

**Iran's Health Ministry Spokeswoman
Sima Sadat Lari Said on Monday
That Some 251 Iranians Have Died
From Coronavirus disease Over the
Past 24 Hours Bringing the Total
Deaths to 52,447**

IRAN NEWS

**Iranian Oil Minister
Bijan Zangeneh Says the Country
Could Build Up Its Crude Oil
Exports to 2.3m Barrels Per Day,
Saying Boosting Oil Production
Is Iran's Right**

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Iran's Tanker Arrives In Venezuela to Load Oil

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Ndros, a crude tanker booked by the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC), has arrived at the Venezuelan coast and is expected to load the South American country's crude, a report said.

Ndros is scheduled to load 1.9m bbl of Merey 16 at Venezuela's government-controlled port of Jose, according to a document seen by Bloomberg News.

The document says the ship has been booked by NIOC, which is listed as a client in the transaction, while Venezuelan state-owned company PdVSA is designated as a shipper.

VLCC Ndros is 2nd to load crude for the NIOC, according to data compiled by Bloomberg; in September, the Iran-flagged ship Horse was the first to load Venezuelan crude for the NIOC.

Iran, Pakistan to Open Second Border Crossing for Trade

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Pakistan and Iran will open another border crossing point for facilitating trade, as the two countries agreed to deepen their bilateral cooperation.

Officials from both countries will attend the opening ceremony at the Rimdan border on December 19.

The announcement was made by Iran Foreign Minister Javad Zarif during his meetings in Islamabad last month.

At the time, Zarif told the Pakistan officials that Iran would open the crossing point, located about 130-kilometre from Chahbahar port in its Sistan and Baluchestan later in November. He had expressed the hope that Pakistan too would open their side of the border — Gabd crossing point — so that trade could be promoted.

The point is believed to be suitably located for the export and import of fruits, livestock, construction material, and petroleum products. The Iranian side of the crossing point has been equipped with modern communication systems, livestock and vegetable quarantine and other required facilities for the import of mango and livestock.

For now, the two countries are using the Mirjaveh-Taftan crossing on a 909-kilometer-long stretch between the two countries.

If U.S. Rejoins JCPOA, Iran Will Return to Full Compliance



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - President Hassan Rouhani yesterday says that the government does not allow anyone to delay the time of ending sanctions, stressing that if the U.S. and others return to their commitments under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Iran will return too.

In his press conference on Monday attended by Iranian and foreign media, President Rouhani referred to the Iran Nuclear Deal or JCPOA, saying: "Government is very hopeful that it will take good steps in the area of removal of sanctions because everyone knows that Trump's economic war has failed."

"The whole world is pressuring the United States that JCPOA must be resumed. One of the Twelfth Government services was that the government did not allow JCPOA to be destroyed with all its might," the president said.

"Trump's main goal was to destroy JCPOA, which was unsuccessful, Rouhani said, adding that "of course some people inside the country wanted to destroy JCPOA as well. We tried to keep JCPOA alive so that this agreement is able once again to play its role in due time."

Noting that JCPOA was a historic agreement in Iran and the region, President Rouhani added: "There may be flaws in this agreement, but in relative terms, it has been a very historic agreement in Iran and the region. Some people wanted to destroy JCPOA, but we kept this agreement because one of our goals is to achieve our nuclear rights."

Referring to the U.S.' illegal sanctions against Iran, Rouhani said: "The end of the sanctions means that the people have achieved their rights. The end of US sanctions means that economic terrorism has stopped, and the criminal has stopped his crime. The government does not allow anyone to delay the time of ending sanctions. Sanctions must end, and this is the right of our people. America must return to its commitments, and if everyone returns to their commitments, we will return to our full commitments, too."

Elsewhere in his remarks, in response to a question from Al Jazeera News Network about the lifting of sanctions and the possibility of his meeting with US-President Elect Joe Biden bilaterally or in the form of a P5 +1, President Hassan Rouhani said the government was doing its best to lift the oppressive sanctions as soon as possible. "We will do our best to lift these sanctions even an hour earlier."

"Whenever other parties fulfill all their obligations, we also fulfill our obligations, and there is no obstacle in returning to our obligations," Rouhani highlighted.

Rouhani noted: "If the United States returns to the nuclear deal and makes up for past mistakes, and Biden returns to the conditions of 2017, we will fully return to our commitments."

President Rouhani also reiterated that "Economic terrorism has come to a halt. That is, the crime has stopped." One significant objective of the government is to break the sanctions, he said, stressing that the government is extremely optimistic about its initiatives in this regard as Trump's economic war has failed and the whole world has admitted that.

With regard to the upcoming elections in Iran, Rouhani described it a great measure to happen next year (according to the Persian calendar).

He expressed the hope that Iran would witness a magnificent election with the participation of all political parties and groups along with very good competition.

He explained that the country is facing a very hard time now because of the economic war waged against the nation as well as the difficult days due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Over 4m Tons of Basic Goods Stored At Iranian Ports

TEHRAN (MNA) - The Secretary of the Iranian Industry, Mining and Trade Ministry's Market Regulation Headquarters said over seven million tons of basic goods are already stored at the country's ports and loaded on vessels waiting to be unloaded.

Speaking in a meeting of the mentioned headquarters on Monday, Abbas Ghobadi said over \$20 billion has been paid by the government to the country's importers of which \$4.2 billion was for basic goods.

Referring to the recent turmoil in the country's markets the official said: "The reports of today's meeting show that the approved price of vegetable oil is constantly being assessed in stores and the price of chicken is close to the approved price. Reports provided by the Agriculture Ministry have also raised hopes that chicken and egg prices will reach the approved price in the coming days."

Ghobadi went on to say that since the beginning of this Iranian calendar year (March 20), about 14 million tons of basic goods, including 25 items of essential commodities, have been imported into the country, of which seven million tons have been cleared in the current quarter of the year (September 22- December 20).

Explosion Hits Tanker Off Saudi Arabia's Jeddah

RIYADH (Dispatches) - A shipping firm says an explosion has hit a fuel tanker off Saudi Arabia's Jeddah, a key Red Sea port and distribution center for oil giant Saudi Aramco.

The BW Group said in a statement that the ship suffered a blast early Monday after being hit by "an external source".

According to the report, the Singapore-flagged BW Rhine saw all 22 sailors on board escape without injury.

The firm warned it was possible some oil had leaked out from the site of the incident.

Dryad Global, a London-based maritime intelligence firm, also reported the explosion.

The United Kingdom Marine Trade Operations, which is linked to the British navy, called on ships in the area to "exercise extreme caution."

No one immediately elaborated on the cause. The Saudi authorities have yet to confirm the blast.

Last month, an explosion rocked a Greek-operated oil tanker docked at Saudi Arabia's southern port of Shuqaiq. The Riyadh-led military coalition blamed the attack on Yemen's Houthi Ansarullah movement, which has not commented on the incident.

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U.S. Military Tankers Smuggle Crude Oil From Hasakah to Iraq Again

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) - A convoy of dozens of U.S. tankers has left Syria's northeastern province of Hasakah for the neighboring Iraq laden with the Arab country's crude oil, as Washington continues looting Syria's energy resources.

Syria's official news agency SANA, citing local sources in the village of al-Sweidiya, reported that a convoy of 85 military vehicles and tankers departed Syria through al-Walid border crossing on Sunday, heading towards Iraqi territories.

The sources added that 16 armored vehicles belonging to the U.S. military escorted the convoy until it reached the border crossing.

During recent months, the U.S. military has increased smuggling Syria's oil through the Iraqi soil.

On December 9, local sources, requesting not to be named, told SANA that a convoy of 60 US military vehicles and tankers rumbled through al-Walid border crossing and headed towards western Iraq after being filled with crude from Rmeilan oil fields in Syria's Hasakah province.

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France Can't Preach Others on Human Rights

TEHRAN (IFP)- Foreign Ministry Spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh says France is in no position to preach other countries on their human rights situation after decorating Egyptian "dictator" Abdel Fattah el-Sisi with its highest honour, the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honour.

In comments on Sunday, Khatibzadeh said it is a "bitter irony" that "a country that secretly awards Légion d'honneur (the Legion of Honour) to a dictator who has launched a coup, has suppressed numerous people in demonstrations and has imprisoned them in dungeon or executed them, is shamelessly talking about democracy and human rights."

The Iranian spokesman made the remarks in reaction to the French Foreign Ministry's statement in criticism of Iran's execution of Rouhollah Zam, the administrator of the Telegram channel Amad News.

"It's a great shame that some European countries have turned into a safe haven for terrorists for years, from Munafeqin (Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization) grouplet to Al-Ahwaziya criminals," he deplored.

"A number of the main elements of grouplets like Tondar, who masterminded and guided a bombing operation at the Sayyid al-Shuhada Hussainiya (mosque) in Shiraz in 2008 and had plans to carry out other major operations in other parts of Iran, but fortunately failed to do so with Iran's intelligence dominance, had been granted citizenship by the very same European countries," the spokesman noted.

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Imported Mobile Phones in Iran to Be Registered Online

TEHRAN (IP) - Deputy Head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) announced that from 21 December, all mobile phones that enter the country will be online registered.

In order to prevent the spread of coronavirus and also for the satisfaction of incoming passengers, all mobile phones will be online registered and the time for the face-to-face process will be reduced to less than one minute, from 21 December Monday at

Imam Khomeini International Airport, Mehrdad Jamal Arvanaghi told IKAC News.

All mobile phones which entered from July 2 to December 20 have been registered in person, but from that time on, all passengers have to fill passenger declaration and write the phone's IMEI (International Mobile Equipment Identity) – A 15 digit number that can be found in the phone's box, he added.

U.S. Holding 15 Iranians Hostage

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The United States is holding as many as 15 Iranians hostage under the pretext of bypassing American sanctions against the Islamic Republic, an official at Iran's Judiciary says.

Ali Baqeri, the Judiciary's deputy for political affairs who also heads the government branch's High Council for Human Rights, made the remarks to Iran's Jam-e Jam newspaper in an interview published on Monday.

"The Americans take Iranians hostage under hollow pretexts, seeking to exchange them with criminals of American nationality, who are staying in Iranian prisons," he said. "This is outright hostage-taking," the official added.

He noted that the prisoners are among roughly 3,500 Iranians who were being held in prison abroad, adding that the Islamic Republic is "seriously pursuing" their cases.

Baqeri also addressed the issue of the country's legal efforts aimed at consigning to justice those behind the assassination of Iran's top anti-terror commander, Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani.

General Soleimani was assassinated in a U.S. drone strike targeting his convoy in Baghdad in early January as he was on an official visit to the Iraqi capital.

Iran has issued arrest warrants against US President Donald Trump, on whose direct orders the assassination took place, and other American officials behind the killing.

The Judiciary has been tasked with following up the prosecution of the perpetrators through domestic and international channels.

Baqeri said Judiciary chief Ebrahim Raisi has personally formed a panel to pursue the case. According to the official, the Islamic Revolution Courthouse that is responsible for



addressing international cases has also granted legal representation rights to six countries that have somehow been involved in the assassination.

These countries are, therefore, required to provide necessary cooperation with Iran in order to both alleviate ambiguities surrounding the case and gather further evidence related to the assassination, he noted.

The official said he had recently met with Germany's ambassador to Tehran to urge Berlin's assistance in this regard given the U.S.'s use of its German-based military outpost to enable the assassination.

Baqeri noted that a number of German lawmakers have also issued a complaint against the role that the military outpost played in enabling contact between the drones that were involved in the terrorist act.

Culture Minister Pays Tribute To Martyr Fakhrizadeh

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Minister of Culture and the Islamic Guidance Abbas Salehi on Monday paid tribute to scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh in a visit with his family.

Salehi said that Iranians will always be grateful to martyr Fakhrizadeh.

Citing Fakhrizadeh's scientific capabilities, he said that martyrs Fakhrizadeh was active in various fields of science and technology.

Fakhrizadeh was assassinated terrorist attack on November 27 when a car bomb exploded and machine gun opened fire on him afterwards, according to Iranian Defense Minister Brigadier-General Amir Hatami.

Meanwhile, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said on Saturday that Iran will retaliate the assassination of a defense industry scientist appropriately.

Earlier, Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Ali Shamkhani said that the enemies had been trying hard to assassinate Iran's defense industry scientist for 20 years before his martyrdom.

20-20 Reading Challenge to Increase Study Rate in Iran

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The Executive Secretary of the 20 and 20 Reading Books Challenge, Mehdi Mohammadi said on Monday that the constant participation in this challenge will lead to an increase of 480 million minutes of per capita reading in Iran by the end of the Iranian calendar year (will end on March 20, 2020).

Mohammadi said that the Cultural and Artistic Organization of Tehran Municipality kicked off the challenge to promote the culture of reading books among the Iranians.

Referring to the motto of the challenge which is "Let's read books for 20 minutes every night", he noted that the inspiring move invites people to study for 20 minutes every night at 20:00 local time.

The issue of book reading has always been an important concern of the Cultural and Artistic Organization of Tehran Municipality and the organization has held several programs to encourage people to read books, he reiterated.

The head of the Media Cultural Center added that amid the outbreak of the Covid-19 disease and the restrictions imposed as a result of the pandemic, the 20 and 20 Book Reading Challenge provides people with a good opportunity to use their free time to read more books.

Araqchi Acclaims Oman's Balanced Approach During Muscat Visit



TEHRAN (IFP) - Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Seyed Abbas Araqchi has lauded the balanced approach the Sultanate of Oman has adopted to the regional and international issues.

Araqchi made the remarks during a visit to Muscat, where he arrived on Monday morning to participate in the 7th meeting of Iran-Oman Committee of Strategic Consultations.

The ranking Iranian diplomat also held a meeting with Minister of Foreign Affairs of Oman Sayyid Badr bin Hamad bin Hamood Al Busaidi on Monday.

In the gathering, Araqchi highlighted Oman's significant place in Iran's foreign policy, hailing the sultanate for its balanced role and stances on the regional and international developments.

The Iranian deputy minister also underlined the importance of constant interaction between the officials of the two countries, saying the decision to convene a session of the Strategic Consultations Committee at the current juncture is highly significant.

The top Omani diplomat, for his part, highlighted the capacities available in the bilateral relations between two Muslim countries, calling for closer cooperation with Iran, particularly in the economic and trade fields.

Busaidi also stressed the need for talks on the regional issues, and expressed hope that the ground would be prepared under the new international conditions for understanding among the regional countries.

The Iranian deputy foreign minister is visiting Oman after a three-day trip to Afghanistan.

Leader Permits EC To Proceed With Work On FATF Bills



TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei has approved the administration's proposal for the extension of a process that authorizes the Expediency Council to review the remaining bills regarding the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) requirements, a VP said.

Iranian Vice President for Legal Affairs Laya Joneidi announced on Monday that Ayatollah Khamenei has agreed on the extension of work on reviewing the FATF bills.

In a recent letter to the Leader, the administration had put forward legal proposals to address a series of concerns of the Expediency Council's members and has explicated Iran's current action plan and a number of other developments, such as amendments to a series of recommendations made by the Financial Action Task Force, she added.

Ayatollah Khamenei has approved the administration's proposal for the extension of period for working on the remaining bills relating to the FATF commitments, and referred the case to the Expediency Council, Joneidi noted. The FATF voted on February 21 to keep Iran on its blacklist for what it said failing to comply with international anti-terrorism financing norms.

In October 2019, Iran's parliament approved four bills put forward by the government to meet standards set by the FATF. Only two of them have so far gone into effect and the fate of the two others, one on Iran's accession to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the other one a bill amending Iran's Combating the Financing of Terrorism (CFT) law, is still in limbo.

Scientific Independence Source of Nation's Authority

TEHRAN (MNA) – Stating that scientific independence is the source of a nation's authority, Commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) said Iran is able to decipher the human genetic map.

Major General Hossein Salami made the remarks on the sidelines of the inauguration ceremony of Noor Genetics Center of Baqiyatallah University of Medical Sciences on Monday.

"If a country's scientific resources grow, so does society; while political, economic, or cultural aspects are mostly considered to be the cause of nations' independence, scientific independence is the source of a nation's authority," Salami said emphasizing that science and awareness expand the scope of a country's greatness.

"We have enemies who always try to keep us weak because a country that is far from progress will be weak and be forced to surrender," he added, saying, "But if a country comes out from foreign scientific domination and produces basic needs domestically, it will grow even if it is under a global siege."



"When a person is assassinated for advancing in the scientific space, it means that the enemy is targeting our scientific growth and authority, and every point on which the enemy focuses is our strength," he stressed.

Salami considered the inauguration of the Noor Genetics Center as one of the important achievements of the IRGC, saying, "When we can decipher the human genetic map, the treatment will be easier and more accurate, so we

should not lag behind the world."

He highlighted that the threat of the enemies can be turned into an arena of growth and development with efforts of Iranians.

Noor Genetics Center of Baqiyatallah University of Medical Sciences was inaugurated in the presence of Major General Salami on Monday.

According to the report, genetic identification, gene and cell research and technology, the national genome database and medical genetics services are among the sections of the center.

Tehran, Caracas Fight U.S. Hegemony, Counter Its Cruel Sanctions

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Majlis Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf says the Islamic Republic and Venezuela are pursuing a strategic policy, which is based on maintaining their independence while fighting the US hegemony and its cruel sanctions.

"While emphasizing the two countries' strategic policy of maintaining independence and fighting the hegemonic measures of the U.S. and countering the cruel sanctions imposed by that country's administration, and emphasizing the important role of parliamentary exchanges in bolstering friendly relations, I hope that in the coming term [of the Venezuelan parliament], bilateral cooperation will further expand in various fields by taking advantage of the two countries' potentialities and parliamentary diplomacy," Qalibaf said in a message to Venezuela's National Constituent Assembly President Diosdado Cabello on Sunday.

Iran's top parliamentarian also extended his sincere congratulations to the Venezuelan lawmaker over the recent successful parliamentary elections in the Latin American country.

Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro's ruling party on December 7 won a sweeping victory in parliamentary elections, further consolidating his grip on the Latin American country's power institutions.

With this victory, Maduro's ruling Socialist Party will consolidate its control over an expanded 227-seat National Assembly.

Bolivia's New Gov't Intends to Reopen Embassy in Tehran

TEHRAN (PressTV)- Bolivia's new government intends to reopen its embassy in Tehran, in a move aimed at rebuilding the country's relations with other states, Foreign Minister Rogelio Mayta says.

Mayta said President Luis Arce's administration wanted to restore relations with Iran, Venezuela, Mexico, Cuba, Argentina and Russia, Venezuelan television station Telesur reported on Sunday. Mayta said his country should seek to interact with all countries of the world within the framework of respect for sovereignty.

Under former president Evo Morales who was forced to resign last November, Tehran and La Paz enjoyed close bilateral relations.

However back in June, Bolivia's the then-interim president Jeanine Anez announced the closure of her country's diplomatic offices in Iran and Nicaragua.

"We have nothing against those noble and brotherly countries that we respect and are friends, but we are going to close those embassies to save and invest those savings

in health and against the COVID-19," Anez said at the time.

Upon Arce's landslide victory in the October 19 presidential election, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani voiced Tehran's readiness to revive relations and expand cooperation with the new Bolivian government.

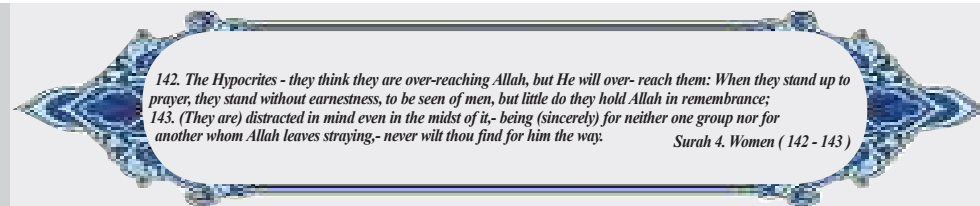
"In the new era of returning power to the people's representatives, I voice support for your elected government and express the readiness of the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to revive mutual relations and expand cooperation with the friendly country of Bolivia in all fields," Rouhani said in a message to Arce.

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif also visited Bolivia last month to attend Arce's inauguration. Zarif, too, underlined the need to boost ties and strengthen cooperation between the two nations. Mayta said Sunday during the Anez administration, Bolivia had severed ties with Venezuela, Argentina, Mexico, Cuba and Iran, regretting the moves which he described as politically motivated and based on US orders.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	11:59
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:12
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:37
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	07:07



No Permission Needed To Return to Oil Market

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Stating that the export of 2.3 million barrels is possible, Minister of Oil Bijan Zanganeh said that Iran does not need permission to return to oil markets.

He made the remarks on the sidelines of the opening ceremony of South Pars phase 11 drilling on Monday.

“If there are no sanctions and resources are provided to rehabilitate wells that have been reduced in production, 2.3 million barrels can be exported,” said Zanganeh.

Noting that OPEC has the commitment to maintain prices, he added, “Iran does not need permission to return to the oil market because it considers it as a right.”

Elsewhere in his remarks, he referred to the sanctions, saying, “During the sanctions period, we proved that we will not give up and find another way to prevent the stop of the development of the oil industry through the efforts of our colleagues.”

“Despite U.S. sanctions against Iran’s oil industry, Iran’s oil production has never stopped,” Zanganeh highlighted.

He reiterated that if the sanctions are lifted and resources for revival pf production in some wells whose production has decreased, Iran can export 2.3m bpd.

On the possible candidacy for running president in 2021 election, he said he himself has also heard such a rumor, reiterating that one should not trust whatever he ears.

Zanganeh also warned people over gas consumption, saying that people should stop wasting



gas and they should be used according to their needs otherwise they may face restriction.

On the conditions set by foreigners for return to Iran in case of lifting sanctions, he said first the U.S. should return to the JCPOA, then we can talk about this point.

Touching upon developing joint fields, he emphasized that currently, the ministry is focused on developing Balal, Farzad, Kish and South Pars fields in the gas sector and Karoun, Jofeir and Sepehr projects in oil sector.

He also said that the first phase of Phase 14 of South Pars is to come on stream by the yearend.

Zanganeh reiterated that if the South Pars gas field is not developed and the production is not protected, the country will face shortage of gas in two years.

He went on to say that the ministry has called on domestic companies to start development of some gas and oil fields as soon as possible, noting that currently 95 percent of the total population of the country enjoy using gas services.

Launching Khaf-Herat railway, Great Historical Event

TEHRAN (IP) - A member of the National Security and Foreign Policy Commission of Iran’s Parliament said that the Khaf-Herat railway would be connected to the national railway network in Afghanistan and would eventually reach China.

Member of the National Security and Foreign Policy Commission of the Islamic Consultative Assembly of Iran Fada-Hossein Maleki stated that the Khaf-Herat railway launch is a great historical event that the two nations and the governments of Iran and Afghanistan have been waiting for years.

Maleki noted that Khaf-Herat railway launching is a major development that will create a privileged position for Sistan and Baluchestan Province and eventually Chabahar port and that Afghanistan will be defined as a commercial hub in the region.

Referring to the importance of the Iranian officials’ visit to Kabul, he stressed that the two countries have a common civilization and language and seek to expand cooperation on various issues.

Cooperation With MSC on Hot Rolling No. 2 a “National Duty”

IRAN NEW ECONOMIC DESK

ISFAHAN - Deputy Industry, Mining and Trade Minister and newly appointed head of Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation (IMIDRO) on the sidelines of his visit of Mobarakeh Steel Company said cooperation with MSC on its implementation of its hot rolling No.2 unit project is a national duty.

Speaking to reporters, Vajihollah Jaafari called hot rolling No.2 unit of MSC and provision of raw material as two important and essential issues for this gigantic complex, adding that on the hot rolling No.2 unit project, some necessary measures should be taken unanimously in Mobarakeh Steel Company in order that the project could bear fruit in the shortest time.

He added that the project without any doubt should be implemented as soon as possible because it is very effective both for the future of the company and providing the national market with steel sheet.

Jaafari then called for resolving the problems in way of the problems as soon as possible.

He said as the supervisory body, he knows his duty to support Mobarakeh Steel Company in provision of its raw material, adding that he tries to prepare a package for provision of the raw material for the company in the shortest time.

He reiterated that in the field of provision of raw material, one will definitely see the cooperation of IMIDRO, Ministry of Industry and its minister.



South Pars Phase 11 Drilling Operations Officially On



TEHRAN (Shana) - Drilling operations of the first well of South Pars Phase 11 development project kicked off officially by the order of Iranian Minister of Petroleum Bijan Zanganeh today (Monday, December 14).

MAPNA Group’s offshore rig (MD-1) was discharged from Soroush Oil Field on October 30 and was deployed in the position of phase 11 of South Pars in Persian Gulf waters on November 6. Drilling of 12 appraisal/development wells in the phase in two stages is on the rig’s agenda.

In the first stage, drilling and completion of five appraisal-development wells, installation of SPD11B platform, and initial production of 500 million cubic feet of gas per day (equivalent to 14 million cubic meters) will be achieved.

Later on, by drilling and completing seven other wells, parallel with the initial production, the total rich gas recovery from the platform will increase to one billion cubic feet (equivalent to 28 million cubic meters) per day.

The development of South Pars Phase 11 has been fully entrusted to Petropars after France’s Total and China’s CNPC International pulled out of a consortium that was supposed to develop the project.

“We tap the capacity of all domestic contractors to develop Phase 11 and shake hands with all of them to carry out this great national project,” Hamid Reza Massoudi, the CEO of Petropars, once told Shana.

“Artavil” Joins Iran’s Oil-Tanker Fleet

Iran (IP) - ARTAVIL oil-tanker left the dry basin of Iran Shipbuilding and Offshore Industries Complex Co. (ISOICO) and joined the large fleet of the National Oil Tanker Company.

With a length of 248m, a width of 43m, a height of 19 m, and weight of 56,000 tons, Artavil is one of the several tankers of Aframax of the National Tanker Company of Iran, which about a month ago entered the dry dock of ISAICO for periodic repairs.

The Afra Max (Average Freight Rate Assessment) is a special vessel designed to carry large amounts of oil.

The overhaul of the main engine, generators, electric motors, pipes, and valves is one of the major repairs performed on the Artavil tanker. All the overhaul stages were performed in ISAICO by the Iranian experts.

The repair of the vessel inside Iran prevented the outflow of about one million dollars from the country. ISAICO (Iranian Shipbuilding and Offshore Industries Complex), which covers an area of 1,100 hectares on the Persian Gulf coast, is the largest maritime infrastructure in Iran, which utilizes unique workshops and specialized manpower, it has the ability to design, build and repair vessel and offshore construct of any size.

Iran to Provide Safest COVID-19 Vaccine

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Minister of Health and Medical Education Saeed Namaki said on Sunday that the Iranian government will provide the safest coronavirus vaccine for the Iranian people.

Namaki further noted that the Iranian scientists are also working on the COVID-19 vaccine.

The world will understand this and in the upcoming spring, Iran will produce the vaccine, he added.

“We didn’t allow a vaccine to be tested here on the Iranian people, while elsewhere they do human testing,” Namaki pointed out.

He also said that more than 10,000 hospital beds inaugurated in Iran under the severe U.S. sanctions and in the Covid-19 crisis which is exceptional in recent decades.

Speaking at the inauguration ceremony of 64 health projects in South Khorasan province on Sunday, Iranian Health Minister Saeed Namaki spoke about Iran’s progress under cruel sanctions and pressures amid the Coronavirus pandemic.

“For the first time, both before and after the victory of the Islamic Revolution, we have inaugurated more than 10,000 hospital beds under the severe sanctions and in the Covid-19 crisis”, said the Minister.

He also criticized the inhuman move of the Americans

in terms of blocking Iranian patients’ access to medicine, vaccines through freezing Iranian assets.

Earlier on December 5, Namaki had referred to the effects of sanctions on the Islamic Republic, adding that the US has recently prevented Iran to receive a consignment of flu vaccine which was purchased from France.

HTSC Catalysts to Be Loaded at Hydrogen Units of Isfahan Refinery

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

ISFAHAN - Esfahan Oil Refining Company (EORC) has purchased and loaded HTSC catalysts required for its hydrogen units from an Iranian knowledge-based company in order to support domestic manufacturing.

According to Isfahan Oil Refining Company, Masoud Motavali, Head of Goods Procurement of Isfahan Oil Refining Company, said the HTSC catalyst is used in hydrogen production units of refining industries to convert CO to CO2 and increase hydrogen purity.

He stated that the catalysts used in these units are purchased and replaced every three or four years, adding: “Until 2014, this type of catalyst was not produced in the country, but after that, catalyst production studies began in Iran and finally in 2019, a contract with Kharazmi Technology Development Company signed on production and delivery of high temperature shift catalysts for the hydrogen unit of Isfahan Refinery, which is one of the most modern refineries in the country, and the possibility of officially producing this product was provided domestically.”

The head of commodity procurement of Isfahan Oil Refinery announced the cost of catalyst production at 2.4 Euros per kilogram, and continued: “This type of catalyst was procured from an Indian company with a price of 68.4 Euros per kilogram.”



FAO to Support Iranian Experts in Developing, Appraising Green Projects

TEHRAN (FAO)- The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), as part of its ongoing efforts in supporting Iran to enhance its national capabilities to adapt and mitigate climate change, provides another training opportunity for Iranian experts, enhancing their knowledge and skills to scale up climate investment for the agricultural and rural development sectors, leverage partnerships with global funding bodies, and build climate-resilient development pathways.

Representing over 20 Iranian entities and divisions from both public and private sectors, during this five-day workshops the participants were provided with requisite vision, understanding, tools and hands-on training on developing climate rationale, collecting required data and information, assessing project idea, concept note and full proposal. Besides, the attendees were trained on critical project-formulating concepts including Paradigm shift, Theory of Change (TOC), Simplified Approval Procedures (SAP), and Performance Measurement Framework, according to the six criteria for Green Climate Fund investment.

Within this workshop the national approval process for accessing GCF funds was also reviewed and discussed by the participants. This assessment process, which is called the No-Objection Procedure (NOP) is an evaluation method developed for the National Designated Authority (NDA) at the Department of Environment. NOP will enable NDA to evaluate, assess and score all prospective concepts and projects who wish to access GCF funds. Being partnered with the Department of Environment and the Green Climate Fund, “FAO is committed to support Iran’s National Designated Authority (NDA) and respective stakeholders to engage with the

international bodies and to access the climate finance to limit or reduce greenhouse gas emissions, adapt to the impacts of climate change and boost climate-resilient development in the country,” emphasized Mr. Gerold Bödeker, FAO Representative to the Islamic Republic of Iran in his remarks delivered at the Workshop.

Reiterating the fact that “FAO stands ready to assist the Islamic Republic of Iran as it raises its ambition on climate action,” Mr. Bödeker further underscored that the “Organization works closely with its international and national counterparts to build a good understanding of global green-climate approval process modality and criteria among engaged stakeholders in the country.”

FAO, being the lead UN agency in promoting climate-smart approaches, practices and techniques in the agriculture sector, implements the project “Green Climate Fund Readiness and Preparatory Program of the Islamic Republic of Iran,” supporting the country in its efforts to preserve the environment and biodiversity, and build the resilience among millions of rural family farmers.





AMBASSADOR'S FOREWORD

On December 16 Kazakhstan celebrates its 29th Anniversary of Independence. The years following independence in 1991 have been marked by significant reforms to the soviet style economy and political monopoly on power. Over the 29 years of independence, Kazakhstan has emerged as a successful model of economic development. During all these years the country has reached high achievements in developing its nationhood in spite of difficult geo-political environment and global challenges. The country is widely acknowledged as the most economically prosperous state among the former Soviet republics. Being the 9th largest country in the world by the territory (2.7 mln km²), Kazakhstan ranks the 6th in the world by total amount of its mineral resources, worth roughly around 50 trillion USD. Having obtained independence, Kazakhstan defined its own way of development strategy and has actively learned from the experiences of other countries in implementing economic policies. The government has established effective political and economic institutions that have helped the country avoid the "resource curse" and attract significant foreign direct investment. Kazakhstan has been open to foreign companies and investments from the very beginning. In particular, it largely privatised its energy sector and attracted foreign capital for developing its economy. In the situation of an acute shortage of financial resources, especially at the dawn of independence, foreign investment helped Kazakhstan to modernize production, enter global markets and address key issues of social and economic development. Throughout a period of independence, Kazakhstan has ensured political stability as well as inter-ethnic and inter-religious harmony. It allowed to avoid the divisions and conflicts that have been seen in some other parts of the region. On December 1st Kazakhstan also celebrated the Day of the First President. The date commemorates significant achievements and contribution of the First President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev to establishing and developing of the country. Under his leadership, Kazakhstan has become a politically stable and economically sustainable country with multiethnically diverse population. The First President was the author of many global initiatives that have received recognition and respect of international community. From the beginning of his leadership the President Nazarbayev stepped forward with initiative to strengthen security at home and abroad. In this regard, we would like to share with Iran News' readers materials about Kazakhstan and its achievements over the independence years which we hope will better familiarize them with our country.

Ambassador of Kazakhstan to Iran Askhat Orazbay

KAZAKHSTAN'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Kazakhstan's economy is the largest in Central Asia accounting for more than half of the region's GDP and larger than all the other states in the region combined.



This is mostly due to the country's vast natural resources, including an abundance of natural minerals, hydrocarbons and rare earth metals. Almost all elements can be found in Kazakhstan's soil. The country ranks first globally in terms of explored reserves of uranium, chromium and barite. It has a skilled workforce and the economy is quickly diversifying towards agribusiness, manufacturing, logistics and mining.

The government has recently introduced initiatives to further diversify the economy, targeting sectors such as transport, pharmaceuticals, telecommunications, petrochemicals and food processing.

The ongoing process of privatising major state enterprises is to continue until the state's share of the economy reaches 18%. Government measures to boost the growth of small and medium sized businesses predict that by 2025, the SME GDP share will increase to 35%.

Between 1991 and 2020, Kazakhstan received \$330 billion worth of foreign direct investment as a result of the economic and social reforms initiated by the Government. In the 2020 Doing Business Report by the World Bank, Kazakhstan was ranked 25th globally. Kazakhstan's increased role in global trade and its key involvement in the new Silk Road has given the country the potential to open its markets to billions of people.

Kazakhstan is investing heavily in digital infrastructure and is implementing projects to provide extensive broadband internet access across the country. Plans are also underway to introduce 5G and high-quality data centres in urban and rural areas over the coming years.

Kazakhstan's Ministry of the National Economy projects that the country will see a 2.8% GDP growth in 2021 and a 4.6% growth by 2025.

Despite the negative effect of Covid-19, in ten months of 2020 the real sector of the economy demonstrates positive growth dynamics. In the manufacturing industry, growth was ensured by 3.2%, of which in food production - by 3.4%, pharmaceuticals - by 39.7%, the production of finished metal products - by 19.5%, mechanical engineering - by 16.5%, including the automotive industry - by 53.6%, as well as paper products - by 15% and light industry - by 16.4%, construction - by 10.7%, housing commissioning - by 9.7%, agriculture - by 5.2%. The gold and foreign exchange reserves of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the assets of the National Fund as of October 1 amounted to \$ 91.1 billion. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the President has instituted specific policies intent on propping up SMEs. 100 billion tenge was allocated from the National Fund to support businesses, with the Accounts Committee and the Ministry of Finance assigned to oversee the quality of execution of this instruction. A legislative framework has been developed to exempt micro and small businesses from paying income tax for a period of 3 years, up to and including 2023. State subsidies for interest rated of up to 6% per annum on all existing loans to SMEs in COVID-19 impacted areas of the economy, for a period of 12 months, have been provided.

Kazakhstan has set itself the task of becoming one of the 50 most competitive countries in the world, and by 2050 among the 30 most developed countries. Kazakhstan has developed its 2050 Development Strategy, which states that the country will use renewable and alternative energy sources to create 50% of the electric capacity generated in the country. This forms part of Kazakhstan's initiative to transform to a model "green economy".

The largest privatisation programme in Kazakhstan's history is ongoing, foreign investment incentives have been introduced, and the Astana International Financial Centre has been operating for a few years.

Over the past three years, approximately 500 companies have been put up for sale as part of the privatisation programme with completed sales already worth around \$500 million. Kazakhstan is currently implementing the "Third Modernisation" programme, which includes the technological modernisation of



the economy. The government is committed to cultivating new industries which utilise digital technologies, including 3D-printing, e-commerce, mobile banking and digital services. Digitalisation is a major priority for Kazakhstan, as it will play a key role in the development of our industries. This is why the government developed the "Digital Kazakhstan" programme. As part of the digitalisation programme, the Government plans to digitise its mining and metallurgy industries. As a part of the 2018 to 2025 plan on the digitisation of mining and metallurgy enterprises, 192 projects are to be digitised at a cost of \$3.9 billion. Profits resulting from the digitisation are expected to reach \$5.7 billion by 2025. Kazakhstan is working to significantly increase the productivity of labour in its national economy through widespread introduction of automation, robotics, artificial intelligence and exchange of "big data".

KAZAKHSTAN'S TOP ACHIEVEMENTS DURING THE INDEPENDENCE

Kazakhstan is among the safest countries by the nuclear safety rating. This was facilitated by the decree of the First President on the closure of the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site on August 29, 1991. On August 29, 1949, the first test was carried out at the site. More than 40 years later, it was on this day that a decree was issued to close the landfill where 500 explosions were made. On Kazakhstan's initiative, the UN declared August 29 as the Day of International Action against Nuclear Tests. In 1995, on the initiative of Elbasy Nursultan Nazarbayev, the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan was established. Its goal is to ensure social and political harmony in the country. The authority of the organization is recognized internationally.



One of the main successes of Kazakhstan is the construction of the capital - the city of Nur-Sultan. In a short time, a modern city appeared, which has become the hallmark of the country. The city has been awarded the UNESCO City of Peace award. This award is granted to new cities of the planet that have achieved great results in socio-economic, political and cultural development in a short time. During the period of independence, the republic has become a member of authoritative and influential international organizations. Among them are the UN, OSCE, OIC, ECO, SCO, CIS, EAU, CSTO, OECD. Kazakhstan became the first country in the Central Asian region which hosted the OSCE summit after a ten-year break. The capital of Kazakhstan also holds Congresses of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions. Great attention is paid to sport in Kazakhstan at the suggestion of the First President. For 29 years, Kazakhstani athletes have won over 60 Olympic awards. Among the successful Kazakhstani athletes are Gennady Golovkin, Dmitry Balandin, Eldos Smetov, Ilyal Iyin, Olga Rypakova, Alexander Vinokurov, Zarina Diyas, Elizabeth Tursynbaeva and many others. The main sporting events of the country during the period of independence were the Asian Winter Games in 2011 and Winter Universiade in 2017. In 2012, Kazakhstan was included in the list of 50 competitive countries in the world in the global report of the World Economic Forum 2013-2014. Back in the early 2000s, the First President of the Republic of Kazakhstan set a nationwide task to become one of the developed countries of the world. During this time, the volume of GDP increased 18 times, the income of the population increased 9 times, the poverty level was reduced 10 times. In 2017, Kazakhstan became the first CIS country to host the International Specialized Exhibition EXPO. 115 states and 22 international organizations took part in it. The exhibition was attended by about 4 million people, of which half a million came from other countries. During the period of Independence, Kazakhstan has attracted \$ 330 billion of foreign investment. The largest investors are the Netherlands, USA, Switzerland, France, Great Britain, Russia, Italy, Japan, Belgium and Canada. Since Kazakhstan gained sovereignty, more than 300 thousand jobs and 1250 new enterprises have been created in the country. More than 100 countries are consumers of Kazakhstani products. In recent years, the production of more than 500 types of products has been mastered, about 50 new products have been exported. In 2018, on the initiative of the First President, the Astana International Financial Center began its work. English law operates on its territory.

KAZAKHSTAN-IRAN RELATIONS AT GLANCE

Iran is a very important partner and neighbor of Kazakhstan. Both of the countries historically have been having amicable relations and mutually beneficial cooperation. Since the first ever visit of our First President Nursultan Nazarbayev to Iran in November 1992 Kazakhstan and Iran have never had any troubles or turbulences but only strong political will to strengthen bilateral ties.



Nur-Sultan and Tehran have been reciprocating in supporting each other. Iran invaluable supported Kazakhstan's bid to the UN Security Council, our capital's candidacy for hosting EXPO-2017 and signed a Statute of Islamic Food Security Organization headquartered in Nur-Sultan.

Just to demonstrate a very high dynamics of political contacts at the highest level, it is enough to mention that in 2019 meetings between Presidents Mr. Tokayev and Mr. Rouhani, Kazakh Prime Minister Mr. Mamin and Iranian First Vice President Mr. Jahangiri were held, while the Foreign Minister of Iran Mr. Zarif and the First Deputy Speaker of Iranian Parliament Mr. Pezeshkian visited the capital Nur-Sultan. Last year political consultations between Kazakh and Iranian Foreign Ministries were held in Tehran.

Despite Covid-19, leaders of the two states keep contacting each other as well. In May this year, two Presidents had a phone call to discuss the state and prospects of development of Kazakh-Iranian relations, including issues of increasing trade and economic cooperation, as well as measures to tackle Coronavirus. Before that, our Foreign Ministers also held a phone conversation followed by a phone call between our Ministers in charge for infrastructure.

The two countries also successfully cooperate in the framework of regional and international structures such as: the UN, the OIC, the CICA, the SCO, the ECO, the Special Working Group on the Caspian Sea.

Similar trends are being witnessed in cultural field. For example, Iranian handicraft artisans took part in the Artisans Fair of the Silk Road Countries held within the framework of Investment & Tourism Forum "Turkistan: One Road – One History" hosted by Turkistan city on November 4-5, 2019.

This year on October 19 an international online Forum titled "Consonance of Civilizations on the Silk Road" dedicated to 1150th anniversary of the great thinker and scientist Abu Nasyr al-Farabi was co-hosted by Nur-Sultan and Tehran. The Forum's high level participation from the Kazakh Side included the State Secretary of the Republic of Kazakhstan K. Kuserbayev, other ministers and scientists while from the Iranian side there were the Minister of Science, Technology and Research of Iran M. Golami and the President of the Iranian Academy of Sciences who is the famous scientist-farabist Dr. R. Davari Ardakani. As to our trade cooperation, unfortunately, it does not match the real potential of our countries due to current circumstances. In 2006-2007 the trade turnover between Kazakhstan and Iran used to be around 2 billion of USD, while in 2009-2010 it decreased to 1 billion of USD. In 2018 we had this level declined up to 516 million of USD, whereas last year our trade shrunk to 380.3 million of USD. In the first half of 2020, the trade volume between Kazakhstan and Iran reached 140 million of USD. The reason of that are restrictions imposed on Iran. But the most important thing is that our business circles have a strong mutual interest in establishing the trade ties and expanding them further. Last year our capital hosted the 16th meeting of Joint Commission on Economic cooperation where all issues related to the field were thoroughly discussed by the both sides. Traditionally, Kazakhstan exports to Iran barley, vegetables, lamb and goat meat, animal feeds, wheat, whereas it imports back fruits and vegetables, dates and nuts, cement, various plastic goods and many other items. This year, despite the Covid-19, executives of "Aktau Sea Port" Free Economic Zone on 18 February 2020 visited Qazvin province of Iran. As a result of that visit, it was agreed to implement with Qazvin Chamber of Commerce a joint project in Aktau on building an Industrial-Commercial Complex on the territory of the SEZ "Sea Port Aktau" with the total amount of investment about 15 million of Euro. That Complex will facilitate in exporting Iranian goods to Kazakhstan and Central Asia and vies-versa. The Complex will be located on a 5-hectare area on the Kazakh part of the Caspian Sea. It gives confidence to say that the bilateral trade will come back to its real level in the nearest future because Kazakhstan and Iran have a huge untapped potential that will let both countries expanding their cooperation in all areas despite the existing challenges. It is also hoped that Kazakh President's visit to Iran being planned for the nearest future upon a personal invitation of the Iranian President will open up a new era in the Kazakh-Iranian relations.



Continued On Next Page



THE FIRST PRESIDENT NURSULTAN NAZARBAYEV

Only strong state can make its way towards prosperity and stability. Time flows fast century after century, but history decreed a new country to emerge at the turn of the millennium at the very heart of the Great Steppe.



The great son of his nation, the founder of our state, the First President of independent Kazakhstan – Elbasy (Leader of the Nation) Nursultan Nazarbayev was destined to accomplish this great mission on a spacious land of a country, among top 10 world largest territories, generously endowed with natural resources and having in arsenal the Soviet-era nuclear weapons.

Elbasy has consistently, guided by the national interests of Kazakhstan, led the country through a tectonic political shift unprecedented in recent history and successfully steered a young independent nation towards joining the club of 30 most developed countries of the world. In June of 1989, Nursultan Nazarbayev became the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan; in April 1990, the Supreme Council elected him as the First President of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan inherited from the Soviet Union a declining economy, a stagnated industrial and agricultural sector, unemployment, and poverty. All this increased social tension and the situation could have escalated at any moment. It is no secret that many politicians and experts at that time were skeptical about the future of our state. However, the balanced and effective policy of the First President allowed us to completely refute such skeptical forecasts. Great efforts were made, including the resolution of the border issue. Undoubtedly, one of the first steps that brought world recognition to Nursultan Nazarbayev was the Decree on the closure of the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site. Kazakhstan was one of the four countries that had the world's largest nuclear arsenals that included more than 110 ballistic missiles and 1,200 nuclear warheads capable of reaching anywhere on the earth. But, as a result of the political will of Elbasy, the Kazakh people, one of the most affected by nuclear tests in the world, took the initiative to abandon weapons of mass destruction. The decision of the First President caused a wide ripple effect in the international community. To date, many countries supported the initiative of Kazakhstan and closed their nuclear test sites that threw everything around them into hellish conditions.

In September of 2006, a Treaty on Central Asia's Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone was signed in Semipalatinsk. In memory of the official closure of the Semipalatinsk test site, the International Day against Nuclear Tests is celebrated around the world on August 29.

The problem of global warming also could not leave Nursultan Nazarbayev indifferent. He drew the attention of the entire world community to the tragedy of the Aral Sea, which poses a threat not only to the countries of Central Asia, but also to all mankind. The First President has always adhered to a balanced and peaceful foreign policy. He was able to form a new type of state, combining Asian traditions and Western innovations. Today, the whole world knows our country as a peace-loving and open state, one that actively participates in the global integration agenda. The First President has always been a driving force and a guarantor of ongoing reforms. Therefore, all his initiatives and undertakings were invariably crowned with success. Under his leadership, Kazakhstan transitioned from a planned economy to a market economy.

Several stages of privatization were carried out, which allowed the economy to restore production, stabilize the financial and macroeconomic situation, create a budget and tax system, curb inflation, and maintain the living standard of the population. The name of Nursultan Nazarbayev is also associated with the introduction of the national currency – the Tenge. Under his leadership, an independent financial and economic system was created, a single vertical line of executive bodies was built, the armed forces and law enforcement bodies were formed, national security was strengthened, a multi-party system was introduced, the foundations of civil society were established, and freedom of the press was ensured.

The successes made it possible to proceed to the next stage of the state development planning as well as to solve strategic tasks. At the initiative of the President, the Strategy for development of Kazakhstan into 2030 was developed. This initiative gave the country the opportunity to go through the difficult transitory stages while withstanding critical tests and overcoming the crises that came their way. In 2012, a new "Strategy Kazakhstan-2050" initiative was adopted, where ten global challenges of the 21st century were answered as well as the task of becoming one of the 30 developed countries of the world was set.

The idea of the First President to transfer the capital of the country to the center of Saryarka was a turning point in the history of Kazakhstan. His proposal to build the main city on the banks of the Esil River gave a powerful impetus to the country's social and political life – it also increased our authority in the world community. This decision made a great contribution to strengthening our geopolitical positions and predetermined the development of Kazakhstan into an indivisible state.

Last year, drastic changes took place in our country. The First President voluntarily stepped down and gave up the power to the younger generation. This once again shows the readiness of the Elbasy to make the most courageous decisions in the interests of the country. As a result, we were able to ensure the transfer of power in a peaceful process. This historic event once again demonstrated the wisdom and foresight of the Elbasy.

NUR-SULTAN CITY – A HEART OF KAZAKHSTAN

This year, Kazakhstan's capital marks its 22-year anniversary. Over those years the new capital went through many changes.



The First President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev was the one who made the historic decision to transfer the capital to the center of the country. In record time, for two decades, on the banks of the river Yesil a new city was built whose name today is known throughout the world.

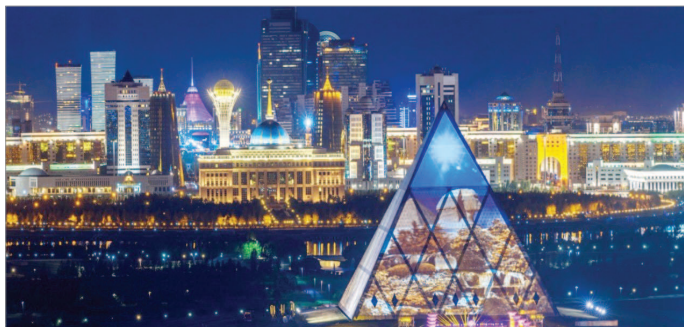
In 1997, Kazakhstan First President Nursultan Nazarbayev suggested to move the capital from Almaty to Akmola (former name of the capital). This decision was based on the important geo-political location of the city in the center of Kazakhstan and the Eurasian continent as well as on the availability of transport and communication infrastructure. The capital's new location was also chosen for the availability of space and land which would allow the city to develop. In making his decision, the President drew on a national study of 32 factors, including socioeconomic indexes, climate, landscape, seismic conditions, natural environment, transport infrastructure, building service and labor. The relocation of the national capital in December 1997 was indeed a turning point for the country. Initially, Kazakhstan continued to face enormous economic problems with the moving of the capital to a city with a population of only 280,000.

In 1998 the new capital was renamed. It was given the name "Astana", which stands for "Capital" in Kazakh. The young capital which changes all the time is the symbol of creation, creativity and progress of Kazakhstan's people. Along with Kazakh companies, the new capital was also constructed by Turkish, Italian, French, Swiss and other countries' enterprises. Annually as many as 60 to 100 middle- and large-scale construction projects were placed in operation. Experts took into consideration the idea of the First President for a Eurasian feel to the city's architectural design and concept. The idea of building the most popular buildings such as Baiterek Tower (A tree of Life), Khan Shatyr Shopping Mall, the Astana Opera House and the Khazret Sultan Mosque was put forward by Nazarbayev himself.

Well-known Japanese architect Kisho Kurokawa, whose previous projects include the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam, Kuala-Lumpur International Airport and National Ethnological Museum in Osaka, created a modern design of Nur-Sultan with Asian nuances. It is a truly unique look and fully reflects the new capital's role as an economic, political and cultural hub.

Nur-Sultan also became the creative testing ground for the ideas of prominent British architect Norman Foster, known as a master of high-tech architecture, from the Millennium Bridge in London, the world's biggest airport in Beijing and the restructured Bundestag in Berlin. He designed the capital's Palace of Peace and Accord, regarded as the most unique home in the world for religions, and other buildings. This was all done with the intention of making the capital the center of Eurasia, where international collegial meetings can be held and historical decisions made. The historic OSCE summit was held here, in which 56 states took part, and the capital provides a forum for congresses of leaders of world and traditional religions on an ongoing basis at the Astana Economic Forum. In addition, the capital of Kazakhstan has become a platform for important peace talks on Syria. In 2017, the capital hosted the International Specialized Exhibition EXPO 2017, which gave a boost to the city economy and for the economies of the regions of Kazakhstan.

Overall, after 22 years of its existence the capital has become the dynamic center of the fast-growing Kazakh nation. UNESCO awarded the new capital the high title of "City of Peace." Today, 11 percent of the country's gross domestic product is produced in the capital, which also provides 10 percent of all investments in the country's economy, that is, the capital has become a



competitive industrial center, where the country's large enterprises are concentrated. More than 57% of the capital's GDP is based on businesses and economic activities of SMEs that produce 20% of all work and services. The volume of production by SMEs has increased by 33 times from US\$433 million in 2005 to US\$14 billion in 2019. Every third resident of the capital works in the field of small and medium-sized businesses. The population of the capital has increased more than 4 times from 280,000 people in 1997 to 1.2 million people in 2020. It is estimated to reach 2 million people in 2030, and 3 million by 2050. From 1998 to 2019, the volume of investments that the capital drew to it multiplied an inspiring 47 times over. In the wake of the Coronavirus pandemic, the city of Nur-Sultan has shown its ability to handle crises and mobilize an effective and timely response to any threats to public safety. This further proves that that model on which the city was built is solid and able to withstand any challenges that are thrown its way. None of this could have been possible if it were not for the vision of the city's names sake, First President Nazarbayev and his tireless work to recreate a new, modern Kazakhstan that's ready to welcome the world with open arms. It is therefore on March 23, 2019, Astana was renamed to Nur-Sultan.

THE ASTANA INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL CENTRE (AIFC), THE UNIQUE FINANCIAL CENTRE OF THE NEW SILK ROAD

The Astana International Financial Centre (<https://aifc.kz>) was first announced in 2015 by the First President of the Republic of Kazakhstan – Elbasy Nursultan Nazarbayev as a part of the "100 Concrete Steps" nation-wide plan to establish strong state institutions and improve social and economic environment in Kazakhstan.

AIFC is the first financial centre operating on the basis of international standards in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Financial Centre's headquarter is an impressive 1632-ha structure, located in the heart of

capital city Nur-Sultan (former Astana) on the EXPO-2017 International Specialized Exhibition infrastructure.

Membership. Today 604 companies have registered in the financial centre from all over the world. Apart from the financial services, AIFC attracts ancillary services providers and investors who find AIFC as the most suitable place for their activities in the region. Among the 604 companies, there are 112 Ancillary Service Providers registered in the following activities: legal, consulting, audit, accounting, IT, blockchain, climate and renewable energy, credit rating, urban planning, HR, Shariah compliance, tax consulting, cybersecurity, education, mining, oil, etc.

AIFC Activities: Capital markets, asset management (global and local private equity, hedge funds and real estate funds), private banking (investment and portfolio consulting, tax and investment planning, asset allocation), FinTech (new FinTech products in a light Regulatory Sandbox regime, along with a specialized regulatory environment (the FinTech Lab), which allows companies to offer their innovative financial services in a safe environment, without the full burden of regulatory requirements), Islamic finance (a regional hub under the Advisory Council on Islamic Finance (ACIF) and the Central Shari'ah Advisory Board with the planned issuance of corporate and sovereign Islamic securities (sukuk)), green finance (green bonds based on the ICMA Green Bonds Principles and the Climate Bonds Initiative systematics).

Market Institutions. There are two Market Institutions registered with AIFC: the Astana International Exchange (AIX) and the Astana International Exchange Central Securities Depository, the clearing organization. The AIX technological platform was designed jointly with NASDAQ and complies with the high requirements and expectations of global market participants. To implement this technological potential, a regulatory framework, unique for the region, based on English common law, has been created. The AIX offers a full-scale business cycle, including trading and settlement clearing transactions. AIX has confirmed compliance with international standards for information security and cybersecurity management ISO 27001 and ISO/IEC 27032: 2012. These



certifications confirm AIX's commitment to a reliable information security system and build confidence in the quality and security of the services provided by AIX. The Astana International Exchange (AIX) shareholders are Astana International Financial Centre, Shanghai Stock Exchange, Nasdaq, Goldman Sachs, and the Silk Road Fund in China.

Disputes and Resolutions The application of common law principles is implemented for the first time in the post-Soviet space at the AIFC. The AIFC Court considers civil and commercial disputes not only between participants of AIFC, AIFC bodies and (or) their foreign employees, but also for companies that choose the AIFC Court as a place for dispute resolution. Based on the English common law jurisdiction, the AIFC Court and the International Arbitration Centre (IAC) already recognized as a leading commercial dispute resolution platform in the region is growing among business, legal and arbitration communities. AIFC Regulatory The Astana Financial Services Authority (AFSA) supervises firms and their employees in the context of monitoring both individual and institutional integrity and ensuring high standards of conduct. AFSA applies the standards of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) on the regulation of money laundering and terrorist financing. AIFC established institutions that meet all international standards and investor expectations. AFSA has focused on supporting AIFC to become a financial services and capital market hub in Eurasia.

AIFC Creates New Opportunities for:

- Investors - by offering securities of state-owned and private sector issuers from Kazakhstan and other countries in the region, as well as business projects, from large-scale initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative, to small IT start-ups.
- Businesses – by providing access to investors, including major international and regional financial institutions, as well as asset managers and Islamic finance institutions.

INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES IN KAZAKHSTAN

Investors have been attracted by Kazakhstan's political stability, well-educated workforce and the access it provides to a fast-growing regional market.



Kazakhstan's investment incentives include a visa-free regime for many countries, exemption from custom duties for equipment and raw materials and land and corporate tax, as well as an Investment Ombudsman. Our country's membership in the EEU

provides investors with access to the Russian market (over 140 million people) and a common market of the Union (more than 180 million consumers). In addition, having presence in Kazakhstan facilitates foreign companies' access to the markets of Western China (300 million consumers) and the Caspian countries (150 million consumers). Several international companies have already established regional headquarters in Kazakhstan and a number of global technology leaders and international companies are operating in the country (General Electric, Toyota Motors, Chevron, Hyundai Motors, Sanofi, Linde, Metro Group, Peugeot, and Sumitomo Metal Mining). "Kazakh-Invest" National Company (<https://invest.gov.kz/>) has been especially established to operate as a "one-stop shop" and to accompany investors through the entirety of their projects, from pitching them opportunities, to preparing investment proposals to the implementation and functioning of the business.

Armenia, Azerbaijan Blame Each Other for Post-Ceasefire Clashes

YEREVAN (Reuters) - Clashes in the Nagorno-Karabakh region have killed four Azeri servicemen in recent weeks, Azerbaijan's defense ministry said on Sunday, in the first report of casualties since a Russian-brokered ceasefire accord.

Separately, authorities in Armenia said six of their servicemen had been wounded in what they described as an Azeri military offensive that took place on Saturday. The Baku government said the clashes, which also left two Azeri servicemen wounded, had taken place in an area that fell under its control when the fighting ended on Nov. 10 and territory in Nagorno-Karabakh previously controlled by ethnic Armenians was handed over to Azerbaijan.



More Than 130 Anti-Lukashenko Protesters Detained

MOSCOW (Reuters) - Police in Belarus detained 135 demonstrators at a Sunday march, the Belarusian rights group Viasna-96 (Spring-96) said, as weekly protests demanding the resignation of veteran President Alexander Lukashenko continued.

Belarus, a country of 9.5 million that Russia sees as a security buffer against NATO, has been rocked by mass protests since an Aug. 9 presidential election that Lukashenko said he won. His opponents say the vote was rigged. More than 120 marches took place in the Belarus capital Minsk and other cities on Sunday, with numbers at each ranging from dozens to several hundred, according to local news outlet Nasha Niva. Police regularly arrest participants, issuing numbers of detainees on Mondays.



Suspected Russian Hackers Spied on U.S. Treasury Emails



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Hackers believed to be working for Russia have been monitoring internal email traffic at the U.S. Treasury Department and an agency that decides internet and telecommunications policy, people familiar with the matter told the news agency Reuters.

There is concern within the U.S. intelligence community that the hackers who targeted Treasury and the Commerce Department's National Telecommunications and Information Administration used a similar tool to break into other government agencies, according to four people briefed on the matter. The people did not say which other agencies.

Three of the people familiar with the investigation said Russia is currently believed to be behind the attack. Two of the people said that the breaches are connected to a broad campaign that also involved the recently disclosed hack on FireEye, a major US cybersecurity company with government and commercial contracts.

"The United States government is aware of these reports and we are taking all necessary steps to identify and remedy any possible issues related to this situation," said National Security Council spokesman John Ulliot.

The hack is so serious it led to a National Security Council meeting at the White House on Saturday, said one of the people familiar with the matter.

The Commerce Department confirmed there was a breach at one of its agencies in a statement. "We have asked the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency and the FBI to investigate, and we cannot comment further at this time."

The breach presents a major challenge to the incoming administration of President-elect Joe Biden as officials investigate what information was stolen and try to ascertain what it will be used for. It is not uncommon for large scale cyber investigations to take months or years to complete.

"This is a much bigger story than one single agency," said one of the people familiar with the matter. "This is a huge cyber espionage campaign targeting the U.S. government and its interests."

Hackers broke into the NTIA's office software, Microsoft's Office 365. Staff emails at the agency were monitored by the hackers for months, sources said.

A Microsoft spokesperson did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Neither did a spokesman for the Treasury Department.

The hackers are "highly sophisticated" and have been able to trick the Microsoft platform's authentication controls, according to a person familiar with the incident, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not allowed to speak to the press.

"This is a nation state," said a different person briefed on the matter.

The full scope of the breach is unclear. The investigation is still its early stages and involves a range of federal agencies, including the FBI, according to three of the people familiar with the matter.

Scores Killed After Taliban Attacks in Kandahar

KABUL (Dispatches) - Dozens of Taliban fighters were killed in fierce overnight fighting between Afghan forces and militants who attacked multiple checkpoints in the insurgent bastion of Kandahar, officials said Sunday.

Taliban militants attacked checkpoints in five districts surrounding the city of Kandahar, which Afghan forces countered with heavy air and ground assaults, the ministry of defence said in a statement.

"The security forces repulsed the attack, killing 51 terrorists and wounding nine," the ministry said, without offering details of any casualties among government forces.

Seven members of a family were also killed in an Afghan air strike in one of the districts, a local official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

"The Afghan air force wanted to target a car filled with explosives... when they hit the car it detonated and caused civilian fatalities," he said. The ministry of defense said it was investigating the incident.

The fighting lasted for several hours through the night, marked with continuous gun battles and heavy bombardments, an AFP correspondent reported from Kandahar.



Algeria's President Makes First TV Appearance in Almost Two Months

ALGIERS (Dispatches) - Algeria's President Abdelmadjid Tebboune said he was recovering from COVID-19 in his first televised appearance since he was hospitalised almost two months ago.

"Thanks to God ... I have started on the road to recovery," the 75-year-old said on Sunday, a day after the first anniversary of his election.

"It may take two or three weeks but, God willing, I will recover all my bodily strength."

The video was broadcast on state television and published on Tebboune's Twitter feed.

He did not indicate his location, but the Twitter feed carried the comment "we will meet soon on the territory of the nation".

Tebboune was sent to an Algerian military hospital in mid-October before being transferred to Germany on a special flight later that month.

His office initially did not explain the reason for the move, but confirmed a week later he tested positive for coronavirus.

His absence sparked concerns of an institutional crisis, weeks after voters approved a revised constitution on record low turnout in a referendum widely seen as a manoeuvre to neutralise the long-running Hirak protest movement.

Tebboune has been unable to sign the revised constitution into law because he must be on Algerian soil to do so.

He also has until December 31 to sign off on a 2021 budget.

But he said on Sunday he was following developments in Algeria "day by day, if not hour by hour". Visibly thinner and wearing a casual jacket, he sat at a desk next to an Algerian flag.

Tebboune won last year's widely boycotted December 12 presidential election following months of mass protests that swept his predecessor Abdelaziz Bouteflika from office.

Dozens of Arrests After Clashes at Pro-Trump Rally

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Supporters of United States President Donald Trump clashed with anti-Trump demonstrators during the weekend in Washington, DC, leading to dozens of arrests, several stabbings and injuries to police officers, in disturbances hours after rallies in support of his baseless claims that he won a second term.

Police said they arrested more than 20 people for a variety of offences, from assault to weapons possession, resisting arrests and rioting.

The violence broke out late on Saturday. Four men were stabbed after a fight downtown, police said. At least one suspect, 29-year-old Phillip Johnson of Washington, was arrested on a charge of assault with a dangerous weapon.

Eight police officers were also injured during the demonstrations, officials said.

The earlier "Stop the Steal" rallies of mostly unmasked Trump loyalists were intended as a show of force just two days before the Electoral College meets to formally elect Democrat Joe Biden as the 46th president.

Trump, whose term will end on January 20, refuses to concede, while clinging to unfounded claims of

fraud that have been rejected by state and federal courts, and on Friday by the Supreme Court.

A pro-Trump demonstration last month, which drew 10,000 to 15,000 people to the capital, also ended late on a Saturday evening with scattered clashes between Trump's allies and local activists near Black Lives Matter Plaza near the White House.

On Saturday, police took more steps to keep the two sides apart, closing a wide swath of downtown to traffic and sealing off Black Lives Matter Plaza.

Saturday's rallies drew dozens of members of the Proud Boys, a violent neo-fascist group, some of whom wore bulletproof vests as they marched through town. The group saw its profile raised after Trump in September famously told them to "stand back and stand by."

After the rallies ended, downtown Washington quickly devolved into crowds of hundreds of Proud Boys and combined forces of Antifa, a far-left anti-fascist movement, and local Black activists — both sides seeking a confrontation in an area flooded with police officers.

As dusk fell, they faced off on opposite sides of a street, with multiple lines of police keeping them separated.



Opposition Supporters Rally To Demand Pakistan PM Quit



ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Opposition protests have gathered momentum in Pakistan as tens of thousands of people defied coronavirus restrictions to demand Prime Minister Imran Khan step down and renew criticism over the military's role in politics.

An alliance of 11 opposition parties, known as the Pakistan Democratic Movement, demonstrated in the central city of Lahore on Sunday, in the culmination of the first phase of protests before a planned march on the capital of Islamabad in January to pile pressure on Khan's government.

The parties of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and slain former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto are part of the movement.

Double-digit inflation, a poor economy, curbs on civil liberties and media censorship are cited by the opposition as the reason for the protests.

Al Jazeera's Kamal Hyder, reporting from Islamabad, said the opposition was keen to portray Sunday's rally as a "referendum" but the government was "determined to stay in power" and not "buckle under pressure".

"There are signs, according to some analysts, that the economy is recovering," Hyder said, adding that the protests were described by the government as "more [of] a ploy" to distract from the corruption charges against Sharif.

The three-time prime minister was forced by the Supreme Court to step down over corruption allegations in 2017 and was convicted and sentenced to a prison term a year later, just days ahead of the general election won by Khan.

He has been living in the United Kingdom since November 2019, when he left Pakistan on medical bail to receive treatment for a blood platelet issue that doctors said threatened his life.

Sharif, who blames generals and judges for what he says were trumped up charges, was expected to address the Lahore rally through video-link from London.

At previous rallies, he has accused the army and intelligence chiefs of rigging the 2018 national elections to block his party from seeking a new term.

For his part, Khan has accused Sharif of "playing" regional foe "India's game" by criticizing Pakistan's powerful military.

If U.S. Rejoins JCPOA...

FROM PAGE 1

Rouhani Also underlined that one of the highest economic growth rates in Iran occurred in 2016 when the country recorded the highest boom in the world and “during these seven years Iranian government fulfilled its promises to the people in many areas.”

He referred to these promises as “moderation, constructive engagement with the global states, lifting imposed sanctions and bringing people to their own rights as well as establishing the nuclear right as a legal right for Iranians.”

Despite the COVID-19 outbreak, many critical projects were inaugurated and some important projects to be started in the coming months, he said.

The President noted that Iran is one of the countries continuously informing the Iranians on the pandemic although all global states have not been open with their people.

President Rouhani stated that Israel’s goal in the assassination of Martyr Fakhrizadeh was to create a war at the last days of the Trump administration, stressing that Iran would avenge the top Iranian nuclear scientist’s blood in a proper time.

Referring to the tensions in the region after the assassination of scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, saying: “The assassination of Fakhrizadeh was the plan of Israel and its main goal in this assassination was to create instability and war in the last days of the Trump infamous administration,” he added.

He said the Islamic Republic of Iran will avenge Fakhrizadeh’s blood in a proper time.

Rouhani said that the Hormoz peace initiative is still on the table, and Iran is ready to negotiate it.

Referring to the Hormoz peace initiative, he said: “The stability of the region is very important for us. You know that we have given the Hormoz peace initiative for the Persian Gulf region. The Hormoz peace initiative was presented to the UN General Assembly. This peace initiative is still on the table, and we are ready to negotiate it.”

He referred to Iran-China cooperation in the region, saying: “Both issues are important. You know that the reason why the US President Donald Trump failed against Iran in the international community was because of Iran’s cooperation and coordination with other countries, so in every issue that Trump went to the UN General Assembly, he could not approve anything, so we continue to have close relations with all countries of the world, especially with China, Russia, the European Union, and our neighbors.”

Explosion...

FROM PAGE 1

This week’s blast comes as Yemeni forces have been conducting retaliatory attacks against Saudi Arabia over the kingdom’s bloody military campaign against their impoverished nation.

Last month, the spokesman for Yemen’s Armed Forces, Brigadier General Yahya Saree, said that a distribution station operated by the Saudi Aramco oil company in Jeddah was targeted by the Quds-2 winged missile with high precision.

Saudi Arabia and a number of its regional allies launched their devastating war on Yemen in March 2015 in order to bring former president, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi,

back to power and crush the Ansarullah movement.

The U.S.-based Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), a nonprofit conflict-research organization, estimates that the war has claimed more than 100,000 lives over the past five years. Riyadh and its allies have widely been criticized for the high civilian death toll as a result of their bombing campaign in Yemen.

The UN says more than 24 million Yemenis are in dire need of humanitarian aid, including 10 million suffering from extreme levels of hunger. The world body also refers to the situation in Yemen as the world’s worst humanitarian crisis.

U.S. Military...

FROM PAGE 1

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France...

FROM PAGE 1

“It is a great pity that great human values have in such way become a plaything in the hands of the governments that have turned everything, including human rights and freedom of expression, into an instrument for their short-sighted political objectives,” the Iranian diplomat deplored.

France, Germany, the European Union and several other countries issued statements in condemnation of Zam’s execution in Tehran. The Islamic Republic says his online work incited violence across the country during the 2017 protests over a hike in fuel prices. In reaction to what Iran calls “interventionist” statements by European countries, the ambassadors of Germany and France were summoned to the Foreign Ministry on Sunday.

“The ambassador of Germany, in its capacity as the rotating president of the (European) Union and also in its national capacity, as well as the ambassador of France were summoned by the director general for European affairs at the Foreign Ministry this afternoon following the interventionist statements issued (by Germany and France),” Khatibzadeh said. “At the meetings, the Foreign Ministry’s director general for European affairs notified the ambassadors of Iran’s strong and explicit protest against the statements of the European Union and the two European countries in support of the notorious terrorist element and the financial and spiritual support from certain European countries for terrorist elements and groups, who have clearly committed criminal security acts against the Iranian nation in cooperation with the Western and the Zionist regime’s espionage services and have explicitly confessed to them,” the spokesperson added.

“In these two meetings, the Foreign Ministry’s director general for European affairs asked the German and French ambassadors according to which standard are incendiary bomb-making training, plots for street clashes, cooperation with the foreign governments and intelligence services with the purpose of toppling the political structure of Iran, and

aiding and abetting the armed criminal activities called journalism? Or under which definition does a journalist become monitored and protected by and cooperate with the internal security agency of France and in close contact with Mossad, begin to extensively collect sensitive national information, including the military information, and provide them to the intelligence services of certain countries?” he added. “As an instance, although the French officials were mindful of the anti-Iran activities and moves of Rouhollah Zam, the French Foreign Ministry’s spokesperson had confirmed earlier that he (Zam) had enjoyed full freedom to carry out his moves,” Khatibzadeh added.

“The Iranian nation will also never forget the role of that group of European countries in equipping Saddam with chemical weapons, which led to the tragic martyrdom of people of Sardasht and Halabja, as well as the martyrdom and injury of a large number of the IRGC and Army forces in the front lines during the imposed war. Still, many victims of chemical attacks during the imposed war are suffering from the pain and miseries across Iran caused by contamination from the chemical substances used in Saddam’s military weapons,” he said.

“In the meetings, the Foreign Ministry’s director general for European affairs added that from the viewpoint of the great Iranian nation, the European countries are accomplices in the shameful measures of such elements, as they have unfortunately sheltered the terrorist and criminal elements that have the Iranian nation’s blood on their hands, have turned a blind eye to their criminal acts, and, above all, try to sanctify terrorism. The fact that the European Union, Germany and France advocate for the criminal elements instead of apologizing to the Iranian nation and to the families of martyrs of terrorist and criminal operations and admitting to their role in those measures is strongly condemned. Thus, their hypocritical comments have no value in the eyes of the Iranian nation and government,” the spokesperson concluded.



Parsian

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roof garden
Nicely Furn

Shanon (adviser)

Niavaran Villa (\$5000)

1000sq.m
5bdrs, S/p
S, J, yard
Fully Furn

(\$2400)
Zaferanieh
190sq.m, 3bdrs
S/p, S, J, pkg
marble fl, F.F

Kamranieh Apts
(\$2000) 2bdrs, 160sq.m
(\$3000) 3bdrs, 200sq.m
with S/pool, S, J, & F.F

(\$10000)
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S/p, S, J, pkgs
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Pakistan Skipper Babar Azam Fractures Thumb

WELLINGTON (AFP) - Pakistan captain Babar Azam has been ruled out of the Twenty20 series against New Zealand and is in doubt for the first Test after fracturing a thumb on Sunday. The World's second-ranked Twenty20 batsman was hurt during a practice session in Queenstown, coach Misbah-ul-Haq said. "He was taken to a local hospital where X-rays confirmed the fracture," Misbah said. There is also a question mark over vice-captain Shadab Khan who has a groin niggle.

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Ajax Player Arrested For Family Stabbing

THE HAGUE (Dispatches) - Dutch international footballer Quincy Promes has been arrested in connection with a stabbing at a family gathering earlier this year, a Dutch news report said Sunday. The 28-year-old Ajax forward Promes "is suspected of assault resulting in serious physical injury," popular daily tabloid De Telegraaf said. The incident happened at a family party at a shed in the scenic town of Abcoude, just outside Amsterdam in late July, the newspaper said.

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SPORTS

TUESDAY DECEMBER 15, 2020

Verstappen Ends Season With Clinical Red Bull Triumph

ABU DHABI (Dispatches) - Max Verstappen claimed his second win of the season and the 10th of his career on Sunday when he drove to a clinical victory for Red Bull in a pedestrian season-ending Abu Dhabi Grand Prix.

The 23-year-old Dutchman dominated from start to finish as he turned his third pole position into a demonstration of speed, talent and flawless strategy to leave both Mercedes men well beaten behind him. It was the first time he had claimed a lights-to-flag victory in Formula One.

"What a way to close a season – fantastic mate," said his Red Bull engineer at the end on team radio. "After such a busy year, I think everyone was a bit tired at the end, but it is amazing," he replied. Verstappen eased home 15.976 seconds clear of Valtteri Bottas, who at least recovered some pride by taking second after his forlorn showing at the Sakhir Grand Prix, and 18.415 ahead of seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton.

"I am so happy," said Verstappen. "I really enjoyed that and it is a great win and a great day for the team. I am going to enjoy the podium -- and enjoy going home!"

On his return to action after recovering from a bout of Covid-19, Hamilton struggled to make any impact as he battled through ahead of Alex Albon, who finished fourth in the second Red Bull, just 1.5 seconds adrift of the out-of-sorts champion.

"You can't win them all," said Hamilton. "And, considering the last couple of weeks that I've had I am genuinely happy with the weekend, even I am have not been 100 per cent.

"But, congratulations to Max. It was a hard race for me and I am glad it's all over. It's a fantastic result anyway to get two podium finishes." Mercedes team-mate Bottas said: "The Red Bull was too quick today. We could not get near them and could not keep up with them, but it was a solid race from my side."

Lando Norris came home fifth ahead of his Ferrari-bound McLaren team-mate Carlos Sainz, a solid showing by the precocious pairing that secured third place in the constructors' championship on a day when they announced an American consortium is buying a major stake in the team.

Daniel Ricciardo, in his last race for Renault before replacing Sainz at McLaren, was seventh ahead of Alpha Tauri's Pierre Gasly, Esteban Ocon in the second Renault and Lance Stroll of Racing Point.

After a warm sunlit desert day, Verstappen made a clean start from his first pole of the year to draw clear of the two 'black arrows'. Bottas recovered from a sluggish departure to retain second ahead of Hamilton as the field settled without incident on the opening lap.



Vettel, in his last race for Ferrari, passed team-mate Leclerc to take 12th but it was not a happy race for either driver. Leclerc finished 13th with Vettel one place back, a disappointing end to a disappointing season for the Italian team. Sergio Perez's Racing Point lost power on lap 10, prompting the arrival of the Virtual Safety Car, followed by the 'full' Safety Car was deployed. For Perez, winner of the previous weekend's Sakhir Grand Prix, it was a disappointing end to his 135 races with the Silverstone outfit.

By lap 20, Verstappen was 3.7 seconds ahead of Bottas who led Hamilton by 1.9. Albon, fourth, was a further five seconds adrift. Back racing for the first time since recovering from Covid-19, Hamilton was operating at less than full power – both physically and with his end-of-cycle engine -- and, after pitting, was unhappy with his new 'hard' tyres.

"That doesn't feel like a good strategy," he said. Soon afterwards, he added: "I'm definitely struggling with the balance. Is the floor ok?"

It became clear that Mercedes were conserving tyres, and power, to preserve reliability, in the unlikely hope of reeling in Verstappen for a late race to the flag.

But the Dutchman cruised clear to endorse his and Red Bull's potential for next season.

Slovenian Outsider Wins Val d'Isère World Cup Downhill

PARIS (Dispatches) - The opening men's World Cup downhill race produced a surprise winner at Val d'Isère on Sunday as Slovenia's Martin Cater won his first race on the circuit.

The powerfully built Cater was taken aback that he had won and only celebrated after a long hard gaze at the clock.

"I thought I was in the top ten or top 15 and I couldn't believe it when I saw I'd won," said the 27-year-old.

Cater took 2min 04.67sec to swoop down the 3037m course on fast, compact snow in bright sunshine.

Otmar Striedinger of Austria was also something of a surprise 0.22sec adrift in second, while Urs Krienbuehl was third at 0.27.

World Cup overall champion Norway's Aleksander Aamodt Kilde was fourth on the treacherous looking course on a day where the action was held up twice to take away injured fallers.

The women's World Cup giant slalom race at French resort Courchevel was postponed at the last minute because of heavy overnight snowfall and has been rescheduled for Monday.



Tottenham Let Points Slip Away at Crystal Palace

LONDON (Dispatches) - Tottenham wasted the chance to move three points clear at the top of the Premier League as Jeffrey Schlupp's equaliser nine minutes from time earned a deserved 1-1 draw for Crystal Palace on Sunday.

Spurs do remain top by a point, but could be usurped later on Sunday by Liverpool ahead of a clash between the two at Anfield on Wednesday. Jose Mourinho's men were punished for sitting on their lead after Harry Kane's long-range shot caught out Vicente Guaita in the Palace goal on 23 minutes.

Tottenham are now unbeaten in 11 league games, but will feel they let two points get away in their quest for a first league title in 60 years as Guaita made amends with brilliant late stops to deny Kane and Eric Dier a winner.

Questions will be asked, though, of why the visitors took their foot off the gas for nearly an hour between the opener and Schlupp's equaliser.

Guaita's up and down day started well as the Spanish goalkeeper had produced another great save low to his right from Tanguy Ndombele's shot. Sergio Reguilon also curled just over on his weaker right foot on one of the many bursts forward from left-back, while Guaita also parried a Kane header from a corner.

However, Guaita was at fault as Kane's speculative long-range effort saw him wrong-footed for the England captain's 15th goal of the season.

Dortmund Sack Favre After Rout

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Bundesliga club Borussia Dortmund said Sunday they have fired head coach Lucien Favre, a day after the team suffered their heaviest home defeat in over a decade.

Swiss coach Favre is to be replaced by his assistant-coach Edin Terzic after Dortmund crashed 5-1 to VfB Stuttgart leaving them fifth in the league five points behind leaders Bayern Munich.

"It is very difficult for us to take this step, but we believe that the current negative development has put our season goals in danger, and we have to take action," said Dortmund sporting director Michael Zorc.



Jota suffered the injury in the Reds' meaningless 1-1 Champions League draw in Midtjylland on Wednesday, leading to criticism of Jurgen Klopp's team selection for the trip to Denmark.

Jota Out for Up to Two Months

LONDON (AFP) - Liverpool's injury-hit season suffered another setback with the news Diogo Jota could be sidelined for up to two months with a knee injury.

The Portuguese international has made a blistering start to his Liverpool career, scoring nine times in 17 appearances since a move from Wolves in September.

Jota suffered the injury in the Reds' meaningless 1-1 Champions League draw in Midtjylland on Wednesday, leading to criticism of Jurgen Klopp's team selection for the trip to Denmark.

Klopp, though, said he was relieved the diagnosis was not worse.

"It's worse than we first thought and better than we then thought," said Klopp ahead of Sunday's visit to Fulham.

"All the potential surgeons had a look on it, no surgery needed. But he will be out for a while. We don't know exactly but one-and-a-half, two months."

Centre-backs Virgil van Dijk and Joe Gomez are expected to miss the majority of the rest of the season, while midfielders Thiago Alcantara, James Milner and Xherdan Shaqiri remain out injured.

Klopp was at least able to welcome back goalkeeper Alisson Becker against Fulham, while Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain was also fit again for a place on the bench.

Messi Saves Lackluster Barca

MADRID (Dispatches) - Lionel Messi saved Barcelona from another embarrassing result by scoring the decisive goal in a 1-0 win over lowly Levante, while Real Sociedad returned top of La Liga on Sunday.

Messi struck with 14 minutes remaining of a lacklustre display from Barca at the Camp Nou which will do little to ease fan fears following their 3-0 hammering at the hands of Juventus midweek.

Ronald Koeman's side are still way off the pace in the title race, nine points behind Sociedad who reclaimed first place despite only drawing 1-1 with Eibar.

Barcelona do however have two games in hand on the Basque outfit.

Atletico are level on 26 points with Sociedad and also have two games in hand while Real Madrid are now just three points behind the leaders having played one less after beating their local rivals 2-0 on Saturday. Villarreal are four points off the lead in fourth after drawing 1-1 at Real Betis, who are one point behind Barca in ninth.

"The team is working well, they gave the maximum," said Koeman. "We still lack a little confidence in ourselves, in our game, but we had a lot of chances, and I have nothing to say about the attitude of the players in this match."

Barca managed to force several saves from Aitor Fernandez, with the Levante goalkeeper doing particularly well to push away a stinging shot from Martin Braithwaite in the 16th minute and Antoine Griezmann's header five minutes later. However the best chance of the opening period fell to Jorge de Frutos in the 12th minute, the Spaniard somehow shooting straight at Marc-Andre ter Stegen after the ball broke kindly for him right in front of goal.

It was hardly the sort of display to honour Sergio Busquets' 593rd appearance for the club, which takes him level at fourth of all time for matches played for Barca alongside Carles Puyol.



Pogba Insists He Is Committed To Man Utd

LONDON (Dispatches) - Paul Pogba claimed he remains fully committed to Manchester United despite his agent stating he is "unhappy" at Old Trafford and looking for a move in January.

Pogba was recalled to Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's starting line-up for Saturday's uninspired 0-0 draw with Manchester City in the Premier League.

The French World Cup winner had started on the bench as United crashed out of the Champions League at the group stage with defeat to RB Leipzig on Tuesday.

Just a day before the game, Pogba's outspoken agent Mino Raiola told Italian newspaper Tuttosport his client had to "change teams."

The 27-year-old rejoined United for a then world record £89 million (\$118 million) in 2016, but has failed to make the desired impact as the Red Devils have not challenged to win either the Premier League or the Champions League.

"I've always fought and will always fight for @manchesterunited, my teammates and the fans," Pogba posted on Instagram.

"Bla bla is not important. The future is far, today is what matters and I am 1000% involved! Always strong together.. all has been clear between the club and myself and that will never change."

"When you don't know what's going on inside don't talk #SpeakTheTruthOrRemainSilent #united #talktothehand."

Pogba's contract is due to expire in the summer of 2022 and Raiola hinted it may be in everyone's interests for United to sell in January before the midfielder's transfer value plummets.

"Paul's unhappy at Manchester United, he can't express himself any more as he would like to and as we expect of him," Raiola told Tuttosport.

