resigned and Erdogan's more market-friendly rhetoric has stoked optimism among foreign investors that Turkey would embrace orthodox economic policies.

Meanwhile economic confidence in Turkey fell for the first time since April after the lira slumped to a record low and the government tightened measures to curb the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

The benchmark index of confidence among businesses and consumers fell to 89.5 points in November from 92.8 in October. Any reading below 100 points reflects pessimism.

Confidence among companies in the construction industry led the decline, decreasing to 79 points from 83.8 points, the figures published by the Turkish Statistical Institute on Friday showed.

A slump in the value of the lira to an all-time low of 8.58 per dollar on Nov. 6 prompted Turkish President Erdogan to sack the governor of the central bank the following day. Treasury and Finance Minister Berat Albayrak, Erdogan's son-in-law, resigned on Nov. 8.

The lira has since rallied to around 7.8 per dollar, partly due to an increase in interest rates by the central bank. Borrowing costs for banks now stand at 15 percent compared with a previous 10.25 percent.

Confidence among consumers, manufacturers and businesses in the services industry also declined, the institute said. It remained unchanged at 95 points for the retail sector.

Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand to Sign Customs Cooperation Pact

JAKARTA (ANTARA) - Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand have finished discussing the frame of cooperation (FoC) in the customs, immigration, and quarantine fields amid the COVID-19 pandemic and plan to endorse and adopt the partnership next year.

Director of the Center for Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle (CIMT), Firdaus Dahlan, made the remarks after attending the 26th meeting of IMT-GT ministers, held virtually on Thursday.

The discussion on the partnership had come to a standstill since 2014. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the sub-regional partnership managed to conclude the discussion on FoC in the customs, immigration, and quarantine fields, he said in a written statement.

He reiterated the three countries hope to endorse and adopt the cooperation document in 2021.

"(The cooperation in the customs field) is expected to bring about larger benefits to the trade sector and goods supply chain through simplified regulations and procedures," he said.

Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand, which share land and



sea borders, established economic and trade cooperation called the Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle (IMT-GT) in 1993 with the aim of improving welfare and economic growth in the three countries, with a total population of about 84 million.

To that end, IMT-GT has held several routine programs to gather stakeholders in the three countries. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the three countries held the 26th meeting of IMT-GT ministers virtually.

At the meeting, the three countries also discussed the strategy of expanding the market for the three countries' export products through digital spaces.

"IMT-GT plans to launch IMT-GT E-Commerce Platform in 2021 to welcome the digital era in the trade sector," he said.

The three countries also affirmed their commitment to complete several infrastructure projects worth US\$51 billion. The projects include bridges, ports, railway tracks, land transportation, and special economic zones.

"Most of the development projects will be completed in 2021," he said.

Japan Ruling Party Calls for Major Green Investment in Draft Plan

TOKYO (Reuters) - Japan's ruling party will call on the government to promote environmental investment with a major decade-long spending program for the country, whose Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga has made a green society a key policy priority.

The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) said in the draft proposal, which was seen by Reuters early on Friday, that the government should create a fund with a size "comparable to global standards" that supports companies investing in green technology, without suggesting a specific figure.

Suga has said that Japan will aim for net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 and the LDP's recommendations will serve as a basis for the government's deliberations on a fresh stimulus package, which Suga has ordered his cabinet to develop.

The proposal, which suggests incentives to promote green investment will be among key pillars of the package along with spending to cushion the immediate blow from COVID-19, will be presented to the government on Monday, an LDP source said.

"By deploying all policy means available, the public and private sectors must work together to achieve zero carbon emission in 2050," said the draft, which was still subject to change after further deliberations when it was seen by Reuters, before being finalised by the party.

As well as calling for deregulation and tax breaks, the proposal also urges the government to expand or create new state-backed loan and loan guarantee schemes to support firms hit by the COVID-19 pandemic.

"It seems (the new package) will be different from just providing support to cope with the pandemic," said Takeshi Minami, chief economist at Norinchukin Research Institute.

"There will be an increasing number of measures with an eye on a post-COVID society," he said.

The draft also called on the government to provide "strong support" for airlines hit by the pandemic, with measures such as slashing airport fees and fuel tax.

And it urged the extension of a subsidy for travel that has provoked concerns over a resurgence of coronavirus infections.

These hit a record daily high of 570 cases in Tokyo on Friday, topping the previous high of 539, city officials said, after 9,792 tests, another record.

With rising infections clouding the outlook, Japan said on Friday it would extend until February next year a subsidy scheme that compensates companies for retaining jobs while temporarily closing business due to the pandemic.

Ruling party executives have called for an extra budget worth around 20-30 trillion yen (\$192-\$288 billion), which will fund part of the stimulus package.



Health Ministry...

FROM PAGE 1

She added that in the past 24 hours, 391 COVID-19 patients had lost their lives, bringing the total death toll to 47,486.

5,865 COVID-19 patients are in critical condition. "So far, 6,038,556 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 Azarbaijan, South Khorasan, Semnan, Qazvin, Lorestan, Ardabil, Khuzestan, Kermanshah, Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad, Gilan, Bushehr, Zanjan, Ilam, Khorasan Razavi, Mazandaran, Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari, Alborz, West Azarbaijan, 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.

Iranian Diplomat...

FROM PAGE 1

De Beco also added that the plaintiffs were turning the case into a political trial on behalf of the MKO.

The next session of the trial is scheduled to take place on Thursday and the court is then expected to adjourn its verdict before ruling early next year.

Following Assadi's apprehension in Berlin, the director general for Europe affairs at Iran's Foreign Ministry met German ambassador Michael Klor-Berchtold to convey the Islamic Republic's strong opposition to the arrest, detention and extradition of the Iranian diplomat and said the move was part of a manufactured plot by those opposing Iran-Europe relations and was planned by the MKO itself.

Iranian Steel...

FROM PAGE 1

Based on the mentioned report, during the said time span, steel production of the European Union countries fell 16.7 percent, CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) fell 1.9 percent, North America fell 17.4 percent, South America fell 12 percent, and Oceania experienced a decrease of 1.8 percent.

In contrast, production in Asia grew by an average of 1.4 percent and West Asia's steel output grew by eight percent.

According to the former Acting Minister of Industry, Mining and Trade Hossein Modares Khiabani, the production capacity of the country's steel chain has increased from 123 million tons in the Iranian calendar year 1392 (ended in March 2014) to 230 million tons in the current year (started on March 19).

U.S., Israel...

FROM PAGE 1

Warning against any adventuristic measures by the United States and Israel against my country, particularly during the remaining period of the current administration of the United States in office, the Islamic Republic of Iran reserves its rights to take all necessary measures to defend its people and secure its interests.

The Islamic Republic of Iran condemns, in the strongest possible terms, the criminal assassination of Martyr Fakhri Zadeh, and expects the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Security Council to strongly condemn this inhumane terrorist act and take necessary measures against its perpetrators."

He also requested "the present letter circulated as a document of the Security Council."

Tesla Recalls 870 Cars in China Over Defective Roofs

BEIJING (Dispatches) - U.S. electric car maker Tesla is recalling 870 vehicles in China over defective roofs, part of which could fall off, China's market regulator said on Friday.

The announcement comes just a month after another recall of almost 30,000 cars imported into China -- the world's biggest auto market -- due to suspension defects.

On Friday China's State Administration for Market Regulation said the latest recall affects Model X cars produced between March 16 and July 31 in 2016.

Parts of the roof trim may have insufficient primer, which is used to improve adhesion, meaning it could fall off, the regulator said in a statement.

"If the trim falls off the vehicle during driving, it will increase the risk of collision or injury for vehicles behind, especially motorcycles, posing a safety hazard," the statement added.

Tesla will inspect the recalled cars for free and perform a test on the roof trim to check if the primer is sufficient.

Man United Unable to Fully Restore Systems

MANCHESTER (AP) — Manchester United has been unable to fully restore its computer systems a week after being targeted in a cyberattack.

The Premier League club's staff still did not have access to email on Thursday night, and some other functions were also unavailable.

"Following the recent cyberattack on the club, our IT team and external experts secured our networks and have conducted forensic investigations," United said in a statement.

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Liverpool Rival Barcelona for Garay

LONDON (Dispatches) - Liverpool are eyeing free agent Lezequiel Garay. With Reds boss Jurgen Klopp fighting a defensive injury crisis, the German has admitted he may be forced into the January market for a solution.

Italian transfer expert Fabrizio Romano says Klopp's search has led to Garay. The Argentine international is a free agent after being cut loose by Valencia over the summer as he was recovering from a knee injury. Garay has also been linked with Barcelona, where he's seen as a stop-gap replacement for the injured Gerard Pique.

Klopp Says Return of Fans a Small Step in Right Direction

LONDON (Reuters) - Liverpool manager Juergen Klopp welcomed the news that 2,000 fans will be allowed into Anfield starting from next month as a small step in the right direction on Friday. The city of Liverpool has been placed under Tier 2 COVID-19 restrictions by the government, paving the way for a limited return of fans for the first time since March.

While London clubs will also be permitted to allow fans back in small numbers next month, many Premier League clubs including Manchester United, Manchester City, Newcastle United and those in the Midlands will not as they are in Tier 3 areas.

Liverpool's game at Brighton & Hove Albion on Saturday will be without fans, as the new measures come in next week. However, 2,000 fans will be permitted to attend Liverpool's home game with Wolverhampton Wanderers next weekend.

Klopp was asked whether it would be an advantage for his title winners.

"I said before I knew which tier Liverpool would be in that's it's not about discussing the advantage or disadvantage of this or that," he told a news conference.

"It's making small steps in the right direction. I'm happy that we can bring in 2,000 people, nobody knows how long we will be able to do that, but I think we should discuss not on the basis of an advantage for this or that team

"The world is in a difficult place and we all wait for small steps. This is a small step in the right direction."

Klopp was less happy, however, with the scheduling which means his side face Brighton in a 1230GMT kickoff on Saturday having played Atalanta in the Champions League on Wednesday. "My thoughts about this are clear," Klopp said. "It's not the time to think about it now. I have to prepare for it. Looks like until end of year it is only us (Weds/Sat).

"Whatever I say doesn't help, so I stop talking. It's just a waste of time. In this moment we play in 25 hours and I have to prepare a team. Wednesday/Saturday 12.30, you have to ask other people why they do that. I don't have the answer."

Liverpool can go top if they avoid defeat at Brighton and Klopp is hopeful that skipper Jordan Henderson will be available after recovering from a muscle injury sustained playing for England against Belgium this month.

"Hendo trained yesterday as part of an individual session," said Klopp, who will be without several key players including Mohamed Salah, Joe Gomez and Virgil van Dijk.



"Only a few days in between so we make late decisions. If you asked me my lineup, I couldn't tell you. I have to wait for medical department to tell me."

Meanwhile Manchester City are hopeful that Sergio Aguero will give them an answer on his Premier League future soon but the Argentine must focus on rediscovering his best form following a knee injury, manager Pep Guardiola said on Friday.

Aguero, who joined City in 2011 and is their all-time leading scorer with 255 goals in all competitions, is out of contract at the end of the season and can speak to overseas clubs from January.

The 32-year-old sustained a hamstring injury in their 1-1 league draw at West Ham United last month, a week after making his first start of the season following knee surgery.

"He's going to give us a decision (on a new contract). He's still not in his best condition. His injury was long," Guardiola told reporters ahead of Saturday's home Premier League game against 17th-placed Burnley.

"He needs to be so sharp, the quality to score in the box we don't have doubts but he needs a bit of time, training sessions and the minutes he will have.

"After that, he has seven months to show. He deserves with the club the fair talks to do what is best for him and for the club. I was lucky to play as a manager with incredible players. He was one of these for sure."

City's attackers are yet to fire on all cylinders this season with 10 goals from eight league matches, but goals have never been in short supply playing at home against Burnley.

Australia Beat India in Tour Opener



SYDNEY (Reuters) - Steve Smith and Aaron Finch led the way with centuries as Australia opened their home summer with a one-day victory over India by 66 runs on Friday in the first men's international played in front of a crowd since March.

The capacity of the Sydney Cricket Ground was reduced by 50% because of social distancing rules but a crowd of 17,821, mostly backing the tourists, were treated to some fireworks from the home batsmen in the afternoon sun.

Finch scored 114 in an opening stand of 156 with David Warner (69) to lay a platform before his predecessor as captain Smith smashed 105 off 66 balls to drive Australia to 374 for six -- their highest total against India.

India, who were forced to spend two weeks in quarantine on arrival in Australia, always looked like struggling to chase down the third highest tally they had conceded in any one-dayer.

Hardik Pandya thumped four sixes in a bright 90 to give them hope but the innings petered out after his fifth-wicket partnership of 128 with opener Shikhar Dhawan (74) was broken and India limped to 308-8 in their 50 overs.

"I've been searching for something for a couple of months but a few days ago something just clicked," Smith said of his batting. "It was nice to contribute to a good win."

Tokyo Olympics Test Events to Resume In March

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Tokyo Olympics test events will resume in March and a decision on fan attendance will come in the spring, an official said on Friday, as preparations continued for the postponed Games despite ongoing coronavirus fears.

The comments from Yasuo Mori, deputy executive director of the Games Operations Bureau, come after International Olympic Committee chief Thomas Bach last week said he was "very confident" the Games will have fans.

The Tokyo Olympics were postponed for a year over the coronavirus, becoming the first to be rescheduled in peace time. The 2020 Games will now start on July 23, 2021.

"We are... thinking about what kind of Tokyo 2020 Games we are going to have in terms of spectators," Mori told reporters, adding that government policy on the matter "will probably be decided in the spring."

Most of the test events, which function as dress rehearsals for each sport, had already taken place before the Games were delayed in March.

But 18 remain to be held, including a trial run of the Olympic marathon which was relocated from Tokyo to the northern city of Sapporo due to concerns over the capital's summer heat.

However, no date was announced for the marathon test, with Mori saying further discussions were needed. Sapporo is in the Hokkaido region, which has been hit hard by the coronavirus.

"For the marathon, we're going to use a public road, and we need the local people's opinion. All that needs to be taken into consideration when we decide if we can have a marathon test event in Sapporo," Mori said.

Fans and foreign athletes will be allowed at some of the test events, which will also be used to assess anti-coronavirus measures and contingency plans.

The tests were announced as spiralling infections and new lockdowns worldwide prompted renewed concerns over the Olympics.

But organisers have been upbeat. Bach, on a visit to Tokyo, said athletes would be encouraged but not required to take a vaccine, if one is available.

Zidane Hits Out at Fixture Schedule as Injuries Mount



MADRID (Reuters) - Real Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane once again lamented the packed fixture schedule as his injury-hit side prepare to take on Alaves in La Liga.

The game against the Basque outfit will be Real's third in a run of ten matches in 32 days. Zidane, who is without many players due to injury including captain Sergio Ramos and forward Karim Benzema, insisted there is a duty to look after player welfare.

"We're only at the start of the season. We want it to be a spectacle like it was before, but things have changed," he told a news conference on Friday.

"What matters to me is looking after the players. When one of my players is injured, I suffer for them. Right now, with all the games that we have coming thick and fast, we need to take care."

In addition to Ramos and Benzema, Zidane confirmed he would be missing midfielder Federico Valverde, as well as defenders Alvaro Odriozola and Dani Carvajal. Luka Jovic will also be absent following a positive COVID-19 test.

However, there was better news with Casemiro and Eder Militao available for selection against the 15th-placed Alaves.

"When sides play against Madrid they come out giving their all and that means we need to be at 150 percent in order to win, and if we can be at the same level as them physically then our quality can make the difference," Zidane added.

Diego Was Unlucky In Barcelona

BARCELONA (Dispatches) - The difference between Diego Maradona's difficult spell at Barcelona and Lionel Messi's triumphant reign at the club is largely down to luck, said the man who helped bring both Argentines to the Camp Nou.

"They are two very similar players. They are two number 10s. That is a position highly valued historically in Argentina," said Jose Maria Minguella. "The number 10 is the creator of the game, the one who collects the ball and somehow creates danger."

Minguella has been involved with Barcelona since the start of the 1970s and helped arrange the deals to secure not only the two Argentine stars but also a host of other players including such international stars as Romario and Hristo Stoichkov.

After a long courtship, he brought Maradona, aged 21, to Barcelona for a then world record fee of 7.6 million dollars in 1982. He was also involved in the deal that brought Messi to the club at the age of 13.

Remembering Maradona, who died on Wednesday aged 60, Minguella told AFP: "Diego was unlucky."

Maradona played for Barcelona from 1982-84, but his first season was cut short by hepatitis and in his second Athletic Bilbao defender Andoni Goikoetxea broke Maradona's left ankle.

When the two clubs met in the cup final at the end of the season, Maradona started a brawl that earned him a three-month Spanish ban. He then moved to Napoli, where he was adored.

"He was alone for two years, a serious injury and an illness deprived him of his explosiveness," said Minguella. "The explosion came in Naples."

Messi's experience has been much happier.

"Leo has been of a benchmark of Barcelona football," said Minguella. "He has shaped an era, won titles, broken records of all kinds."



Hamilton Edges Bottas in Opening Bahrain Practice

MANAMA (Dispatches) - Lewis Hamilton continued on Friday where he left off in Istanbul 12 days earlier by leading the way in opening practice at this weekend's Bahrain Grand Prix.

The newly-crowned world champion clocked a fastest lap in 1 min 29.033sec to outpace Mercedes team-mate Valtteri Bottas by 0.449sec.

It was a rare show of Friday morning supremacy from the champion who has been outpaced by 'Mr Friday' Bottas for most of the second part of this season.

Sergio Perez was third for Racing Point ahead of Ferrari-bound Carlos Sainz of McLaren, Alpha Tauri's Pierre Gasly and the two Red Bulls of Max Verstappen and Alex Albon.

Esteban Ocon was eighth for Renault ahead of Lance Stroll in the second Racing Point and Daniel Ricciardo in the second Renault.

The session was run in relatively cool conditions and featured only a few incidents as the drivers tackled the dusty track surface.

The session began in very light rain, but nothing to trouble the teams or require any change of tyres. "It's spitting a little bit at the back, but nothing too bad," reported McLaren's Lando Norris during the opening laps.

Hamilton swiftly took control with a lap in 1:31.014 only to be succeeded as fastest man by Albon and then Bottas before regaining top spot in 1:30.133 after half an hour's action.

Leclerc was fastest last year (2019) for Ferrari in 1:27.866, an early target for the pace setters as they hit a rhythm.

Both Leclerc and Grosjean had big 'moments' as they pushed for more pace and spun before pitting for fresh rubber. Verstappen also had a big spin at the final corner.

"Ah, lovely," he said, deadpan. "I think the tyres are flat-spotted."

