

Ministry of Intelligence on Sunday Announced the Identification and Arrest of the Main members of the International Arms, Ammunition, and Drug Trafficking Gang Led by the Two Foreign Nationals Inside the Country.

IRAN NEWS

Health Ministry Spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari Said on Sunday That Some 294 More Iranians Have Died From the Coronavirus Disease Over the Past 24 Hours Bringing the Total Deaths to 50,310

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Iran Ready to Increase Oil Output

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iranian President Hassan Rouhani says the country is ready to increase oil exports in the next year.

Speaking on Sunday in the one hundred and eighty-fifth meeting of the Cabinet's Economic Coordination Board, he said "Due to sanctions before the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), oil production and sales faced restrictions, but with the implementation of the deal and the lifting of sanctions, we were able to increase oil sales to more than two million barrels in a short time, and despite valuable operational tools and experience, there is still readiness today to rapidly increase further oil production."

"The U.S. economic war created several obstacles to the country's oil and petrochemical exports, but Trump's wish to reduce Iran's exports to zero never came true," Iranian President's official press service quoted him as saying.

The President said, "The budget presented by the government has been formulated with a realistic view of the conditions ahead next year and taking into account the economic situation of the country and in accordance with the needs of society and the people."

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UNSC Facing Crisis of Legitimacy, Credibility

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Criticizing the performance of the Security Council, Iran's ambassador and permanent representative to the United Nations said: "This body is facing a crisis of legitimacy and credibility due to its poor, passive and in some cases illegal and extra-legal activities."

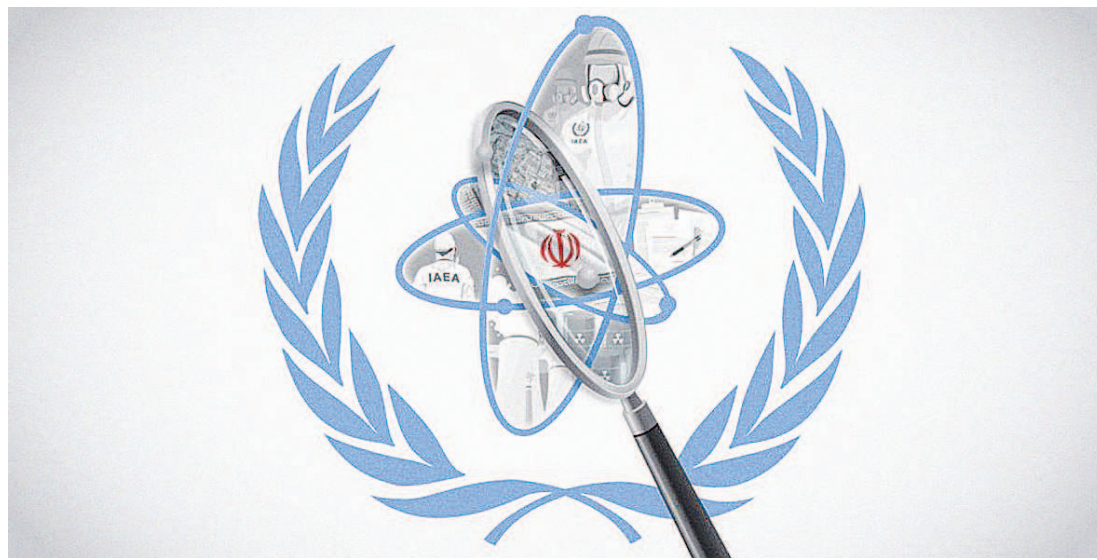
"Majid Takht-Ravanchi," Iran's ambassador and permanent representative to the United Nations, on Sunday stressed in his speech to the UN General Assembly: "The UN Security Council should not be a tool in the U.S. toolbox."

He called the Security Council dominated by Western countries and stated: "This council has been abused by some permanent members and has not been held accountable for its actions."

Iran's ambassador and permanent representative to the United Nations added: "The Security Council is undemocratic due to the weak presence of developing countries in its membership."

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Tehran Vows to Legally Pursue Leakage of IAEA Confidential Report



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran says it will soon begin its "serious" legal pursuit of the leakage of confidential reports prepared by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), after a confidential report by the UN nuclear watchdog on an Iranian facility was leaked to the media.

Iran's ambassador and permanent representative to international organizations in Vienna, Kazem Gharibabadi, said the history of Iran's legal protests against the IAEA over its failure to preserve confidential information dates back more than two decades.

"All Safeguards and JCPOA reports as well as Iran's correspondence with the IAEA and vice versa are confidential. The IAEA shares its reports in its internal site, only accessible to its member states," the Iranian diplomat told the state TV on Saturday.

Gharibabadi said the Islamic Republic has already asked the IAEA to minimize the amount of details it gives its member states in its reports and avoid providing them with non-essential information.

He said in Iran's view, the IAEA is responsible to protect confidential information, and if there is any flaw in this communication mechanism, it must be revised substantially.

His comments came after Reuters quoted a confidential IAEA report as saying that the Islamic Republic plans to install three more cascades, or clusters, of advanced IR-2m centrifuges in the enrichment plant in the central city of Natanz.

"In a letter dated 2 December 2020, Iran informed the Agency that the operator of the Fuel Enrichment Plant (FEP) at Natanz 'intends to start installation of three cascades of IR-2m centrifuge machines' at FEP," the IAEA's report to its member states said.

In his first reaction to the leakage, Gharibabadi had called on the IAEA to ensure confidentiality of safeguards information.

Gharibabadi wrote, "@iaeaorg confidential report, based on Iran's confidential letter, appeared in Media immediately even before the BoG Members could track it down," referring to the IAEA Board of Governors.

Iran's permanent representative to Vienna-based international organizations calls on the IAEA to ensure confidentiality of safeguards information after a confidential report by the UN nuclear watchdog on the Natanz facility was leaked to the media.

"Agency is not merely responsible to update the development, but shall ensure confidentiality of safeguards information," he added.

"If neither the Agency nor its Member States are to be blamed for this crack in confidentiality, @iaeaorg should revise its confidentiality mechanisms including regarding using GovAtom as the safe and confidential means for communications."

GovAtom is a service provided by the IAEA to its Member State representatives. It provides them with online documentation on the work of the Board of Governors and its Committees.

Russia Resumes Baltic Pipeline Construction in Defiance of U.S.

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia has resumed after a one-year hiatus the construction of a highly controversial pipeline project that is set to send natural gas to Germany, in clear defiance of US opposition and sanctions imposed on Moscow over the plan.

According to ship monitoring data released on Saturday, the Russian pipe-laying Akademik Cherskiy vessel sailed into position to resume construction of the German-Russian gas pipeline, known as Nord Stream 2, in the Baltic Sea. The data showed that the vessel had reached the area off the coast of Poland where a section of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline remains uncompleted.

Another Russian pipe-laying ship, Fortuna, sailed off from the German port of Wismar, apparently heading to a different location where another pipeline section is to be built.

Russia's energy giant Gazprom, which is behind the \$11.6 billion pipeline project, had already said it was going to resume the construction work on December 5.

The resumption of the project came as US lawmakers agreed to extend sanctions on companies involved in the construction of the Nord Stream 2 natural gas pipeline.

The U.S. ambassador to Berlin swiftly reacted to the Saturday news and urged the German government and the European Union to put a temporary halt to construction work on the pipeline to send a signal to Moscow.

Washington claims that the pipeline project, which has become a flashpoint in relations between Russia and the West that have sunk to post-Cold War lows, compromises European energy security.

"This pipeline is not just an economic project, but the Kremlin's political tool to bypass Ukraine and divide Europe," Robin Quinville, acting U.S. ambassador to Berlin, told Germany's Handelsblatt daily.

Washington imposed fresh sanctions against the Nord Stream 2 in October, targeting businesses that provide services or funds to upgrade or install equipment on ships that are being used to lay the pipeline.

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ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian



Counting on Biden A Strategic Mistake

The 59th U.S. presidential election was held in November 2020 and it was actually a race between incumbent President Donald Trump as the representative of the Republican Party and his major rival Joe Biden as the Democrat Party representative, and the election conflict despite the vote rigging claim from the White House the White House went nowhere and Trump was dethroned.

The Trump Administration's hostile performance and breaching of promises have caused this question to be raised more than ever whether Biden's victory can bring a change in the U.S. approach against Iran especially in its economic aspect or not. A glance at the decision-making structure in the U.S. is important for getting the answer to this question. According to the U.S. Constitution, the U.S. president is the highest executive person, and by selecting advisors and secretaries, he makes decision. The president is himself in charge of the Armed Forces, executive power and foreign policy strategy. Besides these, the president is able to use veto right to overshadow the legislative trend of the Congress. Despite all these authorities, there have been always challenges in way of president's decisions which may cancel, delay or soften his decisions.

So although President says the first word, it does not mean the final decision and action. So despite Biden's election as the U.S. president, the impacts of the U.S. election on the U.S. policy against Iran should be seen in this framework. Now with Biden's victory in the elections and taking power by the Democrats, although it seems the Republicans have always had more hostile approaches against our country, with a little bit scrutiny and study of the Iran-the U.S. relations, one can find the most sanctions, breach of promises and hostile approach have happened when the Democrats have been in power. So it is more understandable that Biden will not distance him from this attitude.

In different occasions, Biden has called Iran as the country supporting terrorism, violator of the security of the U.S. and its allies in the Middle East and so far he has not taken a clear and definite stance regarding the U.S. conditional or unconditional return to the JCPOA but appointing a Jewish element in the U.S. Department of State. Although during his election campaign he talked of the U.S. return to the JCPOA, with this action he is after legal use of it as a member of the JCPOA and consequently extending Iran arms embargo, adding other and new articles to the agreement, coming out of the current dominant isolation of the U.S. and boosting the U.S. legitimacy among the European states and allies, of course, in confrontation with the White House's past policies.

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Preserving Iranian Scientist Path Frightening Zionist Regime

TEHRAN (MNA) – The spokesman for the IRGC asserted that continuing the path of Iranian nuclear scientist Martyr Fakhri Zadeh is frightening the Zionist Regime.

Speaking in a ceremony on Tuesday, Brigadier General Ramazan Sharif, the spokesman for the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) made some remarks over malicious acts of the Zionist Regime in West Asia (Middle East) such as assassinating the nuclear scientists of Iran, Iraq, and Egypt.

Zionist Regime does all its efforts to prevent the Islamic Word attain scientific achievements, he said adding, "Today, however, under the light of the Islamic Revolution, Iran has achieved independence in all fields of politics, science, the economy as well as military and defense issues."

Referring to the terror attack in which Mohsen Fakhri Zadeh an Iranian top nuclear scientist was martyred, Sharif said, "The assassination of a scientist on the street with a satellite device can not undermine our security."

He also spoke about the guidelines of the Leader over continuing the path of Iranian nuclear scientist, stressing that this is exactly what frightens the Zionist Regime.

Stating that the Zionist Regime is Iran's enemy who will never stop its foolish move against the Islamic Republic he stressed, "Zionist Regime must await Iran's response over its hostile move."



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Speculation on Iran's New UN Envoy Dismissed

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – The Iranian Foreign Ministry's spokesperson rejected reports that Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Abbas Araqchi would take office as the new ambassador to the United Nations.

Speaking to Tasnim on Sunday, Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Saeed Khatibzadeh dismissed the "false" speculation about appointment a new envoy to the UN.

His reaction came after a rumor went around that Araqchi is going to replace Majid Takht Ravanchi as Iran's ambassador to the UN headquarters in New York.

Germans Urged to Cooperate in Martyr Soleimani's Terror Case

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iranian Judiciary's High Council for Human Rights called on Germany to cooperate in completion and removal of ambiguities in assassination case of former Iran's IRGC Quds Force Commander Martyr Qassem Soleimani.

In his meeting with German Ambassador to Tehran Hans Odo Motzel on Sunday, Ali Bagheri-Kani called on him to cooperate for the completion of assassination case of martyr Qassem Soleimani as well as removal of ambiguities on the perpetrators of this heinous crime with the judiciary of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

In this bilateral talk, the two sides discussed the promotion of human rights' interaction between Iran and Germany.

He then pointed to the positions of the Islamic Republic of Iran in supporting the oppressed Palestinian and Yemeni people against occupiers and aggressors as well as the support of western countries from the Zionist regime and Saudi Arabia and added, "The policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is based on human rights while the human rights in western countries have a political basis."

The position of the Islamic Republic of Iran on peaceful nuclear activities and missile capabilities is also deep rooted in human rights because the Iranian nation has the right to use its capabilities to enhance the country's scientific, technological and industrial capabilities to be able to defend its territorial integrity and national security, he emphasized.

Bagheri-Kani went on to say: "According to the Islamic Republic of Iran, dual citizenship does not cause any privilege for a person, nor does it cause any loss of his rights."



Referring to the confrontation between Westerners' human rights and the Islamic Republic of Iran, he noted: "The prerequisite for progress in human rights interaction and understanding is that Westerners must not look at human rights through political lenses."

Stressing that the lack of dialogue can turn simple ambiguities into serious differences, Bagheri-Kani called dialogue a wise and fruitful solution, adding: "Dialogue is for two parties who have different views to reach a common conclusion, but it is against the culture of dialogue for one party to rule before the dialogue; It is as if the judge issues a verdict before the trial."

He underscored: "The issuance of a human rights resolution is like the issuance of a verdict, and this is a serious obstacle to a constructive and fruitful dialogue. This obstacle was not created by the Iranian side, but by the other side, and it shows that the other side is not serious in the dialogue."

Following the meeting, the German Ambassador to Tehran, Hans-Udo Motzel, presenting his country's views on various human rights issues, stated: "We should try to better understand human rights issues through exchange of views."

At the end of the meeting, a volume of a book containing the names and details of 17,159 Iranian victims of the assassination along with the time, place and details of their assassination was granted to the German Ambassador to Tehran.

Iran Pioneer in Producing Equipment for Fighting Coronavirus

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmani-Fazli said that today Iran is one of the pioneers in producing face masks, ventilators and other equipment needed for fighting coronavirus.

Rahmani-Fazli, also commander of the operational headquarters of the National Coronavirus Taskforce, said that good reports on producing qualified equipment, including ventilators, oxygen generators and other equipment presented during the meeting. It was also agreed to provide all these items to the public at a fair and reasonable price, he said.

Interior minister further noted that Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade is currently working to improve quality and in addition to trying to meet local needs, it thinks about exporting the things.

Majlis Legislation on JCPOA Conveying Message to P5 + 1

TEHRAN (MNA) – First Majlis Vice-Speaker Seyed Amir-Hossein Ghazizadeh Hashemi says, "Ratifying a counteractive plan for the lifting of sanctions showed that Iran's precondition for accepting its nuclear obligation is that P5+1 must fulfill their commitments."

Referring to the counteractive plan for the lifting of sanctions which was ratified on December 1 following the failure of JCPOA's European parties to fulfill commitments and in wake of the assassination of an Iranian scientist, Ghazizadeh Hashemi said, "No one is opposed to negotiating, communicating with the world and resolving the existing issues through dialogue."

He went on to say, "Iran fulfilled its obligations under the agreement, however, it was the European parties who failed to fulfill their commitments. Therefore, staying in such a situation is, strategically, in the detriment of national interests and authority of the Islamic Republic of Iran."

Passing a counteractive plan for the lifting of sanctions and preserving the national interests of the Iranian nation conveys a message to the European parties of the JCPOA, the United States, and even Iran's partners, China and Russia, he said added that Iran's message is that If the Europeans fail to fulfill their commitment, Iran will not accept any restriction in the context of JCPOA.

Vice President Hails Iran Achievement In Biotechnology



TEHRAN (IP) - Vice President for Science and Technology says that in recent years there have been good supports for the growth of biotechnology companies.

Sorena Sattari said on Saturday night in the program "Negah"(Insight) of Iran's National TV channel 1, referring to obtaining a license for human testing of the first corona vaccine in the country: "Soon, three other groups will receive a license for human testing of this vaccine."

Sattari added, "Currently, 24 biotechnology medications are produced in the country and we are one of the Asian powers in this field and we have something to say in the world."

He said, "In the field of human vaccine, for the first time, private companies produced cervical cancer vaccine, and soon the flu vaccine will be produced in the human field in the country, which eliminates the need for us to import this vaccine next year."

The Vice President for Science and Technology added: "Good results have been achieved in the field of livestock and poultry flu vaccine."

"We plan to produce five or six human vaccines by the end of this government, and the investor in all of them is the private sector," he said.

Sattari added: "Private sector investment in the country's biotechnology sector is honorable."

He added: "The government should invest in research and take the responsibility for trial and error, but the private sector must work to produce the product."

"Many government agencies have set up a science and technology park, which is very significant," said the vice president for science and technology. Regarding the assassination of Martyr Fakhri-zadeh, he added: "His martyrdom showed that our movement in science and technology is in the right direction, and this martyrdom will double the motivation of our young scientists."

"These assassinations have not damaged our nuclear program," Sattari said.

He said that in the field of science and technology, we should create an active ecosystem and act in the areas of the country's authority in such a way that the place of Martyr Fakhri-zadeh is filled, adding: "There is no possibility of slowing down the scientific process by assassinating people like this martyr."

Iranians Must Prepare for Continuation of Sanctions Under Biden

TEHRAN (IFP) - Iran's first vice president says the country must prepare itself for the scenario in which incoming U.S. President Joe Biden refuses to lift anti-Iran sanctions.

"Given the possibility of changes in the future U.S. administration's policies, we should be ready and have plans for continued sanctions," Jahangiri said Sunday.

At the same time, he noted that the United States' "maximum pressure" policy has, by the West's own admission, been a nonstarter.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Jahangiri touched upon the assassination of eminent Iranian scientist



Mohsen Fakhri-zadeh.

"The necessary response will be given to the assassination of Fakhri-zadeh in due time," he said.

The top official said top on the government's agenda is to meet people's needs for food and basic commodities.

He also noted that the private sector as well as economic players has had a "good performance" during the sanctions era.

The vice president also urged the three branches of government and economic players to have "one voice" with regards to domestic economic activities.

Ex-VP to Appeal Jail Sentence

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Former vice-president to Iran's President Hassan Rouhani says she intends to appeal a prison sentence handed to her on Saturday, the ISNA news agency said.

That came after reports she had been accused of handing classified information to foreign parties.

"I received the sentence this morning, but it's a preliminary verdict," Shahindokht Molaverdi told ISNA.

"There is a 20-day window for reconsideration and I will certainly appeal."

She did not elaborate on her sentence.

Molaverdi served as Rouhani's vice-president for women's affairs for four years and was replaced by Masoumeh Ebtekar in 2017.

She continued as Rouhani's "special aide on civil rights affairs" for the next year, before retiring.

Fars news agency reported Saturday that she had been sentenced by Branch 15 of Tehran's Revolutionary Court to two years in prison for "providing classified information and documents ... aiming to destabilize national security".

Reporting on one of her trial sessions in October, state news agency IRNA said she was accused of aiming to transfer classified information to foreign parties by "signing a contract with the United Nations Population Fund".

Fars also said Saturday that she had been handed another six months for "propaganda" against the Islamic republic's ruling system.

Iranian Delegation in Venezuela To Observe Parliamentary Polls

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – A delegation of Iranian lawmakers has traveled to Venezuela to observe the parliamentary elections in the South American country, an MP said.

Speaking to Tasnim, Chairman of the Iranian Parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Commission Mojtaba Zonnouri said the parliamentary delegation has gone to Venezuela at the request of the Caracas government.

The Iranian lawmakers would observe the parliamentary elections in Venezuela on Sunday, he added.

The delegation is comprised of the National Security and Foreign Policy Commission's vice-chair and spokesperson, as well as members of Iran-Venezuela parliamentary friendship group, Zonnouri noted.

Venezuela is holding parliamentary elections on Sunday to decide the makeup of the National Assembly.

Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro on Saturday met with observers who arrived in the country to monitor the upcoming parliamentary election. According to a video tweeted by Maduro, the Venezuelan leader met observer delegations from Iran, Russia, and Turkey.

Iran, India Inherit Civilization In South, West Asia

TEHRAN (IP) - Minister of Science, Research and Technology in a message to the Second International Conference on Joint Heritage of Iran and India, stressed that Iran and India are the inheritors of ancient and great civilizations with deep roots in the South and West Asia.

The second international conference on the joint heritage of Iran and India, Dara Shikoh's philosophy (founder of comparative mysticism) and the development of the discourse of religious academic studies, was held online on Saturday at Tehran University.

Mansour Gholami, Minister of Science, Research and Technology of Iran, sent a message to the conference, stating: "Dara Shikoh's philosophy is a symbol of peace and security without violence in the world."

The message goes on to say: The existence of a wide range of books, in various scientific fields in Persian in Indian libraries, reflects the old and effective experience of scientific interactions between the two civilizations. Gholami emphasized in this message: This conference is a reminder of the historical and cultural, literary and religious commonalities of Iran and India.

Iran, Pakistan to Expand Trade Ties Through Virtual B2B Meetings

TEHRAN (IFP) - Knowledge-based, innovative, and high-tech companies of Iran and Pakistan will have the chance to hold direct online negotiations and explore avenues for developing business relations between the two sides.

Those interested can sign up to participate in these online B2B meetings, which are due to be held by the Iranian Company for Development of Trade Exhibitions and Events, with the support of the Corridor of Export Development and Technology Exchanges of the Iranian Vice-Presidency for Science and Technology.

In recent years, Pakistan has been one of the main export destinations for Iranian companies, and the trade balance between the two countries has always remained positive in Iran's favour. The Pakistani market has numerous capacities for investors; however, it has been neglected by some Iranian economic activists. The Iranian Vice-Presidency for Science and Technology is supporting this B2B meeting to open this huge gate to Iranian businesses.

Five face-to-face online meetings are to be held between the Iranian and Pakistani companies in the upcoming event.

The meetings can be held either in group or in private, and the Iranian companies will have the right to reject or approve the Pakistani businesses applying for the meeting. For those interested in participation, the deadline for registration is December 24, 2020.

Iran Becomes Member of ARIN-WCA Strategic Committee

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The Islamic Republic of Iran became member of strategic committee of the Asset Recovery Inter-Agency Network in West and Central Asia.

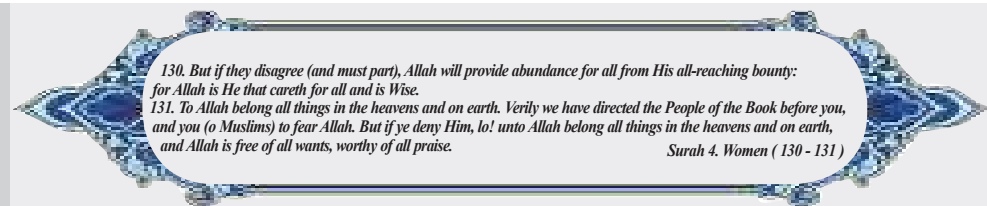
During the meeting of representatives of ARIN-WCA member states which was held on November 17-19, Iran for the first time became member of strategic committee of the Asset Recovery Inter-Agency Network in West and Central Asia.

According to UNODC website, Asset Recovery Inter-Agency Networks (ARINs) are a powerful instrument in this context, as they facilitate effective criminal asset identification and recovery through a cooperative approach, but also because ARINs serve as a catalyst at national level encouraging virtuous practices such as the establishment of national asset recovery offices, asset forfeiture funds or the development of practices and systems of asset recovery (e.g. civil forfeiture).



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	11:56
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:10
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:32
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	07:02



U.S. Blocked Iran Flu Vaccine Consignment

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Health Minister says the United States has continued its sanctions against Iran amid the pandemic, even blocking the import of a flu vaccine consignment to the country.

Iranian Health Minister Saeed Namaki noted that the Islamic Republic has outperformed the US in containing the coronavirus despite Washington's illegal sanctions.

Referring to the effects of sanctions on the Islamic Republic, he added that the US has recently prevented Iran to receive a consignment of flu vaccine which was purchased from France.

He went on to say that Iran managed to become self-sufficient in the production of masks and ventilators 56 days after the outbreak of the pandemic and added that the country has made great progress in making the COVID-19 vaccine as well.

He also said the country has shown the whole world that it is a standard-bearer in terms of coronavirus vaccine production.

Namaki noted Iran managed to produce two antiviral medications in a short a period of time.

"We produced Favipiravir and Remdesivir in Iran in two months," he said.

"Moreover, we managed to produce masks in 56 days and were able to export them as well," the minister added.

"The world has also accepted that we are among the flag-bearers of vaccine production," Namaki said.

The health minister underlined he believes the future will be brighter than today.

"I'm confident that we will show our winning cards to the world," he said.

The minister touched upon Washington's efforts to prevent Iran from getting the coronavirus vaccine.

"In the early days of the COVID-19 outbreak,... we brought the flu vaccine from France, but the U.S. did not allow us to transfer it from an airport in Spain. Now, we are ahead of the U.S. 5-1," he stressed.

He also thanked people for their cooperation in fighting the coronavirus pandemic.



Meanwhile Minister of Industry, Mine, and Trade said that with the efforts of the people and all officials, Iran has become self-sufficient in anti-coronavirus equipment and is ready to export.

Attending the press conference after the meeting of the Logistics and Support Committee of the National Task Force for Fighting Coronavirus, Alireza Razm-Hosseini added that the Ministry of Industry, Mines and Trade has a very good production of anti-coronavirus equipment.

He stated that manufacturers have mass-produced masks and are seeking to export.

Two factories also produce ventilators and meet the needs of the Ministry of Health and other countries' demand, Razm-Hosseini explained. He highlighted that oxygen generators are also produced in the country and Isfahan, Kerman, and Yazd provinces provide free oxygen generators to hospitals.

The meeting of the Logistics and Support Committee of the National Task Force for Fighting Coronavirus was held on Saturday in the presence of the Minister of Interior and the Minister of Industry, Mine, and Trade.

TCCIMA to Hold 6th Anti-Corruption Congress



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN — On the occasion of International Anti-Corruption Day, Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mine and Agriculture (TCCIMA) is to hold the 6th Anti-Corruption Congress on Wednesday.

According to the head of legal support and anti-corruption committee of TCCIM, the chamber will hold the 6th Anti-Corruption Congress and this year it will be virtual and online.

Hassan Forouzanfar said that the chamber welcomes any move for eradicating corruption in the business and in the past five years and on the occasion of International Anti-Corruption Day, it has held a congress on this occasion and this year will be the sixth edition which will be held on Wednesday virtually. He said in the congress, eight recorded speeches from the government and chambers' representatives will be played for the participants in the congress.

He noted that some representatives from the international bodies like UNDC have announced their readiness to join the congress.

Khaf-Herat Railway, Important for Int'l Trade

GONABAD (IRNA) - Inauguration of Khaf-Herat railway project will not only benefit Iran and Afghanistan but also facilitate international trade, Governor of Khaf in northeast of Iran said on Sunday.

Hossein Sanjarani said that railroad project will help develop cultural and economic relations in world and region. Iran has three cross-border transit roads in northeast and east of the country with the neighboring state through which it can facilitate Afghanistan's access to the outside world, according to Iranian officials' remarks.

Sanjarani said that Khaf-Herat railroad has capacity to connect to North-South and East-West corridors. Iran put energy to launch the project, which will connect Central Asia and Far East to Persian Gulf- south of Iran- through railroad, carries a message of peace and friendship to the regional states and the global community, the governor noted.

Since the past, Iran has been a route to connect cultures and countries due to it geopolitical position, he said, adding that the position has turned Iran into a safe place for international trade and economic cooperation.

Professor Mohammad Sharif Malekzadeh Announced:

Global Brand of Halal Tourism Guarantees the Halal, Quality, Health and Authenticity of Goods and Services for the People of the world

The halal tourism industry has grown significantly in the world in the last decade. Currently, global statistics show that 40% of the world's tourism revenue goes to halal tourism. Professor Mohammad Sharif Malekzadeh, the father of modern world science of tourism, said: "The certificate of quality, health, solubility and authenticity of the International Citi One organization is valid in Azerbaijan, Bahrain, China, Germany, Egypt, European Union, Spain, France, England, Georgia, Greece," , India, Italy, South Korea, African Union Intellectual Property Organization, Oman, Russia, Syria, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Tunisia, Turkey, USA and Uzbekistan. This certificate is the main symbol of the world of Iranian-Islamic goods and services. Mohammad Sharif Malekzadeh, former head of the Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization, said during a visit to the Kish Indigenous Museum: "The GHTO is the only organization that meets the standards in the fields of health, originality, quality and solubility." This organization operates in all different fields of goods and services to tourists. Malekzadeh mentioned the holding of the first specialized conference of the heads of IAUP member universities in the Middle East and Central Asia region with the heads of universities of the Kish Free Zone online. He added: "With the positive view of the CEO of the Kish Free Zone Organization, we set up the Central Asia and Middle East Regional Office in Kish."

In halal tourism, not only is halal discussed, but also originality, quality and health are considered. We are the only organization that can export the global standard of halal tourism in all sectors of goods and services. This standard is registered and valid in all EU member states, member countries of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, Asia and the Middle East, and even Latin America and Canada.

The slogan of this organization is "One world, one halal". It has many branches all over the world. All Muslims around the world have accepted the emblem, and many elders, from Islamic scholars to Sunnis and the former president of Ecuador, are members of the organization's Supreme Council.

Malekzadeh continued: "During my presidency in cultural heritage, I tried to change the tourism literature and add another side to the three elements of man, time and place in tourism." The new MFT theory was presented and registered in my name and was also considered. This theory was based on adding another side to the three sides. The goal was to improve the spirit of tourism, which is very important for tourists. Although it does not pretend to be a tangible part of tourism, but achieving peace and a sense of vitality and improving mental quality is one of the things that other aspects of tourism depend on and should be considered.

The head of the Central Asia and the Middle East (IAUP) of the International Union of University Presidents said that a complete travel package should be provided for tourists in tourist destinations. Kish has many capacities that have not been seen. For example, the house of the natives of Kish is one of these cases, and unfortunately this capacity has not been used well.

He continued: in order to offer a complete travel package, historical places



should be included in travel packages and as soon as we enter a place like Kish, we should see advertisements for this possibility; while in the whole city to introduce a place with this ancient history there is no introduction and advertising. We must not forget that today many domestic tourists, especially foreign tourists, pay attention to historical places and visit them in their travels, and these places are one of the tourist attractions. Malekzadeh stressed the importance of the national registration of the Kish Native House. He added: "If the house of the natives of Kish is registered as a national monument, it can use government benefits and assistance for maintenance, restoration and development, because the maintenance and restoration of such works has high costs and is not possible at personal expense."

He praised Mohammad Jasempour, the director of the Kish natives, and added: "This place has been maintained and preserved in the same style and context as before, which is one of the positive points that should be appreciated by the natives of Kish." He added: "The international community, university professors and researchers, members of the International Union of IAUP Presidents and affiliated members of the UNWTO have welcomed my patent." As the quality control manager of the tours, I earned the title of the father of modern science of tourism management. The issue of launching the World Halal Tourism Organization (GHTO) has also been considered.

Professor Mohammad Sharif Malekzadeh told our correspondent in this regard: "Registration of the Halal World Tourism Organization is an effective measure in the development of the tourism industry." Exclusively registered in all 28 member states of the European Union, 17 member states of the African Union, 57 member states of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Latin America, Asia, etc. This organization, as the only international and exclusive tourism organization, can issue certificates in the field of halal tourism. The father of modern tourism science and MFT theory theorist said that the World Halal Tourism Organization was registered in London. All branches of the tourism industry were also registered with the WIPO

International Intellectual Property Organization in Geneva. Currently, it is possible to issue halal tourism certificates for 23 branches, including hotels, restaurants, coffee shops, sea, air, land, rail and airports, shops, cosmetics, food and beverage, pharmaceuticals, There are slaughterhouses, banking, insurance, IT technology and so on. On the other hand, having the largest specialists and various agencies around the world has the ability to provide a wide range of services.

The International Association of University Presidents (IAUP) has recognized the organization as the only educational and research organization in the tourism sector. Now the world's great professors can work with this organization. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) considers the halal tourism standard to be specific to this organization and declares that this organization has international quality standards.

Professor Malekzadeh said: "Currently, corona has spread in the world and the issue of health has become more important. In recent years, the organization has conducted extensive research on the issue of health standardization of goods. It has even worked on the standard of health and quality of solids. For example, passenger seats in vehicles or beds in hotels and resorts must have an international health certificate. There are many unknown diseases in the world right now, and an organization can ensure the health of travelers, because the organization wants to consider all aspects of human health. The World Health Organization and the ISO have not done well in their missions in the field of tourism and health and quality assurance, so we are facing a huge decline and losses in the tourism industry.

Halal tourism services for Muslim tourists guarantee a comfortable and safe stay during their trip according to religious criteria. Hotels and accommodations, restaurants and fast foods, providing services for religious ceremonies and special guides are among the halal tourism services for tourists. Today, Muslim tourists turn to country guides before traveling to make sure they are staying. In order to attract tourists, businesses must decorate their center with the symbol of Halal.

The World Halal Tourism Organization is an independent, monopoly and non-governmental organization that is the only issuer of halal tourism certificates in the world. Citigone International (SITI1) established the Global Halal Tourism Organization (GHTO) in 2019 with the participation of one of the world's largest and most reputable information technology groups. The organization has an office in London and is registered with Company House in the United Kingdom.

It is an affiliated member of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and for the first time in the world has been able to register the standard of halal tourism in the International Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) number 1305212 in Geneva, Switzerland. The standard of halal tourism is based on the principles of quality, health, halal and originality of services. This standard codifies products in 23 categories and validates them by issuing a special halal tourism certificate.

Turkey's Daily Coronavirus Deaths at Record High

ANKARA (Reuters) - Turkey's daily coronavirus deaths hit a record high on Saturday, with 196 fatalities in the last 24 hours, data from the Health Ministry showed, bringing the total death toll to 14,705.

Turkey also recorded 31,896 new coronavirus cases, including asymptomatic ones, in the last 24 hours, down from Friday's 32,736, the highest daily number reported by Ankara since the beginning of the pandemic in March.



Zimbabwe Opposition VP Biti Released on Bail

HARARA (Dispatches) - Zimbabwean police briefly arrested a former finance minister and top opposition alliance official late on Friday on the charge of assaulting a Russian national last month, his party's spokeswoman has said.

Tendai Biti, 53, was freed on \$10,000 bail on Saturday after a night behind bars, after being charged with assault. The provincial head magistrate in Harare, Vongai Muchuchuti, set his trial for January 18.

The charge against Biti, a legislator and vice president of Zimbabwe's opposition alliance Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), relates to an alleged incident following a court hearing on November 30.



Violence Erupts in New Paris Protest Against Security Law



PARIS (Dispatches) - Violence erupted in Paris for the second consecutive weekend at a mass protest against a new security law and police brutality, as demonstrators clashed with police, set alight vehicles and smashed shop windows.

The weekly nationwide protests are becoming a major crisis for President Emmanuel Macron's government, with tensions intensified by the beating of a Black music producer by police last month.

Members of the so-called yellow vests movement, which shook Macron with protests against inequality in France over the winter of 2018-19, were also prominent in the rally on Saturday.

Windows of a supermarket, property agency and a bank were broken while several cars burst into flames along Avenue Gambetta as demonstrators marched towards the central Place de la Republique, AFP news agency reporters said.

Objects were also thrown at police who responded by using tear gas, in a repeat of the violent scenes from the protests last weekend against the security law that would restrict publishing pictures of the faces of the police.

Some demonstrators used objects left into the streets to create impromptu barricades that they set on fire.

Protesters, some letting off smoke bombs and firecrackers, shouted slogans such as: "Everyone hates the police."

It was one of about 100 protests planned throughout France on Saturday against the new security law.

Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said 64 people were detained across the country, and eight police officers were injured.

France has been hit by a wave of street protests after the government introduced a security bill in parliament that set out to increase its surveillance tools and restrict rights on circulating images of police officers in the media and online.

The bill was part of Macron's drive to get tougher on law and order ahead of elections in 2022. His government also said the police needed to be better protected from online hate.

But the draft legislation provoked a public backlash.

After four French police officers were charged on November 30 over the beating and racial abuse of Black music producer Michel Zecler, legislators from Macron's party pledged a "complete rewrite" of part of the draft law.

Under a sign demanding the withdrawal of the security law, CGT union leader Philippe Martinez said several causes were coming together.

"There is no contradiction between public and individual freedoms and the need to fight job insecurity and unemployment," Martinez told AFP.

He referred to the "abuse of employers" and the loss of worker protections. On Friday, Macron gave a hugely anticipated interview to Brut, a video-based news portal aimed at young people, which was seen as an attempt by the president to win credibility with youth particularly concerned by the actions of the French police.

Trump Keeps Up Fraud Claims at Rally For U.S. Senators in Georgia

VALDOSTA (Reuters) - U.S. President Donald Trump campaigned in Georgia on Saturday for two Republican senators at a rally that some in his party feared could end up hurting, not helping, their chances by focusing on his efforts to reverse his own election defeat.

In his first rally appearance since he lost to Democrat Joe Biden in the Nov. 3 presidential contest, the Republican Trump reminded the chanting crowd that he came to southern Georgia to persuade them to vote Republican in runoffs on Jan. 5.

But he quickly turned to his repeated claims, made without evidence, of widespread fraud in the presidential election.

"They cheated and rigged our presidential election but we'll still win it. And they are going to try to rig this election too," Trump told the crowd in Valdosta, who chanted "We love you!" and "Four More Years!"

He repeated his attacks on Republicans who have refused to back him, including Georgia's governor, Brian Kemp. Earlier on Saturday, Trump phoned Kemp and pressured the governor on Twitter to take further steps to help him overturn the election results.

The outgoing president's claims of widespread voter fraud have been rejected by state and federal officials across the country, and his campaign's numerous legal challenges have almost all failed.

Biden was the first Democratic presidential candidate to win in Georgia since 1992. Statewide recounts, including a painstaking review by hand of some 5 million ballots, turned up no significant irregularities.

The January runoffs pit two Republican senators, David Perdue and Kelly Loeffler, against well-funded Democratic challengers Jon Ossoff and Raphael Warnock, seeking to capture a state that has not elected a Democratic senator in 20 years.

The races will determine which party controls the U.S. Senate. Democrats, who already have the majority in the House of Representatives, need to win both seats to control the Senate. If Republicans win one seat, they will retain their majority and be able to block much of Biden's legislative agenda.

Biden said he would visit Georgia to campaign for the Democratic candidates but did not give a timetable for his trip.



German Police Break Up Banned Coronavirus Demonstration

BERLIN (Reuters) - German police intervened on Saturday to break up a demonstration by opponents of coronavirus lockdown measures in the northern city of Bremen after the protest was banned by the country's highest court.

Germany's constitutional court upheld earlier rulings by lower courts that had already denied permission for 20,000 demonstrators to convene in the city centre of Bremen.

However, hundreds of people still gathered, some of them opponents of the government's coronavirus measures and others part of a counter-demonstration.

Bremen police said on Twitter they were trying to keep the groups apart and break up the banned gathering, as well as urging people to wear face masks.

Last month, police unleashed water cannon and pepper spray in an effort to scatter thousands of protesters in Berlin angry about coronavirus restrictions.

Although most Germans accept the latest "lockdown light" to curb a second wave of the coronavirus, critics say the measures endanger citizens' civil rights.

The head of Germany's public health agency said on Thursday that the country's success in dealing with the first wave of the pandemic in March and April had led many people to doubt the virus's severity or even its existence.

While daily infection numbers are no longer rising as sharply as previously, case numbers have stagnated at a high level, and Germany reported its highest single-day death toll since the start of the pandemic on Wednesday.

On Saturday, the number of confirmed coronavirus cases in Germany increased by 23,318 to 1,153,556, according to data from the Robert Koch Institute for Infectious Diseases (RKI), while the reported death toll rose by 483 to 18,517.

Chancellor Angel Merkel and state leaders agreed on Wednesday to extend restrictive measures, which include keeping restaurants and hotels shut and limiting private gatherings to five people from two households, until Jan. 10.

EU Calls for Probe Into Palestinian Teen's Killing by Israel

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - The killing of a Palestinian teenager by the Israeli army in the illegally occupied West Bank has been termed a "war crime" and the European Union Delegation to the Palestinians has called for an investigation into the incident.

Fourteen-year-old Ali Abu Aliya was shot in the stomach during a protest on Friday against Israeli land theft in the al-Mughayyir village near Ramallah.

He died in a local hospital, the Palestinian health ministry said.

"Children enjoy special protection under international law," said the delegation in a tweet.

"How many more Palestinian children will be subject to the excessive use of lethal force by the Israeli security forces?" it said, adding that the "shocking incident must be swiftly and fully investigated by the Israeli authorities in order to bring the perpetrators to justice."

On Saturday, mourners carried the teenager's body, wrapped in a Palestinian flag, through the streets in Ramallah and al-Mughayyir, chanting: "With soul and blood we will redeem you, martyr."

The Palestinian foreign ministry as well as the Palestinian factions termed the incident a "war crime", adding that Israel must be held accountable.

The spokesman for the Fatah movement, Osama al-Qawasmi, said Palestinians should respond to the teenager's killing by adhering to "national unity".

In a statement, Hamas said Abu Aliya's death "confirms the criminal truth about the occupation army", saying Israel must be prosecuted.

"We affirm the need to return to the national consensus on the option of resisting the occupation, one that is capable of responding to the crimes of the occupation and stopping the escalating attack of settlers," Hamas said.

Hanan Ashrawi, a member of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) Executive Committee, said: "The targeting of children and the use of live ammunition against them is a blatant and direct violation of international laws and conventions, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Israel ratified in 1991."

The Palestinian Authority presidency called on "the international community to work to provide protection for our people, end the occupation and establish an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital".

Israel has occupied the West Bank since 1967. More than 450,000 Israelis live in illegal settlements in the territory, home to more than 2.8 million Palestinians.



Ethiopia Sees War Ending, EU Complains of Partisan Aid Access

ADDIS ABABA (Reuters) - Ethiopia said it had captured or killed most commanders of a rebellious northern force, while Tigray's fugitive local leader countered on Friday that civilians were protesting against looting by occupying soldiers.

Neither side gave proof for their assertions about the month-long war in the mountainous region bordering Eritrea, where phone communications have been down and access severely restricted both for media and aid workers.

A senior European official chided the Ethiopian government over an agreement to allow access for humanitarian aid to Tigray, saying it only covered federal-controlled areas and had onerous bureaucratic requirements.

"There may be malnourished children on the other side also," EU crisis commissioner Janez Lenarcic told reporters in Ethiopia. The government did not immediately respond to his comments.

Fighting between Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's federal army and forces loyal to the region's former ruling party, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), erupted on Nov. 4.

Thousands of people are believed to have died while more than 46,000 refugees have crossed to neighbouring Sudan.

TPLF leaders, who enjoy strong popular support in Tigray, appear to have fled to surrounding mountains and say they have begun a guerrilla-style resistance.

TPLF No. 1 Debretsion Gebremichael, one of the most wanted men in Ethiopia, told Reuters in a text message that there were protests in the regional capital Mekelle, which is home to 500,000 people, due to looting by Eritrean soldiers.

"Eritrean soldiers are everywhere," he said, repeating an accusation that President Isaias Afwerki has sent soldiers over the border to back Abiy against their mutual foe.

Ethiopia says the TPLF wants to internationalize the conflict as a way to force the government, which appears to hold all the major towns, into international mediation.

Debretsion, a 57-year-old former guerrilla radio operator, gave no evidence of looting or the presence of Eritreans. A diplomatic source shared a picture of a road covered in stones, which he said was sent from a resident of Mekelle, but it was unclear where or when the picture was shot.





Shanon
(adviser)

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250sq.m, 4bdrs
S/p, Sauna
J, balcony
marble fl
Fully Furn

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

Parsian

(\$2400)
Elahieh Apt
220sq.m, 3bdrs
S/p, S, J, pkg
balcony, & F.F

Niavaran Apts
(\$2000) 2bdrs, S/p, S, J, & F.F
(\$3000) 3bdrs, S/p, S, J, & F.F
(\$3800) 4bdrs, S/p, S, J, & F.F

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Boeing Again Cutting Widebody Production Rate

SEATTLE (Reuters) - Boeing Co is reducing its 787 widebody production to five jets monthly in mid-2021 from six, and delivered zero 787s to customers in November, as longer-haul travel demand remains weakened by the coronavirus pandemic, the U.S. planemaker's Chief Financial Officer said on Friday.

Boeing's Greg Smith also told a conference that there is no "normal profile" currently for jet pre-delivery payments or PDPs, which are tied to production rates. Boeing has been forced to cut production due to the 20-month grounding of its cash cow 737 MAX after fatal crashes and the pandemic downturn.

"I think we've got a couple years here where PDPs will be a little bumpy," Smith said.



U.S. Labor Market Losing Steam As COVID-19 Pandemic Rages

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The U.S. economy added the fewest workers in six months in November, hindered by a resurgence in new COVID-19 cases that, together with a lack of more government relief money, threatens to reverse the recovery from the pandemic recession.

The Labor Department's closely watched employment report on Friday also showed 3.9 million people have been out of work for at least six months, with many giving up, a sign of a lack of confidence in the labor market. The report, which only covered the first two weeks of November, when the current wave of coronavirus infections started, underscored the challenges facing President-elect Joe Biden when he takes over from President Donald Trump on Jan. 20.

Biden called the report "grim" and urged Congress and Trump to provide additional fiscal stimulus. "Americans need help and they need it now," the president-elect said in a statement.

The economy has recouped only 12.4 million of the 22.2 million jobs lost in March and April. Even with a vaccine on the way, economists are warning of a bleak winter. U.S. House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi said on Friday there was momentum behind talks on a coronavirus relief bill.

Nonfarm payrolls increased by 245,000 jobs last month after rising by 610,000 in October. That was the smallest gain since the jobs recovery started in May and the fifth straight monthly slowdown in job growth. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast payrolls would increase by 469,000 jobs in November. Hiring peaked at 4.781 million jobs in June.

"The recovery is stalling and fragile at best," said Sung Won Sohn, finance and economics professor at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. "The onset of winter and resurgence of the virus could knock the economy into another dip before the vaccine and more stimulus from Washington come to the rescue."

Job growth last month was held back by further departures of temporary workers hired for the 2020 Census. Local governments shed more workers, especially at schools, causing overall government payrolls to drop by 99,000 jobs, the third straight monthly decline. The private sector added 344,000 jobs.

The retail sector lost 35,000 jobs, reflecting weak seasonal hiring amid the pandemic. But hiring in transportation and warehousing increased by 145,000 jobs, accounting for nearly three-fifths of the payroll gains. Employment also increased in the professional and business services, financial activities and health care industries. Construction payrolls rose by 27,000 jobs and manufacturers added 27,000 positions.

The smaller-than-expected job gains added to reports on consumer spending, manufacturing and services industries in suggesting that the recovery from the worst recession since the Great Depression was ebbing.

"At this rate, complete stagnation or job losses in December would not be a huge surprise," said Beth Akers, senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute. "It's hard to imagine that the remaining jobs we lost early this spring will return until we've successfully distributed a vaccine that would allow businesses to return to normal operations."

Wall Street's main indexes jumped to all-time highs on hopes for additional fiscal stimulus. The dollar dipped against a basket of currencies. U.S. Treasury prices were mostly lower.

EU to Target 30m Electric Cars by 2030

BRUSSELS (Reuters) - The European Union will aim to have at least 30 million zero-emission vehicles on its roads by 2030, as it seeks to steer countries away from fossil fuel-based transport, according to a draft document seen by Reuters.

In a strategy due to be published next week, the European Commission will lay out measures to tackle the quarter of EU greenhouse gas emissions that come from the transport sector.

"The EU's goal of climate neutrality by 2050 cannot be reached without introducing very ambitious measures to reduce transport's reliance on fossil fuels," the document said.

Hitting the bloc's climate targets will require "at least" 30 million zero-emission vehicles by 2030, it said.

That is a huge step up from the 1.8 million electric and plug-in hybrid vehicles registered in Europe at the end of last year, according to the International Council on Clean Transportation. Hybrids are not zero-emission vehicles.

With countries including France and Slovenia setting out end dates for the sale of new fossil-fuel cars, Europe's low-emission vehicle sales are growing fast, and continued to increase through the coronavirus pandemic this year.

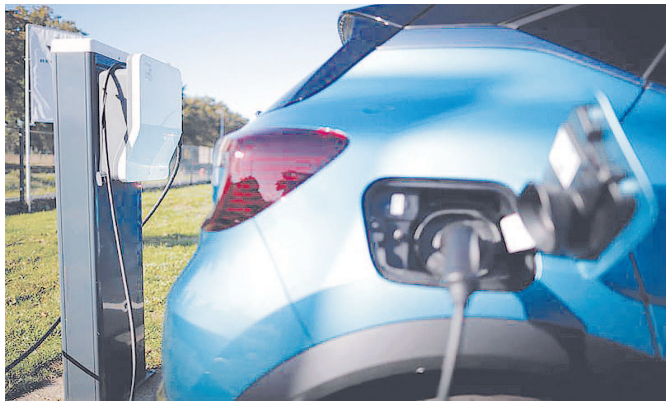
However, industry has warned that a lack of infrastructure could hamper future sales of clean cars.

The EU document estimates Europe will need 3 million public charging points and 1,000 hydrogen refuelling stations by 2030, and promises a "roll-out plan with funding opportunities and requirements" next year. Europe currently has about 200,000 charging points.

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

The EU will next year propose tighter CO2 emissions standards for cars and vans from 2025, and the draft document says they could be expanded to cover buses.

The document also said Europe's high speed rail traffic should double by 2030 and triple by 2050, while zero-emissions aircraft and ships need to be market-ready by 2035.



North Korean Trade Hit More by COVID-19 Than Sanctions

PYONGYANG (Dispatches) - North Korea's closure of borders to safeguard the country from the pandemic is dealing a bigger blow to trade with the isolated economy than international sanctions, according to a report by a trade association in Seoul.

North Korea's trade with China, by far its largest economic partner, shrank 73% through September and is on course to plunge 80% for the whole year, the Korea International Trade Association said recently. That would exceed the 57% drop seen during the same period in 2018 when international sanctions intensified to penalize the Pyongyang regime for its tests of nuclear weapons and missiles to deliver warheads, the report said.

To be sure, in absolute terms the impact of sanctions on the country's trade is larger than the drop seen so far this year.

Still, the trend in trade figures shows that while sanctions mainly hit North Korea's exports to China, the pandemic has severely curtailed imports.

Pyongyang has so far denied any confirmed COVID-19 cases on North Korean soil, but reports from state media suggest the country is experiencing extreme economic pain. Store shelves in Pyongyang have seen sharp drops in several food staples compared to a year ago, specialist service NK News reported last week.

Unlike North Korea's heavily militarized border with South Korea, the country's 1,420-kilometer border with China is porous — and the black-market traders who have crossed for years from both sides have come under closer scrutiny since they could be a source for bringing the virus into North Korea.

Kim Jong Un issued a rare warning for the economy in August, telling party leaders that his country "faced unexpected and inevitable challenges," adding that his development goals had been seriously delayed.

North Korea intensified its border quarantine around August-September to prepare for its Oct. 10 party anniversary, and will probably maintain strict control until January's party congress, importing only essential goods, the KITA report said.

Of the total 73% drop in North Korea's trade with China, exports fell by 70% to \$46 million while imports declined 73% to \$487 million, according to KITA.

Sales of North Korea's major export products, such as watches and wigs, have come close to a full stop, KITA said, adding that the shutdown of borders has disabled the shipments of goods that are free from sanctions. North Korea's purchases of key food staples and medical goods fell less, with falls as small as around 2%.

North Korea doesn't release official growth data, and the breakdown from China's trade report is widely used to gauge the health of the reclusive regime.

Fitch Solutions said in an August report that North Korea's economy would shrink at least 8.5% this year due in part to the pandemic's negative impact.

Global Debt to Hit \$200 Trillion



LONDON (Reuters) - Global debt is set to reach \$200 trillion, or 265% of the world's annual economic output, by the end of the year, S&P Global has forecast - although it doesn't expect a crisis any time soon.

The credit ratings giant said it amounted to a 14-point rise as a percentage of world GDP, having been amplified by both the economic plunge caused by COVID and the extra borrowing that governments, firms and households have had to resort to.

"Global debt-to-GDP has been trending up for many years; the pandemic simply exacerbated the rise," S&P's report said.

Yet, despite the big jump and an expected wave of defaults over the coming year, the firm does not expect a major crisis at this stage.

"The projected 14% surge in global debt-to-GDP in 2020 is unlikely to cause a near-term debt crisis, provided economies recover, vaccines are widely distributed, interest rates remain very low, and borrowing behaviour moderates," the report said.

As long as the world economy gets back on its feet after the pandemic, the global debt-to-GDP ratio should ease back to 256% by 2023, S&P said.

"We expect the debt growth of corporates, governments, and household to ease as they tend to after recessions," it added.

Turkey Becoming Engine Design, Manufacturing Hub

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkey is well on its way to becoming a center for designing and manufacturing all kinds of engines, especially in aviation, the country's president said.

"With these projects, we're entering a new era in the defense industry," Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said at the opening ceremony of a delivery and design center for Turkey's first indigenous helicopter engine via a live video link from the Vahdettin Mansion in Istanbul.

Erdoğan underlined that TUSAS Engine Industries (TEI) would become a role model in Turkey with its planned investments in an engine development project.

"With every step we take, we see once again that in the geography where we live, we can't look to our future confidently without having a strong defense industry," he said.

"We plan to establish a stronger coordination system through our Presidency of Defense Industries and our executive committee," Erdoğan added.

"In the economic policies we carry out, we're focused on medium and long-term goals in the industry, as in every field."

Turkey's first indigenous multirole helicopter, the Gokbey, is a new generation, twin-engine, six-ton class helicopter developed in response to growing market demand.

Tests of the engine, which produces 1,660 horsepower, were completed during the ceremony. The project had kicked off in 2017.

Russia to Germany Gas Pipeline Targeted in U.S. Defense Bill

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The annual U.S. defense policy bill unveiled by lawmakers contains sanctions that backers say will halt one of Russia's biggest projects in Europe: the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline.

The \$11 billion Nord Stream 2 project, led by Russian state energy company Gazprom and aimed at doubling the existing pipeline's capacity, is more than 90% complete. Russia says the project to deliver gas under the Baltic Sea to Europe via Germany will begin operating next year.

But President Donald Trump's administration, which is eager to offer Europe

U.S. shipments of gas, and many U.S. lawmakers oppose the pipeline. They say the project, which would bypass Ukraine, depriving it of lucrative transit fees, would boost Moscow's economic and political leverage over Europe.

The sanctions in the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) target any companies and individuals providing help to the project, including upgrading of a ship needed to lay the pipeline, verification of equipment used to lay the pipeline, and insurance.

The NDAA is expected to be passed by the U.S. House of Representatives early next week and soon after by the Senate. Trump has vowed to veto the bill over a bipartisan provision to strip the names of Confederate military leaders from U.S. bases.

But vetoing the massive bill would carry significant political risk. If Trump vetoes the legislation and Congress upholds his veto, it would end a 59-year streak of passing the NDAA.

"These sanctions significantly toughen existing provisions ... to cover critical components of the pipeline project," said a U.S. official familiar with the process of crafting sanctions on Nord Stream 2 and who spoke on condition of anonymity.

The Obama administration had also opposed the project and the incoming Biden administration is expected to maintain that policy.

Backers say the sanctions will deprive Russia of the capability to upgrade Gazprom's vessel, the Akademik Cherskiy, to lay the type of pipe used in the project, required insurance, and necessary certifications.

"Without any of this, they are just not going to be able to finish the pipeline," said Daniel Vajdich, president of Yorktown Solutions, a lobbyist for Ukraine's state energy company Naftogaz, which opposes the project.

The Kremlin said the threat of new U.S. sanctions was a sign of unfair competition and promised Russia would defend its interests and commercial projects.

Iran Ready to Transfer Home COVID19 Vaccine

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Minister of Roads and Urban Development announced Iran's readiness to transfer the COVID19 vaccines from the source countries.

Iran's air industry is ready to distribute the vaccines across the country, Mohammad Eslami said at a ceremony held in Tehran on the occasion of International Civil Aviation Day on December 7.

Iran's air industry can be a pioneer in providing health for people, the duty which has already been done by the industry through transferring goods and medical equipment to the country, the minister noted. Tens of ferry flights have been made to exchange medicine and medical equipment since the outbreak of the pandemic last December, the minister added.



Pakistan Seeks Debt Suspension From Global Community

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan has requested the international community for debt suspension till the end of the coronavirus pandemic for low-income and most affected countries as well as cancellation of debt of least developed nations, according to a media report on Friday. Pakistan's economic woes have further worsened due to the coronavirus pandemic and Khan's government is arranging finances from world bodies, including the International Monetary Fund, to tide over the crisis.

Presenting a 10-point agenda for urgent action before the UN General Assembly special session on Covid-19 on Thursday, Khan underlined the measures the international community needs to take to defeat the Covid-19 pandemic, the Dawn newspaper reported.

The first item on his list is a request for debt suspension till the end of the pandemic for low-income and most affected countries. The second one is "cancellation of debt of least developed countries" that are no longer in a position to repay their loans, it said.

Other items on the agenda include restructuring of the public sector debt of other developing countries under an agreed inclusive multilateral framework; a general allocation of special drawing rights of USD 500 billion; expanded concessional financing to lower income countries through multilateral development banks; and creation of a new 'liquidity and sustainability facility', which should provide short-term loans at lower costs.

The novel coronavirus has so far infected 410,072 people and claimed 8,260 lives in Pakistan. Addressing the session, Khan said the coronavirus pandemic is the most serious global crisis since the Second World War. Nearly 100 world leaders and several dozen ministers are participating in the two-day virtual UNGA special session that began on Thursday.

Pakistan's agenda also includes a reminder to rich nations to fulfill 0.7 per cent of their official development assistance commitments and mobilising the required USD 1.5 trillion annual investment in sustainable infrastructure. The prime minister also urged the international community to help meet the agreed target of mobilising USD 100 billion per year for climate action in developing countries, the report said.



Khan also called for immediate action to stop the massive illicit financial outflows from developing countries to rich countries, to offshore tax havens. He also suggested immediate return of assets stolen by corrupt politicians and criminals back to these countries.

Earlier in his opening remarks at the special session, UNGA President Volkan Bozkir said, "Today marks an overdue and much-needed moment of reckoning. None of us could have imagined, this time last year, what was to come." UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said "it is time to reset" the global response to crises like this. "As we build a strong recovery, we must seize the opportunity for change," he added. The deadly virus has infected nearly 65 million people across the world and killed close to 1.5 million.

Hackers Target Groups in COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution



WASHINGTON (Reuters) - IBM and U.S. officials are sounding the alarm over hackers targeting companies critical to the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines.

IBM said that the campaign was a sign that digital spies are turning their attention to the complex logistical work involved in inoculating the world's population against the novel coronavirus, although some outside experts questioned whether that was the hackers' focus.

In a blog post published on Thursday, IBM said it had uncovered "a global phishing campaign" focused on organizations associated with the COVID-19 vaccine "cold chain" - the process needed to keep vaccine doses at extremely cold temperatures as they travel from manufacturers to people's arms.

The U.S. Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency reposted the report, warning members of Operation Warp Speed - the U.S. government's national vaccine mission - to be on the lookout.

Other cybersecurity experts expressed some skepticism, however, of IBM's findings.

Joe Slowik, a researcher at online threat intelligence firm DomainTools, said he believed IBM had stumbled upon "a subset of activity" that was part of a much wider campaign "which may not be focused on vaccines or similar activity."

While "definitely malicious," Slowik said he was not convinced it was specifically focused on vaccine distribution. Who is behind the espionage is not clear. Messages sent to the email addresses used by the hackers were not returned.

Understanding how to build a secure cold chain is fundamental to distributing vaccines developed by the likes of Pfizer Inc and BioNTech because the shots need to be stored at minus 70 degrees Celsius (-94 F) or below to avoid spoiling.

IBM's cybersecurity unit said it had detected an advanced group of hackers working to gather information about different aspects of the cold chain, using meticulously crafted booby-trapped emails sent in the name of an executive with Haier Biomedical, a Chinese cold chain provider that specializes in vaccine transport and biological sample storage.

Haier Medical did not return messages seeking comment.

Targets included companies involved in the manufacture of solar panels, which are used to power vaccine refrigerators in warm countries, and petrochemical products that could be used to derive dry ice.

U.S. Economy Will Fall Into Double-Dip Recession Without Stimulus

LONDON (Dispatches) - The U.S. economy will fall into a double-dip recession and take nearly a year longer to return to pre-pandemic growth if Congress fails to pass a new coronavirus relief bill, according to an economic forecast released by S&P Global.

"Since June, S&P Global Economics has said that it is not a far-fetched possibility that we could get a scenario of no more fiscal stimulus and a COVID-19 resurgence that cripples growth in the fourth quarter," S&P Global Chief Economist Beth Ann Bovino wrote in her analysis. "Unfortunately, this downside scenario seems more likely."

She went on to say that a surge in cases and the absence of fiscal stimulus would mean gross domestic product "will decline for two consecutive quarters," postponing a full recovery until the second half of 2022 and risking "longer-term scarring."

"On its own, a one quarter decline does not signal recession. But it increases chances that the U.S. will see



another downturn in the near future," the report said.

Two consecutive quarters of economic contraction is considered the standard definition of a recession.

The S&P forecast predicts the economy will shrink at a 2.3 percent annual pace in the last three months of 2020, bringing the total economic decline for the year to 3.9 percent.

Without a roughly \$1 trillion relief bill, the outlook would get worse, S&P said, and the economy would stagnate at 0.8 percent growth next year instead of the 4.2 percent otherwise forecast.

The prospects for a stimulus before the end of the year are grim. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) is pushing for a \$500 billion bill, while Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) is backing a \$2.2 trillion measure.

A bipartisan, bicameral group of lawmakers this week introduced a \$908 billion measure they hope will serve as a compromise.

Euro Zone Economy to Gain Momentum in 2021 on Vaccine Hopes

BENGALURU (Reuters) - The euro zone economy will contract again this quarter as renewed lockdown measures stifle activity, according to a Reuters poll which showed the bloc's GDP would then return to pre-crisis levels within two years.

Hopes for a coronavirus vaccine and additional support from the European Central Bank this month meant quarterly growth forecasts for next year were upgraded in the poll conducted from Nov. 26-Dec. 2.

"We now assume vaccines will be rolled out in the euro zone next year and most restrictions on economic activity are lifted during Q2. As a result, GDP increases by around 5% next year, regaining its pre-COVID level in early 2022," said Andrew Kenningham, chief Europe economist at Capital Economics.

"There are still big risks to this forecast. There could yet be a third wave of the virus, vaccine distribution could run into political or logistical problems, and governments could be slower to ease restrictions. On the other hand, the vaccines could be more effective or easier to roll out than anticipated". Nearly 80% of respondents, or 36 of 45, who replied to an extra question said the economy would return to pre-crisis levels within two years.

That was a major turnaround in expectations from August when more than 70% of economists said it would take two or more years to reach that level. The wider poll showed after contracting 2.6% this quarter, the economy would grow 1.1% in the first quarter of 2021 compared with 0.8% in the last poll. It was then predicted to expand 2.0% and 1.8% in Q2 and Q3, better than median predictions of 1.8%, 1.2% in November.

On an annual basis, the economy was expected to shrink 7.4% this year, and grow 5.0% in 2021 largely unchanged from the last poll. For 2022, the growth forecast was upgraded to 3.5% from 3.1%.

That pick-up in growth will not filter through to inflation which was expected to remain far below the European Central Bank's target of just below 2%, averaging 0.3% in 2020. 0.9% in 2021 and 1.3% in 2022.

Having remained in negative territory for the fourth straight month in November, inflation is likely to be a point of focus when the ECB's Governing Council meets next week.

Venice Gold Brightens Christmas Spirit

VENICE (AFP) - Venice lacks the tourists who normally give it a festive air at Christmas, but the Italian city has nonetheless highlighted its landmarks to celebrate the holidays this year.

Saint Mark's Square and the Rialto Bridge across the Grand Canal in particular benefit from special lighting and projections that give inhabitants some comfort in this time of coronavirus.

Italian artist Fabrizio Plessi created a Christmas tree on the

square with huge rectangular screens that project a golden light.

They flood the area with warm light at night, reflecting off wet paving stones.

"My purpose is to light up this town, which needs light, which needs culture, which needs new emotions," Plessi told AFPTV.

Owing to the pandemic, "this Christmas is different from the others," said Plessi, who with his white beard could himself pass for Santa Claus.

Counting on Biden...

FROM PAGE 1

Therefore, Biden, at the best, may reduce some of psych wars against Iran or slacken the implementation of some previous or new sanctions against Iran. So, one cannot be so that optimistic to Biden's presidency.

The 12th government in the Islamic Republic of Iran, as it has put all its eggs in the JCPOA basket since September 2013 till now, in other words, in the past seven years, and achieved no success, still has not stopped pinning hopes on this matter that JCPOA with Biden could be a breakthrough.

Attachment to the West is a very incurable disease that many in Iran have been infected by it since the Constitutional Revolution of Iran (1905-1911) and they have even spread the contagiousness of their disease to the educational system and media culture, and the current government and cabinet has not remained immune from this plight. It seems those who have studied in our country feel the real taste of independence. When people go abroad, some kind of attachment to the Western condition shapes in them. Dispatch of offspring of some of officials in the Islamic Republic of Iran to foreign countries, of course, on the pretext of study has created risks for the country both for its economic health and native culture to suffer from the "aghazadegi" (attitude of children of elite who emerge as the men of means and influence).

The next governments should look at this matter seriously with the armed eyes in order that we could somewhat remain guardian of the blood of martyrs of the Islamic Revolution.



Iran Ready to...

FROM PAGE 1

"From this point of view, both economic executives and the general public can receive a clear economic horizon for next year from its messages, and officials related to various economic fields can also express these messages clearly to the public."

"One of the most important messages of next year's budget is supporting the low-income groups by considering targeted payments, compensating for inflation in the wages of employees and workers, providing basic goods based on people's needs, providing raw materials for production and factories and, most importantly, accelerate the development of the country's infrastructure, and other things will be explained to the people in the coming days."

The President continued, "Given the increasing pressures and costs and the elimination of the problems caused by coronavirus, the government has heeded the Supreme Leader's instructions in helping low-income groups as one of the important strategies in the current situation."

Rouhani referred to the obstacles that coronavirus and sanctions have created and disrupted a significant part of businesses, stating, "In such an unprecedented situation, the government has taken all possible measures to increase the social and economic resilience of the disadvantaged."

UNSC...

FROM PAGE 1

He said in many cases, the Security Council has been inactive and ineffective, and in certain cases, its actions have been ultra vires, and it also has been seriously exploited by certain permanent members.

The Council's legitimacy and credibility, as well as its serious trust and confidence deficit, is the direct result of this situation, the envoy said, adding that the promotion of multilateralism is a high priority for the overwhelming majority of member states, and a truly reformed Council can greatly contribute to multilateralism.

Russia...

FROM PAGE 1

Swiss-based company Allseas, which has been laying the pipeline, suspended operations in December last year because of the US sanctions targeting companies providing vessels.

Russia has two projects to send natural gas to Europe, namely the Nord Stream 2, which will send Russian natural gas to Germany, and the Turk Stream 2 pipeline, which will supply Western Europe with energy.

The 1,230-km Nord Stream 2 will deliver Russian gas via the Baltic Sea, bypassing Poland and Ukraine. The Turk Stream 2 will carry gas through Bulgaria.

Germany currently imports around a third of its gas from Russia through Ukraine.

Russia has decreased the amount of gas it delivers to Ukraine since the rise of a pro-Western government in Kiev in 2014. Ukraine's Western allies imposed sanctions on Russia after the Black Sea peninsula of Crimea rejoined Russia that year.

Chancellor Angela Merkel has faced increasing criticism over the Nord Stream 2 pipeline. Pro-US German politicians from different parties have called on her to stop the project, which they say would affect Germany's ties with major allies in the Baltic region, especially Poland.

Kranjec Takes World Cup Giant Slalom Lead

ROME (Dispatches) - Slovenia's Zan Kranjec was fastest after the first run of the men's World Cup giant slalom staged with snow falling in the Italian Alps on Saturday. Switzerland's in-form Marco Odermatt was 0.46sec adrift with overall championship leader Alexis Pinturault of France sitting third only 0.02sec further off. Santa Caterina stepped in to stage the third and fourth races of the men's season when French resort Val D'Isere didn't get enough snow.

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Japan to Host FIFA Club World Cup in 2021

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japan will host the Club World Cup in its existing format in late 2021, FIFA president Gianni Infantino announced on Friday, with his expanded version of the tournament still on hold for now after being postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic. It means there will be two Club World Cups in the same year, with Qatar hosting the 2020 edition between February 1 and 11 before another seven-team edition goes ahead in Japan in December.

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SPORTS

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Chelsea See Off Leeds to Go Top

LONDON (Reuters) - Chelsea moved to the top of the Premier League as they came from behind to beat Leeds United 3-1 at home on Saturday, set on their way by a fifth goal in four days from striker Olivier Giroud.

The 34-year-old Frenchman marked his first league start of the season - a reward for his four goals in Chelsea's thrashing of Sevilla in the Champions League on Wednesday - by stretching to turn in a whipped cross by Reece James in the 27th minute.

That cancelled out a fourth-minute opener for Leeds by Patrick Bamford, once on the Blues' books but who never made a first-team appearance. He latched on to a long ball by Calvin Phillips and rounded goalkeeper Edouard Mendy to score.

Chelsea created most of the chances and went ahead in the 61st minute when Zouma jumped higher than everyone to power a Mason Mount corner down and into the net.

Christian Pulisic sealed the win in added time when he turned in a cross by Timo Werner. Giroud has been urged by France coach Didier Deschamps to play more top-flight football before next year's European Championship, raising speculation he might leave Chelsea in January if he cannot get more game time.

"I feel good and confident. I play with serenity. I had the opportunity to score again today and help the team," Giroud told BBC television. He had other chances to score, including a close-range header in the second minute, and he set up fellow striker Timo Werner but the German miscued when almost on the goal line and his snatched second attempt hit the crossbar.

Leeds, back in the top flight after 16 years, looked dangerous on the break in the first half, pouncing on any Chelsea error to flood forward before fading.

WTA Plan Return to China and A Full 2021 Calendar

MUMBAI (Reuters) - China is central to the WTA's plans for 2021 as women's tennis seeks to put a COVID-ravaged season behind it and hit the new year with a full bouquet of tournaments, tour chief Steve Simon told Reuters.

The WTA lost more than half its events in 2020 after a five-month shutdown of the tour in March. All its tournaments in the Asian swing were cancelled, resulting in a significant loss of revenue.

Despite the financial strain, the WTA kept its entire workforce in place and with support from its main sponsors, the women's governing body said it is in a strong position.

Simon feels the challenges will continue, but with news of effective vaccines around the corner says he expects some level of normality to return next year.

"We have the foresight now to know what we're dealing with," he said in an interview. "Contingency planning can be in place, things that we didn't have the advantage of in 2020. "For 2021 we're planning our full calendar, our full complement of events which usually will fluctuate between 53 and 55 events a year."

With health protocols and dates for the Australian Open yet to be confirmed, the WTA is planning to start the 2021 season on Jan. 4 outside Australia before the players travel to Melbourne for quarantine ahead of the Grand Slam. China was to have featured prominently in the 2020 calendar with three WTA 1000 events plus the season-ending WTA Finals in Shenzhen.

Cavendish Extends Career With Quick-Step Return

PARIS (Dispatches) - British sprint specialist Mark Cavendish has signed a one-year deal to return to Deceuninck-Quick-Step, the World Tour team announced on Saturday.

Cycling great Cavendish, 35, will be racing alongside Tour de France green points jersey jersey Sam Bennett.

The Manxman is revered as possibly the best pure sprinter in history, with 30 Tour de France stage wins and 15 in the Giro d'Italia, plus a world road race title.



The win pushed Chelsea up to top spot in the table with 22 points, leap-frogging Tottenham and Liverpool who both have 21 and were playing last night. Leeds are in 12th position.

Meanwhile Manchester United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer said both Edinson Cavani and Anthony Martial were substituted during Saturday's 3-1 win over West Ham United because of muscle injuries.

Uruguayan striker Cavani, who scored twice as a substitute against Southampton last weekend, was operating as the central striker against West Ham, but did not come out for the second half at London Stadium.

French forward Martial was forced off the pitch after 62 minutes and was replaced by Juan Mata. Solskjaer confirmed both strikers will undergo scans ahead of Tuesday's Champions League encounter with RB Leipzig, with United needing a draw to qualify for the last-16.

"It is unfortunate... sometimes you get muscle injuries. We lost Anthony and Edinson," Solskjaer told Sky Sports. "There's a game already on Tuesday. But It'll probably be (like this) this season.

"Some games we have to do without players and I'm glad we've got the substitutions we have."

After Tomas Soucek put West Ham ahead, goals from Paul Pogba, Mason Greenwood and substitute Marcus Rashford helped United clinch a fifth consecutive away victory in the league this season.

Duplantis, Rojas Named World Athletes Of the Year



PARIS (Dispatches) - World record-breakers Mondo Duplantis of Sweden and Venezuela's Yulimar Rojas were on Saturday named the male and female World Athletes of the Year.

In a season to remember, not least for the coronavirus-hit scheduling, Duplantis broke the world record in the men's pole vault twice.

The 21-year-old cleared 6.17m and 6.18m on back-to-back weekends in February, just weeks before the Covid-19 pandemic brought track and field to a grounding halt.

When competition finally resumed, Duplantis capped his season by producing the highest outdoor vault of all time (6.15m) and finished the year undefeated in 16 competitions.

"It was a really strange season, for me and everybody, but I was able to put it together and get some pretty good results," said Duplantis.

"When everything got shut down and things were pushed back to the end of the season, I was able to find some good form there as well which, for me, was more impressive than my indoor season because I'd had two months off."



Guardiola Says He Is Only Halfway to Retiring

LONDON (Dispatches) - Pep Guardiola joked he is only halfway to retiring as he contemplated his 700th match as a manager against struggling Fulham.

The Manchester City boss, who turns 50 next month, would have reached the milestone more quickly had he not taken a sabbatical in 2012 following the end of his spell at Barcelona.

Guardiola, who managed Bayern Munich before moving to England, last month ended speculation over his future, signing a new deal that will keep him at the Etihad until at least 2023.

"Seven hundred games," he mused at Friday's press conference. "I'm going to do 700 more and after that I'm going to retire."

"In life, when you start something you don't expect what will happen in the future."

"I never expected it (to reach 700). It's good to have 700 games with few defeats in these games."

Guardiola, who has won multiple trophies at each club he has managed, turned his attention to winning more silverware.

"For all the players and staff we had in Barcelona B team, first team, Bayern and here, we share it," he said. "It is an incredible number and we have made incredible things together. Hopefully we can do it in the future."

City, who have started the season poorly by their high standards, will once again be without record goalscorer Sergio Aguero against Fulham.

The Argentine has missed City's past two games after suffering discomfort in his knee. The 32-year-old had a knee operation earlier this year and his comeback this season has already been complicated by a hamstring injury.

"He's getting better," said Guardiola. "The good news is that he's on the pitch with us. We'll see (if he'll be back soon)."

Raheem Sterling is usually a reliable source of goals but the England forward has not scored for six games.

Zidane Gets Breathing Space After Sevilla Win

MADRID (Dispatches) - Under-pressure Zinedine Zidane said Real Madrid's 1-0 win at Sevilla on Saturday, their first in La Liga since October, was significant after a testing recent period for the Frenchman.

Sevilla goalkeeper Bono guided Vinicius Junior's effort into his own net in the second half, allowing Zidane's side to move up to third in the table following two defeats in their past three games.

"These are three very important points for us. It's a well-deserved win, against a very good opponent, who can put you in trouble at any time. We got through this," Zidane said.

"It has been a bit difficult lately, today we have to enjoy it, be happy, but nothing more," he added.

Since Madrid crashed to a 2-0 defeat to Shakhtar Donetsk in midweek to leave their Champions League qualification hopes in the balance, press reports in Spain have linked former Tottenham boss Mauricio Pochettino and ex-Madrid forward Raul to Zidane's job.

Zidane made two changes from the debacle in Ukraine with Casemiro and Vinicius replacing Martin Odegaard and Marco Asensio.

Ex-Madrid boss Julen Lopetegui brought back Bono into the starting lineup after he missed four games with coronavirus which included Wednesday's heavy European defeat to Chelsea.

Morocco's Bono made a shaky start as his attempted clearance inside his own box was blocked by Vinicius.

He made up for the error on his own line despite Karim Benzema's efforts.

The former Girona keeper kept the sides equal at the break with a tidy save from Benzema's 38th-minute shot, but his crucial mistake came 10 minutes into the second half.



Verstappen on Top as Russell Has Reality Check

LONDON (Dispatches) - Max Verstappen topped the times for Red Bull and delivered a reality check for Mercedes new boy George Russell in Saturday's third and final free practice for the Sakhir Grand Prix.

The Dutchman delivered a best lap of 54.064 seconds at the fast, short-lap 'outer loop' of the Bahrain International Circuit to finish ahead of Valtteri Bottas of Mercedes and Alpha Tauri's Pierre Gasly.

Russell, released by Williams to replace coronavirus victim and seven-time world champion Lewis Hamilton in the title-winning Mercedes team, was unable to repeat his impressive Friday form, when he topped both sessions.

He wound up seventh behind fourth-placed Esteban Ocon of Renault, Lando Norris of McLaren and Alexander Albon in the second Red Bull after swapping quickest laps with Bottas during the early part of the session.

Sergio Perez was eighth ahead of his Racing Point team-mate Lance Stroll and Ferrari-bound Carlos Sainz of McLaren.

Ferrari duo Charles Leclerc and four-time world champion Sebastian Vettel were 13th and 15th in what turned out to be a very tight and competitive session.

The session began at sunset with an air temperature of 25 degrees and the track at 30, but as night fell so did those numbers as debutant Pietro Fittipaldi, the Brazilian substitute for Romain Grosjean at Haas, ventured out. For 15 minutes, he was the only man on track.

When he pitted, Norris led the rest into action, the McLaren driver going top before being succeeded by Ricciardo, Leclerc and Bottas.

