

Commander of IRGC Aerospace Force Brigadier General Amir Ali Hajizadeh Says As long as Americans Are Present in the Region, There Is Nothing More Than Humiliation, Insecurity, and Misery for the Region

IRAN NEWS

Commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps Major General Hossein Salami Reiterated The Force's Commitment to Defend The Iranian Nation and Serve Their Interests Through All Ups and Down

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Tehran, Beijing Cooperation Necessary To Fight Against Drugs

TEHRAN (IP) - Iran's Anti-Narcotics Police Chief Brigadier General in a virtual meeting with his Chinese counterpart, said: "The West double standard policy in the fight against drugs has caused problems in the region, and solving the problems require more cooperation between the countries of the region, especially Iran and China."

Iran's Anti-Narcotics Police Chief Majid Karimi in a joint webinar with Yun LIANG, Executive Secretary-General, China National Narcotics Control Commission (NNCC) on Tuesday, referring to the presence of Western countries and the United States in Afghanistan, said: "With the presence of foreign forces in Afghanistan the cultivation and production of narcotics in this country have increased up to ten times." **See Page 7**

Tehran Ready to Help Strengthen Baku-Yerevan Ceasefire



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - President Hassan Rouhani announced the country's readiness to play a role in helping to strengthen the ceasefire between Azerbaijan and Armenia and to stabilize the region.

He made the remarks in his meeting with Minister of Foreign

Affairs of Azerbaijan Jeyhun Bayramov on Wednesday.

Referring to the clear positions of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and support for the territorial integrity of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Rouhani expressed satisfaction with the end of the war between the two countries and the liberation of the occupied territories of Azerbaijan and the establishment of a ceasefire.

He pointed to Iran's plan for ending the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict by sending a special envoy to Russia, Azerbaijan and Armenia and announced the country's readiness to play a constructive role in helping to strengthen the ceasefire between the two countries and establish stability in the region.

Emphasizing the need to use the borders of Iran and Azerbaijan to develop economic and trade cooperation, the Iranian president said, "With the end of the Trump era in the United States and the coming to power of the new administration in this country, we feel that countries will have better conditions for cooperation."

Rouhani further announced Iran's readiness to participate in the reconstruction of the liberated areas of Azerbaijan, saying, "Given the proximity of the two countries and the facilities available in Iran, Iran's participation in the reconstruction of the areas affected by the Nagorno-Karabakh war will be to the benefit of both countries."

Referring to previous agreements between Iran and Azerbaijan, including the Rasht-Astara railway project, the President stressed the need to accelerate the implementation and operation of the agreements.

"Conditions are in place for the implementation of joint cooperation projects agreed between the two countries, including the Khoda Afarin Dam and the construction of a power plant," he said, adding, "The two countries can further develop their cooperation in the fields of industry, science, pharmacy and other sectors." **See Page 7**

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Iran to Start Imports of Coronavirus Vaccine Soon

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Health minister said that the country will start imports of Covid-19 vaccine in the near future.

Saeed Namaki said in a televised interview that due to the direct order of the Iranian President, the health ministry has been pursuing the purchase of the Covid-19 vaccine for a long time.

He said that Iran has been dealing with money transfer difficulties under the tough US sanctions but it has tried its best to reach the goal and imports will begin in the near future.

Namaki added that Iran will also start using its domestically manufactured vaccines in the future.

Head of Scientific Committee of Coronavirus Combat and Prevention Headquarters Mostafa Ghanei said on Wed. that the Iranian vaccines will be available in the market for injection in the late spring of the next year (to start March 21, 2021). **See Page 7**

U.S. Sanctions Iranian Yemen Envoy, Islamic Studies University

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The United States Treasury Department has added the names of Iran's ambassador to Yemen and an Islamic Republic-headquartered religious studies university to the list of its sanctions as Washington sustains its campaign of economic terrorism against Tehran.

The Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) levied the bans against the natural and artificial entities on Tuesday.

Hassan Irloo, Iran's new ambassador to Sana'a, submitted his credentials to Yemeni officials, amid the United States' ire at the progressive course of the two countries' relations, in early November. In October, U.S. State Department spokeswoman Morgan Ortagus issued a raft of meddlesome remarks on Iran-Yemen relations, which featured Irloo and her accusations against him.

She addressed Iran's appointment of the official as its new envoy to the Arab Peninsula country, claiming that the Islamic Republic had "smuggled" the official into Sana'a. **See Page 7**

Iran Not Destabilizing Mideast, Israeli-Arab Conflict Is

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia's envoy to Israel said Tuesday it is the Jewish state's conflict with the Palestinians and other Arab entities that is destabilizing the Middle East, not Iran.

Ambassador Anatoly Viktorov also accused Israel of being an aggressor for attacking arms shipments to the Iran-backed Hezbollah terror group, and questioned whether tunnels found under the Israel-Lebanon border were dug by the Lebanese organization.

"The problem in the region is not Iranian activities," Viktorov told The Jerusalem Post. "It's a lack of understanding between countries and non-compliance with UN resolutions in the Israel-Arab and Israel-Palestinian conflict."

Referring to airstrikes in Syria, attributed to Israel, that have targeted Iranian military position and arms convoys heading to Hezbollah, Viktorov said that Israel is causing the violence. **See Page 7**

A Big Event Will be Held for the First Time Internationally For an Iranian Scientist

President University of Indonesia established the International Permanent Secretariat of the MFT Awards



Dr. Jony Haryanto, the Rector of President University wrote an official letter to Prof. Mohammad Sharif Malekzadeh, MFT Theorist and announced its readiness to host the MFT Awards ceremony. "It is a pleasure to participate in this initiative," the letter said in part. President University announces its readiness to host the Secretariat of the MFT (Malekzadeh Standard for Tourism) Scientific Competition Awards. We believe that the MFT theory will play a valuable role in global education, especially in the field of tourism. The MFT Awards will be held biennially in collaboration with the International Association of University Presidents (IAUP) and the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). Awards in four groups are given to the best manager, top research, top tourism entrepreneur at special interest tourism and top innovation in Halal tourism. Plans, projects, initiatives and effective measures in the tourism industry were

presented to the Secretariat. These projects will be judged and voted by the jury and the winners will be determined. According to the public relations of SIT11 International Organization, this action was taken to appreciate the achievements and scientific efforts of Professor Mohammad Sharif Malekzadeh. Malekzadeh as the father of modern tourism science and support for tourism activists around the world who has proposed new solutions to global crises.



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Iran Fully Supports Astana Peace Process

TEHRAN (IP) - After meeting with Syrian Foreign Minister Faisal Mikdad, who made his first visit to Iran, the Iranian Foreign Minister said that Iran fully supports the Astana Peace Process.

"Pleased to host my old friend Faisal Mekdad on his first foreign trip as Syrian FM," Mohammad Javad Zarif tweeted.

"On the agenda: Focus on furthering political, economic & cultural relations and forging ahead with the fight against terrorism," Iran's FM noted. Zarif, in his tweet, also emphasized Iran's full support for the Astana Peace Process.

EU Urged Not to Interfere in Iran Internal Affairs

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN – Majlis Speaker said that Europe's demand for not implementing Iran's Strategic Action Plan was surprising.

Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf made the remarks in a meeting with the Italian ambassador to Iran Giuseppe Perrone on Tuesday.

"Relations between Iran and Italy must not be influenced by U.S. unilateral, inhuman and illegal actions," he noted.

Referring to the recent statement of the three European countries on Iran's Strategic Action Plan, Qalibaf noted that the EU urged the Iranian government not to implement the new law which was surprising due to their emphasis on democracy and legal obligations.

He reminded: "This law is not Iran's withdrawal of JCPOA, but within the framework of the deal and according to Paragraphs 36 and 37, it allows the other side to reduce its obligations the parties do not fulfill their obligations." Referring to the US withdrawal from JCPOA, he said: "Despite the unilateral withdrawal of the United States from the nuclear deal, the same time, Europe is not fulfilling its obligations, how can Iran unilaterally adhere to its obligations?"



According to Qalibaf, the U.S. withdrew from the JCPOA and Europe did not fulfill its commitments, saying that one cannot unilaterally adhere to the Nuclear Deal.

He stressed: "Italy should not allow the other three countries to speak on behalf of Europe. The three EU3, which did not react to the recent terrorist attack in Tehran and the Iranian scientist's martyrdom, now say that the Iranian government should not implement the law."

Referring to the U.S. presidential election, the Italian diplomat said: "With the new US administration, there will be an opportunity for the two countries to cooperate more than the past."

Giuseppe Perrone also highlighted that Italy seeks to expand bilateral relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran. "Rome is determined to increase trade between Iran and Italy, and we are interested in growing relations," said Italian Ambassador.

He further expressed hope that countries will strengthen their cooperation with each other during the next U.S. administration.

Top Cleric Ayatollah

Mohammad Yazdi Dies at 89

TEHRAN (IFP) - Senior Iranian cleric and veteran politician Ayatollah Mohammad Yazdi has passed away at the age of 89.

Born on July 2, 1931, Ayatollah Yazdi served in several top positions in the Iranian government following the victory of the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

He served as a member of Parliament, the Assembly of Experts and the Guardian Council for decades.

He was also the Judiciary chief from 1989 to 1999.

Ayatollah Yazdi along with four other members of the Guardian Council was put on the US Treasury's list of sanctioned officials on February 20, 2020 on charges that he prevented free elections in Iran.

He passed away on December 9, 2020 due to ill health.

Khaji, Pedersen Discuss Latest Syrian Affairs

TEHRAN (MNA) - Foreign Minister's Senior Assistant for Special Political Affairs held a phone conversation with the UN Special Envoy for Syria when the two sides conferred on Syrian affairs.

As reported, Ali-Asghar Khaji and Geir O. Pedersen discussed the latest developments in Syria, including the Syrian Constitutional Committee during the Wednesday conversation.

Pedersen put forward a report on the outcomes of the fourth round of meetings of the Syrian Constitutional Committee in Geneva last week.

Khaji briefed Pedersen about the latest developments in Syria, the Constitutional Committee, and Idlib issues.

The parties also voiced support for the continuation of future meetings of the Syrian Constitutional Committee.

The Constitutional Committee's fifth round of the Syria talks is set to be held at the United Nations' Geneva office on Jan. 25-29, 2021.

The fourth session of Syria's Constitutional Committee was held on November 27 in Geneva to hammer out the roots of the basic laws for a peaceful Syria.

Regional Countries Must Prevent Creation of Insecure Centers

TEHRAN (MNA) - In a meeting with Azerbaijan's Foreign Minister, the Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council called on regional countries to prevent the creation of insecure centers.

In his meeting with Azerbaijan's Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov in Tehran on Wednesday, Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council Ali Shamkhani referred to the evil deeds of the American-Zionist-ISIL triangle and their presence in West Asia which has ignited insecurity in the region, saying that regional countries must prevent the creation of insecure centers in the region by cooperation.

Shamkhani expressed satisfaction with the establishment of peace between the two countries of Azerbaijan and Armenia and the return of the occupied territories to the Azeri mainland.

He also wished success for the government and people of Azerbaijan in the path of growth and development.

The Iranian official stated that Tehran-Baku relations should be upgraded to the highest possible level.

He noted that the completion of joint projects and the implementation of agreements between the two countries as well as starting new mutual cooperation in various fields require more serious efforts.

Given Iran's experience and technical and engineering capabilities, Shamkhani also expressed his country's interest in participating in the reconstruction of war-torn areas of Azerbaijan.

The Azeri FM, for his turn, expressed gratitude for the principled policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran towards the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis and appreciated the wise positions of the Leader of Iran Ayatollah Khamenei in support of putting an end to the occupation and crisis.

Referring to the determination of the top officials of the two countries to develop and strengthen relations between Tehran and Baku, Bayramov announced the readiness of the Republic of Azerbaijan to improve mutual ties with Iran in various fields.

He expressed his condolences over the martyrdom of the top Iranian nuclear scientist Dr. Fakhrizadeh and strongly condemned this terrorist act.

Qalibaf Calls on Pakistan to Release Iranian Hostages



TEHRAN (MNA) - In a meeting with Pakistani envoy to Tehran, Iranian Parl. Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf urged the Pak government to take immediate action to release three Iranian hostages.

"We expect the Pakistani government to take immediate action to release the three Iranian hostages," Qalibaf told Pak Ambassador Rahim Hayat Qureshi on Tuesday.

"Bilateral cooperation between Iran and Pakistan has a deep cultural, religious, political and economic history," the Iranian official said, "We must try to further strengthen cooperation between the two countries in various fields, especially economic, cultural and cross-border sectors."

Qalibaf noted that considering the joint borders between Iran and Pakistan, as two powerful countries in the region, having border markets launched can strengthen the security and welfare of border residents of the two countries.

He underscored that the Islamic Republic has no preconditions for conducting negotiations with Muslim countries, and of course it is not a threat to any country.

"We must work for endorsement of peace in Afghanistan, and of course the legitimate government of Afghanistan can pursue this goal within the framework of the country's constitution so that the Afghan people could achieve permanent security and peace."

Ambassador Qureshi, for his turn, expressed condolences over the assassination of Iranian scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh.

He said the terrorist act that led to the martyrdom of Dr. Fakhrizadeh was contrary to all international norms and intergovernmental relations. The government and nation of Pakistan declare solidarity with the Iranian nation and government in this regard, he added.

The ambassador said that his government seeks to facilitate Pakistani pilgrims' trips to Iran and has establishing border joint markets on its agenda.

Iran to Sell 2.3 Barrels per Day of Oil Next Year

TEHRAN (IFP) - Iran's president says the world should know that the country will sell its oil next year.

President Hassan Rouhani said Wednesday Iran will produce 2.3 million barrels of crude in the year ending March 2022 and will sell it.

"The world should clearly get the message that the conditions of the production and sale of Iran's oil will be totally different next year than those of two years ago," said the president.

He said those who cashed in on the sanctions for personal gain may not be happy with this message, "but this is a ray of hope for our nation in the next year."

Elsewhere in his remarks, the president touched upon the national spending package for the next Persian year beginning March, 2021.

"The next year's budget pays due regard to people's livelihoods and low-income families," he said.

Based on the next year's budget, he added, families will not have to pay for utilities if their consumption rate remains within the limit announced.

Tehran Rejects Calls by Saudis to Be Included in Iran-West Talks

TEHRAN (IFP) - The Iranian foreign ministry spokesman has dismissed a call by Saudi Arabia and Bahrain to be included in any possible international talks on Iran.

Saeed Khatibzadeh urged regional countries to know their limits and act accordingly.

"Tehran's message to these countries is that Iran is the anchor of stability in the region.

Iran is a historical country in the region, and like an elder brother, has tried to condone others' mistakes, but they should know what their status is and to what extent they can talk," said the spokesman in a Monday press conference.

"Some countries put all their credibility on the line to achieve their objective during the tenure of the outgoing U.S. president. They spent their own people's money to

buy security for a few days. Obviously, they are worried today," Khatibzadeh added.

Khatibzadeh's comments came after Saudi Arabia and Bahrain called for Persian Gulf States to be consulted on any potential negotiations with Iran.

Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan had demanded that the kingdom be "fully consulted" on "what goes on regarding negotiations with Iran."

In his Monday remarks, Khatibzadeh recommend that "Saudi Arabia and its rulers note the problems they have created every day for their own people as well as for the people of the Muslim world and the Arab world can be resolved only if they correct the approach they have adopted, and that they will gain nothing by playing blame games."

General Highlights Iran's Achievements in Military Industry

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Iran is ranked among the world's top countries in the production of missiles and weapons operable by individual soldiers, a deputy defense minister said.

Addressing a gathering of university students in Tehran, Brigadier General Qassem Taqizadeh praised local experts for making considerable progress in various military industries, such as the aerospace and missile technologies, electronic warfare, air defense sector, and naval industries.

Iran is currently ranked among the world's top three countries in manufacturing anti-armor missiles, among the top two in the production of weapons used by individual soldiers, and among the world's four top powers in the missile industry, he added.

The deputy defense minister also gave an assurance that the assassination of eminent Iranian scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh and top commander Lt. General Qassem Soleimani will not remain unanswered, adding, "The al-Quds (Jerusalem) occupying regime will pay the price for such a grave crime."

Iran will take a harsh revenge for the assassinations on the basis of prudence and wisdom in due time, he concluded. Fakhrizadeh, a senior nuclear and defense scientist, was assassinated by unknown gunmen in a small city east of Tehran on November 27.

Some of Those Behind Fakhrizadeh Assassination Arrested

TEHRAN (IFP) - A senior Iranian official says some of those involved in the assassination of eminent Iranian scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh have been identified and apprehended by the country's security agencies.

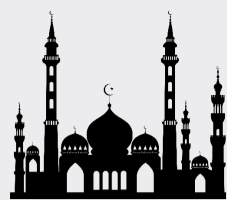
Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, the special aide to Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, said masterminds and perpetrators of the terrorist act will not escape justice.

In an interview with the Iranian Arabic-language Al-Alam News Network, the official noted, "As for the masterminds and perpetrators of the assassination, there is evidence suggesting Zionists were involved in the incident. But were Zionists able to do it alone and without the cooperation of, for example, the U.S. intelligence service or another service? Definitely not," said the official.

He said in the previous cases of the assassination of Iranian scientists, it later came to light that the Israeli regime was involved in their killings.

"Such evidence still exists and it is clear to our security services, and in the not-too-distant future you will see Iran take firm action and give a firm response to those ordering the assassination," he noted. The official also touched upon the passage of the Strategic Action to Lift Sanctions Act in parliament following the assassination of Fakhrizadeh.

He said MPs had been discussing the legislation since months ago, and that the slaying of the Iranian scientist "only expedited the process." "This law is not only the Iranian parliament's reaction to the assassination, but it is also a response to the breach of commitments by the European countries [which are signatories to the Iran nuclear deal]," he noted.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	11:57
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:11
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:34
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	07:04

136. O ye who believe! Believe in Allah and His Messenger, and the scripture which He hath sent to His Messenger and the scripture which He sent to those before (him). Any who denieth Allah, His angels, His Books, His Messenger, and the Day of Judgment, hath gone far, far astray.
137. Those who believe, then reject faith, then believe (again) and (again) reject faith, and go on increasing in unbelief- Allah will not forgive them nor guide them nor guide them on the way: Surah 4. Women (136 - 137)

Iranian, Pakistani Traders Call for Bartering To Overcome Sanctions

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Some of Iranian and Pakistani business activists yesterday in a webinar exchanged views for boosting trade and both sides emphasized bartering goods as a means of overcoming the sanctions.

In the webinar which was held in collaboration between Iran's Tehran Chamber of Commerce and Pakistan's Lahore Chamber of Commerce, economic activists of both countries explored ways for boosting trade relation and removing hurdles in way of their trade.

In the meeting, both sides pointed to the problems resulted by the U.S. sanctions and emphasized using bartering goods, removing non-tariff hurdles and boosting the border trade and preferential trade.

Both sides also expressed their dissatisfaction over the trade volume of both countries despite having huge potentials and called for boosting the bilateral trade to \$5b.

Addressing the webinar, Head of Tehran Chamber of Commerce Masoud Khansari pointed to the commonalities and historic relations of both countries, adding that both countries enjoy good economic relations while they have bigger potentials for strengthening their bond.

He further said Pakistan has turned into Iran's major and trustable trade partner, adding that despite huge potentials of both countries, their trade volume is not satisfactory while there is capability to increase the trade exchange of both countries to the set target of \$3b, and holding such events and meetings will help this to materialize.

Khansari then pointed to the visit of a delegation from Tehran Chamber of Commerce to Pakistan and city of Lahore in February 2020, saying that it was a fruitful visit and expressed hope by containing the COVID-19, these visits would continue in the near future. He said Lahore as the second economic pole of Pakistan and a vast industrial city can play an important role in expansion of bilateral relations.

He also asked for taking some initiatives to overcome problems resulted by high tariffs as well as lack of banking channels for trade. He also called for improving the infrastructures for reaching the maximum trade capacities of both sides. Khansari also said joint ventures, developing industrial parks near borders and transfer of technology can be the key to the success in developing trade relations.

He said by launching a mechanism for bartering goods, both sides can overcome the consequences of lack of financial and banking channels, adding that in fact, bartering can include all exporting goods like iron, dried and fresh fruits, crude oil,



petrochemical products, transformers, raw skin and carper from Iran n exchange with goods like rice, mango, banana, meat, medicines, textiles, leather products and mechanical machines from Pakistan.

Khansari also said both countries should create other mechanisms like using national currencies and launching joint bank which will ease bilateral trade.

He also added that preferential tariff agreement between Iran and Pakistan can turn into a free trade agreement and this move can boost the trade volume between both states as well as controlling smuggling the goods from their borders, and announced Tehran Chamber of Commerce's readiness for supporting economic activists of both countries for developing and easing trade and resolving problems.

Meanwhile in the meeting, Head of Lahore Chamber of Commerce Tariq Misbah pointed to the decline in the world trade volume, and called development of joint investment between Iran and Pakistan a good opportunity.

He said Iran and Pakistan despite having abundant cultural and religious commonalities have not been able to take advantage of their potentials for boosting trade relations in the past years, as the trade of goods between Iran and Pakistan has been estimated around \$400m and there is a long way to reach the \$5b target.

Misbah also noted that banking problem has led to the decline in trade between both states, stipulating that Iran and Pakistan should look for a financial mechanism for increasing their trade. He added presence of Iranian and Pakistan financial institutes and bartering trade can materialize the increase in bilateral trade, adding that exchange of trade delegations is another way for boosting economic cooperation.

Meanwhile trade and investment counsellor of Pakistan Embassy in Tehran Masood Ahmed for his part pointed to the bilateral trade which has faced ups and downs in recent years and called for boosting sustainable trade between both countries.

He emphasized removing the non-tariff hurdles, and talked about systematic problems in Tehran-Islamabad relations, noting that due to the sanctions and lack of banking channels, the border trade and preferential trade should continue.

Hormuzgan Prov., Kazakhstan Eye Boosting Trade Relation

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Head of Bandar Abbas Chamber of Commerce Mohammad Reza Safa in meeting with the head of Kazakhstan Consulate Mr. Dautelali Nysan called for using bilateral capacities for boosting bilateral interactions and called the outlook of economic relations between Iran and Kazakhstan positive and promising.

In the meeting, Mr. Safa talked about the rise in the trade relations of Hormuzgan Province with Kazakhstan due to interactions and talks.

He said the world is familiar with capacities of Hormuzgan Province in terms of its trade and tourism capacities and developing countries have focused on this rich province.

He said the province has high capacities in terms of trade and Bandar Abbas Chamber tries to both invest foreign investors and to pave the ground for presence of traders from the target countries.

He reiterated that one should not forget this point that trade with the world without considering the international agreements, banking relations and even in the post-sanctions era will be difficult for Iranian traders.

Safa noted that restoring trade relation between Hormuzgan Province and Port of Aktau of Kazakhstan is the main goal of the province and the first step has been taken for it.



He also called for holding a webinar between chambers of commerce of Bandar Abbas and Aktau for creating the relation between traders of Hormuzgan and Aktau, adding that the trade gets boom when both sides are aware of the needs of their countries in order to restore bilateral relations.

Safa concluded that in terms of culture, Iran and Kazakhstan have great commonalities and undoubtedly, expansion of trade ties will be to the benefit of traders of Hormuzgan.

Then Mr. Nysan, for his part, said that by launching consulate for six southern provinces of Iran, this opportunity has been provided for these provinces to expand their trade with Kazakhstan. He said Hormuzgan Province with its potential capacities in marine, mining, agricultural and other sectors is of great importance for Kazakhstan.

Tehran, Muscat Discuss Trade, Economic Cooperation

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iranian Ambassador to Muscat Ali Najafi met and held talks with Oman's Minister of Commerce and Industry Qais bin Mohammed Al Yousef on the expansion of trade cooperation.

During the meeting, the two sides emphasized cooperation in the fields of industry and trade and its further strengthening.

Referring to the capacities, facilities and capabilities of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Najafi announced the country's readiness to strengthen cooperation as much as possible.

"My priority is the development of economic relations, which the trade and industry sector can provide very good opportunities in this regard," he said.

He also called for the removal of obstacles and the provision of necessary facilities for Iranian economic actors.

Welcoming the development and strengthening of relations and cooperation between the two countries in the economic field, Al Yousef, for his part, expressed satisfaction with holding of 18th round of the joint commission in Iran last year.

He also expressed hope that the next round would be held in Muscat at the earliest opportunity.

No Restriction on Admitting Truck By Turkish Side at Bazargan

TEHRAN (MNA) – Head of General Directorate of Bazargan Customs in West Azarbaijan province said that there is no restriction on the acceptance of trucks by Turkey at Bazargan Border Crossing.

Mojtaba Bazgir reiterated that there is no restriction in admitting truck by Turkish side at the border crossing.

His remarks came after the publication of a video film on the late acceptance of trucks by Turkey at Bazargan Border and dissatisfaction of Iranian truck drivers waiting at the border.

The protest of Iranian truck drivers has been unofficially announced to the border officials of Gurbulak Border Crossing, he said, adding, "We are waiting for Turkish side's actions in this regard."

The staff of this border tries to accept the trucks during 24 hours a day at the entrance and exit gates. According to the latest statistics, 350 trucks entered the country yesterday while capacity of the border in accepting trucks stands at 600 trucks a day.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Bazgir pointed to the entry and exit of truck in the current year in spite of coronavirus, COVID-19, restrictions at Bazargan Border and added, "Some 63,032 trucks exited from Bazargan Border over the past eight months (from March 21 to Nov. 22) while 32,855 trucks entered into the country in this period."

Bazargan Customs is one of the three origins of border trade between Iran and Turkey, which is active around the clock in the north of West Azerbaijan. As considered Iran's gateway to European countries, Bazargan Border is located one kilometer away from the city of Bazargan, district of Maku in West Azerbaijan.

Iran Exported \$13b to Neighboring Countries

TEHRAN (IP) - Iran has exported more than \$13 billion worth of goods to neighboring countries in the past eight months, the director-general of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO)'s Office of Arabian and African Countries said.

According to Farzad Piltan, the value of Iran's exports to its Arab trade partners in the region reached \$8.565 billion in the first eight months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-November 20).

Piltan said that the value of Iran's total non-oil trade during the first five months of the current stood at \$21.5 billion.

The mentioned trade partners include Iraq, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, Syria, and Bahrain.

Among Iran's top trade partners, Iraq was ranked the second export destination with about \$5.3 billion worth of goods exported to the country, followed by UAE, Oman, Kuwait, and Qatar.

"Other Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Yemen (from the Persian Gulf region) and Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon (from West Asia) were not included in the top 20 Iranian export destinations during the period under review," the official said.

Iran Invested 2.8 Trillion Rials on Khaf-Harat Railway

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's Minister of Road and Urban Development Mohammad Eslami said on Wednesday that Iranian government has invested some 2.8 trillion rials on completion of Khaf-Herat railway to link Iran to Afghanistan.

Eslami said that the strategic railway will be officially inaugurated on Thursday in a ceremony to be participated by presidents of Iran and Afghanistan.

The project accounts for one of the main transit corridors of the region, the minister said.

He said that the project can boost infrastructural development in Afghanistan and help bring economic prosperity to the country. Khaf-Herat railway is 191 kilometers long which stretches 77 kilometers in the Iranian soil and 114 kilometers in Afghanistan.

Iran and Afghanistan have signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with five other countries that are in the way of the East-West corridor and further negotiations are still ongoing in this regard.

In early July, Iranian and Afghan officials held a committee meeting to discuss the completion and inauguration of the mentioned railway.

Iran to Produce 1.3m Cars Next Year

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iranian automakers will produce more than 1.3 million cars next year, marking a 50 percent jump in production in the face of US sanctions, a deputy industry minister says.

Iran Khodro (IKCO) and Saipa are the two largest local manufacturers, which have picked up the slack since France's Peugeot and Renault exited Iran along with other international companies in the wake of U.S. sanctions in 2018, creating a supply crunch which saw car prices vault to unprecedented highs.

As the fallout from the sudden exit of foreign companies began to roll in, the two car makers pooled up local manufacturers of parts to produce Iranian-made vehicles. The defense ministry joined in to manufacture hi-tech auto parts which Iran used to import.

According to a local auto maker, 154 major auto parts have been internally produced, saving the country some 400 million euros in foreign exchange.

"To internally produce auto parts, we have started 82 in-house manufacturing projects with the Ministry of Defense and knowledge-based companies and the Vice Presidency for Science and Technology," Saipa CEO Seyyed Javad Soleimani said Tuesday.

More than 100,000 people are employed by IKCO and Saipa, while another 700,000 Iranians work in industries related to car manufacturing. The auto industry is only second to Iran's energy sector, accounting for some 10 percent of the gross

domestic product and 4 percent of employment.

When the Trump administration reimposed sanctions on Iran in August 2018, it reserved Washington's first hammer blow for the car industry to hurt as many Iranians as possible.

Ironically, the U.S. pressures helped domestic manufacturers thrive under the new situation through mobilizing their resources to fulfill some of the tasks which were an exclusive competence of foreign companies.

Local manufacturers are now producing a wide range of parts such as automotive immobilizers that allow the engine to start only with the vehicle's authorized key, electronic control units, oxygen sensors, electric seats, electric steering, six-speed automatic transmission, polymeric materials, modulators, injectors, airbags, multimedia, direct current (DC) motors, all types of electrical sensors and digital front amplifiers.

The K132 sedan, the first Iran-made car using 90% locally-manufactured parts, is about to roll off the IKCO's mass production line in February. IKCO's rival will produce Saipa Shahin compact sedan, which is 92% reliant on locally-manufactured parts.

However, Iranian manufacturers are worried that a possible opening in Tehran's ties with the West after Trump leaves office could lead to the return of foreign car makers and send them back to square one.

Cuba Attracts \$1.9b In Foreign Investment

HAVANA (Dispatches) - Cash-strapped Cuba said on Tuesday that it had attracted \$1.9bn worth of foreign investment over the past year despite tighter United States sanctions.

Trade Minister Rodrigo Malmierca told an online news conference that Cuba continues to reduce internal obstacles to investors, adding that the 34 investments approved on the island since October 2019 were no small feat given the "economic war" being waged by the administration of outgoing United States President Donald Trump.



Two Protesters Killed in Iraq's Kurdistan Region

BAGHDAD (Reuters) - Two protesters were shot dead on Tuesday in renewed demonstrations against Kurdish political parties in the northern, Kurdish-run region of Iraq, two local officials said.

The officials, including a health source, said one protester had been shot dead by guards at the headquarters of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) in the town of Takya, west of the city of Sulaimaniya.

Iraqi Kurdish authorities issued a ruling on Tuesday banning movement between the city of Sulaimaniya and other surrounding towns for the next 24 hours in an attempt to stop unrest from spreading. Movement between towns was also banned until midnight on Wednesday.



Turkey Calls on EU to Act With Common Sense



ANKARA (Reuters) - Turkey urged the European Union on Tuesday to use "common sense" to end a row over natural gas exploration that has fanned territorial disputes in the eastern Mediterranean and drawn a threat of sanctions from EU leaders.

Speaking at a news conference with his Hungarian counterpart in Ankara, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu reiterated that Ankara wanted to join the EU as a full member, and said EU statements accusing Ankara of stoking tensions were wrong.

EU member state Greece had continued "provocative" steps despite Turkey's diplomatic efforts, he said.

On Monday, EU foreign ministers said Turkey had failed to help end the row with member states Greece and Cyprus over potential gas resources, but they left any decision on retaliatory sanctions for an EU summit on Thursday.

"They need to be fair and honest here. If they also think strategically and with common sense, not just at the summit but always, and we achieve a positive atmosphere, we can improve our ties," Cavusoglu said. "We can only solve our problems with dialogue and diplomacy."

"We want to improve our ties with the EU. We are not saying this because there is a summit or because there are sanctions and other things on the agenda," he added. "We always wanted to improve our ties on the basis of full membership."

NATO member and EU candidate Turkey has been at odds with Greece and Cyprus over the extent of their continental shelves in the east Mediterranean. Tensions flared in August when Turkey sent its Oruc Reis survey vessel to waters claimed by Greece.

After withdrawing the Oruc Reis for what it said was maintenance ahead of a previous EU summit in October, Ankara sent it back shortly after, citing unsatisfactory results from the summit. It withdrew the vessel again last week.

European Council President Charles Michel warned Turkey not to play "cat and mouse" by withdrawing ships before EU summits, only to redeploy them afterwards. Cavusoglu and French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian spoke by telephone on Tuesday, the two countries' foreign ministries said in statements after the call.

Le Drien told his Turkish counterpart that a renewed constructive relationship with the EU could only happen if Ankara clarified its position on several subjects, a spokeswoman said, adding that the call was at Turkey's request.

Turkey's foreign ministry said the two had discussed regional and bilateral issues, without giving further details.

Earlier, a spokesman for Erdogan's AK Party said that using the "language of sanctions" against Turkey will amount to "racists and fascists" winning in Europe. "Using (such) language...is an eclipse of the mind," Omer Celik told a news conference. "The EU must act with reason."

Armenia Opposition Launches Disobedience Drive to Unseat PM

YEREVAN (AFP) - Armenian protesters on Tuesday blocked streets in the capital Yerevan, launching a "civil disobedience" campaign to force Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan to quit over a controversial peace agreement with Azerbaijan.

Shouting "Armenia without Nikol" and "Traitor", opposition supporters blocked traffic across the capital and paralysed the city's subway. Police detained dozens of demonstrators.

In a fresh blow to the embattled premier, the influential head of Armenia's Apostolic Church, Catholicos Garegin, on Tuesday called for Pashinyan's resignation "to avoid tragic developments" and pointed to "mounting tensions in society".

Last week, 17 opposition parties said Pashinyan had until Monday to step down and proposed that former prime minister Vazgen Manukyan take over his duties.

Pashinyan, 45, has been under huge pressure since agreeing on November 9 to a Moscow-brokered deal with Azerbaijan that ended six weeks of fierce fighting over the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh.



Farmers Protest Across India Against Modi's Liberalization

NEW DELHI (Reuters) - Farmers' protests against new laws liberalizing agricultural markets spread across India on Tuesday, as farm organizations called for a nationwide strike after inconclusive talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government.

In eastern and western states, farmers blocked roads and squatted on railway tracks, delaying hordes of people getting to work, and preventing perishable produce from reaching markets.

Farmers from the northern states of Punjab and Haryana, neighboring New Delhi, have been at the vanguard of the agitation since last month, and have set up protest camps in and around the capital.

"We will not allow the government to change the rules because they want to hurt farmers' income by filling the pockets of big companies," said Gurwinder Singh, a 66-year-old farmer from Punjab, a state known as the food bowl of India.

The reforms enacted in September loosened rules around the sale, pricing and storage of farm produce that have protected farmers from an unfettered free market for decades. Assured of floor prices, most currently sell the bulk of their produce at government-controlled wholesale markets, known as mandis.

The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has said the reforms would not hurt farmers' incomes. More talks between the government and farmer organizations are due today. Home Minister Amit Shah late on Tuesday invited leaders of protesting farmers' unions for talks.

"Most likely, the government on Wednesday will give a written proposal about the likely amendments in the laws. Once we receive the proposals, we will examine them," farmers' leader Hanan Molla told reporters after the meeting.

Social media has fanned sympathy for the farmers' cause among the Indian diaspora abroad. During recent days, thousands of people have protested in support of the farmers outside the Indian embassy in central London.

U.S. Supreme Court Rejects Bid To Overturn Pennsylvania Vote

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The United States Supreme Court on Tuesday rejected Republicans' last-gasp bid to reverse Pennsylvania's certification of President-elect Joe Biden's victory in the electoral battleground.

The court without comment refused to call into question the certification process in Pennsylvania.

There were no noted dissents from any of the justices on the court, which has a 6-3 conservative majority including three appointees of President Donald Trump. The president had urged the Republican-led Senate to confirm his most recent nominee, Justice Amy Coney Barrett, before the election so she would be able to participate in any election-related cases. Democratic Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf already has certified Biden's victory and the state's 20 electors are to meet on December 14 to cast their votes for Biden.

Biden won 306 electoral votes, so even if Pennsylvania's results had been in doubt, he still would have more than the 270 electoral votes needed to become president.

Republican U.S. Representative Mike Kelly of northwestern Pennsylvania and other plaintiffs pleaded with the justices to intervene after the state Supreme Court turned away their case.

The Republicans argued that Pennsylvania's expansive vote-by-mail law is unconstitutional because it required a constitutional amendment to authorize its provisions.

Biden beat President Donald Trump by more than 80,000 votes in Pennsylvania, a state Trump had won in 2016. Most mail-in ballots were submitted by Democrats.

The state's high court said the plaintiffs waited too long to file the challenge and noted the Republicans' staggering demand that an entire election be overturned retroactively.

In the underlying lawsuit, Kelly and the other Republican plaintiffs had sought to either throw out the 2.5 million mail-in ballots submitted under the law or to wipe out the election results and direct the state's Republican-controlled legislature to pick Pennsylvania's presidential electors.

Meanwhile, the state of Texas on Tuesday asked the U.S. Supreme Court to throw out the voting results in four other states in a long-shot legal gambit intended to help Trump upend his election loss to Biden.

Officials from the four states - Georgia, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin - called the lawsuit a reckless attack on American democracy while legal experts gave it little chance to succeed. The case was filed directly with the Supreme Court rather than with a lower court, as is permitted for certain litigation between states.



Macron Says Urgent Need To Reform French Police

PARIS (AFP) - President Emmanuel Macron has said there is "urgent" need to reform the French police following multiple allegations of brutality and complaints from officers about growing hostility from the public.

In a letter to a police union leader seen by AFP on Tuesday, Macron said he would call a meeting bringing together all sides in January to discuss how to improve relations between the police and communities.

"There is urgent need to act," Macron said in the letter to the Unite-SGP-FO police union, signalling his intent to personally take charge of a hot-button issue that has brought tens of thousands of protesters onto the streets in recent weeks.

The roundtable discussion, which will bring together police representatives, lawmakers and community leaders, will also address the police's longstanding complaints over working conditions, he said.

"France is held together by its police and gendarmes...we owe them support and protection, I will see to it," Macron wrote on Monday to union leader Yves Lefebvre.

In France, the issue of policing is the preserve of the interior minister. But growing public distrust of the police, combined with increasing discontent in the ranks over long hours and rising anti-police violence, have put pressure on Macron to take action.

Footage of white officers beating up an unarmed black music producer in his studio last month acted as a turning point.

The images of the attack on Michel Zecler, who was stopped for not wearing a mask during the Covid-19 pandemic, fuelled longstanding allegations of racism in the force and amplified demonstrations against a bill that would have restricted filming of the police.

Macron's ruling LREM party has since promised to rewrite the controversial clause in its draft security law.

The four officers have been charged with assault and proffering racial slurs. Other incidents caught on camera have shown police in Paris using violence to tear down a migrant camp.



Shanon
(adviser)

Parsian

Mahmoodieh Apt (\$2300)
220sq.m
3bdrs, S/p
Sauna, J
roof garden
marble floor
pkg, & F.F

Farmanieh Villa (\$7000)
2000sq.m
5bdrs, S/p
Sauna, J
nice yard
terrace, pkg
elegantly Furn

Kamranieh Apts
(\$1800) 160sq.m, 2bdrs, S/p, S, J, pkg, & F.F
(\$2700) 260sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, S, J, pkg, & F.F

Nice mountain View

Gheitarieh Apt (\$1800)
180sq.m, 3bdrs
balcony, & F.F

Niavaran (\$2000)
200sq.m, 3bdrs
balcony

Elahieh bldg (\$5000)
4storey, 13bdrs
pkg lots

Commercial office
Vali-e-Asr
300sq.m, 3bdrs
(\$30 per sq.m)

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South Africa's Economy Sees Major Rebound in Q3

CAPE TOWN (Dispatches) - South Africa's gross domestic product (GDP) rebounded by a massive 66.1% in the third quarter of the year, reflecting the economy's recovery from the height of the Covid-19 lockdown. This is on a seasonally adjusted and annualized basis.

Stats SA cleared up its GDP figures after some confusion during the second quarter release, which showed a 51% decline in GDP due to lockdown.

The data reflects the latest quarter compared to the immediate preceding quarter, e.g. 2020-Q3 with 2020-Q2. According to Stats SA, there are seasonal differences between quarters such as weather conditions influence agriculture production, holidays of Easter and the festive season influence trade, transport and accommodation, and year-end closures influence construction and many business services – which adds complication to the assessment.



Japan Cabinet OKs 73.6 Trillion Yen New Stimulus to Fight Virus

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japan's Cabinet approved Tuesday an additional economic package worth 73.6 trillion yen (\$707 billion), including private funds to help ensure the coronavirus-stricken economy to stay on a recovery track.

The package includes extensions of subsidy programs aimed at promoting domestic travel, spurring consumption and helping companies maintain employment, as well as incentives for digitalization and carbon reduction, according to government officials.

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga said his government estimates the stimulus measures will boost Japan's real gross domestic product by 3.6 percent, helping the world's third-largest economy to continue rebounding from the worst contraction on record since 1955 in the April-June quarter due to the pandemic.

To help fund the stimulus, fiscal spending of around 30.6 trillion yen will be secured in a third supplementary budget for fiscal 2020 through next March and an initial budget for fiscal 2021. Both are expected to get Cabinet approval later this month, the officials said.

"We will maintain employment, keep businesses going and revive the economy," Suga said at a meeting of the government's Council on Economic and Fiscal Policy.

The package is the first drawn up to fight the pandemic since Suga took office in mid-September. It came as Japan has seen record numbers of new coronavirus cases, seriously ill patients and daily death tolls in recent weeks, raising concern over the strain on the medical system.

Separately, the government said Tuesday that the domestic economy in the July-September period grew an annualized real 22.9 percent from the previous quarter. The figure was up from the preliminary figure of 21.4 percent, and a sharp turnaround after a state of emergency over the virus caused it to shrink an annualized 29.2 percent in the April-June period.

With help from the package, the government aims to get the economy back to pre-pandemic levels next fiscal year, the officials said. But, some economists caution negative growth could return amid the recent resurgence of virus infections. The latest stimulus follows a total of 57.60 trillion yen earmarked in two previous extra budgets for the current fiscal year and raises concerns over Japan's fiscal health, the worst among major developed countries.

Japan's public debt already exceeded 1,100 trillion yen as of the end of fiscal 2019, more than double its gross domestic product, and its total budget for fiscal 2020 has swelled to over 160 trillion yen even before the compilation of a third extra budget. Among the latest stimulus steps, the government's "Go To Travel" subsidy campaign launched in July will continue until June next year, beyond its original end date of late January. The program has recently been criticized for putting a priority on reviving the economy rather than preventing the further spread of the virus.

The government will extend until late February a special measure to boost financial assistance to companies that have been forced to furlough employees due to worsening business conditions amid the pandemic. The measure was due to expire at the year-end. The government will also increase subsidies to help local governments make up for losses suffered by restaurants and bars that comply with requests to shorten their operating hours. Financial support for medical institutions will also be raised to secure more beds for COVID-19 patients and prepare for administering vaccinations.

UNICEF Seeks \$2.5b for Children Affected by Poverty in MENA

PARIS (Dispatches) - The UN children's agency Monday appealed for \$2.5 billion in new funds for 39 million children in the Middle East and North Africa impacted by war, poverty and the coronavirus pandemic.

"The region is home to the highest number of children in need in the world," said Ted Chaiban, UNICEF regional director for the Middle East and North Africa.

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"This is largely due to man-made crises including armed conflicts, poverty and economic stagnation."

He said the latest appeal "aims to reach children with critical humanitarian assistance and continue responding to the massive needs emerging as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic".

Children are most in need in war-torn Yemen, in and outside conflict-ravaged Syria, and in Sudan, UNICEF said in a statement. In Yemen, 12 million children, or almost every child, need assistance after five years of conflict, it said. In Syria, 4.8 million children need aid after a civil war has killed more than 380,000 people, displaced millions and ravaged the economy. A further 2.5 million live as refugees in neighboring countries after their parents fled the almost ten-year conflict. In Sudan, 5.3 million children need aid because of unprecedented floods, an economic crisis and a sweeping political transition from autocratic rule toward democracy.

In Lebanon, 1.9 million children now rely on assistance as the economy has plummeted and following a massive explosion in Beirut that killed more than 200 people and ravaged large parts of the capital in August.

Most funds requested in UNICEF's appeal would go towards supporting children's education, while the rest would ensure access to water, sanitation, healthcare and nutrition, and mental health support, it said.

"We hear of fatigue to fund long-term crises like in Yemen and Syria," Chaiban said.

But he stressed that "the world cannot turn a blind eye to the needs of children impacted by two of the most horrific conflicts in recent history.



German Investor Morale Rises in December

BERLIN (Reuters) - German investor sentiment soared more than expected in December on expectations that vaccines against the coronavirus will boost the outlook for Europe's largest economy, a survey showed on Tuesday.

The ZEW economic research institute said its survey of investors' economic sentiment moved up to 55.0 from 39.0 in the previous month. A Reuters poll had forecast a reading of 45.5.

"The announcement of imminent vaccine approvals makes financial market experts more confident about the future," ZEW President Achim Wambach said in a statement. A separate gauge of current conditions fell, however, to -66.5 from -64.3 in the previous month. That compared with a consensus forecast of -66.0 points.

Germany is rushing to prepare vaccination centres across the country so it can start offering shots quickly once a vaccine has been approved in Europe. Britain began the mass vaccination of its population against COVID-19 on Tuesday. The investor morale data reinforced other positive news on the German economy, which grew by 8.5% quarter-on-quarter from July through September after plunging 9.8% plunge in the second quarter during first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Booming car sales drove a stronger-than-expected jump in German industrial output in October, in a further sign that export-oriented manufacturing helped the economy to get off to a solid start in the fourth quarter.

The German government has unleashed an unprecedented array of rescue and stimulus measures to help companies and consumers get through the COVID-19 pandemic as unscathed as possible, including incentives to buy electric and hybrid cars. Industrial output was up by 3.2% on the month in October after an upwardly revised increase of 2.3% the month before, figures released by the Federal Statistics Office showed on Monday. That was the biggest increase since June.

Turkey "New Safe Haven" for Int'l Investors

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkey will be part of the solution in the post pandemic quest to diversify global supply chains, opening significant opportunities for investors, Finance Minister Lutfi Elvan tells the International Investment Forum.

Turkey's economy administration focuses on macroeconomic, financial and price sustainability, says finance minister. Turkey is offering significant opportunities for investors looking for a new and safe haven, and the country launched a mobilisation in the economy and justice fields to

become an attraction centre for investments.

Turkey will resolutely implement reforms that will make the future predictable for investors, the country's treasury and finance minister Lutfi Elvan told the International Investment Forum on Tuesday.

The five-day virtual forum, which began on Monday, was organised by the International Investors Association.

Turkey has well developed production, as well as research and development (R&D) infrastructure and the Turkish industry is able to manufacture almost every product, Elvan noted.

"In the manufacturing industry, we have a supplier infrastructure that works flawlessly and can quickly adapt to changing conditions," he underlined.

In Turkey, with its dynamic start-up atmosphere is getting stronger every day, especially in the fintech, biotechnology, and game industries, he stressed.

The diversity of logistical facilities, incentives, and especially dynamic and qualified workforce raise profits and productivity of all entrepreneurs who invest in Turkey, he added.

He also said the economy administration focused on macroeconomic, financial, and price sustainability.

"We will solve every problem in a transparent, accountable, rational, and predictable manner under the market economy rules," he highlighted, adding: "We are very determined to fight against inflation, and the Central Bank has all kinds of instrument independence."

Touching on the pandemic conditions, he said global supply chains have been changing with several multinational companies seeing disadvantages of depending on a single supplier in this process.

"In the coming period, new production locations will probably appear, and Turkey offers significant opportunities for investors looking for a new and safe haven," he stressed.

Saudi Daily Oil Exports To U.S. Fall to Lowest Level in 3 Decades

JEDDAH (Dispatches) - Daily exports of Saudi crude oil to the U.S. recently fell to their lowest level in three

decades, with industry experts putting the drop down to increased demand from Asia and a change in the energy dynamic between the two countries.

Data from the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) showed that two weeks ago 73,000 barrels per day (bpd) were shipped from the Kingdom to American refineries.

The figure represents the lowest daily amount on record since June 2010. However, going by monthly figures, it would also be the least since 1985 when Saudi imports fell to zero for several months as part of a price war. Saudi Arabia has 16 percent of the world's proved oil reserves and is the largest exporter of total petroleum liquids in the world. According to the EIA, in 2012 the Kingdom became the second-largest petroleum exporter to the US, surpassing Mexico, but still behind Canada.

EIA data showed that May 2003 was when Saudi exports to the U.S. hit the highest level, with 2,244,000 bpd, followed by May 1991 (2,053,000 bpd), April 2003 (2,024,000 bpd), August 1991 (1,964,000 bpd), and June 2003 (1,921,000 bpd).

Dr. Bassam Fattouh, director of the Oxford Institute for Energy Studies, told Arab News it would be too simple to assume that the recent slump in oil exports was to do with US President Donald Trump losing the recent presidential election. He pointed out that oil was a highly liquid global market and crude reserves would flow to where they were most needed and to where exporters could capture the highest value. "This is regardless of who the U.S. president is," he said, adding that increased Asian demand was also a big factor.

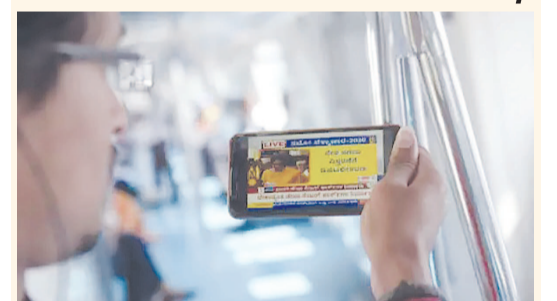
"While the rise in virus cases in the US are causing a slowdown in demand, and refineries have been running below their norms, crude demand in Asia has been strong and this has been reflected in the strong differentials especially for sour crudes destined to Asian refineries."

Energy and oil marketing adviser Faisal Faeg, who previously worked for OPEC and oversaw the US market when he was employed by Saudi Aramco, said that the latest slump was unlikely to be long-term as American refineries were configured to process Saudi medium sour crude grades.

Some observers have been quick to point that the US is becoming more energy independent by developing shale, but Faeg believed this was not the case.

"It is not about the US being independent in crude after the shale revolution as Saudi Aramco still owns the largest oil refinery in North America, and the latest developed and the most sophisticated, which is located in Port Arthur, Texas with a crude capacity of more than 600,000 barrels per day."

Fitch Improves Forecast of Indian Economy



NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - Fitch Ratings on Tuesday raised India's GDP forecast to -9.4 per cent in the current fiscal year to March 2021 from a previously projected contraction of 10.5 per cent after the economy staged a sharper rebound in the second quarter.

In its Global Economic Outlook, Fitch said the coronavirus recession has inflicted severe economic scarring and the country needs to repair balance sheets and increase caution about long-term planning.

"We now expect GDP to contract 9.4 per cent in the fiscal year to end March 2021 (FY21) (+1.1 percentage point), followed by +11 per cent growth (unchanged) and +6.3 per cent growth (+0.3pp) in the following years," the rating agency said.

The projections compare to a GDP growth of 4.2 per cent in 2019-20 (April 2019 to March 2020) fiscal and 6.7 per cent annual expansion between 2015 and 2019.

In September, Fitch had sharply lowered its forecast for India's gross domestic product (GDP) to a contraction of 10.5 per cent in current fiscal 2020-21 (FY21) versus its previous estimate of 5 per cent contraction.

On Tuesday, Fitch said the Indian economy staged a sharper rebound in the July-September quarter from the coronavirus-induced recession. GDP fell 7.5 per cent year-on-year, up from -23.9 per cent in the April-June quarter.

"The rebound in activity was especially sharp in the manufacturing sector: output reached its pre-pandemic level in 3Q20 (July-September), and the manufacturing PMI hints at further gains," it said adding that manufacturing is buoyed by strong demand for autos and pharmaceutical products, in particular.

The rebound in the services sector was more muted amid continued social distancing, with containment measures scaled back only gradually.

"The outlook is brighter owing to an expected rollout of various vaccines in 2021. India has pre-ordered 1.6 billion doses including 500 million doses of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine. Distribution should allow a faster-than-expected easing of social-distancing restrictions and boost sentiment," it said.

“Ojagh” to Vie at Japanese Festival of MIUVEF

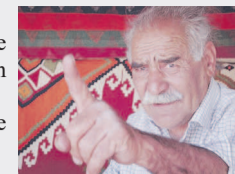
TEHRAN (MNA) – Iranian short documentary ‘Ojagh’ by Ali Bolandnazar has been named as one of the finalists to vie at the First MEIHODO International Youth Visual Media Festival (MIUVEF) in Japan.

‘Ojagh’ is about the folk customs of the Qashqai Clan, and the place and role of the ojagh or oven among the

people of the Qashqai Clan.

This short documentary has also nominated for the Tourism Section Award of the 6th Bosnian-Herzegovinian Film Festival as well as many domestic film festivals.

It has won an award for the best short documentary at the 23rd edition of Religion Today Film Festival in Italy.



Russia's Economy Recovered Quicker Than Most of Industrialized World

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Moscow's targeted approach to supporting Russia's economy during the pandemic has helped it bounce back from the crisis quicker than most of the industrialized world, says a deputy finance minister.

Although the Kremlin's Rbs4tn (\$54.3bn) Covid-19 support package amounted to a scant 4 per cent of gross domestic product, or less than a tenth of the assistance provided by Germany, Italy, and the US, Russia estimates the contraction in its GDP has slowed from 8 per cent year-on-year in the spring to 3.6 per cent in the third quarter of 2020, which placed it in the top five of G20 nations.

Russia benefited from a stimulus ordered by president Vladimir Putin before the virus struck, of which Rbs1.75tn has been spent this year.

“It's a myth that Russia's anti-crisis package was small,” Vladimir Kolychev said in an interview with the Financial Times. “The economy doesn't care how you paint your expenditure. The important thing is that it increased.”

The country was able to make a quick recovery because targeted spending made it more efficient in handling the coronavirus crisis, Mr Kolychev added.

He said Russia had boosted government spending in total by 27 per cent this year, a figure Moscow claims is higher than that of any EU country.

“It's obvious that Russia's economy suffered less in the second quarter and recovered more quickly in the third quarter,” Mr Kolychev said. “That's not just because of our support measures, but because the quarantine itself in Russia was structured differently than in Europe.” Russia has recorded more Covid-19 cases than all but three countries worldwide, hitting a new daily record of 29,093 on Sunday.

Mr Putin, however, chose not to impose a nationwide lockdown in favour of delegating patchwork measures to local authorities who largely left Russia's industry alone while shutting the consumer sector almost entirely. The recovery plan eschewed tapping Russia's \$167bn cushion of savings from its oil and gas wealth to make direct payments to businesses and citizens in favour of tax holidays and loan guarantees.

Elina Ribakova, deputy chief economist at the Institute of International Finance, said Russia's “proactive fiscal support” in the wake of Covid-19 had been small. “Not surprising as Russia was facing a triple shock in 2021 from Covid, oil and risk of sanctions given the US election.”

She said the country would have “one of the smallest contractions globally due to the arithmetic of keeping lockdowns limited to keep economic damage under control”.

She added: “Unfortunately, it is not clear whether in Russia the healthcare system is capable of handling so many Covid cases.”

Mr Kolychev said Russia's Rbs500bn in yearly payments to families with children — one of the few direct support measures in the coronavirus package — had helped consumer activity grow 3 to 5 per cent in the second quarter and continue to rise 1 to 2 per cent.

Moscow also passed several tax breaks for sectors including small businesses and the petrochemicals, including a cut from 20 to 3 per cent for IT businesses.

Mr Kolychev claimed the contraction in Russia's GDP would have been negligible if not for the Opec+ deal of oil producers that limited production during the first wave of the pandemic. Vladimir Kolychev, a deputy finance minister, said Russia's Rbs500bn in yearly payments to families with children had helped consumer activity grow © Luke MacGregor/Bloomberg

“European countries haven't grown their expenditure as quickly. The US, Canada, and Australia might have, but their programs evidently were set up in a way that didn't lead to quick growth in consumer spending. They recovered, but there hasn't been a consumer boom,” he said.



“We wanted to use these temporary benefits to target growth in places where people had the most problems with their income. If you give everyone [money], including the rich, then the rich are hardly going to change their consumption habits.”

Mr Kolychev defended Russia's decision not to spend the \$167bn national wealth fund, squirrelled away from surplus oil and gas revenue, on economic stimulus payments, saying it had to be saved to “spread natural resource revenue fairly among the generations over time” rather than used as a way out of the crisis.

The finance ministry has used some of the fund to cover budget shortfalls during the pandemic, but has doubled its domestic borrowing to Rbs5tn rather than tapping its oil savings to boost spending.

Mr Kolychev said: “When there's a fall, the private sector is careful about spending and doesn't want to go into debt, and the financial sector doesn't want to give debt to the private sector because it knows the risks of default might be quite high. That creates a space for the state to borrow more without there being issues for the availability of debt financing for the private sector.”

Last month, Russia raised €2bn in eurobonds for the first time this year, taking advantage of favourable market conditions at a time when the Kremlin fears US president-elect Joe Biden's administration could ramp up sanctions on Moscow next year.

Mr Kolychev said the country had drawn up plans to ease the impact of any future US sanctions that would bar foreigners from holding Russia debt. Those potential countermeasures include regulatory easing for Russian borrowers and a possible pause in future issuances to ease pressure on the secondary market.

But even though foreigners hold more than a third of Russia's rouble bonds, Mr Kolychev said Moscow could replace them through local demand if required.

“Foreign holdings of Russia's sovereign debt haven't gone up much in cash terms in the last two years,” he said. “That essentially means that as far as debt is concerned, there isn't that much reliance on foreign investors. Our domestic financial system can easily handle the existing level of borrowing.”

Deforestation Wiped Out 8% of Amazon in 18 Years



SAO PAULO (Dispatches) - Deforestation in the Amazon destroyed an area bigger than Spain from 2000 to 2018, wiping out eight percent of the world's largest rainforest, according to a study released Tuesday.

The Amazon plays a vital role in curbing climate change, but destruction of the rainforest has only accelerated in recent years, found the study by the Amazon Geo-Referenced Socio-Environmental Information Network (RAISG).

Since the turn of the millennium, 513,016 square kilometers (198,077 square miles) of the rainforest have been lost, according to the updated Amazon atlas produced by the organization, a consortium of groups from across the region.

It is RAISG's first such atlas since 2012.

“The Amazon is far more threatened than it was eight years ago,” RAISG said in a statement.

The consortium found that after making gains against deforestation early in the century, the Amazon region has again slipped into a worrying cycle of destruction.

Deforestation hit a high of 49,240 square kilometers of forest loss in 2003 — a record for this century — then eased to a low of 17,674 square kilometers in 2010, the report said.

But the destruction has since surged to startling levels. “Deforestation has accelerated since 2012. The annual area lost tripled from 2015 to 2018,” the study found.

“In 2018 alone, 31,269 square kilometers of forest were destroyed across the Amazon region, the worst annual deforestation since 2003.”

The destruction is fueled by logging, farming, ranching, mining and infrastructure projects on formerly pristine forest land.

Southeast Asia to Take a Major Economic Hit If Shipping Blocked in South China Sea

BEIJING (Dispatches) - A military conflict in the South China Sea would force most shipping from Europe, the Middle East and Africa destined for Asia and the U.S. west coast to be diverted around the south of Australia.

The additional shipping cost would bring reductions in economic activity around the world, but with dire effects on countries at the epicenter, according to a study published by the US National Bureau of Economic Research.

The study shows that the countries most exposed to economic loss from a regional maritime conflict are already spending more on their militaries.

The authors, Kerem Cosar and Benjamin Thomas from the University of Virginia, comment that the findings are ‘consistent with the idea that these perceived threats could set in motion a rapid arms race for the countries involved’.

About 80% of global trade is carried by sea, and estimates of the volume carried through the South China Sea range from 20% to 33%.

The area is subject of numerous overlapping territorial disputes involving China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Taiwan, Malaysia and Brunei, while China's construction of artificial islands with military installations has made it a focus of tension with the United States.

The study assumes that a conflict would close the Malacca Strait between Malaysia and Indonesia and

would stop all east-west passage between the Pacific and Indian Oceans through the South China Sea.

It would not be practicable to reroute shipping through the Torres Strait to the north of Australia because coral reefs and shallow depths make it too hazardous for large vessels.

Facing a total freeze on international shipping, Taiwan's economy would contract by a third, while Singapore's economy would fall by 22%, according to the baseline estimate. Hong Kong, Vietnam, the Philippines and Malaysia would suffer falls of between 10% and 15%.

The modelling shows the economic impact would be lowest for countries with shorter trade routes and those best able to offset the loss of international trade with domestic spending.

China's economy would only face a loss of 0.7% because it has huge domestic markets and ports outside the potential conflict zone.

While the authors comment that conflict would carry real costs for China, they note that the much larger burden on others in the region demonstrates ‘the possibility of a large country maintaining control over the region by imposing substantial costs on smaller countries’.

The modelling exercise shows Australia would suffer a drop of between 1.9% and 3.1%. The economies of Japan and South Korea would fall by between 2% and 3%.

Iran Not destabilizing...

FROM PAGE 1

“Israel is attacking Hezbollah, Hezbollah is not attacking Israel,” he said, adding that Israel should not attack “the territories of sovereign UN members.”

Viktorov also rejected the idea that Israel coordinates such attacks with Russia, saying any warning Jerusalem gives Moscow on such attacks is about the safety of Russian forces in Syria — there to support the regime as it quells a lingering civil war. “There is no way that we are approving any Israeli strikes on Syria, never in the past and never in the future,” he stressed.

Israel has a channel of communication with Russia to prevent the two countries' militaries from clashing in the Syria arena. However, in 2018, Russia blamed Israel when Syrian air defenses accidentally shot down a Russian plane during an airstrike, killing all 15 crew members.

Israel, which rarely admits to carrying out the strikes, has kept up a determined campaign aimed at keeping Iran-backed fighters from gaining a foothold in Syria.

The campaign has included thousands of airstrikes on targets linked to Iran and alleged weapons convoys, according to reports and accounts from officials speaking anonymously.

Tehran Ready to...

FROM PAGE 1

Rouhani called the relations with the friendly and neighboring country of Azerbaijan good and brotherly, saying, “The will of the Islamic Republic of Iran is to develop relations with the Republic of Azerbaijan, and we hope to use the opportunity to create new international conditions to further develop relations between the two countries.”

Appreciating the support of the Islamic Republic of Iran for the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, Jeyhun Bayramov, for his part, said, “We consider Iran as our good friend and neighbor, and the will of the President and Azerbaijani officials is the comprehensive development of relations with Iran.”

Referring to the liberation of the occupied territories of this country and the revival of 132 km of border with Iran, he added, “Azerbaijan's border with Iran is a border of friendship and development, and we believe that the revival of these borders can create new cooperation projects for the two countries.”

He emphasized the development and deepening of relations with Iran in political, economic and trade fields, saying, “The implementation of the Rasht-Astara railway project will increase economic and trade cooperation between the two countries.”

Bayramov expressed hope that with the new international conditions and the removal of existing obstacles caused by US sanctions, joint cooperation projects between the two countries will be implemented and operational quickly.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan also condemned the assassination of the Iranian scientist Martyr Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, stressing, “The assassination of a scientific scientist is not acceptable in any way and we strongly condemn this action.”

Tehran, Beijing...

FROM PAGE 1

Majid Karimi said: “Iran is at the frontline of the fight against drugs in the world. In the first 11 months of the current year, the Iranian police confiscated more than 900 tons of various drugs, and it will reach more than one thousand by the end of the year.”

Confirming Brigadier General Karimi's remarks, Yun LIANG, Executive Secretary-General, NNCC of China, stressed the need for more cooperation between the two countries in the fight against narcotics and said: “According to the memorandum of understanding between the two countries in the fight against narcotics, cooperation should be strengthened.”

Yun LIANG added: “The Anti-Narcotics Police of Iran has valuable experiences in the field of counter-narcotics, and the cooperation between the two countries will be crucial.”

Iran to Start Imports...

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Meanwhile the spokeswoman for Iran's Ministry of Health announced in her presser that 1,072,620 people in the country have been infected with the coronavirus, and 765,639 of the total infected people recovered.

According to definitive laboratory findings from yesterday to December 9, 2020, newly diagnosed patients with COVID-19 reached 10,223 cases out of whom 1,747 patients were hospitalized, the Spokeswoman for Iran's Ministry of Health Sima Sadat Lari stated. She added that in the past 24 hours, 295 COVID-19 patients had lost their lives, bringing the total death toll to 51,212.

5,779 COVID-19 patients are in critical condition.

So far, 6,523,409 COVID-19 diagnosis tests have been conducted across the country, the Health Ministry spokeswoman noted. Currently, 64 counties are in the red zone, 278 are in the orange zone, and 106 are in the yellow zone.

U.S. Sanctions...

FROM PAGE 1

Iran's Foreign Ministry Spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh had previously verified the appointment and Iran's reputable news agencies widely reported on the development.

The Treasury echoed Ortagus' accusation back then that Irloo was “linked” to Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), without providing any proof.

The Al-Mustafa International University, an open university that is based in the north-central city of Qom, was another target of the Tuesday bans. The Treasury likewise alleged groundlessly that the academic center was tied to the Iranian elite forces.

The U.S. resumed its economic war against Iran in 2018 after leaving an international nuclear accord between the Islamic Republic and world powers, and returning the inhumane sanctions that the deal had lifted.

Both Washington's departure from the agreement and its reinstatement of the sanctions are in outright violation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2231 that has endorsed the nuclear agreement.

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Woods' Hall of Fame Induction on Hold

NEW YORK (Reuters) - Tiger Woods' induction into the World Golf Hall of Fame will have to wait, after organizers said they were postponing the 2021 ceremony until the following year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The 15-time major winner will be inducted alongside 11-time PGA winner Susie Maxwell Bernard, former PGA Tour Commissioner Tim Finchem and the late Marion Hollins, who broke barriers as one of the few female developers of golf courses in the sport's history.

Newcastle Reopen Training Center

LONDON (Reuters) - Newcastle United players will report for training at the club's training centre on Tuesday, a week after it was closed because several players and staff tested positive for COVID-19. The rising number of positive cases forced Newcastle to lodge a request to postpone last Friday's league match at Aston Villa which was approved by the Premier League Board. "Newcastle United's players will train at the training centre today following a temporary closure last week due to a rise in COVID-19 cases," the club said in a statement.

Juventus Thrash Barcelona; Man United Out of Champions League

LONDON (Dispatches) - Cristiano Ronaldo netted two penalties as Juventus outclassed Barcelona 3-0 at the Camp Nou to claim top spot in Champions League Group G. It was Ronaldo's first meeting with Barcelona and Lionel Messi since leaving their bitter rivals Real Madrid in 2018 and though the pair briefly embraced before kick-off on Tuesday night, it was Ronaldo who quickly made his mark. The Portugal star tested Barca goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen early on, before opening the scoring from the spot in the 13th minute after being felled by Ronald Araujo. Defender Danilo flashed an effort just wide as the visitors cranked up the pressure, with a stunning Weston McKennie volley putting the Italian champions two goals up and in full control seven minutes later. Ronaldo got his second penalty when Clement Lenglet was penalised for handball seven minutes after the restart. As he could twice celebrate with his trademark leap, Messi was left frustrated as he failed to beat Gianluigi Buffon with his five shots on target. Things almost got worse for the Catalans 15 minutes from time when Leonardo Bonucci thought he had scored, only for a VAR review to show he had been offside as he bundled the ball in from close range. Both sides had already qualified for the knockout stages before kick-off and while they end the group phase on 15 points, Juve take first place by virtue of a superior head-to-head record. Under-fire Barca boss Ronald Koeman was left furious, however, at the nature of his side's display. Borussia Dortmund struck twice in the space of 11 second-half minutes to seal a 2-1 victory at Zenit St Petersburg in the Champions League on Tuesday and clinch top spot in Group F.



The game also witnessed a moment of history, with Dortmund's 16-year-old striker Youssoufa Moukoko becoming the youngest-ever player to feature in a Champions League match when he replaced Felix Passlack in the second half. Lazio sneaked into the Champions League lat 16 for the first time in over 20 years despite being held to a 2-2 draw at home to Club Brugge, who played the entire second half with 10 men. Manchester United were eliminated despite a late rally as they suffered a 3-2 defeat at RB Leipzig. The Germans were totally dominant in the early stages and raced into a two-goal lead with goals from Angelino and Amadou Haidara, before a third in the second half from Justin Kluivert. A Bruno Fernandez penalty sparked the visitors into life in the 80th minute and a Paul Pogba header soon after set up a tense finale, but it all came too late for United who were left to rue a sloppy start and will now drop into the Europa League. The Champions League match between Paris Saint-Germain and Istanbul Basaksehir was suspended after both teams walked off the pitch following an alleged racist slur by the fourth official. Play was initially halted after a row initiated in the 14th minute when Pierre Webo, Basaksehir's assistant coach, was sent off. A much-changed Chelsea side were left frustrated in front of their own supporters as Krasnodar earned a 1-1 draw in the Champions League dead rubber at Stamford Bridge. In the other Group E match, Jules Kounde's fine volley from the edge of the box and Youssef En Nesyri's double sealed a 3-1 win for section runners-up Sevilla at Rennes, who grabbed a consolation through Georginio Rutter's late penalty

Kenin Named WTA Player of the Year



LONDON (Reuters) - American Sofia Kenin has been named WTA Player of the Year after winning her maiden Grand Slam singles title at the Australian Open. Kenin defeated World No. 1 Ashleigh Barty in the semi-finals and twice Grand Slam champion Garbine Muguruza in the final to claim the title at Melbourne Park. Kenin also reached the French Open final and finished the season ranked a career-high No. 4. The 22-year-old is the eighth American to win the WTA Player of the Year accolade, joining Serena Williams, Martina Navratilova, Lindsay Davenport, Tracy Austin, Chris Evert, Venus Williams and Jennifer Capriati. Iga Swiatek, who became the first Polish player to win a Grand Slam singles title when she beat Kenin in the French Open final, was named the WTA's Most Improved Player of the Year. Former world number one Victoria Azarenka was named WTA Comeback Player of the Year after she claimed her first title in over four years at the Western & Southern Open and advanced to her fifth career Grand Slam final at the U.S. Open. The Belarusian also regained her spot in the WTA Top 20.

Europe's Top Sides Handed Straightforward Routes to Qatar

ZURICH (Reuters) - England were pitted against old rivals Poland in their World Cup qualifying group after a draw which left Europe's top sides with apparently straightforward routes to the 2022 tournament in Qatar. Spain, France, Italy, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Portugal, Croatia and England all avoided each other thanks to the seeding system and, barring major upsets, should qualify comfortably for the tournament in Qatar. Instead, the main excitement is likely to be the scramble among the middle-ranking teams to finish second in their groups and qualify for the play-offs. Under a revised format, the 10 group winners qualify directly for Qatar while the runners-up go into a play-off system along with the best two teams from the Nations League, a separate competition. Those 12 teams will be divided into three paths of four, with the winners of each also going to Qatar. The group stage will be played between March and November next year with the play-offs in March 2022. World champions France were drawn in Group D alongside Ukraine -- a side they recently beat 7-1 in a friendly -- Finland, Bosnia and distant Kazakhstan in European Group D. Old rivals England and Poland will face each other again as they were placed in Group I along with Hungary, Albania, Andorra and San Marino. Poland, led by prolific forward Robert Lewandowski, were arguably the most dangerous side among the second seeds. The two sides have been paired in five previous World Cup qualifying competitions, with Poland famously reaching the 1974 World Cup at England's expense. Spain must get past Sweden, who qualified for the 2018 World Cup at the expense of Italy, in Group B, although even if they finish second, they will still have another bite of the cherry in the play-offs. Greece, Georgia and Kosovo are the other teams in that group. Cristiano Ronaldo's Portugal, the current European champions, must face Serbia, Ireland, Luxembourg, Azerbaijan in Group A while Belgium meet Wales, Czech Republic, Belarus, Estonia in Group E. Even off-colour Germany should be able to get through Group J where their opponents are Romania, Iceland, North Macedonia, Armenia and Liechtenstein. Group F appeared to be the most evenly-balanced group featuring Denmark, Austria, Scotland, Israel, Faroe Islands and Moldova. Croatia, runners-up in 2018, will face Slovakia, Russia, Slovenia, Cyprus and Malta in Group H. The Russian match will be a repeat of the 2018 World Cup quarter-final which Croatia won on penalties after a 2-2 draw.

Pogba Wants to Leave Manchester United



LONDON (Dispatches) - Paul Pogba is "unhappy" at Manchester United and should leave in the next transfer window, his agent Mino Raiola said, in comments that may signal the exit of the one-time world's most expensive player. Raiola said the World Cup-winning France midfielder, 27, needs a "change of scene" after struggling to establish himself under United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer. "Paul's unhappy at Manchester United, he can't express himself any more as he would like to and as we expect of him," Raiola told Italian newspaper Tuttosport. "He has to change teams, he needs a change of scene. His contract is up in a year-and-a-half,

in the summer of 2022, but I think the best solution for all sides is a transfer in the next window." He added that Pogba, who returned from a spell at Juventus for a then world record fee of £89 million (\$118 million) in 2016, has no plans to extend his contract. "The club... knows it risks losing him for nothing, as at the moment the player has no intention of extending his contract," Raiola said. "If anyone doesn't understand, they don't understand anything about football." Pogba, eclipsed since the arrival of fellow attacking midfielder Bruno Fernandes, has repeatedly spoken of his frustrations at club level while on international duty. "He is in a situation with his club where he cannot be happy, neither with his playing time, nor with his positioning," France coach Didier Deschamps said last month. Pogba has also expressed his desire to play for Real Madrid one day, particularly if that means playing under the orders of Zinedine Zidane.

Argentine Senator Wants Maradona on Country's Bank Notes

Buenos Aires (Reuters) - An Argentine senator wants to put Diego Maradona on the country's bank notes and presented a project to Congress on Monday to get the late soccer star and possibly even his 'Hand of God' image on a 1,000-peso note. The note, worth around \$12.27 at Monday's exchange rate, would feature Maradona's face on one side and a picture of one of his most famous goals on the other, said the bill's sponsor Senator Norma Durango. Maradona's two most famous goals came in the 1986 World Cup quarter-final against England. He got the first by punching the ball past England goalkeeper Peter Shilton and the second by dribbling past half the England team to score what is still considered one of the greatest goals of all time. Argentina won the World Cup with a series of outstanding performances by Maradona, who died on Nov. 25 of a heart attack, age 60. "The idea is not just to recognize our most important idol but also to think of the economic question," said Durango. "We feel that when tourists come here they will want to take a 'Maradona' away with them." Although it was not clear which one of the two goals would feature, some Argentines bristled at the thought of the 'Hand of God' goal featuring on an official government document because it could be seen as condoning illegality. The Senator for the La Pampa province said the final decision would be made by lawmakers, who are expected to hear her proposal early next year. "The idea is to recognize Maradona, for good and for bad, who is the best known Argentine in the world," Durango said. "I feel the project has got a great response even though some people don't agree with it." The current 1,000-peso note features the national bird, the Rufous horned.



Australia Avoid T20 Whitewash Despite Kohli Blitz

Sydney (Reuters) - India captain Virat Kohli's breezy 85 went in vain as Australia prevailed by 12 runs in the final Twenty20 International to avoid a series whitewash at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Tuesday. Chasing 187 to sweep the three-match series, Kohli kept India in the hunt before falling in the penultimate over in the first full-capacity cricket match in Australia since the COVID-19 outbreak. Both sides were guilty of sloppy fielding and poor catching and Kohli was one of the beneficiaries. Steve Smith dropped him when Kohli was on nine, and Andrew Tye spilled a return catch when the batsman, who also survived a stumping opportunity later on, was on 19. Leg-spinner Mitchell Swepson (3-23), who dismissed Sanju Samson and Shreyas Iyer in his final over to hurt India's chase, was adjudged man-of-the-match. Earlier, Matthew Wade smashed a career-best 80 as he and Glenn Maxwell powered Australia to 186-5. Skipper Aaron Finch returned from a hip injury to score a duck and Smith made 24 before becoming spinner Washington Sundar's second victim. Maxwell joined Wade the middle and started messing with the bowlers' line and length by repeatedly playing the trademark reverse shot. The sloppy tourists did not help their cause either. Maxwell was caught at 18 at midwick but was recalled after a replay confirmed spinner Yuzvendra Chahal had overstepped. Deepak Chahar dropped Maxwell on 46 in the deep and Chahal spilled another chance with Shardul Thakur being the luckless bowler on both occasions. T Natarajan eventually bowled Maxwell for 54 off 36 balls. Australia had won the preceding ODI series 2-1. The teams will now lock horns in a four-test series starting on Dec. 17 at Adelaide.

