

**Health Ministry Spokeswoman
Sima Sadat Lari Said on Sunday Some
247 Iranians Died From Coronavirus
Disease Over the Past 24 Hours
Bringing the Total Deaths to 52,196**

IRAN NEWS

**President of Iran's National
Olympic Committee Reza Salehi
Amiri Arrived in Omani Capital
Muscat on Sunday to Participate
At the 39th Olympic Council of
Asia (OCA) General Assembly**

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Health Minister Highlights Iran's Heroic Struggle with Sanctions

TEHRAN (IFP) - Health Minister Saeed Namaki has hailed the country's success to deal with the coronavirus pandemic and inaugurate new projects in spite of the unprecedented pressures and hostile sanctions.

It is a divine blessing that Iran has managed to tackle the coronavirus pandemic and inaugurate new medical projects under the pressure of sanctions, Health Minister Namaki said in an address to a Sunday event held to open new medical and health projects in South Khorasan Province.

"These days that you saw the coronavirus was being controlled, (you would not believe) what we went through," the minister added.

After the day of Ashura when the third Shiite imam, Imam Hussein (PBUH), and his companions suffered great hardship, no other nation had ever experienced such difficulties except the Iranian nation, he added.

"They (enemies) closed all ways to us, on the currency and its transaction, on the import of medicine and equipment," the health minister said. **See Page 7**

Iran Dubious About U.S. Intention in Afghan Peace Talks

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Abbas Araqchi said on Sunday that Iran is doubtful about the US intention in the peace process in Afghanistan.

Araqchi, currently on a visit to Kabul, made the remarks in an interview with IRNA.

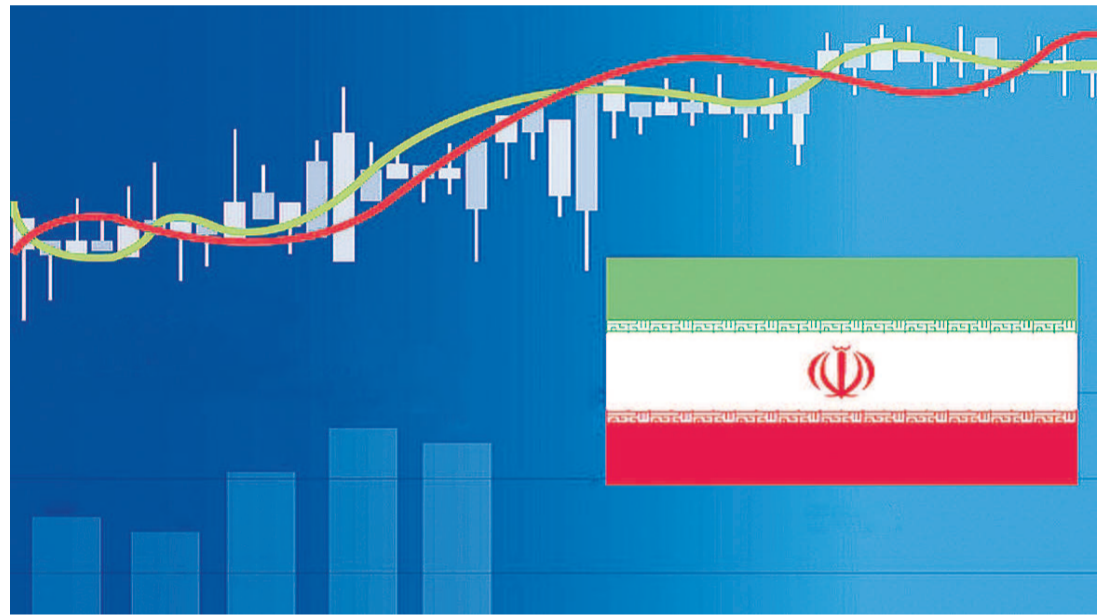
The U.S. intervention in other countries pursues the U.S. interests and advancing their agenda for the other countries, Araqchi said.

Iran welcomes the efforts of any country which aim to help the peace process in Afghanistan, the Iranian official said, however, noting that he is doubtful about the U.S. good faith.

Asked to comment about a demand by the Taliban group and the U.S. for 7,000 other Taliban prisoners to be released, Araqchi said that this has to be determined by the Afghan government.

He said that Iran supports the Afghan-led peace talks, but, does not intend to intervene in the details of the agreements or the way the Afghan Government implements them. **See Page 7**

Iran Economic Growth Rate Becomes Positive Despite Sanctions



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Governor of the Central Bank of Iran Abdolnaser Hemmati says the economic growth rate in Iran has become positive, both with and without oil revenues.

In a post on his Instagram page on Sunday, the top banker said Iran has achieved a positive economic growth. The great Iranian nation's fortitude under the pressure of economic war and outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic and the efforts of the Iranian economic activists finally yielded results, Hemmati said.

"As I had already announced according to the course of indices of industrial and agricultural production as well as the growth in the credit of working capital of banks, the country's economic growth has become positive," the CBI governor announced.

A recent report from the CBI's economic calculation department shows that the gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate during the first six months of the current Iranian year (March 20 - September 21) has been positive with and without petrodollars, he stated.

Iran's economic growth excluding the oil income in the first half of the current Iranian year has increased by +1.4 percent compared to the corresponding period last year, while the economic growth with oil has risen by +1.3 percent compared with the 6-month period a year earlier, he noted.

The CBI chief finally noted that the economic growth with the inclusion of oil has stood at -2.9 percent and +5.1 percent in the last spring and summer, respectively, while the growth rate without oil income has reached -0.6 percent in the first quarter and +3.2 percent in the second quarter of this year.

Meanwhile Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) is organizing an online 3-day Iran-Europe business forum in collaboration with the European Union (EU) which is to open today (December 14).

During this three-day event more than 60 Iranian and European officials will deliver speeches and companies from the two sides will hold online B2B meetings.

This investment conference will be run by the UN's International Trade Center - an agency jointly managed by the United Nations and the World Trade Organization - and the TPO.

The main purpose of this event is to create a suitable environment for companies on both sides to engage in trade-economic interactions. The Europe-Iran Business Forum, which is funded by the European Union, will be the first of its kind in two years, according to a statement by the organizers.

Iran Urges CICA to Counter U.S. Economic Terrorism Amid Pandemic

TEHRAN (IFP) - Iran has called on the member states of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) to counter United States' economic terrorism amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

The comment was made by Reza Najafi, the director general for international peace and security at the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who represented Iran at a meeting of senior officials of member states of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA).

The event chaired by Kazakhstan was held via video conference on December 11, 2020.

The meeting was themed on reviewing the situation of the region and using member states' experience in fighting the coronavirus pandemic aimed at boosting their development and cooperation with one another. Iran's delegate at the meeting congratulated Kazakhstan on assuming the presidency of CICA for the years 2020-2022 and wished its new Secretary General Kairat Sarybay success. Najafi also appreciated efforts by CICA member states to tackle existing challenges.

In his speech, the Iranian representative touched upon hot-button issues such as fighting the COVID-19 pandemic as the biggest global crisis, the importance of constructive and efficient cooperation in the regard, countering unilateralism and boosting multilateralism, the necessity of making sure that all humans across the world have equal access to the COVID-19 vaccine, opposition to pursuing any illegal moves, countering the destructive effects of the United States' coercive and unilateral moves and economic terrorism on the campaign against the coronavirus pandemic. He also appreciated relentless efforts by different state and private institutions which are seeking to find a way to end the coronavirus crisis. Elsewhere in his remarks, he referred to the assassination of top Iranian scientist Mohsen Fakhri-zadeh, saying most CICA members have already condemned the terrorist act.

Najafi said the assassinated scientist played a key role in medical and peaceful nuclear activities, especially in the development of the first Iranian coronavirus diagnosis kit and supervising the production of the vaccine.

He highlighted the perpetrators and the terrorist regime behind Fakhri-zadeh's assassination will pay the price for their crime in due time. He also said Iran is fully prepared to work with other CICA members in exchanging expertise and knowhow on all issues of mutual interest, especially the COVID-19 pandemic.

A meeting of senior officials of CICA is held biannually aimed at making decisions on the implementation of agreements reached and decisions adopted at meetings of CICA heads of state and ministers.

ViewPoint By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

Write It Saddam, Read It Erdogan

Reading out the poem "Araz, Araz" and actually it means "Aras, Aras (Aras River)" by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has only revealed half a percent of hidden malice of this ambitious Freemason that has got so bad that even Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif responded to Erdogan's remarks by saying, "No one can talk about our beloved Azerbaijan."

The esteemed readers remember that during the Azerbaijan-Armenia conflict over Karabakh, I wrote an article with the title of "Atheist or Hypocrisy, Which One Should We Side With?" In that article that I wrote on October 7, I explained the reason why Erdogan was supporting Azerbaijan Republic in war with Armenia that this malicious man thinks more of Turkish Empire rather than merely thinking of the support of Azerbaijan. But interests definitely required that we put Armenia under pressure in order that Erdogan's intentions are materialized by Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev. In that article I had written

"Have anyone thought that Turkey in supporting Republic of Azerbaijan's invasion at Armenia is pursuing some part of its scenario on Neo-Ottomanization? That Nagomo-Karabakh dispute has very dimensions and multi-dimensions like inland, outland, regional and even international roots and for this reason all regional and international actors are involved in this dispute, "and in justifying Turkey's behavior in the very article I had written, "Suppose that we have not had and do not have any peaceful relation with Armenia which is a non-Islamic country and we call them atheist but how can we not see the goals of Turkey behind this dispute? Turkey's interest for active presence in the Caucasus region and cooperation and proximity with Azerbaijan can be analyzed as the hegemonic goals and its major goals can be enumerated clearly. First Turkey with supporting Azerbaijan has a strategic approach to the Caucasus Region for creating a strategic balance for competition with regional actors like Russia and Iran and attaches a special attention to extending its joint border with Iran. Secondly, economic goals of Turkey in the Caucasus Region for providing its energy through developing and expanding the oil pipeline (Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan), and cooperation with Azerbaijan has a far-sighted process and it is part of its Neo-Ottomanization strategy in the region. Thirdly, Turkey's motivation for entering the South Caucasus Region is accompanied with a nationalism and ideological approach. Turkish language, religion and common religion have made Turkey's President Erdogan have a special view blended support from Azerbaijan in the Karabakh issue. Now it is quite clear some of expenditures which are spent by Pan-Turkism in Iran are financed through which avenues. Smartly one should notice that the dominant condition on Caucasus region is in a way that countries which struggling with crises like Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan have to rely on regional and trans-regional powers and actors for pursuing their goals and relation because of their incapability in managing the crisis and settling the disputes. So the success of Turkey in this region will not ever be to the benefit of the region." **See Page 7**

Response to Fakhri-zadeh Assassination at Proper Time, Place

TEHRAN (MNA) - A top Iranian military general says enemies of the Islamic Republic should await punishment for assassinating nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhri-zadeh.

"Undoubtedly, the revenge for the blood of this martyr will be taken from the Arrogant System at a proper time and place based on the operational logic of the Islamic Revolution front. The US - the Great Satan - and the Zionist regime should know that they will pay for this crime," Chief of General Staff of Iranian Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Hossein Baqerigheri said on Sunday in a meeting with the family of Mohsen Fakhri-zadeh. **See Page 7**

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Intelligence Ministry Dismantles Foreign Currency Saboteurs

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iran's Intelligence forces have identified and dismantled a large network of economic saboteurs in Yazd province.

According to the ministry's public relations office, the forces have disbanded a ring of economic saboteurs responsible for disrupting the foreign currency market in Yazd Province.

Eight offenders have been arrested and handed to the Judiciary and a significant amount of currencies and banking documents have been confiscated in the operation.

Expansion of Economic Ties with Neighbours a Priority

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's First Vice President said that strengthening transport fleet and resolving problems at borders are required for promoting export.

Speaking in a meeting of chairpersons of Iran and neighboring countries' joint chambers of commerce on Saturday, Es'haq Jahangiri obliged the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) to compile a comprehensive program with each of neighboring states in the relevant issue.

Jahangiri reiterated that strengthening the transport fleet and resolving problems at borders are prerequisites for promoting exports and export activities.

He pointed to the significance of neighboring states in the promotion of export and added, "According to the statistics, Iran's neighboring countries accounted for 65 percent of country's total exports share in the first eight months of the current year (from March 21 to Nov. 22)."

Therefore, Iran Chamber of Commerce should formulate a clear and precise program for cooperation with each of the neighboring states, Jahangiri emphasized. Promoting and developing cooperation with neighboring states is the main policy



of the Islamic Republic of Iran, he said, adding, "Neighboring countries are Iran's main export target markets. In addition to determining priorities, necessary platforms should be paved for expanding cooperation with these countries."

Elsewhere in his remarks, Jahangiri emphasized the need for completing infrastructures of cooperation with neighboring countries and reiterated, "Despite all restrictions, efforts were made to connect country's national railway to the railway network of neighboring countries and giant steps were taken in this field."

Turning to the significant role of Iran and neighboring countries' joint chambers of commerce in promoting trade and business exchanges, he stated, "The joint chambers of commerce can play a leading role in resolving problems facing traders and merchants."

Government's Priority, Reducing Livelihood Problems

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – President Hassan Rouhani said that in times of economic war, reducing livelihood problems and providing basic goods has been a priority for the government.

The meeting of the government's economic coordination headquarters was held on Sunday, chaired by Iran's President Hassan Rouhani.

The President stated in this meeting that in the conditions of economic war, the government has made every effort to reduce the living problems of the people, despite the pressure of sanctions and the government's priority has been to provide basic goods to increase public welfare and support the vulnerable people.

Rouhani called controlling the fluctuations of the domestic market and preventing the increase of the prices of basic goods, the inflation rate in the country as well as the creation of welfare in the society as the most important goals of the government.

He highlighted that the macro-policy of supplying and allocating foreign exchange for basic goods must not become a breeding ground for exploitation of opportunities and corruption.

Turkey Reaffirms Respect for Iran's Sovereignty

TEHRAN (IFP) - Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey Mevlut Cavusoglu has called his Iranian counterpart to give an assurance that Ankara respects the Islamic Republic's sovereignty and territorial integrity after the Turkish president's recitation of a poem provoked unease in Iran.

In the Saturday telephone conversation with Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, Cavusoglu underlined the close and friendly relations between Turkey and Iran, and highlighted Ankara's definite policy of good neighborliness.

Foreign Minister Cavusoglu also gave an assurance that Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan fully respects Iran's national sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The senior Turkish diplomat explained that President Erdogan had not been aware of the sensitivities surrounding the lines he recited in Baku and associated



the poem only with Lachin and Karabakh, which is why he recited it in the recent event in Azerbaijan Republic.

For his part, Foreign Minister Zarif underscored the significance of friendly relations between the two neighbours that signify mutual respect.

Highlighting the cordial ties between the president of Turkey and the high-ranking officials of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Foreign Minister Zarif expressed hope for the expansion of bilateral relations on the basis of mutual trust.

The phone call from the Turkish foreign minister came after President Erdogan provoked controversy when he recited lines from a folk song that promises a reunion of Azeri-speaking people from Iran and Azerbaijan Republic, who are now separated by the Aras border river.

The Turkish leader made the comments at a speech to the "Victory Parade" in Baku on Thursday.

Iran's Initiative to Resolve Yemeni Crisis on Table

TEHRAN (MNA) – Senior Assistant to Iranian Foreign Minister in Special Political Affairs said on Sun. that Iran's initiative to resolve the Yemeni crisis is on the table.

Ali-Asghar Khaji said Tehran hopes that the countries of the region, the United States, and the enemies of Yemen will understand that war cannot be the solution for Yemen and that Iran's initiative as a fundamental solution is still on the table.

He noted that from the beginning of the invasion of Yemen, Iran declared that the solution for this country should be political, and for this reason, the Islamic Republic proposed a balanced plan consisting of four clauses to resolve the issue.

"Some countries in the region thought that they could resolve the Yemeni issue militarily within three or four months without granting political concessions to the Yemeni parties," he said.

"The military war in Yemen has led to the greatest humanitarian crisis of the century," Khaji noted, "Thousands of women and children have lost their lives and hunger has spread."

"The aggressors in Yemen did not achieve their goals despite six years of attacks, but the Yemeni people were able to create an equation of balance, deterrence, and power in their favor," he added.

"We hope that the countries of the region, the United States and the enemies of Yemen will understand that war cannot be the solution and that Iran's initiative to stop the aggression, lift the siege, and start the Yemeni-Yemeni dialogue is still on the table as a fundamental solution," he said.

He stressed that the Yemenis have the courage and military strength to confront the "occupiers and aggressors" and that there is no need for Iran.

German Ambassador Summoned Over EU's 'Interventionist' Statements

TEHRAN (IFP) - Iran has summoned the German ambassador to Tehran over the statements released by the European Union and Berlin regarding the execution of Rouhollah Zam, the administrator of the anti-Iran Telegram channel Amad News.

Hans-Udo Muzel, whose country holds the EU's rotating presidency, was summoned after the European Union and the German Foreign Ministry released interventionist statements regarding Zam.

In the meeting, the director general for European affairs at the Iranian foreign ministry strongly condemned the statements and dismissed them as interference in Iran's internal affairs.

Rouhollah Zam had been convicted of acting against Iran's internal and external security, spying for French intelligence agencies, and desecrating Islamic sanctities. Authorities say his online work inspired deadly anti-government protests in Iran in 2017.

Hans-Udo Muzel also received Iran's strong protest at the tolerance shown towards elements who provoke violence and acts of terror, and have taken refuge in some European countries and target the security of Iranian people.

The German diplomat, in turn, said he will notify EU officials as well as his country of Iran's protest.

Majlis Terms Erdogan's Literature Surprising, Unacceptable

TEHRAN (MNA) – Following the recent remarks of the Turkish President, the Iranian lawmakers expressed condemnation over divisive literature of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, calling it surprising, unacceptable.

In a public session of the Iranian Parliament on Sunday, Seyed Mohsen Dehnavi read a statement issued by more than 225 lawmakers on the recent events and positions of the Turkish President.

We strongly condemn the use of divisive literature by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who is expected to be a good neighbor and strive for the unity of the Islamic world as well as the establishment of peace and stability in the region, reads the statement.

According to the statement, Iranian parliament members attached great importance to the territorial integrity of the country.

They also stressed the unity of the Muslim nations noting that the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran is obliged to base its general policy on the coalition and unity of Islamic nations and to make continuous efforts to achieve political, economic, and cultural unity in the Islamic world.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan traveled to Baku on Thursday to attend a military parade of Azerbaijani forces on the occasion of the liberation of the occupied territories. At the ceremony, which was also attended by Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, Erdogan recited a separatist poem about the Aras River on the Iranian-Azerbaijani border.

Fakhrizadeh's Family Receive First-Class Medal of Nasr

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Baqeri presented the first-class Medal of Nasr (Victory) with a signature of the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution to the family of the recently-assassinated scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh- on Sunday.

General Baqeri awarded the medal to Fakhrizadeh's family at their home.

Medal of Nasr is the armed forces' highest medal.

Dr. Fakhrizadeh, Deputy Minister of Defense and Head of the Research and Innovation Organization of the Ministry of Defense of Iran, who was described by the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei as "a distinguished nuclear and defense scientist", was assassinated and attained martyrdom on Friday evening, November 27, near the town of Absard, Damavand city in east Tehran during a terrorist operation by the criminal agents of the Zionist regime.

"First to investigate this crime and firmly prosecute its perpetrators and its commanders, second to continue the martyr's scientific and technological efforts in all the sectors where he was active," Khamenei.ir quoted the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei as speaking about the incident.

Araqchi, Ex-Afghan President Call for Boosting Friendly Relations

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - The former President of Afghanistan wrote about Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister meeting saying: "In this meeting, the strengthening of brotherly and friendly relations between Iran and Afghanistan was emphasized."

Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister in his state visit to the Afghan capital of Kabul held a meeting with former Afghan President Hamid Karzai.

Describing the event, Karzai wrote in his Twitter account that "Pleased to meet Hon. Seyed Abbas Araqchi".

Afghan top diplomat went on to add that "Seyed Abbas Araqchi Emphasized the further strengthening of the brotherly and friendly relations between our countries."

"We also discussed the next steps in the peace process," concluded Karzai.

During the meeting, Araqchi stressed Iran's support for the government, the democratic republic, and the Afghan constitution.

During his visit to Kabul, he also met with Mirwais Nab, Political Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan.

Both sides discussed the peace talks between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Taliban and the role of the Islamic Republic of Iran in establishing a regional consensus on the political and security situation in Afghanistan and expanding political, economic and trade relations between the two countries and other related issues.

Tehran, Brasilia to Accelerate Trade of Plant Products

TEHRAN (FNA) - Iran and Brazil inked an agreement to speed up the trade of plant products between the two countries, Head of Iran Plant Protection Organization Keikhosrow Changanvayee said.

Changanvayee said on Saturday that Iran Plant Protection Organization and Brazil International Plant Protection Convention signed an agreement to accelerate and facilitate the trade of plant products.

The agreement was signed at the 2nd Advisory Committee of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Brazil.

The Iranian official said that the agreement enables the two sides to cooperate on plant quarantine and inspection and enjoy the improvement of mutual plant products transactions.

He expressed hope that the document will develop the trade in bilateral plant products in line with national and international plant quarantine rules and regulations.

The virtual Second Advisory Committee was held between Iran and Brazil with the participation of some of Iran's Ministry of Agriculture and other Iranian officials.

In a relevant event in September, the former Brazilian Ambassador to Tehran Rodrigo de Azeredo Santos and an official with Iran's agriculture Ministry, Alimurad Sarafrazi met and discussed the ways to pave the way for signing of commercial documents in a bid to facilitate commercial cooperation.

Algeria Rejects Trump's Stance on Western Sahara

ALGIERS (Reuters) - Algeria on Saturday rejected a decision by outgoing U.S. President Donald Trump to recognise Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara, saying the step would undermine efforts to end the decades-long conflict over the desert territory.

Trump's administration said it was recognising Moroccan claims to Western Sahara as part of a deal under which Morocco agreed to normalise its relations with Israel.

In Algiers, the Foreign Ministry said the U.S. decision "has no legal effect because it contradicts U.N. resolutions, especially U.N. Security Council resolutions on Western Sahara".



Swiss Freeze Assets of Belarus Leader Lukashenko

ZURICH (Reuters) - Switzerland has frozen the financial assets of the president of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, following the violent aftermath of the elections in the east European country.

Lukashenko and son Viktor are among 15 people banned from entering or travelling through Switzerland, the government said.

The individuals are alleged to be responsible for the use of violence and arbitrary arrests, it said.



U.N. Chief Urges Countries to Declare Climate Emergency



BRUSSELS (Reuters) - U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called on every country to declare a "climate emergency" on Saturday, as world leaders marking the fifth anniversary of the Paris climate accord made mostly incremental pledges relative to the scale of the crisis.

Guterres made his call at a summit aimed at building on momentum behind the Paris deal, buoyed in recent months by renewed commitment from China and the prospect of U.S. President-elect Joe Biden bringing the United States back into the pact.

Nevertheless, the dozens of leaders who spoke mostly offered tweaks to existing commitments or promises of bolder moves before crucial talks in Glasgow in late 2021, rather than breakthrough new policies to hasten the end of fossil fuels.

"Can anybody still deny that we are facing a dramatic emergency?" Guterres, a former Portuguese prime minister who has made climate change his signature issue, said via video.

"That is why today, I call on all leaders worldwide to declare a State of Climate Emergency in their countries until carbon neutrality is reached."

With the impacts of climate change increasingly stark since the Paris deal was struck - ranging from wildfires in Australia and California to collapsing ice sheets - popular pressure has grown on leaders to listen to warnings from scientists.

Britain, co-hosting the summit, made one of the clearest new commitments, announcing late on Friday it would stop direct government support for overseas fossil fuel projects.

Campaigners hailed the move for putting pressure on other G7 economies to restrict support for oil and gas companies.

Renewed pledges to back Paris from countries such as India, Germany and France were welcomed less in terms of substance and more for keeping alive hopes of faster action to meet the monumental challenge of halving global emissions by 2030 in line with the Paris deal.

Chinese President Xi Jinping, who surprised many in September when he announced the world's biggest producer of climate-warming emissions would become carbon neutral by 2060, and unveiled targets to speed the expansion of wind and solar power.

"China always honours its commitments," Xi said.

But China showed no signs of bowing to calls from Guterres and campaigners to wind down finance for new coal-fired power plants, a major source of emissions.

Japan and South Korea, which both pledged in October to reach net-zero emissions by 2050, likewise made no commitments on coal finance - though they did pledge to submit more ambitious emissions targets under the Paris accord.

Pro-Trump Protests Decry President's Election Loss

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Conservative groups claiming without evidence that the Nov. 3 election was stolen from President Donald Trump staged protests across the country on Saturday, with one in Washington turning violent at times as police broke up sporadic clashes after dark.

Organizers of Stop The Steal, linked to pro-Trump operative Roger Stone, and church groups urged supporters to participate in "Jericho Marches" and prayer rallies.

But groups of pro-Trump "Proud Boys" protesters and "Antifa" counterprotesters brawled in downtown Washington on Saturday night. Police moved in quickly to separate them, using pepper spray on members of both sides, Reuters witnesses said. Around 200 members of the Proud Boys, a violent far-right group, had joined the marches earlier on Saturday near the Trump hotel. Many wore combat fatigues, black and yellow shirts and ballistic vests, carried helmets and flashed hand signals used by white nationalists.

Earlier, police in riot gear and on bicycles kept the opposing demonstrators apart by blocking streets. After dark fell, the protesters - including members of the aggressive far-left anti-fascism movement - splintered into smaller groups to roam the streets in search of their rivals.

Protests were also held in other communities around the country, including Atlanta, Georgia, another state where Trump's campaign has sought to overturn Joe Biden's election victory, and Mobile, Alabama, according to local news coverage.

Local media in the Washington state capital of Olympia reported here that one person was shot and three arrested after clashes between pro- and anti-Trump protest groups. More than 50 federal and state court rulings have upheld Biden's victory. The U.S. Supreme Court on Friday rejected a long-shot lawsuit filed by Texas and backed by Trump seeking to throw out voting results in four states.

"Whatever the ruling was yesterday ... everybody take a deep, deep breath," retired Army General Mike Flynn, Trump's former national security adviser, told protesters in front of the Supreme Court, referring to the court's refusal to hear the Texas case.

Flynn who twice pleaded guilty to lying to the FBI about contacts with the former Russian ambassador, spoke in his first public address since Trump pardoned him on Nov. 24. "My charge to you is to go back to where you are from" and make demands, Flynn told the crowd, without being more specific. The U.S. Constitution is "not about collective liberty it is about individual liberties, and they designed it that way," he said.



EU's Trade Deal offer to Britain "Remains Unacceptable"

LONDON (Reuters) - Talks between Britain and the European Union on a post-Brexit trade deal will continue overnight but London believes the current offer from the EU remains unacceptable, a British government source said on Saturday.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen both said on Friday that Britain was likely to complete its journey out of the EU in three weeks without a trade deal.

"Talks are continuing overnight, but as things stand the offer on the table from the EU remains unacceptable," the British source said.

"The prime minister will leave no stone unturned in this process, but he is absolutely clear: any agreement must be fair and respect the fundamental position that the UK will be a sovereign nation in three weeks' time."

The EU and Britain are at loggerheads over fishing rights, economic fair play and dispute settlement despite months of talks to cover trade after Dec. 31, when a transition period that has kept the country in the bloc's single market and customs union following its January exit comes to an end.

The two sides have set a deadline of Sunday to find agreement and prevent a chaotic break.



More Than 100 Arrested at Paris Protest Against Security Bill

PARIS (Dispatches) - Paris police have taken nearly 150 people into custody in what quickly became a tense protest against proposed security laws, with officers wading into the crowds of several thousand to haul away suspected troublemakers.

On Saturday, police targeted protesters they suspected might coalesce together into violent groups like those who vandalized stores and vehicles and attacked officers at previous demonstrations.

The interior minister said police had detained 142 people. Long lines of riot officers and police vehicles with blue lights flashing escorted Saturday's march through rain-slickened streets. They hemmed in protesters, seeking to prevent a flare-up of violence. A police water cannon doused demonstrators at the end of the march, as night fell.

Thousands of marchers were protesting against a proposed security law that has sparked successive weekends of demonstrations and against a draft law aimed at combating "radicalism".

The security bill's most contested measure could make it more difficult to film police officers. It aims to outlaw the publication of images with the intent to cause harm to police.

Critics fear the security bill, which has been adopted by the lower house of parliament, could erode media

freedom and make it more difficult to expose police brutality. The provision caused such an uproar that the government has decided to rewrite it.

Slogans on placards carried by marchers in Paris said "I will never stop filming" and "Camera equals mutilation?" There were also protests in other cities. In Lyon, in the southeast, authorities reported five arrests among people they said attacked police and sought to loot shops.

Footage of white police beating up an unarmed Black music producer in his Paris studio on November 21 amplified anger over the legislation, widely seen as signalling a rightward lurch by President Emmanuel Macron. Other incidents caught on camera have shown police in Paris using violence to tear down a migrant camp.

In the face of mounting protests, Macron's ruling LREM party announced it would rewrite the bill's controversial Article 24, dealing with filming the police.

But the announcement fell short of the mark for left-wing protesters and rights groups, who are demanding that the law be completely withdrawn.

In scenes reminiscent of the "yellow vest" anti-government protests of late 2018 and early 2019, shop windows were smashed and vehicles set alight last week in Paris as small groups of demonstrators clashed with police.



Venezuela's Opposition Concludes Popular Consultation to Reject Maduro

CARACAS (Reuters) - Venezuela's opposition, led by Juan Guaido, on Saturday concluded a "popular consultation" to repudiate President Nicolas Maduro's government after boycotting a congressional vote last Sunday.

The consultation started virtually on Monday and ended with in-person participation. With 87% of responses reviewed, the opposition said just under 6.5 million people participated. Of those, over 3 million voted in person, and 2.4 million online. Close to 845,000 Venezuelans abroad took part, the opposition reported.

The effort was aimed at helping the opposition demonstrate a broad rejection of Maduro, but it does not offer a clear path toward a change of government.

The legislative elections returned Maduro's allies to congress despite an economy in ruins, aggressive U.S. sanctions that stifle the OPEC nation's oil exports and the migration of some 5 million citizens. The Maduro government said 5.2 million Venezuelans voted in the election.

Congress was the last state institution not in the hands of the ruling Socialist Party.

The idea of a popular consultation was proposed in August by Guaido, who is recognized by dozens of countries as Venezuela's legitimate president following Maduro's disputed 2018 re-election.

Opposition leaders and most Western nations said the election was stacked in favor of Maduro, who has been widely criticized for his human rights record and for undermining democracy to stay in power.

On Thursday, Maduro said that "no internet consultation has constitutional status... No one could think that an internet consultation has legal value."

Blanca Marmol, a former supreme court magistrate who helped organize the popular consultation, told a news conference, "This is, I want to emphasize, the last resource we have in the constitution."

Organizers on Saturday reported incidents in 11 of Venezuela's 24 states, with police and ruling party supporters removing some opposition sites for the informal vote.



Shanon
(adviser)

Velenjak Apt (\$2500)
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J, balcony
roof garden
Fully Furn

Pasdaran Villa (\$3000)
1000sq.m
5bdrs, S/p
S, J, balcony
green yard
Fully Furn

Parsian

(\$3000) Farmanieh
300sq.m, 4bdrs
S/p, S, J, pkg
L.balcony
F.F

Niavaran (\$1500) 2bdrs, F.F

(\$7000) Elahieh bldg
4storey, 13bdrs
yard, pkg lots
renovated
F.F

Jordan (\$1400)
3bdrs, 200sq.m, S/p, & F.F

Darrous (\$800) 2bdrs, & F.F
Darrous (\$1500) 3bdrs, & F.F
Darrous (\$2700) 4bdrs, & F.F

Cell: +989121907875
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UAE's Non-Oil Economy to Grow 3.6% in 2021

CAIRO (Reuters) - United Arab Emirates' (UAE) non-oil gross domestic product (GDP) is expected to grow by 3.6% in 2021, state news agency WAM reported on Saturday citing central bank estimates, suggesting the economy will rebound from an expected contraction in 2020.

The Central Bank of UAE, in its second-quarter report on the economy, had recently said the non-oil economy was projected to contract 4.5% for 2020 as a whole due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The state news agency said 388 billion dirham (\$105.6 billion) worth of total economic support packages and initiatives have been announced since the start of the pandemic.



Lukoil to Sell Stake in Oldest Kazakh Asset

MOSCOW (Reuters) - Lukoil plans to sell its 50% stake in Turgai Petroleum, its oldest oil asset in Kazakhstan, as Russia's No 2 producer seeks to boost its revenues by focusing on more profitable fields, four industry sources told Reuters.

Lukoil, Russia's top private oil company, entered neighboring Kazakhstan in 1995, but output at its oldest field there has slowed to a trickle, while Lukoil's need for cash is pressing as at least 100% of its adjusted free cash flow goes in dividends.

Following the sale, it would concentrate on Kazakhstan's giant Tengiz and Karachaganak oilfields, in which it holds minority stakes, the sources said.

Other major oil companies have been streamlining portfolios after pandemic lockdowns and a deep fall in energy demand helped to drive oil prices to the lowest levels this century earlier this year.

The sources, who asked not to be named because they are not authorised to speak to the press, did not say how much the deal might be worth but said the buyer was a private company KVK Petroleum co-owned by Timur Kulibayev, a son-in-law of ex-Kazakh president Nursultan Nazarbayev.

Three of the four sources expected the deal to close this month.

Kulibayev already has interests in oil producing and oil servicing companies in Kazakhstan, as well as in other assets from financials to telecoms.

Lukoil did not reply to a Reuters request for comment. KVK Petroleum could not be reached.

Kazakh National Chamber of Entrepreneurs, where Kulibayev holds a senior management position, did not reply to a Reuters request for a comment.

The remaining 50% of Turgai Petroleum is owned by PetroKazakhstan, a joint venture between China's state energy company CNPC and Kazakh state firm KazMunayGaz. Turgai operates the Kumkol oilfield, whose output has declined in the last decade to around 350,000 tonnes of oil per year.

"There is nothing left there. Obviously it's for sale", said a source familiar with Lukoil's plans to sell the asset, which was the first the Russian company bought in Kazakhstan in 1995.

Oil produced by Turgai Petroleum is mainly supplied to the Kazakh Pavlodar refinery and to China via the Atasu-Alashankou pipeline.

Lukoil owns a 13.5% stake in the Karachaganak project, holds another 5% in Tengizchevroil and a 12.5% stake in Caspian Pipeline Consortium, which ships Kazakh oil to the Russian Black sea coast for further exports to Europe.

\$500m ADB Loan to Expand Financial Inclusion in Indonesia

JAKARTA (Dispatches) - The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved a \$500 million policy-based loan to support the Government of Indonesia's efforts to expand financial access among micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises and marginalized groups such as women and youth.

The Promoting Innovative Financial Inclusion Program will help the government better target and track financial inclusion, improve the payments infrastructure, and strengthen the regulatory framework for digital financial services, data privacy, consumer protection, and financial literacy. The program will help build a more inclusive financial services sector, which will reduce poverty and inequality and support Indonesia's long-term sustainable development.

"The program's reforms support policy and technology enablers to foster innovations and boost financial inclusion by providing access to formal financial products and services, improving their quality, and increasing their use by financially underserved populations," said ADB Financial Sector Specialist for Southeast Asia Poornima Jayawardana. "Financial inclusion will play an important role in Indonesia's recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. More equitable, efficient access to financial products and services will support government measures to mitigate the pandemic's economic and social impacts, rebuild livelihoods, and prepare for future economic shocks."

The Financial Inclusion Insights Survey by the Indonesian National Council for Financial Inclusion shows the percentage of Indonesian adults with a bank account rose from 35% in 2016 to 56% in 2018. Despite the progress, Indonesia still lags behind neighbors such as Malaysia and Thailand.



Italian Industrial Production Had a Soft Rebound in October

ROME (Dispatches) - After a volatile summer, industrial production was up a modest 1.3% MoM in October. When commenting on the extremely volatile industrial production data for August and September, we warned about the risk of over-interpreting their directional signals, and advised on waiting for the October release to get a better sense of the underlying direction. This has now been published and depicts a stabilizing production framework.

Italian industrial production increased by 1.3% month-on-month in October, after contracting 5.7% MoM in September and a surprisingly strong expansion in August. In working days adjusted terms, industrial production was down 2.1% year-on-year. Browsing the seasonally adjusted big aggregates breakdown, we note that the production of investment goods led the way (+2.6% MoM), followed by intermediate goods (+1.3% MoM) and consumer goods (+0.7% MoM), with energy production alone in negative territory (-3% MoM).

The October release leaves a flat statistical carryover to 4Q20 industrial production. As November marked the start of the soft lockdown Italy (and other Eurozone trading partners) is still partially in, we expect November industrial production to have contracted again. We would need an unlikely strong rebound in December to make industry a positive contributor to 4Q20 GDP growth. Even if that was the case, the polarization of the current lockdown measures on consumption-related service sectors (hospitality, bars and restaurant, leisure) will almost inevitably make services a clear negative contributor to 4Q20 GDP. Details from Istat confidence surveys for November point in that direction. Confidence was down, driven by increasing worries about future unemployment and by worsened expectations about developments in the Italian economic situation, creating the conditions for more precautionary savings. Not the most favourable environment for a consumption boon.

Saudi Arabia, South Korea Build Intellectual Property Rights

RIYADH (Dispatches) - Saudi-Korean relations continue to flourish, including in the field of intellectual property as the two nations thrive during a troubling year.

The Saudi Authority for Intellectual Property (SAIP) has been active since its inception in 2017 and has signed agreements with the US Patent and Trademark Office, the Japan Patent Office and the Korean Intellectual Property Office (KIPO).

Speaking to Arab News, Dr. Yongrae Kim, commissioner at KIPO, said that his office has been the key partner for SAIP in implementing initiatives in areas such as establishing national IP strategies, nurturing IP specialists and developing an IP automation system.

Kim said that IP provided businesses with an incentive to create new values to achieve growth in quantity and quality based on innovation, and created values that would lead to their success.

"This then eventually contributes to the nation's efforts to boost national competitiveness. With the understanding of such a significant role that intellectual property plays, many countries are putting their resources in to develop national IP strategies to further improve their economic environment," he said.

With the continued spread of COVID-19 affecting the global economy, Kim said there had been initial concern over a possible shrinkage or slowdown in innovation efforts, especially in IP filing activities. "Despite this gloomy speculation, we've witnessed a steady increase in the flow of incoming IP applications filed domestically on contact or contactless technologies and services," he said.

"Surprisingly, the total number of IP filings in Korea this year has risen compared to last year, and as far as I understand, a similar trend is being found in other countries, too."

Kim thinks that this is in part due to the prompt support measures taken by many IP offices around the world to mitigate impacts on their users and applicants and protect their rights. "So, to ensure the continuity in innovation, SAIP and KIPO, for example, have entitled COVID-19-related applications to go through accelerated examination, and reduced fees and extended the time limits on certain actions for affected applicants."

Kim said that the COVID-19 pandemic is fueling digital transformation across all economic and industrial sectors, and also promoting changes in the landscape of global trade such as the expansion of protectionism, growth of digital trade and reshaping of the global value chain. Kim believes that IP offices now need to gear up for accelerating digital transformation.

Kazakh Gov't Officials Report Positive Economic Indicators

NUR-SULTAN (Dispatches) - Kazakh government officials noted positive economic indicators over the past 11 months and reported them during the Dec. 10 government meeting, the Kazakh Prime Minister's press service reported.

Construction and processing industries show significant growth, said Kazakh Minister of the Economy Ruslan Dalenov. The processing industry grew by 3.3 percent, where pharmaceuticals and car construction increased the most by 39.5 percent and 52.6 percent respectively.

"The underlying drivers of positive dynamics remain investment in non-extractive sectors, economic lending, real sector growth and rebounded growth in services, as well as ongoing measures to support the economy," said the minister. The service sector, which suffered the most from the coronavirus outbreak, is also showing positive signs.

"The November figures show a recovery in the services sector. Particularly, trade increased by 17.1 percent, arts, entertainment and recreation by 17 percent, technical activities by 15.9 percent, accommodation and catering services by 10.5 percent, administrative services by 10.5 percent, educational services by 7.6 percent and communications by 4.5 percent," said Dalenov.

Over the past 11 months, the state budget received eight trillion tenge (US\$19.1 billion) exceeding the planned budget by 4.7 percent, while the national budget received 5.224 trillion tenge (US\$12.5 billion).

Speaking at the meeting, Kazakh Energy Minister Nurlan Nogayev said that oil and gas condensate production amounted to 78.5 million tonnes over the past 11 months, exceeding the nation's plan by one percent. Tengizchevroil which operates Kazakhstan's major Tengiz and Karachaganak fields produced 24.3 million tons of oil, and the North Caspian Operating Company that covers Kazakhstan's giant Kashagan field as well as Kairan and Aktoty produced 13.9 million tons of oil.

Nogayev also spoke about the recent meeting of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), where the countries agreed on a modest production increase of 500,000 barrels per day starting January 2021.

"This decision was taken for January 2021 only. Decisions for the following months will be taken from January 2021 onwards at monthly meetings with OPEC+ ministers taking into account the current situation in the oil market," said the minister.

In April, OPEC and non-OPEC allies agreed on a record slash in oil production amounting to 7.7 million barrels per day, or ten percent of global oil output after a slump in global oil demand amid the coronavirus outbreak.

Pakistan Economy Contracted \$10.5b Foreign Loans in FY20



ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - The economic affairs ministry said that about 70 per cent of the total external public debt consisted of loans on fixed interest rates as of June 30, 2020, while the remaining 30 per cent loans were obtained on floating interest rates.

As of June 30, 2020, Pakistan's total external public debt amounted to \$77.9 billion, compared to \$73.4 billion during the same period last year, showing a growth of 6 per cent.

Cash-strapped Pakistan contracted \$10.447 billion worth of new foreign loans from multilateral institutions and commercial banks during the fiscal year 2019-20, almost one-fourth higher than previous year's \$8.4 billion, according to a media report.

According to the Annual Report on Foreign Economic Assistance 2019-20 released by the Ministry of Economic Affairs, 99 per cent of the new commitments were for loans and the remaining 1 per cent in grant commitments, the Dawn News reported.

Out of the total new agreements of \$10.447 billion, more than \$6.79 billion financing agreements were signed with multilateral agencies, \$3.463 billion with foreign commercial banks and \$193 million with bilateral lenders.

The report said the high level of commercial financing worth \$3.463 billion — accounting for 33 per cent of the total new commitments — had been secured from commercial banks to refinance maturing commercial debt during the year.

Asian Development Bank (ADB) emerged as the largest lender with new commitments of 30 per cent, followed by World Bank 22 per cent, Islamic Development Bank (IDB) 7 per cent and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) 5 per cent.

These financial institutions extended financing of about 98 per cent of the total new commitments.

The report said that 69 per cent of the new commitments during FY 2019-20 were made under the category of budgetary support.

Ronaldo, Bronze Top FIFA "The Best" Finalists Lists

ZURICH (Dispatches) - The three finalists for FIFA's 'The Best' awards were named on Friday with Robert Lewandowski, Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo topping the men's list. The award winners will be revealed on 17 December with England's Lucy Bronze, Pernille Harder of Chelsea and the tall French defender Wendie Renard in the running for the women's award. Voting is equally weighted between on-line fan votes, some 200 journalists, national team coaches and captains.

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Everton Blame Covid For Record £140m Loss

LONDON (Dispatches) - Everton have announced club record losses of £139.9 million (\$186 million) after the implications of the coronavirus pandemic significantly impacted revenues. The Toffees said the impact of Covid-19 amounted to an unforeseen loss of £67.3 million due to a cut in matchday revenue and television rebates. However, the figures show Everton would still have made a huge loss without the disruption of the pandemic after also posting a then-record loss of £111.8 million last year.

Manchester Derby Fires Blanks, Chelsea Suffer Defend

LONDON (Dispatches) - Manchester United and Manchester City did their Premier League title ambitions little favors in a drab 0-0 draw at Old Trafford as Chelsea's challenge also suffered a setback in a 1-0 defeat at Everton on Saturday. The pressure on United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer was ramped up after his side crashed out of the Champions League with a midweek defeat at RB Leipzig. The beleaguered boss desperately needed an uplifting result in the derby to win back some support, but there was little for either side of the Manchester divide to get excited about as both teams failed to fire. United have won just one of their last four games in all competitions and have only one win at Old Trafford in six Premier League games this term. However, Solskjaer defended his side's performance as they restricted City to just one big chance when David de Gea saved from Riyad Mahrez midway through the first-half. "In my time against Manchester City that's the best performance we have had. Not the best result but the best performance," Solskjaer said. "Tactically we knew they were going to give us some problems but defensively we were excellent. With the ball we didn't create as much as we wanted." A draw leaves United still one point above City but the Red Devils are now eighth with Pep Guardiola's men ninth. United were awarded a penalty two minutes into the second half when Kyle Walker kicked Marcus Rashford, only for the decision to be overruled by VAR as the forward had strayed offside in the build-up. A penalty was the difference between the sides at Goodison Park as Everton fed off the atmosphere created by 2,000 fans for the first time since March to arrest their slide. Ancelotti's men had won just once in their previous seven games after a flying start to the campaign had taken them top of the table in early October. The only goal came on 22 minutes when Dominic Calvert-Lewin was wiped out by a rash challenge from Chelsea goalkeeper Edouard Mendy and Gylfi Sigurdsson coolly slotted away the spot-kick.



Chelsea hit the post twice through Reece James and Mason Mount from shots outside the box, but were limited without the creative spark of the injured Hakim Ziyech and Christian Pulisic. A first defeat in 18 games, excluding penalty shootouts, leaves Frank Lampard's men still two points adrift of Tottenham and Liverpool who can extend that advantage at the top to five points when they are in action on Sunday. Victory lifts Everton up to seventh and back to within one point of the top four. At St James' Park, Newcastle made a fast start on their first match since a coronavirus outbreak at the club led to last weekend's clash with Aston Villa being called off. Miguel Almiron scored the fastest goal in the Premier League this season after just 20 seconds. West Brom levelled through Darnell Furlong, but Dwight Gayle scored the winner eight minutes from time to lift the Magpies up to 11th. Villa are into the top half after Anwar El Ghazi's last-gasp penalty beat Wolves 1-0 in a dramatic finale. The visitors were reduced to 10 men five minutes from time when Douglas Luiz was shown a second yellow card. But Nelson Semedo's stoppage-time foul on John McGinn triggered El Ghazi's penalty before Wolves midfielder Joao Moutinho was dismissed for a second yellow card just moments from full-time in a fractious local derby.



Bassino Wins With Shiffrin Fourth at Courchevel Giant

PARIS (AFP) - Italy's Marta Bassino won the women's giant slalom in Courchevel on Saturday as triple overall World Cup champion Mikaela Shiffrin finished in fourth place. Bassino, 24, added to her season-opening victory at Soelden in mid-October to remain on top of the discipline's standings and move up to second in the general table despite snowfall and testing fog in the French Alps. Sweden's Sara Hector was second 0.46 seconds behind with Slovakia's Petra Vlhova, who leads overall, in third at 0.59sec. Shiffrin made a fateful error midway through the second run to conclude her run 1.70sec off the pace. Shiffrin's preparations for the 2020-2021 campaign have been hit by the coronavirus as well as a back injury. She was second and fifth in slalom in her season bow at Levi in Finland in November. A second giant slalom will take place in the resort in France.

Caviezel Claims Val d'Isere Super-G

PARIS (Dispatches) - Switzerland's Mauro Caviezel showed he had returned to form after an achilles injury by claiming victory in the men's super-G at Val d'Isere on Saturday, the first speed event of the World Cup season. The 32-year-old timed 1min 01.34sec in snowy conditions in the deserted French Alpine resort, finishing 0.10sec ahead of Norway's Adrian Smiseth Sejersted, with Austrian Christian Walder rounding out the podium at 0.54sec. "It's incredible," said Caviezel after his win on a course on the Oreiller-Killy piste shortened by a third because of poor visibility. "I didn't feel 100 percent and I've still got some work to do, but it augurs well for what's to come." France's Alexis Pinturault came in seventh, a result that saw him go atop the overall World Cup standings.



Conte Tells Inter Fans He needs Time to Build Skyscraper

MILAN (Dispatches) - Antonio Conte told Inter Milan fans on Saturday he needed time to turn Inter Milan into "a skyscraper" in European football. Inter's season in Europe is over after finishing bottom of their Champions League group, a third consecutive financially-damaging exit in the first round. "The fact that the league and Coppa Italia are all that remain for us is painful for me," Conte told a press conference before Sunday's Serie A game against Cagliari. "Our elimination from the Champions League burns and those who know me know how I'm feeling about it. "I want to send a message to Inter fans, we're not giving in to those who hope to destroy what we are trying to create after a year and a half of work. "There is too much negativity, even if I understand that there is impatience after ten years without trophies."

"But we started from the ground up, we need time. Once the base has been built, one can think of the skyscraper, the kind Inter fans deserve." Inter are second in Serie A, five points behind leaders AC Milan. The 18-time champions have not won the league since 2010, having finished runners-up last season. But Conte, who led Juventus to the first three in their current run of nine consecutive Serie A titles, said he had not shirked from the difficulties he knew existed when he took over in 2019. "The situation wasn't the best but I knew that and I still wanted to try to take Inter back to where they deserve to be," continued Conte, who also won the Premier League and FA Cup with Chelsea. "On a financial level, we knew that it'd be difficult due to the COVID emergency, but we remain united. "Now we have to focus on the championship, then when the cups start again we will have, for now, two games fewer to play than the others. "This is the advantage we have for now."

Dortmund Suffer Worst Home Defeat in More Than Decade

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Borussia Dortmund coach Lucien Favre admitted his side suffered a "disaster" in the Bundesliga title race on Saturday after being routed 5-1 by VfB Stuttgart to suffer their heaviest home defeat in over a decade. Stuttgart's Congo winger Silas Wamangituka netted twice in the romp which piled the pressure on Favre with fifth-placed Dortmund now five points behind leaders RB Leipzig. "Things went mercilessly wrong," admitted Dortmund defender Mats Hummels. "We shot ourselves in the foot every few minutes." Dortmund have taken just a point in their two league games since star striker Erling Braut Haaland was ruled out until January with a hip injury. Stuttgart's relentless pressing and sloppy Dortmund defending resulted in the visitors scoring four unanswered second-half goals. "We are not a team that can defend well, that has to be said quite clearly," fumed Dortmund captain Marco Reus, while Favre admitted it was "a disaster".

Real Madrid Take Derby Honors

MADRID (Dispatches) - Real Madrid reignited their La Liga title push on Saturday beating leaders Atletico 2-0 as their city rivals suffered a first league defeat of the season. Real, who salvaged their Champions League campaign in midweek by making the last 16, moved to third in the table, three points behind Atletico. It was a disappointing night for Diego Simeone's side who had boasted a 26-match unbeaten run in the league, stretching back to February. That was a run which consisted of 17 wins and nine draws. Real had been the last team to beat Atletico in the league. "We confirmed the improvement we showed in many areas against Sevilla and Borussia, and gave another good display," said Real coach Zinedine Zidane, reflecting on his side's wins in the past week which have helped turn around the season. "There are criticisms that hurt, but they also make you stronger." "We competed very well from minute one until the end, we must be satisfied with work well done." His team were in front after 15 minutes when Casemiro headed home a corner from Toni Kroos. That was reward for Real's early pressure which had seen Karim Benzema denied by a fine save from Jan Oblak moments earlier. Real went 2-0 up after 63 minutes with Kroos again the provider. His pass eventually fell for Dani Carvajal who unleashed a 30-metre drive which hit the post but was diverted into the net by the helpless Oblak. The 'keeper was credited with an own-goal for his troubles. It was only the fourth goal conceded by the usually water-tight Atletico defence in 11 league games this season.



Verstappen Claims First Pole of Season

ABU DHABI (Dispatches) - Red Bull's Max Verstappen clinched his maiden pole position of the campaign on Saturday for the season-ending Abu Dhabi Grand Prix. The Dutch driver edged Valtteri Bottas in second and the Finn's Mercedes team-mate Lewis Hamilton, who is racing for the first time since winning the championship after contracting coronavirus, in third for the Grand Prix. It was Verstappen's first pole since the 2019 Brazilian Grand Prix and the third of his career after clocking his best lap in one minute and 35.246 seconds to beat Bottas by 0.025 seconds. The top three were separated by only 0.086sec, but it was a disappointment for Mercedes who missed out on pole for only the second time this year. Lance Stroll of the Mercedes-powered Racing Point team claimed the other. Lando Norris, equalling his previous best, was fourth for McLaren ahead of Alex Albon in the second Red Bull and Carlos Sainz in the second McLaren. Having said on Thursday he expected to claim 'his seat' for third place again, Verstappen was delighted. "I am very happy with that. Luckily, for me, everything came together in that final lap. It seems like we have a decent top speed this weekend so, hopefully, this will work out for tomorrow," he said. "It's a long season for everyone with a lot of races in a row so this was good for the whole team." His Red Bull team chief Christian Horner whooped with delight and described Verstappen's lap as awesome. "Very well deserved for Max," said Horner. "He's threaded it together and nailed an amazing lap at the end. He's just made it happen himself. "It's been a long season on Saturday afternoons, but to finish the season on pole, we've just got to convert it now."

