

The Joint Meeting of Iran Nuclear Deal Known as the JCPOA Is To Be Held on Wednesday Through Video-Conferencing at the Level of Deputy Foreign Ministers and Political Managers of 4+1

IRAN NEWS

Health Ministry spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari Said on Saturday That Some 221 More Iranians Have Died Over the Past 24 Hours From the Coronavirus Bringing The Total Deaths to 51,949

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2

DOMESTIC

Moroccan-Israeli Tie Normalization Betrayal of Islamic World



> SEE PAGE 2

3

DOMESTIC

Materializing Iran-Iraq \$20b Trade "Possible"

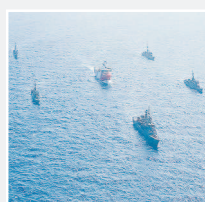


> SEE PAGE 3

4

INTERNATIONAL

Turkey Rejects EU Sanctions Plan as Erdogan Seeks Calm



> SEE PAGE 4

8

SPORTS

Rams Celebrate First Win Over Patriots Since 2001



> SEE PAGE 8

Iran COVID-19 Infections, Deaths Declining Thanks To Restrictions

TEHRAN (IFP) – President Hassan Rouhani says the trend of coronavirus infections and fatalities is on the decline thanks to the restrictions enforced and people's cooperation.

In comments on Saturday, President Hassan Rouhani further warned people against taking the COVID-19 lightly.

"One important issue that media should always highlight is the danger of regarding the coronavirus outbreak as something ordinary," he said.

"Whenever we feel that it is over and there are no problems and dangers anymore and that we have weathered the coronavirus crisis, a resurgence of the disease and a rise in figures will immediately start in the coming weeks," the president noted.

He said the first priority is to protect people's health. "Of course, coronavirus has not only affected people's health, but their economy, culture, lives and social issues as well, and everybody should help to contain the disease," he said.

President Rouhani noted Iran has never denied the risk posed by COVID-19.

See Page 7

IAEA Only Authorized To Monitor Iran Nuclear Work Under JCPOA

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is authorized to only monitor and verify Iran's voluntary measures in accordance with the 2015 nuclear agreement, says the Iranian permanent representative to Vienna-based international organizations, stressing that the agency has no right to assess the Iranian nuclear work.

"@iaeaorg sole role is to monitor and verify the voluntary nuclear-related measures as detailed in the JCPOA and to provide regular updates in this regard," Kazem Gharibabadi said in a post on his Twitter account on Friday, referring to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

Any assessment or analysis is out of the IAEA's mandate, he said.

The Iranian diplomat's tweet came in response to remarks made by the IAEA Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi, who told Sky News that Iran should not follow through on threats to increase uranium enrichment and throw out inspectors.

See Page 7

Iran, India, Uzbekistan to Talk On Joint Use Chabahar Port



NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India welcomes the interest of Uzbekistan to use the Chabahar port as a transit port, the MEA said in a statement

For the first time, India, Iran and Uzbekistan will hold a trilateral dialogue on Monday on joint use of the strategically located Chabahar port which is being increasingly seen as a fulcrum of connectivity to Central Asia. The announcement of the meeting was made by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).

"The first trilateral working group meeting between India, Iran and Uzbekistan on joint use of Chabahar Port will be held virtually on December 14," the MEA said.

The port is being developed by India, Iran and Afghanistan to boost trade ties among the three countries in the wake of Pakistan denying transit access to New Delhi.

Located in the Sistan-Balochistan province on the energy-rich Iran's southern coast, the port can be easily accessed from India's western coast, bypassing Pakistan. It is considered to be a major transit point to connect with several Central Asian countries.

The trilateral meeting is taking place in the backdrop of India pitching for participation of Uzbekistan in the International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC) project.

"India welcomes the interest of Uzbekistan to use the Chabahar port as a transit port. This would open up economic opportunities for the traders and business community of the region," the MEA said in a statement.

"Besides Uzbekistan, other Central Asian countries have also shown interest in using the port. India seeks to cooperate closely with regional countries on this issue," it said.

Ways to speed up connectivity projects linking Central Asia was a major focus of a virtual summit between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev.

The International North South Transport Corridor is a 7,200-km-long multi-mode transport project for moving freight among India, Iran, Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia, Central Asia and Europe.

Monday's meeting would be jointly chaired at the deputy minister level by Uzbekistan and Iran while the Indian delegation would be headed by a secretary-level officer.

Hezbollah Condemns Morocco-Israel Agreement on Normalization of Relations

BEIRUT (Dispatches)- Lebanon's Hezbollah resistance movement has strongly condemned the so-called agreement between Morocco and the Israeli regime on the normalization of relations, stressing that the Arab countries having relations with Tel Aviv will soon regret their move.

American President Donald Trump announced on Thursday that Morocco had reached a US-brokered agreement with Israel on the normalization of relations, becoming the fourth Arab country – After the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, and Sudan – to reach such an agreement with the Tel Aviv regime since August.

Morocco's royal court also confirmed the news and said that the US will open a consulate in the Western Sahara territory in line with the agreement.

"We condemn the announcement by the Moroccan authorities about the normalization of relations with the Israeli enemy. This move is in the context of the successive fall of a number of Arab governments that, at the behest of the United States and the Zionist regime, have undermined the Palestinian ideals and want to destroy it," said Hezbollah in a statement published on its official al-Manar website.

As part of the agreement, Trump who is due to leave office on January 20, agreed to recognize Morocco's "sovereignty" over the contested Western Sahara.

Morocco annexed the vast Western Sahara region, a former Spanish colony, in 1975 and has since been in conflict with the Algeria-backed Polisario Front, a movement that seeks to establish an independent state in the territory and end Morocco's presence there.

The provocative normalization agreements between Israel and three Arab countries have already sparked outrage among the Palestinians who view the agreements as stabs on their back and a betrayal of their cause.

"The submission of these governments to the US and Zionist blackmail policy in the hope of achieving gains here or lifting sanctions there, are nothing but illusions and mirages from which they will not gain anything, and they will quickly discover that they have reaped nothing but disappointment and that their country has become exposed to the Israeli enemy and its dangerous conspiracies," Hezbollah added.

West Urged to Put Aside Politicizing Chemical Weapons

NEW YORK (IRNA) - Iran's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations Majid Takht Ravanchi called on the Western states not to politicize issues consistent with prohibition of chemical weapons.

The Ambassador made the remarks while speaking at the United Nations Security Council's Friday meeting on the situation in the Middle East, Syria and the chemical weapons.

Iran condemns use of any kinds of chemical weapons, Takht Ravanchi said.

Below is the full text of his speech:

I would like to begin by congratulating you for assuming the Presidency of the Council for this month.

In contemporary history, Iran has been the main victim of the large-scale, most systematic and frequent use of chemical weapons during the eight-year war imposed on us by Saddam when some Western States, not only assisted Saddam in developing chemical weapons but also refrained from taking any action when he extensively used such weapons against our citizens and later against Iraqi citizens.

Such bitter experiences have thought us that no one should possess such inhumane weapons and the legal regime to prohibit their development and use, must not allow any sort of politicization.

See Page 7

FDI in Iran Industry, Mining, Trade Sectors Up by 71%

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The overall foreign investment in different industry, mining, and trade sectors of Iran grew by 71% over the past eight months of the current Iranian year in comparison to figures from the same period last year, according to statistics released by Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade.

Iran has attracted some \$1.022 million in foreign investments in the country's industry, mining, and trade sectors over the mentioned period, the report said.

It also suggested that the figure used to stand at \$597 million in the preceding period.

Germany, China, Turkey, and India were the main four countries making investments in Iran in the eight-month period, the report said, however, noting that the number of investors from Afghanistan were more than the number of investors from other countries.

India Pins Hope On Biden for Resuming Trade With Iran

KOLKATA (Dispatches) - After a dip in trading relations with Iran following the 2018 sanctions by the Trump administration, India is looking to revive its relations with the Persian Gulf nation under the Biden administration in 2021.

"One of the advantages of importing oil from Iran would be that India can bargain for a better payment condition as both countries have historically a good understanding in terms of payments. Also, oil prices are low and India can get a better deal," said Urvisha H. Jagasethi, a research analyst at CARE Ratings.

"As a buyer, I would like to have more buying places. I should have more destinations to go for purchasing [oil]," Dharmendra Pradhan, India's oil minister, is reported to have said recently.

During his campaign, U.S. President-elect Joe Biden said he wanted to offer Iran a "credible path back to diplomacy."

Until 2018, Indian imported large quantities of crude oil from Iran and exported rice, tea, sugar and pharmaceutical products, among other items.

The situation changed after the United States withdrew from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action 2018. Under the agreement, Iran was to halt much of its nuclear enrichment program, reduce its uranium stockpile and grant international inspectors extensive access to its facilities in exchange for relief from economic sanctions.

See Page 7



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Turkey Summons Iran Envoy

TEHRAN (MNA) – Turkey’s Foreign Ministry has reportedly summoned the Iranian ambassador to Ankara over Iranian officials’ protest against President Erdogan’s controversial remarks.

Ambassador Mohammad Farazmand has been summoned to hear ‘Ankara’s condemnation’ of allegation against Turkey and Erdogan, as well as protest the summoning of Turkish envoy to Tehran by the Iranian Foreign Ministry, Anadolu reported quoting unnamed sources.

“If Iran has discomfort with any issue related to Turkey, it is unacceptable for Iran’s foreign minister to target Turkey via Twitter if there are other channels to communicate,” the report says.

Moroccan-Israeli Tie Normalization Betrayal of Islamic World

TEHRAN (MNA) – The Secretary-General of the World Assembly of Islamic Awakening condemned the normalization of Moroccan relations with the Zionist regime, calling it as a betrayal of the Islamic world.

“Morocco announced its readiness to establish full relations with Israel 42 years ago during the reign of King Hassan II, following the infamous Camp David peace treaty between Egypt and Israel regime,” said Ali Akbar Velayati in a message issued on Friday.

“Two years after when the Zionist regime reached an agreement with the Palestine Liberation Organization, Morocco re-established full relations with the regime in 1995,” he added, saying, “It was forced to cut ties with the occupying regime in Quds after the beginning of the great Palestinian resistance intifada in 2000.”

“Unfortunately, over the past decades, Morocco has hosted a number of regime leaders, such as Isaac Robin and Shimon Peres, and has openly and covertly established close ties. Meanwhile, the Moroccan government did not restrict Israeli flights to Morocco, and tens of thousands of Israelis traveled to Morocco each year, so the recent normalization of Morocco’s relations with the Zionists is not a new issue,” Velayati highlighted.

He said, “The new point in announcing the normalization and establishment of a



new relationship is, in fact, the deal that took place between the triangle of the United States, Morocco, and the Zionist regime. In this deal, in the face of Morocco’s betrayal of Islam and the Palestinian cause, the United States recognized Morocco’s sovereignty over the Arabian Desert.”

“The World Assembly of Islamic Awakening condemns these betrayals by the Kingdom of Morocco, UAE, Bahrain, and Sudan and emphasizes that all leaders, personalities, elites, scholars, thinkers, intellectuals, academics of the Islamic world should condemn the recognition of this regime and confront this betrayal with political, social, media measures, as well as imposing sanctions on Israeli-made goods as the action of Morocco and some other reactionary countries is a betrayal of the Islamic world and the cause of Palestine,” he stressed.

On Thursday, Morocco became the fourth Arab country since August to strike a deal aimed at normalizing relations with the Israeli regime. The others were the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Sudan.

Azerbaijan, Ever Firm Citadel of Iran

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Foreign Ministry Spokesman advised the Turkish people who well know Iran’s history to remind their officials to review the roots of the poems they want to cite.

In a Friday tweet, Saeed Khatibzadeh said the Turkish ambassador was told that establishing foreign policy upon fantasies is not wise.

Khatibzadeh stressed that “Azarbaijan” has always been a fortified citadel of Iran.

The spokesman of Iran’s Foreign Ministry announced the summoning of the Turkish ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Iran Foreign Ministry in response to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s interfering and unacceptable remarks during his visit to Baku.

Khtibzadeh added that the Assistant Foreign Minister and the Director-General of Eurasia Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs summoned the Turkish ambassador to Tehran and, while conveying Iran’s strong protest, stressed an immediate explanation from the Turkish government in this regard.

“The Turkish ambassador was informed that the era of territorial claims and warmongering and expansionist empires has passed for many years,” the spokesman reminded.

He noted: “The Turkish ambassador was informed that the Islamic Republic of Iran does not allow anyone to interfere in its territorial integrity and, as its glorious history testifies, Iran does not draw in one’s horn regarding its national security.”

Mass Producing Gate Valves in Defiance of Sanctions Begins

TEHRAN (IFP) - Iran has put into service the production line for gate valves used in crude oil transfer pipelines despite the sanctions imposed on the country.

The production line was established by two major companies and was inaugurated in a ceremony by Vice President for Science and Technology Sorena Sattari.

The gate valves are used in a pipeline almost 1,000 km long taking oil from the Goreh area to the port of Jask.

It is one of important national projects transferring some 2 million barrels of crude oil daily.



Speaking at the ceremony, the vice president said good cooperation exists between knowledge-based start-ups and major corporations, which has seen innovation and creativity finding their way into old big companies.

“It is very important to support knowledge-based companies at a time of sanctions,” he said, adding the Science and Technology Department of the Presidential Office is doing so by supporting domestic production of goods.

“Currently, there are more than 5,500 knowledge-based firms in the country, which have created more than 300 thousand jobs,” he said.

Iran Scientific Achievements Significant Despite Enemy Efforts to Halt It

TEHRAN (IP) - Minister of Science, Research, and Technology stated that Iran has gained significant achievements in the research field, despite enemies’ efforts to stop it.

The honoring ceremony of selected research students and technologists held at the Education Ministry in presence of Minister of Science, Research, and Technology Mansour Gholami and Minister of Education Mohsen Haji-Mirzaei early morning on Saturday.

Delivering a speech at the ceremony, Gholami stated that Iran could meet the country’s needs amid the coronavirus outbreak with nearly 105 Scientific-Technology centers and 47 Scientific and Technology Parks.

“Iran has met its professional scientific and educational needs and is no more dependent on foreign countries after the Islamic Revolution,” Gholami noted.

“Iran stands beside scientifically developed countries and by their annual assessment it has developed significantly,” the minister highlighted.

The senior official noted that it is necessary to increase students’ self-belief and trust in order to develop the country.

“Iranian graduates are the source of serious improvements wherever they are in the world,” the minster said.

Iran’s Education Minister Mohsen Haji-Mirzaei also said that Iran has more than 600 research centers that help develop the country’s scientific sectors.

Haji-Mirzaei stated that by increasing students’ capabilities, the society will be developed too.

“Research is fundamental to solve the country’s issues and problems; moreover, it helps increase national capacity and capability,” he noted.

“Without research, life lacks quality; so Education Ministry plays an integral part to develop it,” the minister added.

At the end of the ceremony, some of the selected researchers were honored.



Israel Approaching Collapse



TEHRAN (IP)- The Chief Commander of Iran’s Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) emphasized that the Israeli came closer to its collapse with the assassination of Dr. Fakhrizadeh.

In a visit with the family of Martyr Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, prominent nuclear scientist, on Friday, Major General Hossein Salami noted that the enemy’s assassination of Dr. Fakhrizadeh and Lt. Gen. Qasem Soleimani made them brilliant, adding that the great sons of Iran who are assassinated by the US and Israeli regimes, bring great honors to their country.

He pointed to the decisive and gracious character of Martyr Fakhrizadeh. He noted that the enemies never tolerated such great men, saying, However, the loss of such men is painful to the country, and they are proof of the enemies’ oppression practiced on the Iranian nation.

General Salami stated that the beacon lit by the martyrs never extinguished and stressed that their shining path will be followed more than ever.

Saying that the Israeli regime accelerated its collapse and overthrow through the assassination of the nuclear and defense scientist Dr. Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, the Commander of IRGC emphasized: “The Zionist regime and its affiliates will definitely pay the price for these barbaric crimes, and the great nation of Iran will take its severe revenge on them in due time.”

Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, head of the Research and Innovation Organization of the Ministry of Defence of Iran, was martyred in a terrorist attack on Tehran’s outskirts on November 27.

U.S. Tempts Others to Sacrifice Palestinian Cause

TEHRAN (IP) - The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran stressed in a Twitter message that the United States is tempting other countries to sacrifice the Palestinian cause and shake hands with thieves in various ways.

The Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in a message on Twitter wrote: “The United States is trying to tempt others to sacrifice the Palestinian cause and shake hands with the thieves, either by removal from phony blacklists, by fobbing off F-35s or by recognizing the occupation, the U.S. regime tries to tempt others to sacrifice Palestinian cause and shake hands with lands thieves. It’s bullying and bribery, not peace or diplomacy.

Iranian Foreign Ministry added that such an approach won’t last long.

The White House claimed in a political statement that arms sale directly supports US foreign policy and national security goals by increasing the UAE’s deterrence.

The U.S. government announced to Congress on November 10 that it had approved the massive sale of General Atomics, Lockheed Martin and Raytheon products to the UAE. The deal includes more than 50 F-35 fighter jets and more than 14,000 bombs and ammunition.

Iran UN Envoy Hails Rejection of Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Iran’s ambassador to the United Nations welcomed the UN General Assembly’s rejection of an idea for the revival of an “Islamic Emirate” in Afghanistan.

Addressing the 40th Plenary Meeting of the UN General Assembly, entitled “The Situation in Afghanistan”, Majid Takht Ravanchi praised the Afghan government’s positive approach to peace talks with the Taliban.

The Iranian diplomat also welcomed the progress made in the peace talks and expressed Iran’s preparedness to play a more active role to help its success in coordination with the UN, Press TV reported. “A sustainable peace in Afghanistan should not be imposed from abroad,” he said, adding that the peace talks are not expected to resolve all the problems of the past decades overnight.

“All foreign players must avoid interfering in the peace talks that must be facilitated by the UN. In this regard, we welcome the General Assembly’s call for further UN interaction in the peace process,” Takht Ravanchi added.

The Iranian envoy said despite the beginning of peace talks, the security situation in Afghanistan is still worrying, as the number of attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure including educational and diplomatic centers is on the rise.

“We strongly condemn all these attacks, most of which are carried out by terrorist groups, especially Daesh whose elements are still being transferred from Syria and Iraq to Afghanistan,” he added.

Zam Executed on Charge Of “Corruption on Earth”

TEHRAN (IFP) - Iran has executed Rouhollah Zam, the administrator of an anti-Iran Telegram channel named Amad News, after his death penalty for “corruption on earth” was upheld by the Supreme Court.

He was executed on Saturday morning, according to Iranian official media.

Amad News was notorious for disseminating incriminating content against the Islamic establishment, insulting the sanctity of Iranian Muslims and publishing fake news in order to drive a wedge between the Iranian people and government.

Zam faced charges of having “committed offenses against the country’s internal and external security” and “espionage for the French intelligence service,” alongside “corruption on earth” as well as insult to “the sanctity of Islam” according to an indictment released in February.

He was arrested in October 2019 by the Intelligence Organization of Iran’s Islamic Revolution Guards Corp (IRGC).

No Foreign Interference Capable of Affecting Tehran-Baku Ties

TEHRAN (IRNA) - An Iranian lawmaker said on Saturday that foreigners cannot affect brotherly relations between Iran and Azerbaijan by meddling in their bilateral relations.

Tehran-Baku ties are too strong to be affected by any third country, Ghani Nazari Khanqah said. He said such relations would not be damaged through meddlesome remarks.

Commenting on recent remarks made by Turkey’s President Tayyip Erdogan in Baku, the lawmaker said the Turkish President should read history to find out that Azerbaijan has been part of Iran but was separated from the Iranian soil after the 1828 Turkmenchai Treaty.

“Pres. Erdogan was not informed that what he ill-recited in Baku refers to the forcible separation of areas north of Aras from the Iranian motherland. Didn’t he realize that he was undermining the sovereignty of the Republic of Azerbaijan? NO ONE can talk about OUR beloved Azerbaijan,” the Iranian Foreign Minister tweeted in a related development.

The Iranian lawmaker further said that President Erdogan should know that Turkey owes its today life to the braveness and sacrifice of the Iranian youth.

They were the Iranians who saved Turkey and Iraq when the two neighboring countries were exposed to threats by the terrorist group of Daesh (ISIS), the parliamentarian stressed, adding that it was Iran that gave tranquility to the regional people.

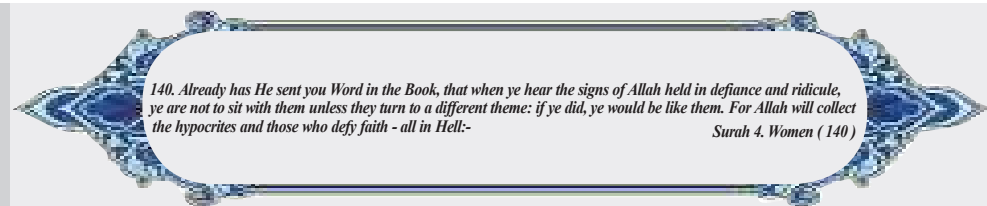
It is better for the Turkish president to study the history in order to well find out what sort of fate awaits those who had coveted the Iranian soil and territorial integrity, the lawmaker underlined.

He went on to say that Iran took a clear stance on the 44-day conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh region.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	11:58
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:12
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:36
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	07:06



Materializing Iran-Iraq \$20b Trade “Possible”

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Head of the Iran-Iraq Joint Chamber of Commerce believes Iran and Iraq can touch the set target for boosting their trade volume to \$20b and it is up to the foreign ministry to use its potentials for boosting trade.

Speaking to Tasnim News, Yahya Al-e Eshaq said that it is the skill and art of the foreign ministry in discovering how economic levers to be used for laying the ground for the political goals or vice versa.

He termed Iran's relations with Iraq a strategic one, adding that if Iran and Iraq's relations in the economic field are not very strategic it is at least one of the priorities for short and long terms.

He added that the base for Iran-Iraq economic relation has been set for trade volume of \$20b for next four years and last year both countries increased their trade volume up to but this year due to outbreak of coronavirus and sanctions may decline to \$9b by the yearend.

Al-e Eshaq reiterated that materialization of \$20b trade target with Iraq is possible, adding that the condition for touching the set target is that economy becomes one of the priorities of actors and decision-makers of the country in the economic and political fields and foreign ministry also decides to help for materialization of this goal.



Meanwhile Head of Iran-China joint Chamber of Commerce Majid-Reza Hariri said that although several times in the country's diplomacy system some economic and trade departments have been shaped, for years one can miss the economic diplomacy in our country.

Majid Reza Hariri further said that economy is not the priority of our officials in the international affairs, adding that decision of the country, establishment and politicians is not due to any reason to prioritize economy in the international affairs.

On the current trade condition of Iran and China, he said Iran and China's relation unlike the public assumption in the society does not just limit to imports and currently China is the major destination for Iran's non-oil exports.

On the problems and defects of Iran exports, he said major part of Iran's non-oil exports is related to the low price energy, and gas, condensate, petrochemical products and other energies account for 50 percent of Iran's non-oil exports.

He reiterated that the government by itself is unable to be present in the international markets and therefore, the government and the people (private sector) should have more contribution in this regard.

Culture Minister Invites Regional Actors to Coalesce on Inclusive Peace

TEHRAN (IP) - The Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance of Iran stressed the need to develop a comprehensive peace through a coalition of all active groups and actors in the West Asian region.

Abbas Salehi said in the second conference of 'Future of Peace and Human Rights in West Asia' that while Iran has extended its hands to maintain peace in the region, the US and Israeli regimes are trying to create chaos and destroying the possibility of any peace coalition by casting division and opening the space for the Takfiri terrorist groups.

Salehi said the intervention of the Western countries, particularly the US, as we as their militarism, the Israeli occupation, and Takfiri terrorist groups as the most elements of destroying the peace in the region, stressing the convergence of the countries to confront the problems.

"This region needs a return to the true principles of peace, principles that have been prevalent in this region for many years and were the source of coexistence and convergence," he stated.

Iran's Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance attributed the strong culture of peace and coexistence in the West Asian region to the monotheistic religions and noted that monotheistic religions have taught principles and foundations and have considered it as the basis of internal and external relations of societies that have had a great impact on the convergence of nations in the region.

The Second International Conference on the "Future of Peace and Human Rights in West Asia" was held by The Foundation of Dialogue and Solidarity of the United Nations through a webinar.

The Foundation of Dialogue and Solidarity of the United Nations is a non-governmental, non-political, trans-religious, and non-profit foundation established as a transnational organization with international goals to promote a culture of dialogue and world peace.

Iran-Syria Trade Volume Hits \$83m in 7 Months

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - In the first seven months of this current Iranian year, the value of goods exported to Syria was about \$ 73 million and the value of goods imported from Syria to Iran was about \$ 10 million, said the director-general of the Arab-African department of the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran.

Farzad Pilten said that the volume of Iran-Syria trade decreased and stated that, although in 2010 the trade volume between the two countries was 550 million dollars, in 2018 the trade volume between Iran and Syria reached 105 million dollars.

The Director-General of the Arab and African Department of the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran stated: Of the \$ 550 million in trade between the two countries in 2010, \$ 520 million was the value of Iran's exports to Syria and \$ 30 million was the value of goods imported from Syria to Iran.

Regarding the trade volume between Iran and Syria this current Iranian year (starting on March 21),

he added: "In the first seven months of this year, the trade volume between the two countries was \$ 83 million, of which \$ 73 million were exports to Syria and about \$ 10 million were imports from Syria."

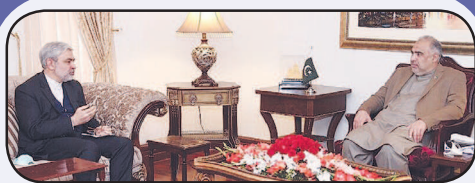
"The main products exported to Syria are powdered milk, auto parts, pipes and profiles, various types of iron and steel rods, etc.," Pilten said.

He pointed out that from 2008 to 2018, the export of technical and engineering services to Syria was about \$ 2.2 billion, he said: "The construction of a flour factory, a factory for refining mineral oils, launching car production lines and creating power stations are among the most important grounds for exporting technical and engineering services of Iranian companies to Syria has been."

Referring to Syria's \$ 4.3 billion in imports in 2019, he said: "This is while the country had only \$ 309 million in exports in that year, so this volume of imports will have good export opportunities for us."

"The main products exported to Syria are powdered milk, auto parts, pipes and profiles, various types of iron and steel rods, etc.," Pilten said.

Parliamentary Cooperation to Help Iran, Pakistan Economic Ties



ISLAMABAD (IRNA) - The Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Pakistan and Speaker of Pakistani parliament have stressed the need to strengthen parliamentary friendship group between the two countries which could help in removing obstacles impeding mutual economic and trade cooperation.

According to National Assembly's statement, Ambassador Seyed Mohammad Ali Hosseini and Speaker of Pakistan's National Assembly Asad Qaiser met on Friday at the parliament house to discuss parliamentary and bilateral relations.

During the meeting, Ambassador Hosseini thanked Pakistan for its firm stance against the oppressive and unilateral US sanctions against the Iranian people.

The two sides emphasized the need to deepen parliamentary cooperation, strengthen the parliamentary friendship group between the two countries, increase border crossings and trade cooperation. Speaker Asad Qaiser emphasized to enhance cooperation in the fields of trade commerce and energy for the mutual benefit of both states.

He also remarked that trade activities across the Pakistan-Iran border need special focus as it would increase the trade volume between both countries exponentially.

Qaiser said that the government of Prime Minister Imran Khan is striving to have friendly relations with all its members, specially trade and commerce.

The Speaker also mentioned that unity among Muslim countries is imperative to resolve the issues faced by Muslim Ummah across the world.

He also mentioned the importance of Parliamentary diplomacy in this context as people to people contacts between countries would be a win win situation.

Ambassador Hosseini remarked that Iran values its ties with Pakistan and desires to enhance these ties on the basis of trade and business. He appreciated the role of Pakistan for bringing regional peace. He also said that Parliamentary contacts are essential to improve these ties. He appreciated the role of Pakistan for its efforts to have unity among Muslim countries.

Exporting COVID-19 Diagnostic Kits on Agenda

TEHRAN (IRNA)- Director of Health Technology Development Office of Iranian Ministry of Health and Medical Education Hossein Vatanpour told IRNA on Saturday that exporting surplus production of COVID-19 diagnostic kits is on the agenda of the Iranian knowledge-based companies.

Vatanpour said that the priority of the Ministry Health is to provide the domestic needs, but the knowledge-based companies can export their products after receiving the necessary permits.

He said that with introduction of rapid diagnostics test kits, up to 100,000 tests can be conducted in a week, adding that the kits were taken complementary to the other means of corona tests to improve screening capacity.

The new kits have been produced by the knowledge based enterprises or research centers and have received production license from the Ministry of Health, he said.

Regarding the Iranian COVID-19 vaccines, he said that one of Iranian vaccines is expected to undergo human testing by mid-spring and be mass-produced by late summer or early fall.

The head of the Strategic Technologies Center said on December 5 that Iranian hospitals have been equipped with domestically-developed ventilators and coronavirus diagnostic kits.

Esmail Qaderifar said that three Iranian knowledge-based enterprises are making at least 40-50 ventilators a day, that is about 1,000 a month.

Qaderifar said that with the help of the knowledge enterprises, Iran has made big achievements in manufacturing ventilators and coronavirus diagnostic kits.

He said that Iran is able to export the two above-mentioned products and three-ply masks, adding that the export can be done whenever the Ministry of Health and the National Task Force Against Coronavirus authorizes the export.

U.S. Deliberately Raising Costs of Humanitarian Trade With Iran

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Central Bank of Iran (CBI) Governor Abdolnasser Hemmati says the United States keep hampering Iran's efforts to access vaccines needed to tackle the coronavirus pandemic in the country, saying Washington is just untrue in its claims that banks would not face punishments if they process payments related to humanitarian trade with Iran.



"The U.S. pretends that food and medicine are not subject to sanctions but in practice (it) is stonewalling (the payments)," Hemmati was quoted as saying by Tasnim news agency.

The comments came two days after the US Treasury said in a statement that it maintains broad exceptions from its regime of sanctions on Iran that allows the commercial sale and export of humanitarian goods to the country.

The statement came following reports showing that U.S. sanctions were impeding Iran's ability to place orders for coronavirus vaccines as the country seeks to contain one of the harshest outbreaks of the disease in the Middle East region.

Hemmati said a Washington decision earlier this year to impose sanctions on 18 Iranian banks and financial institutions had effectively blocked channels available to Iran to carry out transactions related to humanitarian trade.

"(They) have raised the costs of transactions significantly, and this is a part of their maximum pressure policy," said the CBI governor.

Official Calls for Smart Tourism

GOLESTAN (IP) -- Deputy Minister for Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism Mohammad Hossein Talebian stressed the need to pay attention to 'smart tourism' amid the COVID-19 outbreak.

Mohammad Hossein Talebian in an exclusive interview with Iran Press in Golestan, North-Eastern Iran, elaborated on the development of smart tourism amid the COVID-19 outbreak, saying: "The most important method will be holding smart exhibitions."

Deputy Minister for Iran's Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism added that so far there had been some virtual exhibitions held whose continuity would be effective in developing smart tourism.

He also explained that one could hold a joint virtual exhibition through the contribution of other countries, adding that places that are difficult to access can provide smart and virtual tourism for tourists with live video coverage.

The cultural official said that open archeological sites can receive tourists during the time of the coronavirus disease by observing health protocols and social distance.

In general, with a combination of smart technology and popular behaviors, tourism can be expanded in various dimensions, so that the production of coronavirus vaccine will provide better conditions for the growth and dynamism of Iran's tourism industry, noted the deputy minister.

Astrakhan Seeks Iran Partnership In Infrastructure Projects

MOSCOW (IRNA) - The governor of Astrakhan Region, Russia, in a meeting with new Iranian Consul-General Mehdi Akouchakian sought Iranian partnership in carrying out infrastructural projects and economic activities in the region.

Inviting Iran to participate in carrying out infrastructure projects in the region, Igor Babushkin said that 80% of goods passing through Astrakhan are in direction of Iran transit route.

Babushkin added that the most important field of cooperation between Iran and Astrakhan is development of North-South Corridor.

Igor Babushkin, Governor of Astrakhan

He also suggested that Iran can use the capabilities of the new shipping line in the Caspian Sea for cargo shipment, adding that Astrakhan can make ships for Iran and participate in meat export to Iran.

He also said that educational and cultural cooperation is another field that can be expanded.

He said that 170 Iranian companies are active in Astrakhan, adding that the trade between Iran and Astrakhan region amounted to about two million tons of various goods in the past nine months of 2020.

Akouchakian said in the meeting that many of the recommended field are supported by Iran and that Iranian traders are interested to participate in agriculture in Astrakhan.

ICC Seeks Full Investigation Into Nigerian Conflict

AMSTERDAM (Reuters) - The prosecutor of the International Criminal Court on Friday said she would seek a full investigation into possible war crimes and crimes against humanity allegedly committed during Nigeria's conflict with the Islamist rebel group Boko Haram.

Fatou Bensouda said in a statement her office had completed a preliminary examination and found a "reasonable basis to believe" that Boko Haram and its splinter groups had committed war crimes and crimes against humanity, through murder, rape, sexual slavery, and torture. Judges must approve the request. Bensouda's office has been reviewing the conflict between government forces and Boko Haram and its various splinter groups in western and northern Nigeria since 2010.



Turkey Rejects EU Sanctions Plan as Erdogan Seeks Calm



ISTANBUL (Dispatches) - Turkey on Friday dismissed as "unlawful" a European Union plan for sanctions over its maritime disputes with Greece and Cyprus, as President Recep Tayyip Erdogan urged calm.

After a marathon Thursday summit, EU leaders decided to draw up a list of Turkish targets for sanctions because of Ankara's "unilateral actions and provocations" in the eastern Mediterranean, believed to be rich in energy resources.

But Turkey, an EU candidate country whose accession process has frozen over many issues including its human rights record, is also at risk of such reprisals from NATO ally the United States over its controversial acquisition of Russian defence systems.

The extent of European and possible U.S. sanctions was not immediately known, but they could weigh on the vulnerable Turkish economy.

They could also hurt the already depreciating Turkish currency, which suffered further losses on Friday before rallying. "We reject the biased and unlawful attitude which had to be inserted into the December 10 EU summit conclusions after the pressure of solidarity and veto," the Turkish foreign ministry said in a statement.

The list of individuals targeted by the sanctions would be known in the coming weeks.

But a lack of consensus among member states blocked broader economic sanctions and prevented Greece's attempts to impose a European arms embargo on Ankara.

"I will not reveal the drama," a Western diplomat said of Thursday's meeting.

"You see that part of the public's expectations which were raised by some European countries are not present in the conclusions and that certain things that aired publicly, including an arms embargo, were not in the conclusions," the diplomat added.

"This is the result of discussion."

French President Emmanuel Macron, who backs Greece, welcomed the EU's "firmness" on Turkey but Erdogan played down the bloc's plans.

He said some "countries in the EU with common sense displayed a positive approach and foiled this game," speaking to reporters in Istanbul.

"We have deep-rooted political and economic relations with both the US and the EU which neither of them can ever disregard or risk losing," Erdogan said in another address later on Friday.

In an apparent attempt to calm things down, he said: "We have never taken and will never take any step that will harm the spirit of these relations."

"An agenda of sanctions imposed due to political aims and irrational basis is harmful for all sides and do not bring any benefits or profits," the Turkish leader added.

He said Turkey believed any issue could be "resolved through dialogue and cooperation."

EU to Discuss Arms Exports To Turkey With NATO and U.S.

BRUSSELS (Reuters) - EU leaders plan to discuss arm exports to Turkey with NATO allies and Washington, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said on Friday, after Greece pushed for an arms embargo on Ankara.

Merkel spoke after a summit where the EU's 27 leaders agreed to prepare limited sanctions on Turkish individuals over Ankara's energy exploration dispute with Greece and Cyprus, but postponed discussions on any harsher steps until March.

"We ... spoke about how questions about arms exports must be discussed within NATO. We said that we want to coordinate with the new U.S. administration about Turkey," Merkel told a news conference. Many EU states are also members of NATO.



Pakistan Accuses India of Funding Disinformation Campaign in EU

ISLAMABAD (Reuters) - Pakistan accused arch-rival India of funding a long running disinformation campaign against it on Friday and said it would raise the matter in global forums.

In making its claim that India attempted to manipulate international bodies through fake news websites and organizations, Pakistan's foreign minister cited a report by European non-government organization EU Disinfo Lab.

The report highlighted a network of hundreds of fake media outlets and organizations that it said have pushed a pro-India agenda in the European Union (EU) and United Nations (UN) bodies to discredit the country's rivals, in particular Pakistan.

EU DisinfoLab did not detail any direct links between the alleged network and the Indian government and Reuters has no independent evidence of them. "Today, India is manipulating and misusing the international system for its own nefarious designs," Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi said at a press

conference, adding that the Indian government was funding the network.

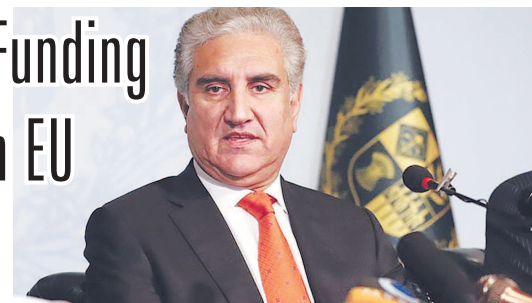
Qureshi called on the UN and UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) to immediately investigate and de-list "10 fake NGOs created by India to malign Pakistan."

He also asked the European Union Parliament to begin an investigation into what he termed to be the manipulation of the body and its legislative process by "fake organizations involved in anti-Pakistan propaganda under a fully funded disinformation and influence operation, run by India."

New Delhi rejected the charges, saying it was Pakistan that was spreading disinformation.

"As a responsible democracy, India does not practice disinformation," Anurag Srivastava, India's foreign ministry spokesman, told a news conference.

The EU DisinfoLab report also said Indian press agency Asian News International (ANI) was the only press agency to extensively cover material from the disinformation network.



U.S. Urges Eritrea to Pull Out of Tigray

WASHINGTON (AFP) - The United States said Friday it believed Eritrean forces had entered Ethiopia's Tigray region after a major offensive by Addis Ababa and urged their withdrawal.

"We are aware of credible reports of Eritrean military involvement in Tigray and view this as a grave development," a State Department spokesperson said.

"We urge that any such troops be withdrawn immediately."

Eritrea has come under rocket fire at least three times since Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed launched an offensive on November 4 in its dissident-led northern region.

The rocket attacks were seen as a way to internationalize the conflict by drawing in Eritrea's authoritarian regime, which has historic tensions with Ethiopia but has found common cause with Abiy against the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF).

The United States earlier applauded Eritrea for showing restraint after the rocket attacks and said it had been in contact with the regime, one of the world's most secretive.

Abiy ordered the offensive following alleged attacks in Tigray on federal military camps.

Abiy declared victory on November 28 but access remains tightly controlled and the TPLF -- which had dominated Ethiopian politics for nearly three decades until 2018 -- has vowed to keep up its fight.

The State Department also voiced alarm over "reports of human rights violations and abuses in the region."

"We and other international partners continue to urge an independent investigation of the reports and accountability for those found responsible," the spokesperson said.

"We continue to urge all parties to restore peace, protect civilians -- including refugees -- and allow unhindered humanitarian access in Tigray."

U.S. Supreme Court Swiftly Ends Texas Bid to Upend Election Results

WASHINGTON (Reuters) -The U.S. Supreme Court on Friday rejected a long-shot lawsuit by Texas and backed by President Donald Trump seeking to throw out voting results in four states, dealing him a likely fatal blow in his quest to undo his election loss to President-elect Joe Biden.

The decision allows the U.S. Electoral College to press ahead with a meeting on Monday, where it is expected to formally cast its votes and make Biden's victory official.

Biden, a Democrat, has amassed 306 votes to Trump's 232 in the state-by-state Electoral College, which allots votes to all 50 states and the District of Columbia based on population. The four states in question - Georgia, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin - contributed a combined 62 votes to Biden's total. To win the White House, 270 votes are needed.

In a brief order, the justices said Texas did not have legal standing to bring the case, abruptly ending what Trump had touted this week as his best hope for overturning the election.

After midnight, Trump said on Twitter, "The Supreme Court really let us down. No Wisdom, no Courage!"

Complaining that the court had rejected the case "in a flash" despite his winning more votes than any other sitting

president, Trump wrote: "A Rigged Election, fight on!"

While Biden has moved forward with a wave of appointments for his incoming administration ahead of assuming office on Jan. 20, Trump and his legal team have filed a flurry of unsuccessful lawsuits in several states baselessly claiming voter fraud and challenging the results.

Trump's goal had long been for a case to reach the Supreme Court, where he had placed three new justices in his first term and where conservatives hold a 6-3 majority. The lawsuit brought by Texas and supported by 17 other states and more than 100 Republican members of Congress gave him that opportunity.

In the run-up the Nov. 3 election, Trump had pushed for the swift confirmation of Justice Amy Coney Barrett, with the publicly stated hope that she could be in a position to help rule on an election challenge.

But Barrett and the two other justices appointed by Trump - Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh - signed onto the court's order derailing the Texas suit without comment.

"Texas has not demonstrated a judicially cognizable interest in the manner in which another state conducts its elections," the court's order said.



Norway Could Block EU, British Fishing Vessels From Jan 1

OSLO (Reuters) -Norway may stop British and EU vessels fishing in its waters from Jan. 1, its fisheries minister said on Friday, as talks on the management of common North Sea stocks have been held up by London's protracted Brexit standoff with Brussels.

Norway, which is not part of the EU but is part of the European single market, had previously negotiated annually with the bloc about the management of common fish stocks, access to each other's waters and exchange of fish quotas.

That has had to change following Britain's withdrawal from the EU. Britain completes its departure from the EU's orbit on Dec. 31.

In September, Norway and Britain agreed a so-called "framework" agreement on which to base their future relations on fisheries.

But on one specific issue - the management of North Sea fish that swim between waters belonging to the EU, Norway and Britain - Oslo wants a trilateral deal in place. And these negotiations have not yet started.

"If we do not get a deal by Jan. 1, we will not open Norway's economic fishing zones to vessels from the EU and Britain," Ingebrigtsen told parliament.

"Neither can we expect Norwegian vessels to get access to their (the EU's and Britain's) zones before a deal is in place."

Negotiations over such a deal have been delayed because London and Brussels have not reached an accord governing their relations from the start of 2021, he said. Fisheries is one of the issues of contention in the talks between London and Brussels.

"Norway is ready to start talks so that we can agree on total quotas for our common stocks in the North Sea. Our goal is to continue as normal, but for that we need clarity, quickly," Ingebrigtsen later said in a statement.





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S/p, Sauna
J, bakcony
marble fl
L.balcony
Fully Furn

Shanon (adviser)

Shariati Villa (\$5000)
1000sq.m
5bdrs, S/p
S, Jacuzzi
L.balcony
green yard
Fully Furn

Parsian

Farmanieh Apts
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(\$2200) 3bdrs, S/p, F.F
(\$2600) 4bdrs, S/p, F.F

Available bldgs
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Spain's Debt-to-GDP Ratio Rises to 114.1%

MADRID (Reuters) - The Spanish government's debt rose as a percentage of its gross domestic product (GDP) to 114.1% in the third quarter of 2020, up from 110.2% in the second quarter, the Bank of Spain said on Friday.

Spain's debt-to-GDP ratio was 97.5% at the end of the third quarter 2019. Measures to cushion the economic blow from the coronavirus have forced the government to ramp up spending this year, while economic output has slumped in the wake of restrictions on businesses.



EU Leaders Clinch Deal on Tougher 2030 Climate Goal

BRUSSELS (Reuters) - European Union countries agreed a new climate change target for the bloc on Friday after haggling through the night in Brussels, pulling the political trigger on a policy revamp to make every sector greener.

Leaders of the 27 member states agreed to cut their net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% from 1990 levels by 2030, substantially toughening an existing 40% target. The EU wants to reach "net zero" emissions by 2050, a deadline that scientists say the world must meet to avert the most catastrophic impacts of climate change.

European Council President Charles Michel, who chaired the talks, called the EU the leader in the fight against climate change, and said the target had been hard-fought, but was "credible". European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said it would put the bloc "on a clear path towards climate neutrality in 2050".

The EU will present its target at a United Nations global virtual summit on Saturday.

The EU emissions trading market already seeks to put a price on the carbon emissions that drive climate change.

The price of permits rose to an all-time high above 31 euros a ton on Friday, on expectations that the supply of permits would be cut, to force deeper emissions cuts.

The target is a compromise between wealthier, mostly western and Nordic EU countries that want more ambitious action and eastern states with coal-dependent power sectors and energy-intensive industries, which wanted specific conditions attached to emissions cuts. Poland held out alone until dawn for a guarantee that promised funding from the EU carbon market for poorer countries would not be reduced.

It also sought assurances that future national emissions-cutting targets, set by Brussels for certain sectors, would be based on gross domestic product - meaning that less prosperous states would be required to cut less.

A majority of countries had opposed these demands on grounds that they would pre-empt detailed proposals that the EU's executive Commission will make next year.

The final deal gives a commitment to address "imbalances" in carbon market funding that could leave poorer countries worse off.

The leaders agreed to meet again next year to tackle the question of GDP-based emissions targets. The Commission's proposals will speed a shift to electric vehicles and aim to mobilise investments in the huge low-carbon infrastructure that will now be needed - including a requirement for extra energy sector investments of 350 billion euros (\$420 billion) a year this decade.

The "at least 55%" target is as good as final, but will need approval from the European Parliament, which supports a more ambitious 60% cut.

"They are setting us up for a tough negotiation," said Jytte Guteland, parliament's lead lawmaker on the issue.

Some campaigners also said the target was too weak.

"It won't transform how we get around and how we produce our food fast enough to beat the climate emergency," said Greenpeace policy adviser Sebastian Mang.

Turkish Lira Declines as U.S. Sanctions Risk Sours Appetite

ANKARA (Dispatches) - The lira dropped as much as 1.7% to 8.0272 per dollar before paring declines, after President Donald Trump was said to have signed off on a package of penalties against Ankara over its purchase of Russian S-400 missile systems. Meanwhile, the European Union resisted Greek-led demands for tougher sanctions, and instead held out the possibility of weighing more punitive measures by March if Turkey continues its confrontational acts in the eastern Mediterranean.

Washington and Ankara are also at odds over U.S. support for Syrian Kurdish militants and Turkey's spat with Cyprus and Greece over maritime boundaries.

The lira move was a "knee-jerk reaction rather than a major shift in market sentiment," according to Rabobank strategist Piotr Matys in London. "If punitive measures are relatively mild and symbolic and the response from Turkey is fairly measured, the lira should trim its latest losses."

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's overhaul of his economic team last month, accompanied by market-friendly policy pledges and a long-awaited rate hike, have helped the lira rebound from an all-time low. Still, the currency has moved weaker since an uptick in November's inflation data, putting pressure on the new central bank chief Naci Agbal to deliver another large rate cut at the Dec. 24 meeting. Local investors bought \$3.2 billion of hard currency and gold last week.

The decision will be "crucial" for the lira, according to Matys. "Governor Agbal may have to respond to those expectations by raising the policy rate further as the central bank cannot afford to disappoint the market," he said.



Cuba Adopting Single Exchange Rate in January

HAVANA (Reuters) - Cuba said late on Thursday it would start its long-awaited monetary reform in January, eliminating its dual currency and labyrinthine multiple exchange rate system in a bid to improve business conditions in the crisis-stricken economy.

In a televised address to the nation, President Miguel Diaz-Canel said the Cuban peso would be left, fixed at a single exchange rate of 24 per dollar, scrapping other more favorable rates in what amounted to the first devaluation of the peso since the country's 1959 revolution.

"We consider the conditions have been created to enable us to announce the start of the task of (monetary) ordering from Jan. 1," said Diaz-Canel, sitting next to Cuban Communist Party chief Raul Castro.

For nearly three decades, two currencies have circulated in Cuba's state-run economy: the peso and the convertible peso (CUC), pegged to the dollar.

These have been exchanged at various rates: 1 to 1 for state-owned businesses, 24 pesos for 1 CUC for the public and others for joint ventures, wages in island's special development zone and transactions between farmers and hotels.

The government has said it will eliminate the CUC as part of the currency reform, although Diaz-Canel did not refer explicitly to it on Thursday, simply saying there would be just one exchange rate from January.

Economists say the reform spells short-term pain for Cubans but is important in the long-term as varying exchange rates have effectively subsidized some sectors and distorted the way economy works.

Diaz-Canel said it was no "magic solution" to the cash-strapped country's economic problems.

"However it will favor the creation of the necessary conditions to advance in a more solid manner," he said. Economists expect triple-digit inflation, and government announcements

in recent months suggest it does too. It has said the initial devaluation will be accompanied by a five-fold increase in average state wages and pensions even as many state-controlled prices are increased or allowed to respond to demand.

But the wage increase does not apply to around two million of the seven million-plus labor force in the private sector, informal sector or who simply do not work.

"The task is not void of risks," said Diaz-Canel, saying it was one of the most complex challenges Cuba had faced but promising that "no one will be left destitute".

Those who raised prices unduly would face severe sanctions, he said. The government has said some companies will be given a year to get their books in order before ending subsidies, and it will continue to provide universal and free healthcare and education, some subsidized food and other social gratuities.

EU Official Sees More Chance of No Brexit Trade Deal



BRUSSELS (Reuters) - Britain is more likely to leave the European Union's orbit on Dec. 31 without a trade deal than with an agreement, an EU official quoted the head of the European Commission as telling the bloc's 27 national leaders on Friday.

Britain quit the EU in January but remains an informal member until Dec. 31 - the end of a transition period during which it has remained in the EU single market and customs union.

Both sides say they want to agree arrangements to cover nearly \$1 trillion in annual trade, but talks are deadlocked and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said on Thursday there was "a strong possibility" an agreement would not be clinched.

"The probability of a no deal is higher than of a deal," the EU official, speaking on condition of anonymity, quoted European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen as saying during an EU summit in Brussels.

Johnson and von der Leyen have given negotiators until Sunday evening to break the impasse over fishing rights and allowing Britain to be punished if in the future it diverged from the bloc's rules.

"Situation is difficult. Main obstacles remain," the EU official said of von der Leyen's message. "To be seen by Sunday whether a deal is possible."

Sterling tumbled, stocks fell and implied volatility surged as investors started to price in the risk of a chaotic finale to the five-year Brexit crisis. The pound fell 0.8% against the dollar to \$1.3190 before recovering somewhat.

A no-trade deal Brexit would damage the economies of northern Europe, send shockwaves through financial markets, snarl borders and sow chaos through the delicate supply chains which stretch across Europe and beyond.

Most big investment banks still say a deal is their central prediction, but some investors recall that Wall Street and the City of London were poorly prepared for Britain's 2016 Brexit referendum as few believed it would vote to leave.

Japan Urges Quiet Yearend

TOKYO (Reuters) - Japan's government urged people on Friday to spend a "quiet" year-end after daily coronavirus infections hit a record, but said it would keep providing subsidies to promote tourism despite media reports that it may pause the campaign.

"The reports are not true, we will continue to operate it in an appropriate way, striving to prevent infections spreading," the government's top spokesman, Chief Cabinet Secretary Katsunobu Kato, said at a regular press briefing.

New coronavirus infections in Japan reached 2,848 cases on Thursday, the most in a single day since the pandemic began.

Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga said in an online town hall that while the contagion situation is tense, he was not considering an immediate halt to his signature domestic travel campaign. Local media reports had said the administration was mulling a pause in the campaign for around two months at the year-end and into the New Year as public opinion had shifted to supporting a halt.

Suga's government has so far defended the subsidies as necessary to keep hotels and airlines in business and revive an economy hurt by a pandemic that has kept people at home.

At a separate briefing, Shigeru Omi, chairman of the government's coronavirus research panel, outlined scenarios that would call for stronger measures, but that those decisions would ultimately have to be made by central and local governments.

Suga's administration, which this week announced a fresh \$708 billion economic stimulus package, said on Friday it would also use 385.6 billion yen (\$3.7 billion) of emergency budget reserves to fund a shortfall in the travel campaign, which is set to run until the end of June.

China to Step Up Fiscal Support for New Economic Strategy

BEIJING (Reuters) - China will step up fiscal policy support for a strategy to make its economy mainly rely on domestic demand, supply chains and innovation, Finance Minister Liu Kun said.

China has unveiled a "dual circulation" strategy for the next phase of economic development in which it will rely mainly

on "domestic circulation" - the internal cycle of production, distribution, and consumption, supported by innovation and upgrades in the economy.

"Fiscal policy has the advantage of optimizing resource allocation and promoting structural adjustments," Liu said in an article republished on the finance ministry's website dated Friday.

"Government finance is duty bound to support and speed up the cultivation of a complete domestic demand system, and there is much to be done," Liu said.

The government will take steps to boost domestic consumption, including appropriately expanding public consumption, and increase imports of high-quality goods to help upgrade domestic consumption, Liu said.

Fiscal policy will also support tech innovation, as some key technologies are controlled by foreign countries, and the upgrading of supply chain, Liu said.

China's research and development (R&D) spending has been the second highest in the world for seven consecutive years but it needed to improve spending structure and efficiency, Liu said.

The government would support key science and technology projects, encourage firms to boost R&D spending, and implement tax incentives for firms to invest in basic research, Liu said.

China has boasted the most complete manufacturing supply chains in the world but tension with the United States has exposed its vulnerability as it relies heavily on U.S. high-tech products, such as semiconductors.

Liu also said China would strengthen fiscal and tax support for sectors involved with national economic security and ensure the safety of sectors such as grain, energy, technology and health.

China would establish a mechanism for local government debt financing to strengthen the prevention of hidden debt risk, Liu added.

Syrian Envoy Submits Credentials to Foreign Minister

TEHRAN (MNA) – Newly-appointed Syria's ambassador to Tehran Shafiq Dayoub submitted a copy of his credentials to Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif. The letter of credence was delivered to the Iranian minister on Saturday in a meeting at the Foreign Ministry's headquarters.

Shafiq had earlier acted as Syria's ambassador to Jordan and also as director-general of the Syrian Foreign Ministry for Asian affairs. He has succeeded Ambassador Adnan Mahmoud in Tehran.



South Korea's Booming Stock Market Lures Foreign Investors

SEOUL (Dispatches) - Foreign investors are flocking to South Korea's red hot stock market, one of the world's best-performing this year, as signs of a strong economic rebound from Covid-19 fuel demand.

The country's benchmark Kospi Composite has gained about 90 per cent since the height of coronavirus-induced market turmoil in March. The rally has been boosted by strong investor appetite for shares in semiconductor companies, which could benefit from improvements in global capital expenditure next year.

Global funds have bought a net \$5bn of South Korean shares since the start of November, with purchases of the country's blue-chip shares hitting the fastest pace in four years.

"Foreign investors are rushing to the market, encouraged by the rosy economic outlook, semiconductor upcycle and expected forex gains," said Choi Joon-chul, head of VIP Asset Management.

Analysts are optimistic on the outlook for South Korea's economy and markets next year. Investment bank JPMorgan Chase forecasts that the Kospi will rise by another 15 per cent in 2021, even as further waves of coronavirus infections threaten the country's export-led economic recovery.

The OECD expects that South Korea's economy will grow 2.8 per cent in 2021 — the best performance among its 37 members — following a 1.1 per cent contraction this year.

Technology companies including Samsung Electronics, SK Hynix and LG Electronics have benefited from strong demand for mobile devices, TVs and other home appliances as people spend more time at home during the pandemic.

The country's exports jumped by more than a quarter in the first 10 days of December as shipments of semiconductors and mobile devices soared 52 per cent and 60 per cent respectively. Brokerage Nomura has predicted "another super cycle" in the memory chip market next year.

JPMorgan in a recent note forecast that South Korean companies would post on average a 56 per cent increase in their 2021 operating profits, which could help drive stock valuations higher.

Analysts also think the country's economic recovery will broaden next year to include names outside of the tech sector, while improving corporate governance and



shareholder return policies could also boost share valuations.

While an earnings recovery in South Korea could propel the Kospi to its best annual performance in more than a decade this year, with the index up 26 per cent in 2020, some analysts are concerned about valuations.

The index trades at almost 14 times its projected earnings for the next 12 months. While that is a significant discount to the forward PE of about 26 for Wall Street's S&P 500, it marks a 10-year peak for the South Korean index.

Corporate earnings could also be affected by a rising won, which makes South Korean exports more expensive. The currency is up 6 per cent against the dollar this year, with some analysts predicting it will touch its 2008 high of Won1,000 per greenback.

"Valuations seem stretched but the rally going forward depends on corporate results," said VIP's Mr Choi. "The stronger won could work against exporters, potentially pulling down their earnings next year, while the economy could face a longer-term backlash from sharp debt increases of government and households."

India...

FROM PAGE 1

The Trump administration then imposed strict sanctions against Iran, targeting its energy sector and gave its trading partners, including India, six months from November 2018 to curtail their trading with Iran.

"Anyone doing business with Iran will not be doing business with the United States," Trump tweeted.

India stopped buying oil from Iran from mid-2019 and also restricted its trade with the Gulf nation.

"Iran is quite important to India's oil imports," said Jagasheth. "It [Iran] used to be the third-biggest crude oil supplier to India after Iraq and Saudi Arabia."

One of the advantages of importing oil from Iran was the low shipping cost. As the relations dwindled, India diversified to buying oil from non-OPEC countries over the last two years.

Jagasheth said until fiscal year 2019, India imported between 10 percent and 11 percent of its oil from Iran. India follows an April-March financial year.

India used to buy oil from Iran through a barter deal involving banks in the two countries. An export and import mismatch and pressure from the U.S. Treasury nearly led to a break in trade ties in 2010.

India withdrew from the Asian Clearing Union, a payment arrangement initiated in 1974 in which the participants settled payments for intra-regional transactions among the participating central banks. The mechanism helped the Asian countries save on their foreign exchange reserves by bartering for oil from Iran.

After India's exit from the union, a new rupee-riyal trade mechanism was established in 2012, allowing Indian oil refineries to deposit funds into UCO and IDBI banks in India to import oil from Iran. The funds, in local currency, were used to clear the dues of Indian exporters to Iran. The importers in Iran deposited their dues in local currency to the central bank of Iran, which in turn would give them currency allocation.

However, in the last year, oil imports from Iran have dried up, and so have the funds in the local Indian banks to carry on the barter trade. The shrinking pool of funds with Indian banks will not be able to support the exports for long.

"The deposits from Iran on account of oil imports' banks have come down significantly," said A. K. Goel, managing director and chief executive officer at UCO Bank. "Now, with the new administration in the U.S., there are hopes the trading volume will revive."

So far, in FY20, India's total exports to Iran were \$3.3 billion, a decrease of about 4 percent over the previous year. India's imports from Iran in FY20 were nearly \$1.3 billion, a drop of nearly 89 percent over the previous year. Indian exporters said Iranian importers owe them substantial payments.

"Basmati rice export to Iran has come down by more than 50 percent in the last year," said Vinod Kaul, executive director of the All India Rice Exporters Association. "Moreover, since December 2019, payments of Indian exporters worth INR 1,750 crore (\$237 million) are stuck with the central bank of Iran. Since then, there has been only a negligible amount of rice exports from India to Iran." The central bank of Iran has been erratic in giving currency allocation to the importers in Iran. Consequently, bilateral trade with India has declined substantially since December 2019.

"Iran used to account for nearly 30 percent of rice exports from India. Many countries are over-buying rice because of Covid-19, which has helped India meet its rice export target, and exceed it as well. However, with Iran exports taking a hit, we are losing exports worth near \$500 million every year," Kaul said.

Philippines to Be SE Asia's Worst Performer This Year

MANILA (Dispatches) –

The Philippines is seen to post the worst economic performance in Southeast Asia this year, according to the Asian Development Bank (ADB) which slashed its growth forecast anew as household consumption and investments remained sluggish amid the coronavirus pandemic.

In its Asian Development Outlook (ADO) Supplement report released Thursday, the ADB now expects Philippine gross domestic product (GDP) to contract by 8.5% from -7.3% penciled in September. The revised forecast was at the lower end of the 8.5-9.5% slump projected by the Philippine government's economic team.

"The GDP forecast for 2020 is downgraded to 8.5% contraction because household consumption and investment have fallen more than expected," the multilateral lender said.

The Philippines will likely see the sharpest annual GDP drop in Southeast Asia, behind Thailand (-7.8%), Singapore (-6.2%), Malaysia (-6%), and Indonesia (-2.2%). Only Vietnam is expected to grow this year with 2.3% GDP, revised upward from the original 1.8% forecast.

Aside from the Philippines, the ADB also downgraded the outlook for Indonesia (-2.2% from -1%, previously) and Malaysia (-6% from -5%), as pandemic containment efforts continued to hamper economic recovery.

"The Philippine economy contracted by 10.0% in January–September 2020, reflecting muted consumer and business activity and confidence under the pandemic," the ADB noted.

Localized lockdowns or formally referred to as community quarantines are still being imposed across the Philippines, which has the second-highest number of coronavirus infections in Southeast Asia after Indonesia. As of Thursday, the number of coronavirus infections in the country hit 445,540, while the death toll stood at 8,701.

Developing Asia, a group of 45 nations in the Asia-Pacific, will likely shrink by 0.4% this year, less than the 0.7% contraction forecast in September, the ADB said. Growth will rebound to 6.8% in 2021, but the ADB noted "prospects diverge within the region."

"A prolonged pandemic remains the primary risk, but recent developments on the vaccine front are tempering this. Safe, effective, and timely vaccine delivery in developing economies will be critical to support the reopening of economies and the recovery of growth in the region," ADB Chief Economist Yasuyuki Sawada said in a statement.

The worsening tension between the United States and China over trade and technology was also flagged as a risk to the growth outlook for the region.



For Southeast Asia, the ADB also lowered its GDP forecast this year to -4.4% from the previous -3.8% forecast. It also cut Southeast Asia's growth outlook for 2021 to 5.2% from the previous 5.5%.

The ADB retained its 6.5% growth forecast for the Philippines in 2021, "assuming that public

investment picks up and the global economy recovers."

This is the second-fastest estimated growth among Southeast Asian countries next year, behind Malaysia's 7%.

Meanwhile, the ADB raised its 2020 inflation forecast for the Philippines to 2.5% from the 2.4% it gave in September, and retained the 2.6% outlook for 2021.

If realized, the estimate for this year will match the average inflation seen last year.

West Urged...

FROM PAGE 1

Now, we understand and feel, more than any other country, both the horrible nature of these inhumane weapons and the poisonous nature of politicizing the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention and the work of the OPCW.

It is in this context that we condemn, in the strongest possible terms, the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anytime, anywhere and under any circumstances, and also call for promoting the full, effective, balanced and non-discriminatory implementation of the Convention as well as upholding the integrity, authority and legitimacy of the OPCW.

Nevertheless, it is a source of grave concern that, in the past several years, a group of member States, systematically abusing the processes of this Council and the OPCW, have politicized the consideration of the implementation of the Convention by Syria.

They disregard the fact that, in her final report to this Council in 2014, the head of the Joint Mission to Eliminate Chemical Weapons in Syria confirmed that Syria has fulfilled all its commitments and that its entire chemical stockpiles have been destroyed. This was confirmed later by the OPCW, as well.

They refer to a technically defective report of the IIT -- prepared without on-site investigation or due regard to the chain of custody -- and intentionally disregard the progress achieved so far by Syria in implementing its obligations.

They also overlook Syria's commitment -- reiterated also very recently -- to continue to work with the Technical Secretariat to resolve all outstanding issues as soon as possible.

Even the relevant decision of the 94th session of the OPCW's Executive Council disregarded Syria's unprecedented cooperation with the OPCW, carried out despite serious security threats posed by the deadliest terrorist groups as well as the restrictions imposed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Unfortunately, such unproductive policies of some Western countries, pursued adamantly during the past several years, have resulted only in division within this Council and the OPCW and eroded their legitimacy and credibility.

More importantly, such politically motivated approach continues to endanger the consensual decision-making tradition in the OPCW -- the latest example of which is the decision of the recently held 25th Session of the Conference of the States Parties on program and budget of the OPCW for 2021 that was adopted by voting.

Such unconstructive approach will continue to adversely affect the efforts for the full and effective realization of the very purpose of the CWC, namely the elimination of chemical weapons, which is yet to be realized due to blatant failure by the U.S. as the sole major Possessor State Party.

A recent draft decision, proposed by a group of countries, to deprive a State from continuing to be a party to the Convention, despite destroying all its chemical weapons as verified by the OPCW and also its continued cooperation with the Organization, will set a dangerous precedent and will have a far-reaching serious consequence for the regime of chemical weapons disarmament.

Continuation of such policies is not acceptable and must not be allowed anymore. Therefore, every effort must be made to restore the OPCW's authority and promote the full and non-discriminatory implementation of the CWC.

Iran COVID-19...

FROM PAGE 1

"Unlike some countries such as the United States where its president kept saying, for weeks, that there was nothing [dangerous]," Iran publicly announced the outbreak of the disease as soon as the first infections were reported, he said.

He thanked people, medical personnel, and relevant institutions for their cooperation in the campaign against the disease.

The president called for health protocols to be observed more seriously in places like barracks and garrisons where, inevitably, more people are staying.

The president urged people to keep abiding by health protocols.

"All of us should know that it is not enough to simply comply with some health instructions such as wearing masks, observing social distancing rules and washing hands; rather, all existing health protocols must be observed, especially in the current cold season when people naturally spend most of their time in closed spaces and indoors," he explained.

He noted the government has adopted the necessary measures to purchase the coronavirus vaccine, expressing hope people will prevent another surge in the disease by conforming to health protocols until the vaccine is distributed on a large scale.

IAEA Only...

FROM PAGE 1

In the wake of the assassination of top Iranian nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh in late November, the UN nuclear agency chief warned against any further escalation after lawmakers at Iran's Parliament overwhelmingly endorsed the outlines of a strategic action plan which aims to counteract sanctions imposed on the Iranian nation and safeguard its interests.

He also called on the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to remain "impartial" despite the pressure exerted by the U.S. on the UN nuclear watchdog regarding Tehran's nuclear activities.

Kazem Gharibabadi made the remarks in a post on his twitter account on Friday, three days after U.S. Special Representative for Iran and Venezuela Elliott Abrams told the Jewish News Syndicate (JNS) that Washington needs "coordination with the Europeans, particularly the British, French and Germans, who were involved in the negotiation with Iran in 2015, to keep the pressure on the IAEA."

Gharibabadi attached to his tweet a statement delivered at the 2019 New Year Reception by then IAEA director general Yukiya Amano.

"Now, it is obvious that to whom the Late DG Amano was referring on 30 Jan 2019: If attempts are made to micro-manage or put pressure on the @iaeaorg in nuclear verification, that is counter-productive and extremely harmful," the Iranian envoy wrote.

"The Agency shall remain independent, professional and impartial. We should all reject these pressures which are detrimental to the interests of whole international community," he added.

Haaland in Qatar Rehab Despite Pandemic

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Borussia Dortmund revealed they have given star striker Erling Braut Haaland permission to receive treatment for a hip injury in Qatar, despite the coronavirus pandemic. The 20-year-old, who has scored 33 goals in 32 games for Dortmund, is out until January with a torn hip muscle and is being treated in Qatar. "It was his wish to go through rehab there," explained sports director Michael Zorc. "He is surrounded by experts who are in close contact with our medical department. That's why we have agreed to the request."

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De Kock to Captain S. Africa Test Team

CAPE TOWN (Reuters) - Quinton de Kock has been named South Africa test captain for the 2020-21 season and will lead an inexperienced squad without leading fast bowler Kagiso Rabada at the start of the two-match series against Sri Lanka in Pretoria on Dec. 26. South Africa's director of cricket, Graeme Smith, had previously said the workload of captaining the test side would be too much for white-ball skipper de Kock, but the selectors have had a change of heart.

8 IRAN NEWS

SPORTS

SUNDAY DECEMBER 13, 2020

Rams Celebrate First Win Over Patriots Since 2001

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Rookie Cam Akers rushed for 171 yards as the Los Angeles Rams gained a measure of revenge for a 2019 Super Bowl loss with a 24-3 rout of the New England Patriots.

The sting of a one-sided 13-3 defeat 22 months ago in the Super Bowl in Atlanta, Georgia was still fresh in the minds of the players and coaches for the Rams, who had not beaten the Patriots since 2001, a string of six straight losses.

"For me personally it felt good to get a little payback," said Rams defensive tackle Aaron Donald.

Akers more than doubled his previous best rushing effort, an 84-yard performance in a 23-20 loss to the San Francisco 49ers on October 29.

Quarterback Jared Goff threw for two touchdowns and the defense smothered the Patriots offense as the Rams moved a half game in front of the Seattle Seahawks for first place in the NFC West Division. The Rams have now won four of their last five games.

Kenny Young also had an outstanding game, returning an interception 79 yards for a touchdown. He had one of a half dozen sacks for Los Angeles forcing Patriots quarterback Cam Newton to take a seat in the fourth quarter.

"Our defense played lights out," said Donald.

Newton threw for just 119 yards before being replaced by Jarrett Stidham for the Patriots whose uphill battle to make the playoffs just got much more difficult.

New England was going for a sweep of the SoFi Stadium tenants after stomping the Los Angeles Chargers 45-0 on Sunday.

This was the first meeting between the two since the Patriots Super Bowl romp where Goff completed just 19 of 38 passes and failed to throw a touchdown.

The Rams gained 166 yards in the first quarter on Thursday. They got a touchdown and a field goal on their first two possessions, highlighted by Goff leaping into the end zone from 11 yards out. Akers ran for 84 yards on nine carries in the first quarter.

Matt Gay added the 35-yard field goal.



Young intercepted Newton's toss and scampered untouched into the end zone just 14 seconds into the second quarter and the rout was on.

"Everybody is playing great football. It is fun to play. We will continue to strive for great things," said Donald.

This was a clutch win for Los Angeles, with a contest against the winless New York Jets next week ahead of season-ending games against the Seahawks and Arizona Cardinals that could determine the division winner.

Before Thursday's game, quarterback Jared Goff said his memories against the Patriots amounted to "not very many good ones," and McVay called Super Bowl LIII "a very humbling night."

When asked Thursday if he thought about redemption over the Patriots, McVay downplayed any notion of it.

Goff passed for 137 yards and one touchdown, with an interception, and also scored on a QB sneak for his first victory over the Patriots in three tries. And the Rams leaned heavily on the run, as rookie Cam Akers moved into the starting lineup and McVay ditched a running back committee to utilize Akers as a feature back. A second-round draft pick from Florida State, Akers rushed for a career-high 171 yards on 29 carries and caught two passes for 23 yards.

Hamilton, Doyle And Liverpool Win SJA Awards



LONDON (Reuters) - Seven-times Formula One world champion Lewis Hamilton, female jockey Hollie Doyle and Premier League champions Liverpool were the main winners at Britain's Sports Journalists Association (SJA) awards.

The ceremony was conducted virtually, instead of the usual gala event, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Hamilton was named Sportsman of the Year after becoming the most successful Formula One driver of all time in a record-breaking season in which he equalled Ferrari great Michael Schumacher's seven titles.

The Mercedes driver, who also won the award in his debut 2007 season with McLaren, is competing in the year's final race in Abu Dhabi this weekend after recovering from the new coronavirus.

Doyle was Sportswoman of the Year after becoming the first female jockey to win five races on one card at Windsor in August.

Ferrari Chief Resigns For Personal Reasons

ABU DHABI (AFP) - Chief Executive Officer Louis Camilleri announced his departure from Ferrari on Friday for personal reasons on the eve of this weekend's season-ending Abu Dhabi Grand Prix.

The 65-year-old Italian left his post with immediate effect.

He was appointed in July 2018 as replacement for Sergio Marchionne who was unwell and died days later.

Camilleri has suffered from a severe bout of Covid-19 and only recently left hospital to continue recovering at home.

He made changes during his period as boss - bringing in current team boss Mattia Binotto to replace Maurizio Arrivabene and this year deciding not to retain four-time champion Sebastian Vettel next season.

"Ferrari has been a part of my life and serving as its chief executive has been a great privilege," said Camilleri in a statement issued by Ferrari.

"My admiration for the extraordinary men and women of Maranello and for the passion and dedication they apply to everything they do, knows no bounds.

"I'm proud of the company's numerous achievements since 2018 and know that Ferrari's best years are still to come."

Ferrari have endured a difficult and disappointing season this year and have failed to win a race. In 2019, the team generated controversy by using an irregular power unit.

Ferrari's executive chairman John Elkann has taken over as chief executive on a temporary basis.

Verstappen Tops Opening Abu Dhabi GP Practice

ABU DHABI (AFP) - Max Verstappen topped the times ahead of Valtteri Bottas in Friday's opening free practice at the season-ending Abu Dhabi Grand Prix.

The Dutchman clocked a best lap in 1min 37.378sec in his Red Bull to outpace the Finn, in his Mercedes, by 0.034 seconds, while seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton was fifth on his return from his Covid-19-inflicted absence.

James, Davis to Skip NBA Preseason Opener



LOS ANGELES (AFP) - LeBron James and Anthony Davis will sit out the Los Angeles Lakers' first exhibition game following the shortest off season in National Basketball Association history, the U.S. media reported Thursday.

The Lakers face the Los Angeles Clippers in the first of four exhibition games ahead of the 2020-21 season but Friday's contest won't include the star duo, head coach Frank Vogel told

reporters at practice on Thursday.

The 35-year-old James is entering his 18th season in the NBA, but more importantly it has been just 71 days since the final game of the pandemic disrupted 2019-20 season.

The Lakers defeated the Miami Heat in game six of the NBA finals on October 11 to claim a record-tying 17th NBA championship.

The Lakers will play three preseason games after Friday, one more against the Clippers and two against the Phoenix Suns.

The Lakers open their regular season on December 22 when they face the Clippers at Staples Center arena.

The season kicks off hours earlier in New York with a game between the Golden State Warriors and the Brooklyn Nets.

Mourinho: I Can't Keep All My Players Happy

LONDON (Reuters) - Jose Mourinho's Tottenham Hotspur may be flying high in all competitions but the Portuguese coach conceded that he is unable to keep all of his players happy with England forward Dele Alli not getting any minutes in their Europa League win on Thursday.

Spurs beat Royal Antwerp 2-0 to seal top spot in their group but Alli was not one of the five substitutes used and midfielder Harry Winks, making a rare start, walked straight down the tunnel when he came off for Tanguy Ndombele in the second half.

"How can I keep them all happy? I don't think they're all happy at all, that's the nature of football, I can no make miracles," Mourinho told BT Sport.

"I told the players if they're not subbed on just go for a hot shower," the Portuguese said in reference to Winks.

"I told every player that left the pitch to go because when the weather is cold I prefer they go to the dressing room and have a shower," Mourinho later clarified.

"Winks decided to go and I am happy with that because I am the one that told him to do it."

Spurs head into Sunday's Premier League clash at Crystal Palace top of the standings and have not lost since the opening day of the season.

However, Alli has been a peripheral player this campaign, making only two appearances in the league, and the 24-year-old looked a frustrated figure on a chilly evening in north London.

"Let's not run away from reality. A player on the bench who realises all five subs have been used of course is not a happy player and I would not expect him to be happy," Mourinho said.

Alli was linked with a move away from Spurs in the close season and could look for a transfer in next month's window to boost his chances of making England's Euro 2020 squad.



Griezmann Ends Commercial Relationship With Huawei

BARCELONA (Reuters) - France and Barcelona footballer Antoine Griezmann, who has been an ambassador for tech giant Huawei Technologies Co Ltd, has cut commercial ties with the company, citing China's treatment of Uighur Muslims.

"I announce that I am putting an end immediately to my partnership linking me with this company," Griezmann, a 2018 World Cup winner with France, wrote in a statement on Instagram on Thursday.

A Huawei spokesperson said the Chinese company was saddened by Griezmann's decision.

"We would like to extend an invitation to speak to him personally, to explain the work that is currently being done at the highest level, inside the company, to address the issues of human rights, equality, and discrimination at all levels," the spokesperson said.

The United Nations estimates that more than a million ethnic Uighurs and other Muslims have been detained in China's Xinjiang province. China has denied any abuses and says its camps in the region provide vocational training and help fight extremism.

The striker's decision followed a report here in the Washington Post on Dec. 8 that alleged that Huawei had tested software capable of sending automated alerts when surveillance cameras recognised members of the mainly Muslim minority Uighur group.

The article cited a document that it said was signed by Huawei representatives showing that Huawei had worked with a startup called Megvii to test artificial intelligence capable of triggering an automated "Uighur alarm". Commenting on the report on Thursday, Huawei described the language used in the document as "completely unacceptable", adding however that it was a description of functions provided by Megvii, while the document was approved not by Huawei, but by a subcontractor.

"It is not compatible with the values of Huawei," the spokesperson said. "Our technologies are not designed to identify ethnic groups. Non-discrimination is at the heart of our values as a company."

