

**Iran's Health Ministry Spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari Said on Wednesday That Some 213 More Iranians Have Died From the Coronavirus Disease Over the Past 24 Hours as Death Toll Mounted to 52,883**

# IRAN NEWS

**Senior Diplomats From Iran and Major Powers Met Yesterday Online To Discuss the State of Their Nuclear Deal That Is Eroding Despite Conciliatory Signals From United States President-Elect Joe Biden**

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2

## DOMESTIC

**Tehran, Moscow Underline Boosting Parliamentary Relations**



> SEE PAGE 2

3

## DOMESTIC

**CBI Governor Accuses U.S. of Impeding Imports Of COVID-19 Vaccines**



> SEE PAGE 3

4

## INTERNATIONAL

**Sanctioned Turkish Defense Industry Chief Expects U.S. Ties to Survive**



> SEE PAGE 4

8

## SPORTS

**Man City Held to Home Draw; Chelsea Lose**



> SEE PAGE 8

## No Contact With Biden's Representative in Oman

TEHRAN6 (MNA) – Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi has dismissed rumors of contact with the representative of U.S. President-elect Joe Biden during his recent visit to Oman.

In a note on Tuesday, Araqchi explained the details of his recent visit to Oman and called the speculations about meeting with the new U.S. president's representative in Oman a fantasy.

"After a two-day trip to Kabul, I had a four-hour trip to Oman on Monday to hold the 7th Joint Strategic Consultative Committee of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Kingdom of Oman," he said.

He described the trip as "intensive and very useful," adding, "Among the countries of the Persian Gulf, Iran's relations with Oman have always had a special feature and importance."

Referring to rumors circulating in social media regarding contact with US officials, the diplomat said, "The storytellers who talk about imaginary meetings do not seem to have a clear understanding of the current situation."

**See Page 7**

## Tehran Calls for End to Development, Testing of Nuclear Weapons

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's permanent representative to Vienna-based international organizations has called for an end to the development and testing of nuclear weapons, saying such a move is the first step toward total nuclear disarmament.

Kazem Gharibabadi made the plea at the 55th Session of the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) in the Austrian capital on Tuesday and underlined Iran's long-standing position on the need for the complete elimination of all nuclear weapons.

"Iran supports the objectives stipulated in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) with the ultimate goal of disarmament, as well as general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control," he said.

"We also strongly believe that stopping all explosive tests of nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosions, as well as ending the quantitative development and qualitative improvement of these weapons, is the first necessary step towards nuclear disarmament," Gharibabadi added.

**See Page 7**

## Leader Urges Nation, Officials To Focus on Defusing Sanctions



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei says revenge for Iran's senior commander Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, who was assassinated by the United States, is certain and will be exacted at the right time.

Ayatollah Khamenei made the remarks on Wednesday at a meeting with organizers of programs to commemorate the first martyrdom anniversary of top Iranian and Iraqi anti-terror commanders, Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, and a group of their comrades.

The two commanders were martyred in a drone strike ordered by U.S. President Donald Trump near the Baghdad International Airport on January 3. Back then, General Soleimani was in the Iraqi capital on an official visit at the invitation of the Iraqi government.

The two figures were highly popular because of the key role they played in eliminating the US-sponsored Daesh terrorist group in the region.

Ayatollah Khamenei recalled the million-strong funerals that were held for the two commanders, saying the "unforgettable" ceremonies "surprised the arrogance's soft war generals and served as a first severe slap in the face of the Americans."

The Leader added that Iran's retaliatory missile strike on the American Ain al-Asad air base in Iraq had been another slap in the face of the Americans.

Ayatollah Khamenei said a tougher slap will, however, be the subjugation of arrogance in the software sector, which requires the efforts of revolutionary youth and faithful elite, besides the expulsion of the United States from the region, which demands the nations' will and resistance.

"Of course, this harsh slap is separate from revenge, because those who ordered and killed General Soleimani must see revenge, and this revenge is certain [and will be taken] at the right moment," the Leader added.

Ayatollah Khamenei said General Soleimani's "historic" martyrdom turned him into a hero for Iranians and the entire Muslim Ummah.

"The reason why martyr Soleimani became a hero for the Iranian nation and different strata of people (even those beyond imagination) honored him and expressed their feelings was that martyr Soleimani was the embodiment of cultural values of Iran and Iranians," the Leader said.

He also mentioned courage and the spirit of resistance as two of the prominent characteristics of General Soleimani.

The Leader further said General Soleimani had "wisdom, ingenuity, sacrifice and altruism" and was a man of spirituality and sincerity, not hypocrisy.

**See Page 7**

## Iranian Oil Exports Rise as Tehran Finds New Buyers

LONDON (Dispatches) - Iran has circumvented U.S. sanctions and exported more oil to China and other countries in recent months, providing a lifeline for its struggling economy and undermining the Trump administration's so-called maximum pressure campaign against Tehran.

The scale of Iran's petroleum sales is difficult to gauge, given their often covert nature. Several firms that monitor the global oil trade say shipments from Iran have roughly doubled from the low levels seen earlier this year, although estimates vary widely.

On the high end, U.S.-based TankerTrackers.com, which uses satellite imagery to follow deliveries, estimated Iranian crude oil exports hit 1.2 million barrels a day over the fall, up from 481,000 barrels a day in February.

Meanwhile, SVB International in Washington said Iran exported 585,000 barrels of crude oil a day in November, up from 230,000 earlier in 2020. Petro-Logistics saw an increase in exports to about 447,000 barrels a day, from 222,000.

The more conservative figures suggest U.S. sanctions have kept most Iranian crude bottled up. But the sharp increase seen across the three market trackers suggests Tehran has been more successful recently in selling its oil.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said last year the U.S. was aiming for zero oil exports from Iran, having previously sought to drive them below 1 million barrels a day, down from their 2018 pre-sanctions levels of 2.5 million barrels a day.

Among the biggest customers for Iran is China, which, according to Beijing's official trade statistics, imported 62,000 barrels a day of Iranian oil in October, up from zero in June. Industry watchers said the actual totals were likely much higher and included oil transhipped through other Asian countries.

**See Page 7**

## Iran Happy With Trump Departure

TEHRAN (PressTV) - President Hassan Rouhani says Iran is not excited about the election of Joe Biden as U.S. president, but is happy with the departure of Donald Trump, the "most rogue" and "law-breaking" American leader so far, who did not even abide by humanitarian principles in dealing with the Iranian nation.

"We are by no means excited about [Joe] Biden coming to power, but we are happy with Trump leaving as a terrorist and a person who even blocked Iran's access to [COVID-19] vaccines; we are happy because he failed to adhere to basic moral and human principles," Rouhani told a cabinet meeting in Tehran on Wednesday.

He also stressed that today's situation is completely different from that of 2015, when long-running negotiations culminated in the nuclear deal, officially called the Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

"In 2015, when we were negotiating the JCPOA, the sword of six resolutions was above our head, but today this sword is broken. Back then, the PMD (Possible Military Dimensions in the nuclear case) was another threat that does not exist today," Rouhani said.

**See Page 7**

## India's Basmati Exports To Iran on the Rise

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India's basmati rice exports continue to grow, especially to Iran, despite shippers facing payment problems from the largest buyer of the fragrant grain.

"Basmati exports are doing very well. They are 30 percent higher this year compared with last year," former president of Delhi-based All India Rice Exporters Association (AIREA) Vijay Setia said.

According to the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA), an arm of the commerce ministry, basmati exports in the first half of the current fiscal were up 33 percent at 27.44 lakh tons compared with 20.57 lakh tons during the year-ago period.

Though the per unit value realization was low at \$885 a ton against \$1,061 last year, the shipments have increased 17 percent in rupee value. In dollar terms, basmati shipments earned \$2.4 billion in the first half of the fiscal.

**See Page 7**

## Iran Has Great Capacities To Expand Renewable Energy Market

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iranian Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian said on Wednesday that the country has great potentials in the field of renewable energies and can have a significant role in developing the region's market for such energies.

In a video message in the 5th edition of Iran's International Renewable Energy Conference and Exhibition (Iran REC 2020), Ardakanian said: "Relying on the high potential of renewable energy sources, including solar, wind, biomass, geothermal, etc., the Energy Ministry has planned good measures in order to implement new policies for creating positive changes in the development of the country's renewable energy sector."

"In recent years, the global renewable energy market and its governing policy frameworks have been developing rapidly and by installing 177 GW capacity of new renewable power plants with more than \$282 billion of investment in this field during 2019 (up one percent from the previous year), the total installed capacity of renewable power plants across the world has reached 2,533 GW."

Ardakanian said that wind and solar power plants with 622 and 584 gigawatts, respectively, have the highest capacity among renewable energy sources.

**See Page 7**



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## Iran Ranks 2nd in World In Growth of Science

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran currently ranks fifth in key research and second in the growth of scientific production in the world, Minister of Science, Research and Technology Mansour Gholami said.

Addressing a ceremony to honor selected researchers and technologists of the country, he hailed Iran's status in the field of science and technology.

Production of science in Iran has had a good position among the leading countries in the world for many years, but maintaining this position requires

special and all-out support for science, research and technology, Gholami said.

Today, the science and technology parks are source of pride and hope and play crucial role in solving problems in various affairs of the country, he said.

"Today, we can proudly claim that our science and technology centers have an effective role in producing knowledge, turning knowledge into technology, turning science into wealth and creating basic employment through parks, knowledge-based companies and growth centers," Gholami said.

## Tehran, Moscow Underline Boosting Parliamentary Relations

**MOSCOW (IRNA) - Majlis Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf and Chairman of the Russian State Duma Vyacheslav Volodin in a telephone talk late on Tuesday stressed the need for promoting parliamentary collaboration.**

Duma in a statement on Tuesday announced that Qalibaf and Volodin discussed parliamentary mutual and multilateral cooperation during the phone talk.

Volodin pointed out that Iran-Russia cooperation which has strategic nature should be developed.

Highlighting significance of parliamentary relations between the two countries, he said that fortunately, high-level parliamentary meetings and talks are taking place between the parliaments, and these relations have played an important role in developing and facilitating bilateral relations.

Tehran-Moscow relations are excellent and strategic, Russian official said, noting that Russian parliament and government are ready to continue cooperation on the



expansion of political, parliamentary, economic, cultural, tourism relations, as well as important regional and international issues.

Qalibaf, for his part, hailed strategic ties, saying that Majlis is ready to further improve parliamentary relations with Russia, and the two parliaments must play their part in strengthening relations between the two countries.

"Given the important position of the Russian Federation and the Islamic Republic of Iran, as well as the abundant capacities of the two countries, the two sides can play a more common role in various fields," he said.

## Chinese Ambassador Condemns U.S. Illegal, Unilateral Actions

TEHRAN (MNA) - The Chinese ambassador to Tehran condemned the illegal and unilateral actions of the United States in the world.

Chang Hua made the remarks in his meeting with Iranian Parliament Speaker's Special Aide for International Affairs Hossein Amir-Abdollahian on Tuesday.

During the meeting, the two sides discussed bilateral, regional and international issues and stressed the need for



expansion of cooperation and consultation between the various political and parliamentary sectors of Iran and China. Chang Hua condemned the assassination of Iranian scientist Mohsen Fakhrazadeh as well as US illegal and unilateral actions in the world.

The need for the immediate and unconditional return of the United States to the JCPOA and the lifting of all unjust sanctions against Iran were other issues that were emphasized by the Chinese ambassador.

## Int'l Developments Not Disrupted Tehran-Manila Relations

TEHRAN - Philippines Ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Iran Wilfredo C. Santos on Tuesday met and held talks with Chairman of the Philippines-Iran Inter-Parliamentary Friendship Group Mr. Alireza Salimi.

During the meeting, Salimi said that Iran and the Philippines in the past years have advanced their relations based on the mutual interests, adding that the international developments have failed to cause any disruption in Tehran-Manila ties.

He then pointed to the old and sustainable relation between both states in different fields like economic, cultural and political, adding that formation of parliamentary friendship groups is a move for boosting and developing bilateral relations, reiterating that Majlis fully supports bolstering and strengthening relations in the economic, trade and cultural fields.

Salimi, who is a member of presiding board of Majlis, added that joint cooperation in regional and international bodies is to the benefit of both countries, and boosting level of relations in agro and economic sectors are of the important issues for both states.

He then pointed to the assassination of Iranian scientist Mohsen Fakhrazadeh, and the U.S. sanctions and urged international organizations to probe this terrorist and anti-human rights act.

Mr. Santos, for his part, pointed to the historic relation between Tehran and Manila, and called Iran an important, peace-loving and historic country in the Middle East.

He also stated that Iran is a friendly country which has always supported the Philippines in diplomatic, regional and international relations especially in the UN.

He also praised Iran's growth in technology, defense and scientific equipment and its special stand in the world nano-technology, announcing his country's readiness for expansion of ties in this sector.

Santos then emphasized parliamentary interactions between both states and exchanges of delegations between parliaments of both countries.



## Iran Eyes Promotion Of Friendly Ties with Kazakhstan



TEHRAN (IFP) - In a congratulatory message to his Kazakh counterpart, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani has called for the expansion of friendly ties with the Central Asian nation in various fields.

President Rouhani on Wednesday sent a message to his Kazakh counterpart, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, to congratulate the government and people of the Republic of Kazakhstan on the country's 29th anniversary of independence.

Pointing to the expansion of relations between Iran and Kazakhstan in line with the interests of the two nations over the past years, President Rouhani expressed hope for stronger friendly interaction in all fields through joint efforts and employment of the existing capacities.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Kazakhstan have common responsibility and interests for strengthening regional stability and security and Islamic solidarity. Constant consultations between the two countries at various levels are necessary to that end," the Iranian president stressed.

President Rouhani also wished the Kazakh leader and people success and prosperity.

Kazakhstan's Day of Independence is celebrated annually on 16 December.

It was the last of the Soviet republics to declare independence following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991.

In recent years, Tehran and Nur-Sultan have stepped up efforts to broaden bilateral relations in different fields.

## Ratification of FATF Bills Prerequisite for Iran's Access to Financial Resources

TEHRAN (IFP) - Spokesman for the Iranian Administration Ali Rabiei says ratification of the remaining bills regarding the Financial Action Task Force requirements will take the country out of the FATF blacklist and help it have access to financial resources and avoid futile international challenges.

Speaking to reporters after a Wednesday meeting of the cabinet, Rabiei said the Expediency Council's ratification of the FATF bills, proposed by the administration, will result in the improvement of international banking and financial relations and the removal of some obstacles.

Pointing to a recent letter that the administration has sent to Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei to put forward legal proposals to address a series of concerns of the Expediency Council's members, Rabiei said, "The Leader ordered that they (bills) not be expired, and that the (Expediency) Council can once again address the subject."

Expressing optimism about the ratification of the bills, the spokesman added, "God willing, we will resolve the problems in cooperation with the (Expediency) Council.



I believe we should all refer to people today."

"We must consider the interests of people. We believe that the sanctions will fail. After the defeat of sanctions, our becoming blacklisted should not cause any problem to serving the people," he noted.

The spokesman said the cabinet has once again discussed the FATF subject at the Wednesday session, adding, "Even if it is ratified by the (Expediency) Council, the situation has become again different from the past. Coming out of the blacklist requires a great deal of effort, while the administration will be doing that."

"The regulations have become stricter. However, if they (bills) are ratified, we will push hard to remove those obstacles. We still believe that these bills are necessary to enable us to have access to our financial resources and avoid useless international challenges," he concluded.

A few days ago, Ayatollah Khamenei approved the administration's proposal for the extension of a process that authorizes the Expediency Council to review the remaining bills prepared by the government to take Iran out of the FATF blacklist.

## Leader Sets Conditions to Reduce Share of National Development Fund

TEHRAN (IP) - The Supreme Leader of Islamic Revolution, in response to the President's letter to reduce the fund's share to 20 percent in the 2021 budget bill, allowed the withdrawal of more than 20 percent of the National Development Fund to a limit of only 1 million barrels per day.

The text of the Leader of Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei's letter to President Hassan Rouhani is as follows:

It is agreed to reduce the fund's share to 20%, subject to the following points:

1- The share of the National Development Fund for the sale of crude oil, gas condensate, and surplus per one million barrels per day should be 38% and all overdue government loans from the National Development Fund should be paid from the government's share of the said surplus.

2- All the expenses that have been financed in the budget of 2020 from the sources of the National Development Fund, should be financed in the budget of 2021 from the sources of the general budget. Withdrawal from National Development Fund resources is not permitted for the 2021 budget.

Mohsen Zanganeh, a member of the Parliamentary Program and Budget Commission, announced on his personal Twitter by publishing this letter: This letter means a reduction of 50,000 billion Tomans from resources and the removal of paragraph 4 of the 2021 budget bill, therefore, I suggest that the government make the reforms and resubmit the bill.

## Islamabad Can Play a Role In Maintaining JCPOA

TEHRAN (IP) - Referring to Prime Minister Imran Khan's efforts to help defuse tensions in the region, the Pakistani president said that Islamabad was able to play a unique role in resolving misunderstandings as far as maintaining the JCPOA was concerned.

In an interview with the Pakistan Institute for South Asian Strategic Stability Institute (SASSI), Arif Alvi expressed Pakistan's readiness to help improve the trust between Iran and the United States and the United States and China.

He added that the Pakistani government, especially Prime Minister Imran Khan, could play a unique role in maintaining the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and remove misunderstandings between Tehran and Washington.

"We appreciate Iran's support for Pakistan's regional positions," the Pakistani president said in a speech at a joint meeting of the National Assembly and Senate members on 20 August.

According to the report, Arif Alvi, referring to the Cold War between China and the United States, which is a major obstacle in the relations between the two countries, said: "Islamabad can play a role in helping this situation."

He stressed: "Pakistan's foreign policy will be balanced and we will not have a selective view, and we will use the same method to promote unity among the Islamic Ummah, especially to counter the phenomenon of Islamophobia."

## New Technologies Can Facilitate War on Narcotics Trade

TEHRAN (IFP) - Vice President for Science and Technology Sorena Satatri has highlighted the major role of domestic knowledge-based companies and advanced technologies in the fight on drug trafficking and in preventing, diagnosing and treating illicit drug misuse.

The Iranian vice president on Tuesday visited an exhibition of the scientific and practical achievements in the war on drugs.

In remarks at the event, held on the occasion of the National Research Day, Sattari said new technologies and innovative methods can introduce new techniques for preventing, diagnosing, and treating drug misuse and even for detection of drug smugglers. He also proposed that Iran's Anti-Narcotics Headquarters should take advantage of the local knowledge-based companies, innovative firms and science accelerators in various fields.

Hailing the close cooperation between the Vice Presidency for Science and Technology and the Anti-Narcotics Headquarters over the past year, Sattari said such collaboration would allow for the use of technology and innovation in the war on drugs.

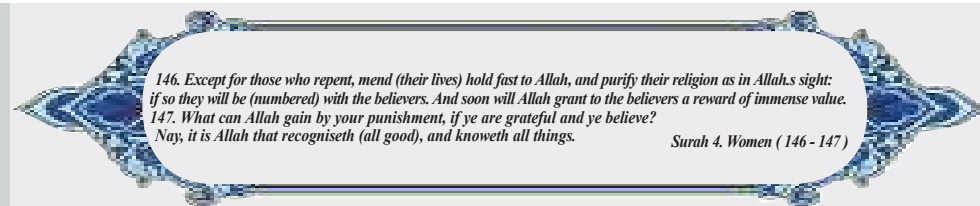
"We must enter the field of war on drugs with the help of technology and innovation. Publication of books and articles alone without technological support would not suffice," the vice president added.





## PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:00
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:13
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:38
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	07:08



## CBI Governor Accuses U.S. of Impeding Imports of COVID-19 Vaccines

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

**TEHRAN - Explaining the details of financing the imports of the Coronavirus vaccine to Iran, the Governor of Iran's Central Bank Abdolnaser Hemmati said the U.S. can revoke its permit to buy the vaccine at any moment it desires.**

Hemmati underscored that the purchase of basic goods, medicines, and medical equipment must not be subject to any sanctions and their imports must not require any license.

"Of course, all U.S. sanctions against Iran are illegitimate in our view and against the international laws," he said, "But the Trump administration has violated all the international regulations in line with its policy of maximum pressure, or in better words, the maximum coercion and unilateralism."

"The boycott of the entire Iranian financial system and all Iranian banks is among one of the major violations of the U.S. from the international regulations," he added.

"The fact that the U.S. has imposed sanctions on the CBI and all Iranian banks, as well as on Iran's exports of oil, petrochemicals, and other Iranian exports, shows that there are no limits for it on putting pressure on the Iranian nation," Hemmati said.

"Imports of basic goods and medicine must be done via banks," he said.

"How would it be possible to do imports without banks?" he asked.

Underlining that all anti-Iranian policies of the US have failed, the CBI governor said banks who are involved in transferring money for the purchase of Covid-19 for Iran follow some specific pre-conditions.

"Due to U.S. pressure on various European banks, i.e. intimidating them from working with Iran and levying heavy fines on them, the destination bank is willing to accept the money if a special and occasional license is issued by the United States with all the steps of money transfer explicitly mentioned in it."



"Currently, the license issued by the U.S. covers the conversion of Iranian financial resources frozen in South Korean banks from Won to U.S. dollar through an American bank and then to a destination bank," he described.

The CBI top official added: "In this license, there is no guarantee that the money will reach its destination."

"The Americans have made it clearly stated that they can revoke their licenses at any time and at any stage."

"This can include the stage when the money is converted into US dollars and is an American bank. The question is in case the purchase of medicine and food is not sanctioned, what does the revocation of an issued license mean?"

"Another point is that the Americans have issued a public license for imports of humanitarian items to Iran that foreign banks are reluctant to accept!"

Hemmati noted that foreign banks are not reluctant to work with Iran but are terribly concerned with U.S. fines. However, Hemmati informed that Iran is doing its required financial transactions for purchasing basic goods and medicine via channels that cannot be monitored and controlled by the US, reiterating that US policies against Iran are doomed to failure.

Iran will definitely purchase the Covid-19 vaccine from specific countries, he added.

## Italian Ambassador Meets Tehran University President

IRAN NEWS CULTURAL DESK

TEHRAN – Italian Ambassador to Tehran H.E. Giuseppe Perrone, accompanied by Ms. Yaroslava Romanova, First Secretary (Cultural and Press) and Dr. Rosalia Gambatesa visiting Italian professor to University of Tehran met President of University of Tehran Mahmoud Nili Ahmadabadi on Tuesday.

Emphasizing on the necessity of enhancing the already-established academic ties between UT and Italian universities, both sides expressed their will to expand the mutual collaboration within the framework of various programs.

**The main topics which both sides discussed included the followings:**

Promotion of exchange and mobility programs for students and faculty members; Joint research projects; Sabbatical leaves; Holding joint cultural and artistic exhibitions; Exchange of academic, materials; Organizing meeting between the presidents of Iranian and Italian top universities; supporting the establishment of Ph.D. programs of Italian language by dispatching qualified native instructors; holding thematic joint workshop on cinema, architecture, archaeology; holding joint book exhibitions; establishments of an association to boost cultural relations; presentation of lecture by Italian ambassador at UT; exchange of experience on the relation between university and industry; using the facilities of UT partner universities in Italy and vice versa to reduce the costs; collaboration within EU programs.



## Foreign Investment in Iran One-Seventh of Turkey



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Chairman of the Iranian and Foreign Joint Venture Investments Association says Iran could have attracted foreign investments between 40 to 50 billion dollars annually but due to the sanctions, lack of communication, lack of trade trust, adding that the condition for foreign investment is not favorable.

Speaking to ILNA, Seyed Hossein Salimi talked about the Iran-Europe Business Forum which was supposed to be held on Monday but was postponed, and said in such forums and gatherings the latest information about the condition for investment is presented for those who are eager to invest in Iran. He added that such meetings and presentation of information can allure companies and investments and this forum could have good output for the country which was unfortunately postponed due to some reasons. He said those economic activists who are willing to work with Europe and European counterparts are the main losers of such postponements.

On the current condition of attracting foreign investment and significance of such forums, he said this forum could have positive impact on foreign investment, adding that if the foreign investments in other countries are around 40 to 50 billion dollars or in Turkey it is around \$20b, it is around \$3b annually in Iran which is an insignificant figure.

Salimi noted that Iran is among the top countries in the world in gas and electricity sectors and the country has many skillful workforces ready to work. He added the country could have attracted annual foreign investment of 40 to 50 billion dollars but sanctions, lack of communication and above of all lack of trade trust have made the condition unfavorable for foreign investment.

He also called for resolving domestic problems regarding investment because instability in laws and regulations make the investors to snub investment, and for this reason economic stability and stability in regulations is necessary for investment.

Salimi reiterated when a foreign investor even in India learns that laws and regulations in Iran do not last more than one year, he is reluctant to investment.

## 14th Cinema Verite Int'l Fest Opens

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The 14th Iran International Documentary Film Festival known as "Cinema Verite" opened in Tehran on Tuesday.

This week-long cinematic event is underway totally online and will be wrapped up on December 22.

Directed by Mohammad Hamidi-Moqaddam, the Iranian festival has several sections, including the National, International, and Martyr Avini Prize, Entrepreneurship Documentary Competition, Corona Virus Special Section, Side Sections, and commemorations.

In the meantime, several expert workshops, master talks, as well as masterclasses, will be held in this international cinematic event.

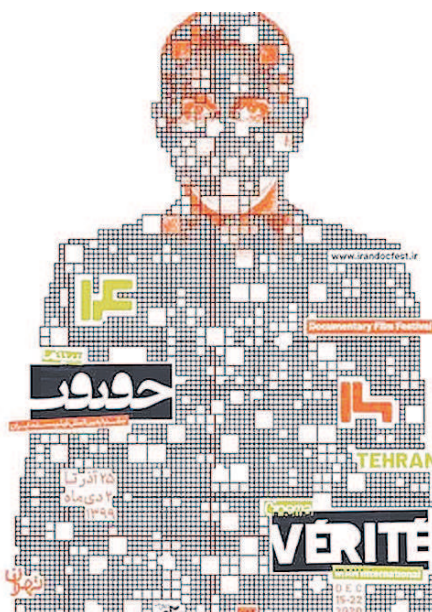
The national competition section comprises short, mid-length, and feature-length documentaries.

The international section of this edition will be held in a non-competition format due to the spread of Coronavirus.

The international section of the festival also enjoys numerous non-competition sections such Special Displays, Mirror of a Festival, Portrait, Perspective of One Country Documentary Cinema, Chile Documentary Cinema, and Masters of 2020, as well as 13 Editions & 13 Films.

Due to the spread of Coronavirus, this edition of the festival will be held in online and remote format via utilizing the national platform in the country.

Mohammad Hamidi-Moqaddam sent a message to the event.



Documentary cinema is the common language of nations. This event is an opportunity to connect people together at a time when the pace of change is accelerating. With the help of documentaries, people gain a new understanding of the issues around them and use this knowledge to foster the situation, the message reads.

There is no part of life that is far detached from the eyes of documentary cinema. Wherever there is a need to search, transform, and change, documentary cinema is there. Documentaries have always been at the forefront of facing challenges and difficulties. They take risks in the path of truth-seeking and truth-telling. We see

many manifestations of this risk and sense of responsibility in today's difficult situation and the epidemic of the Coronavirus, it added.

The intertwining of the Cinema Verite with the documentary cinema has caused the festival to go one step further in connection with this risk-taking and sense of responsibility. While many cultural and artistic events are held in an aura of stagnation and ambiguity, holding an online cinema festival provides an unparalleled opportunity. This festival is turning the challenge into an amazing opportunity to create a vast landscape that provides the opportunity to watch documentaries for a very wide range of audiences, it further noted.

## \$117.5m Saffron Exported in 8 Months

TEHRAN (IP) - Iran's customs spokesman says Saffron exports in the first eight months of this year amounted to more than 192 tons worth \$117.5 million.

Ruhollah Latifi added that Hong Kong, Spain, Afghanistan and China respectively are the 5 countries that have bought the most Iranian saffron, respectively.

He said Oman, Kuwait, Qatar, Macau and Taiwan are ranked sixth to tenth in the purchase of Iranian saffron.

According to the customs spokesman, the Iranian Saffron is also exported to European countries like France, Italy, Sweden, Netherlands, Belgium, the United Kingdom and Germany.

## Iran-Russia Trade Exchanges Rise to \$2.2b

ASTARA (IRNA) - A member of the board of directors of the Iran-Russia Chamber of Commerce said on Tuesday that trade between the two countries has increased from \$ 1.7 billion last year to \$ 2.2 billion this year (to end March 20, 2021).

During his visit to the container export hub of agricultural products from Astara port to Astrakhan port, Russia, Jalili Jalalifar said that development of economic ties with neighboring countries is one of Iran's important strategies.

The best way to counter sanctions is to strengthen trade ties with Eurasia member states, he maintained.

"Among the countries of the Eurasian Union, Russia is of particular importance, and given the infrastructure available in the northern ports, especially in Astara, we must work to develop trade, especially exports," he said.

Astara, Gilan province, lies on the border with Azerbaijan Republic and on the Caspian Sea. It is an important border trade center between Iran and the Caucasus.

## Gov't Might Lift Ban On Imports of Cars

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The government has banned the importing of cars for the past two years, Iranian car manufacturing companies have grabbed the chance to entirely monopolize the local market.

However, two developments have raised the possibility of the resumption of car imports next year. The first is allocating a share for importing vehicles in the government's newly proposed budget.

The secretary of the Iranian Automobile Importers Association, Mehdi Dadfar, says, "In the government's budget for the next Iranian calendar year, 1400, (March 20, 2021-22), President Hassan Rouhani's administration revenue from car import duties is estimated at twenty trillion rials, (approximately \$475 million at subsidized official price) with which several thousand cars can be imported."

Currently, about 3,000 vehicles are still stockpiled in customs warehouses across Iran, and some have attributed the budget line to the clearance of these cars. Of course, the release of these automobiles may be a prelude to the widespread import of vehicles, with the allocated budget for importing cars exceeding the value of the cars stored in customs warehouses.

Meanwhile, the Iranian Majlis parliament is also planning to present a parliamentary motion to resume importing cars. The spokesman for the parliament's Industries and Mines Commission, Hojjatullah Firouzi, says, "The parliament has four conditions for importing vehicles aimed at organizing the local car industry. In the planned motion, the importers should offer their automobiles on the stock exchange."

Furthermore, Firouzi says, "Under the parliamentary bill, only the individuals and automakers who import cars have the right to export automobiles. They are permitted to import cars as much as the vehicles they ship. Part manufacturers can also import cars equivalent to the value of the products they export."



## Pakistan President Approves Anti-Rape Ordinance

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Pakistan's president has passed an ordinance aimed at ensuring rape trials are completed within four months, while also setting up a national sex offender registry.

"The President of the country Dr Arif Alvi has approved the Anti-Rape Ordinance 2020," said a statement from his office on Tuesday, adding that the ordinance will remain valid for 120 days until it needs to be ratified by parliament. "The ordinance will help expedite [legal] cases of sexual abuse against women and children."

The new ordinance will set up special courts to try cases of sexual abuse of women and children, requiring all proceedings to be completed within four months.



## Armenia, Azerbaijan Exchange First Prisoners

MOSCOW (Reuters) - Armenia and Azerbaijan have begun exchanging groups of prisoners of war, part of an "all for all" swap mediated by Russia after a bloody conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh enclave, Russia's defense ministry said on Tuesday.

The six-week conflict between Azerbaijan and ethnic Armenian forces over the region and its surrounding areas was brought to a halt by a Russian-brokered ceasefire deal last month. The fighting locked in territorial gains for Azerbaijan and has stoked anger in Yerevan, prompting street protests against Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan.

Russian peacekeeping forces have deployed in the region.



## Sanctioned Turkish Defense Industry Chief Expects U.S. Ties to Survive



ISTANBUL (Reuters) - Turkey's defense industries chief said U.S. sanctions against him and his agency for buying Russian missile systems would not have a big impact on ties and may boost domestic development, though the defense minister said the move had "shaken" their alliance.

The sanctions, announced at a delicate moment in the fraught relations between the two NATO partners as President-elect Joe Biden prepares to take office, could affect contracts worth \$1.5 billion to \$2.3 billion, around 5% of U.S.-Turkish trade. Ankara has condemned the measures as a grave mistake, but the lira firmed after their announcement, having been pressured for more than a year by the prospect of U.S. punishment for Turkey's purchase of the Russian S-400 air defenses.

The sanctions avoided targeting Turkey's economy generally, focusing on its arms procurement and development body Defense Industries Directorate (SSB), its chairman Ismail Demir, his deputy and two officials responsible for air defense systems.

They do not cancel existing contracts or prevent either side procuring vital defense needs - including parts for the U.S. F-35 stealth fighter still being produced in Turkey, or spare parts for Turkey's F-16 jets.

"We expect this will not influence our relations much," SSB head Demir said on Tuesday. "We are NATO allies. As they themselves said, there is cooperation with Turkey in many areas. We and they expect this to continue," he said in comments broadcast by state-owned Anadolu news agency.

The so-called U.S. CAATSA sanctions, designed to deter any country from agreeing military deals with Russia, also restrict U.S. loans and credits to SSB, although that is not seen having a significant impact.

"We will find remedies for this in our own circles," Demir said. "The issue of developing domestic industry will continue, maybe more quickly."

While Demir played down the sanctions, Turkish Defence Minister Hulusi Akar said they had damaged relations and called for renewed cooperation between the two allies.

"This sanctions decision has shaken all values in our countries' alliance," Akar said.

President Tayyip Erdogan had earlier said it was upsetting that Washington had taken the step.

The foreign ministry said Turkey would retaliate against what it called an unjust decision, and Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu discussed the move in a phone call with his U.S. counterpart Mike Pompeo on Tuesday.

The SSB, while increasingly independent, relies on international cooperation for critical research, development and design in some of its hundreds of weapons projects, said Can Kasapoglu, director of defence research at the Istanbul-based think-tank EDAM.

## Yemen Most at Risk of Humanitarian Catastrophe in 2021

SANAA (Dispatches) - Yemen is the country most at risk of a humanitarian catastrophe in 2021, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) has warned, marking the third year running the war-ravaged nation has earned the grim recognition.

Continued conflict, widespread hunger and a collapsing international aid response threaten to dramatically worsen the current crisis in Yemen next year, the IRC said on Wednesday.

Tamuna Sabadze, the aid agency's director for Yemen, said support was critical, now more "than ever".

In an interview with Al Jazeera from the capital, Sanaa, she called for "more commitment than we see today" from internal, regional and global actors to end the conflict. "Without this, things will not change in Yemen; the ordinary civilians of Yemen will really have no future and no hope. "Twenty-four million people are in need of some kind of humanitarian aid - be it food, protection, health services, or education. "The majority of the country really needs the UN and humanitarian funding in order to meet their basic day-to-day needs."



## Pompeo Accuses Russia of Sowing Chaos in the Mediterranean

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - America's top diplomat Mike Pompeo on Tuesday accused Russia of continuing to "threaten Mediterranean stability" and sowing "chaos, conflict and division" in countries around the region.

In a statement on "Russian Influence in the Mediterranean," the outgoing Secretary of State responded to his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov, who he said "accused the United States of playing political games" in the region.

Lavrov "again gets the facts wrong and attempts to rewrite history," Pompeo said, denouncing Moscow's actions in Libya, Greece and Syria.

In Libya, he said, the U.S. "supports the formation of an inclusive government that can secure the country and meet the economic and humanitarian needs of the Libyan people," and is working with the United Nations towards that goal.

"Russia on the other hand undermines Mediterranean domestic politics, supports Syria's brutal dictator, and fuels Libya's conflict with its proxy. Who is playing games here?" he added on Twitter.

He elaborated in the statement, saying: "Russia continues to threaten Mediterranean stability using a variety of techniques to spread disinformation, undermine national sovereignty, and sow chaos, conflict, and division within countries throughout the region."

Outgoing U.S. President Donald Trump was never really able to keep his promise to improve relations with Russia, stumbling over accusations of Russian interference in his 2016 victory and the bipartisan hostility of American politicians against the Kremlin.

Russian President Vladimir Putin waited more than a month to congratulate President-elect Joe Biden on his victory against Trump in the November 3 US presidential election.

"For my part, I am ready for collaboration and contacts with you," Putin told Biden in a congratulatory telegram on Tuesday, according to a Kremlin statement.

## Biden's Team Is Planning a Cuba Reset

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - President-elect Joe Biden's team plans to bring the U.S. closer to normalized relations with Cuba, reversing many of the sanctions and regulations imposed during the Trump administration, according to people familiar with the matter.

That strategy includes reducing restrictions on travel, investment and remittances for the island nation that are perceived to disproportionately hurt Americans and ordinary Cubans, said the people, who requested anonymity because the new administration is still coming together. Other measures that target Cuba for human rights abuses would remain in place, the people said.

The prospect of a détente between Washington and Havana rekindles memories of the thaw that Biden helped champion during the Obama administration, when the two nations restored diplomatic ties that had been broken for decades following Fidel Castro's rise to power.

But the president-elect is returning to an even messier scene: the Cuban economy is suffering its worst crisis since the collapse of the Soviet Union amid fallout from Covid-19 and U.S. sanctions. At the same time, Cuban intelligence officers have helped prop up Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela, allowing his

regime to consolidate its grip on power in defiance of demands for free and fair elections.

With a packed domestic agenda, it's unclear how quickly Biden will move on implementing his Cuba policy. Even if some changes happen early, the ongoing Covid-19 lockdown could delay the benefits of any measures that allow for greater travel to the island. It's also unclear whether Biden will increase staffing at the U.S. embassy in Havana. The Trump administration pared back diplomatic operations after strange illnesses, including brain trauma, afflicted some U.S. diplomats and their families.

Biden said in October that the U.S. needed a new Cuba policy, though his team has been firm in condemning efforts by Havana to silence dissidents, including a recent raid on a house full of activists and artists.

The president-elect has also denounced Venezuela's Maduro as a dictator. Just as the Trump administration connected Cuba and Venezuela policy, using sanctions as a tool intended to spur political change, Biden's team may try to leverage a rapprochement in exchange for the Cubans reducing their presence in Venezuela and supporting a diplomatic resolution to the crisis there, according to the people.



## Bosnian Presidency Members snub Russia's Disrespectful Lavrov

SARAJEVO (Reuters) - The Croat and Muslim Bosniak members of Bosnia's inter-ethnic three-man presidency declined on Tuesday to meet visiting Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, saying he had shown disrespect towards their state.

Lavrov, whose nation is a champion of Serbian interests in Bosnia and the wider Balkans, met the Serb member of the presidency Milorad Dodik on Monday and again on Tuesday.

Croat presidency member Zeljko Komsic said the first meeting, in the government office of Bosnia's autonomous Serb region just outside the country's capital Sarajevo, was insulting as no national flag was on display despite the Russian being on an official visit.

"Mr Lavrov, as one of the worlds' three top diplomats...is sending us a message ... which we interpret as disrespectful and a denial of the state he is visiting," Komsic told reporters. He and Bosniak Muslim presidency member Sefik Dzaferovic did not attend a planned meeting with Lavrov at the presidency building in Sarajevo, where the Russian met Dodik again.

"The incident...is, I believe, irrelevant to Russia's position, to the development of relations with the people of Bosnia..." Lavrov said after meeting President Aleksandar Vucic of Serbia in its capital Belgrade.

"The politicians who made this decision are not independent," Lavrov said. "I think (they are) clearly acting on someone's prompting and most likely expressing the interests...of external forces."

Komsic said that Lavrov, who on Monday endorsed the Serb Republic parliament's resolution on military neutrality, knew that a regional legislature cannot decide such strategic policy.

"We are aware that we are small and weak, but we are not ready to be a hostage in any kind of games by Russia when it comes to their relations with the European Union and NATO members," Komsic said.

Earlier on Tuesday after meeting his Bosnian counterpart Bisera Turkovic, Lavrov said: "Russia confirms its principled and strong support for Bosnia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and equality of all of its constituent peoples".







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## Britain, Mexico Agree Deal on Post-Brexit Trade

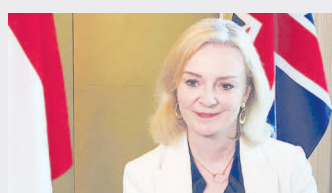
LONDON (Reuters) - Britain and Mexico signed a deal on Tuesday to keep trade flowing between the two countries on existing terms after Britain leaves the European Union's common trade policy, with an agreement to begin negotiating a deeper partnership next year.

The continuity agreement prevents UK-Mexico trade from reverting to more restrictive World Trade Organization terms

once Britain's exit from EU trade orbit is complete on Jan. 1.

"This deal supports a trading relationship worth more than 5 billion pounds (\$6.69 billion) and locks in access to each other's markets," trade minister Liz Truss said in a statement.

Without such a deal, tariffs and duties estimated at 59 million pounds would have been applied to British exports like cars, beer and tea, her department said.



## Chinese Economic Recovery Continues, Expected to Continue Into 2021

BEIJING (Dispatches) - Chinese industrial output expanded for an eighth straight month in November, with economic recovery in the world's second largest economy gathering pace as global demand increased.

Data released by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) earlier in the day showed that industrial production grew 7% year-on-year, against the 7% growth in forecasts prepared by Investing.com and slightly higher than October's 6.9% growth. Retail sales grew 5% year-on-year, down from the forecast 5.2% growth but up from October's 4.3% growth.

The unemployment rate was 5.2%, in line with forecasts but slightly down from October's 5.3% rate.

Strong exports have been a key driver for the economy's recovery from COVID-19-induced lockdowns in the first quarter of the year. Demand for medical equipment and work-from-home electronic devices have also boosted exports in recent months as many of China's biggest markets tightened restrictive measures to curb increasing numbers of COVID-19 cases.

Some investors remained positive about the economic recovery.

The data points to fourth quarter growth that's likely to be better than the previous three months, NBS spokesman Fu Linghui said after the data's release. The retail recovery is on track and consumption will remain the main growth engine, he said, while also projecting "relatively fast" expansion in 2021.

The improvement in industrial production was "underpinned by robust domestic demand and very strong export ... we expect the macro policy stance to shift from expansionary to contractionary, with the overall government deficit declining and monetary policy makers aiming to contain macro leverage," Oxford Economics' Louis Kuijs told Bloomberg.

Single's Day events put on by e-commerce companies such as Alibaba in November also saw strong consumer sentiment and further boosted orders for small factories.

The accelerated recovery seen so far in the fourth quarter looks set to continue into 2021, aided by stronger demand, credit growth and stimulus measures.

However, the tighter restrictions implemented in some of China's trading partners could create shipping bottle necks, in turn increasing transportation costs and capping the speed of China's recovery.

## Japanese Stimulus to Give GDP Boost, Fiscal Reform in Need

TOKYO (Reuters) - Japan's latest economic stimulus package to cushion the blow from the coronavirus pandemic is likely to boost the economy most strongly next fiscal year, while it underscored the need to achieve economic revival and fiscal reform, key ministers said.

The ministers made the remarks as Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga's cabinet approved on Tuesday a third supplementary budget to fund the \$708 billion stimulus package, to help the economy recover from its COVID-induced slump in the second quarter.

The COVID-19 crisis has forced Japan's government to put off fiscal reforms, even though it holds the industrial world's heaviest public debt burden, more than twice the size of its economy. "It's true that underlying fiscal conditions will worsen due to the third extra budget," Finance Minister Tarao Aso told reporters after the cabinet approved the budget. "We must proceed to achieve both economic revival and fiscal reform so as not to cause loss of trust in finances, and overcome the coronavirus crisis."

The stimulus package is expected to boost gross domestic product by around 0.5% in the current fiscal year through March, 2.5% in fiscal 2021, and 0.6% from fiscal 2022 onwards, Economy Minister Yasutoshi Nishimura said on Tuesday.

In its latest long-term growth projections, released in July, the government expected real GDP to shrink by 4.5% in the current fiscal year, followed by a 3.4% rebound in the next fiscal year through March 2022.

Private-sector economists in a Reuters poll released Tuesday expected the world's third-largest economy to contract by 5.3% this fiscal year and 3.4% next fiscal year.

The boost from the new stimulus package is likely to lead to creation or support of jobs for about 600,000 people until the end of next fiscal year, the government said in an estimate released Tuesday.



"There will be a push-up effect," Nishimura said.

The package, which includes about 40 trillion yen (\$384.50 billion) of fresh fiscal spending, contains initiatives aimed at lowering carbon emissions and boosting adoption of digital technology.

The latest package would bring the combined value of coronavirus-related stimulus to about \$3 trillion.

The third extra budget for the financial year ending in March includes spending of around 19.2 trillion yen to fund the new stimulus package. Tax revenue is expected to fall 8.4 trillion yen short of initial projections to around 55.1 trillion yen, pushing up planned bond issuance by 22.4 trillion yen and bringing new issuance to a record 112 trillion yen this fiscal year.

## UK Jobless Rate Rises Again, Redundancies Hit Record High

LONDON (Reuters) - Britain's jobless rate rose again in the three months to October and redundancies reached a record high as companies were hit by new coronavirus restrictions and prepared for the end of government job subsidies that were eventually extended into 2021.

Official data showed the unemployment rate reached 4.9%, up from 4.8% in the three months to September, it's highest in more than four years. However, the increase was smaller than expected by most economists. A Reuters poll had forecast a jump to 5.1%.

The number of redundancies reached a record high of 370,000 in the August-to-October period, although it decreased in October alone, the Office for National Statistics said.

"Overall we have seen a continuation of recent trends, with a further weakening in the labour market," said Darren Morgan, ONS director of economic statistics.

For much of the period covered by Tuesday's data, finance minister Rishi Sunak rejected calls to extend his broad job- retention scheme beyond a scheduled Oct. 31 expiry, raising fears of an acceleration in job losses.

But, as a second wave COVID-19 cases hit, Sunak was forced to extend the scheme until the end of March 2021. "The ... extension of furloughing will provide a lifeline for many jobs over the difficult winter months, but the big question is what happens after," said Tej Parikh, chief economist at the Institute of Directors.

The introduction of vaccines offered some hope, but hiring plans remained stuck in neutral, he said, calling for new measures to help job creation, such as a social security contributions cut.

The Bank of England has forecast that the unemployment rate is likely to peak at nearly 8% in the second quarter of 2021.



## U.S. Import Prices Inch Up in November

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - U.S. import prices rebounded less than expected in November as an increase in the cost of petroleum products was offset by cheaper food and motor vehicles, supporting views that inflation could remain moderate amid a resurgence in new COVID-19 infections and rising unemployment.

The Labor Department said on Tuesday import prices edged up 0.1% last month after dipping 0.1% in October. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast import prices, which exclude tariffs, advancing 0.3% in November.

In the 12 months through November, import prices decreased 1.0% after falling by the same margin in October.

Petroleum prices increased 2.1% last month after slipping 0.1% in October. Excluding petroleum, import prices were flat after edging down 0.1% in October.

Import prices have remained weak even as the dollar has depreciated about 7.4% versus the currencies of the United States' main trade partners since April.

Government data last week showed marginal increases in consumer and producer prices in November. Though the coronavirus pandemic has boosted prices of some goods because of supply and production constraints, it has weighed on services, leading to overall benign inflation.

The flare up in coronavirus infections has led to renewed business restrictions and a rise in layoffs.

Imported food prices dropped 2.2% last month. The cost of goods imported from China ticked up 0.1% after being unchanged in each of the last two months. In November, prices for imported capital goods gained 0.1%. The cost of imported motor vehicles eased 0.1%. Prices for consumer goods excluding autos were flat.

## EU Faces Franco-Dutch Call for Rules to Stop Greenwashing

LONDON (Reuters) -French and Dutch securities regulators called on Tuesday for European Union rules to prevent "greenwashing" or inaccurate claims that investments are sustainable and climate-friendly.

Several firms provide ratings on a company's environmental, social and governance (ESG) risks that asset managers use to make "green" investment decisions. The European Commission wants to boost sustainable investments and is due to publish an action plan in 2021.

The Dutch and French regulators made their joint call in a bid to persuade the EU executive to include proposals for rules for ESG raters in its package.

"While their influence is expected to grow considerably, providers of sustainability-related services remain largely unregulated," France's AMF and its Dutch counterpart AFM said.

The EU's European Securities and Markets Authority (ESMA) should become the regulator for ESG ratings firms, they added.

"The proposed framework is aimed at preventing misallocation of investments, greenwashing, and ensuring investor protection."

ESMA's chair Steven Maijor has said that supervision of ESG ratings was "far from optimal" due to a lack of clarity on the methodologies that underpin ratings.

Sustainable finance is growing rapidly, and the EU is keen to increase "green" investments to help its economy recover from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Any decision to propose EU rules to regulate ESG ratings would be up to its executive body, the European Commission.

The bloc is introducing rules for asset managers on ESG disclosures in March, along with a "taxonomy" to provide clear legal definitions on sustainability that will make greenwashing far harder, a European regulatory official said.

"It requires financial market participants to report on sustainability factors and impact, which pretty much automatically pushes them to dependence on these ratings and data," the official said.

Refinitiv, which provides ESG ratings, said the EU's priorities in tackling greenwashing should be "elsewhere", citing the bloc's efforts to create a taxonomy to define green activities and other initiatives on data disclosure.

"The European Commission is rightly focusing its efforts on the areas that require immediate attention and solutions," said Elena Philipova, Head of ESG at Refinitiv, 45% owned by Reuters News' parent Thomson Reuters.



EHRAN (UNIC) – United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in his message on launch of the International Year of Fruits and Vegetables 2021, today called for a healthier, more resilient and sustainable world where everyone can access and afford the diverse nutrition they need.

### *The full text of his message reads:*

Fruits and vegetables are the cornerstone of a healthy and varied diet. They provide the human body with an abundance of nutrients, strengthen immune systems and help lower risks for a number of diseases. Yet, despite these tremendous benefits, we do not consume enough of them.

By declaring 2021 as the International Year of Fruits and Vegetables, we are taking a closer look at a critical sector and urging the adoption of a more holistic approach to production and consumption that benefits human and environmental health.

A key moment in the International Year of Fruits and Vegetables will be the Food Systems Summit where we will call on all stakeholders to intensify efforts to make food systems more inclusive, resilient and sustainable.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development emphasizes the role our food systems play in fighting hunger, ending poverty and protecting our planet. Yet, today, rising populations, increased urbanization, the growing scarcity of natural resources, agricultural pollution and land use change, high levels of food loss and waste and the impacts of climate change are all highlighting the fragility of our food systems.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect the health and livelihoods of people across the world, we must come together to ensure that nutritious food, including fruits and vegetables, reaches the most vulnerable, leaving no one behind.

Let us use this International Year to rethink our relationship with how we produce and consume food. Let us re-examine our food systems and commit to a healthier, more resilient and sustainable world where everyone can access and afford the diverse nutrition they need.



# Indian Film Festival to Host 3 Iranian Movies

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Three Iranian cinematic works will be screened at the 13th edition of India’s Jaipur International Film Festival.

The 13th edition of India’s Jaipur International Film Festival has accepted three Iranian films, including ‘Death Eater’ (Mordeh Khor) by Sadeq Daqiqi, ‘Reverse Route’ by

Abolfazl Jalili and “That Night’s Train” by Hamidreza Qotbi into its screening program.

The selectors have chosen these films from 1484 entries from 38 countries in the world.

The 13th Jaipur International Film Festival will be held in Jaipur, India, on January 15-19, 2021.



# Airlines Warned Over Safety as Jets Return From Pandemic Storage

SYDNEY (Reuters) - Regulators, insurers and experts are warning airlines to take extra care when reactivating planes left in extended storage during the COVID-19 pandemic, citing potential pilot rustiness, maintenance errors and even insect nests blocking key sensors.

The unprecedented number of aircraft grounded as coronavirus lockdowns blocked air travel - at one point reaching two-thirds of the global fleet - has created a spike in the number of reported problems as airlines return them to service.

The number of “unstabilized” or poorly handled approaches has risen sharply this year, according to the International Air Transport Association (IATA). Such mishaps can result in hard landings, runway overshoots or even crashes.

Worried by IATA’s data, insurers are questioning airlines about whether they are doing extra pilot training to focus on landings, said Gary Moran, head of Asia aviation at insurance broker Aon PLC.

“They want to know about the circumstances of the training,” he said.

Approaches and landings place significant demands on crew for which training and regular experience are seen as vital.

According to aircraft maker Airbus SE, the largest category of fatal accidents can be traced back to the approach to an airport, while the largest number of non-fatal accidents happen during landing.

In May, a Pakistan International Airlines jet crashed after an unstabilised approach, killing 97 people, while 18 died in an Air India Express crash on landing in August, also after an unstabilised approach.

Training is not the only concern.

The European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) has reported an “alarming trend” in the number of reports of unreliable airspeed and altitude readings during the first flight after a plane leaves storage.

In some cases, take-offs had to be abandoned or the aircraft had to return to base.

In most cases, the problem was traced back to undetected insect nests inside the aircraft’s pitot tubes, pressure-sensitive sensors that feed key data to an avionics computer.

In June, a Wizz Air Holdings PLC jet halted take-off after the captain found the airspeed was reading zero.

Examination of the plane found insect larvae in one of the pitot tubes, with the aircraft having been parked for 12 weeks before the flight, the U.K. Air Accidents Investigation Branch said last month. No passengers were on board.

Insects blocking a pitot tube contributed to the 1996 crash of a chartered Birgenair plane in the Dominican Republic that killed all 189 people on board.

Kate Seaton, a Singapore-based aerospace partner at law firm HFW, said flight crews need to be aware of potential defects that might not have been identified properly as planes return to service after an unprecedented grounding.

“We are in new territory - the industry must take steps to mitigate the risks but need to be prepared for the unexpected,” she said.

EASA said last month that issues found after prolonged parking included an engine shutdown in flight after technical problems, fuel system contamination, reduced parking brake pressure and emergency batteries losing their charge.

“We’ve got people returning to work who are quite rusty, which is a big issue,” insurer Aon’s Moran said.

Airlines have developed training programmes for pilots re-entering service ranging from theory refreshers to multiple simulator sessions and supervised in-flight checks, depending on the length of absence.

Australia’s aviation regulator said on Nov. 30 its inspectors would beef up surveillance on COVID-19 related risks involving the re-entry into service, pilot training and safety risk management for the remainder of the year through to June 30, 2021.

Pilots also need to make an honest assessment of their skills and confidence upon returning to work, International Federation of Air Line Pilots’ Associations representative Peter Meiresonne said at an industry webinar in October. They may need to turn down offers like shorter landing approaches from air traffic control if they do not feel ready, he said.

“Maybe now is a good time to say, ‘We are not able today’ or ‘Give us a six- or 10-mile lineup rather than a four-mile lineup’, which you might accept when you are more proficient and (flight experience is) more recent,” he said.

Leader...

FROM PAGE 1

General Soleimani defeated arrogance both during his lifetime and with his martyrdom, Ayatollah Khamenei said. “The U.S. president said that they spent 7 trillion dollars in the region but achieved nothing and finally he was forced to visit a military base for a few hours in the dark of night. The whole world acknowledge that the United States has not achieved its goals in Syria and especially in Iraq,”

“The hero of this great work is General Soleimani, which was done during his lifetime,” he added.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the Leader advised the people and officials to double their efforts to strengthen the country in economic, science, technology and defense sectors, and not to trust the enemy.

Ayatollah Khamenei further stressed the country should focus on neutralizing the sanctions instead of securing their removal, saying, “The lifting of sanctions is in the hands of the enemy, but neutralizing them is in our own hands.”

“Of course, we do not mean that we should not seek to lift the sanctions, because if the sanctions can be lifted, we should not delay that even by an hour,” he explained.

Criticizing Europe’s hypocritical behavior, Ayatollah Khamenei said that three European countries also showed extreme malice and hypocrisy.

He also urged Iranians to preserve national unity, calling on the country’s three branches of power to strengthen national unity through synergy and cooperation.

Referring to the imposed sanctions on Iran, Leader of the Islamic Revolution called on authorities to look for the ways to defuse sanctions rather than the ways to lift them.

“Of course, we are not saying that we should not seek to lift the sanctions. If the sanctions can be lifted, we should not hesitate to do it even for an hour,” he noted.

“If the sanctions can be lifted in a right, wise, Iranian-Islamic and dignified way, it should be done, but the main focus should be on defusing the sanctions,” Leader added.

“I support the officials of the country as long as they adhere to the goals of the nation,” Ayatollah Khamenei highlighted.

No Contact With Biden...

FROM PAGE 1

Following Araqchi’s visit to Oman, some media outlets claimed that meeting with the new U.S. president’s representative was among the Iranian deputy foreign minister’s trip to the Arab neighbor.

This is while Iran had previously dismissed similar rumors.

Back in November, the New York Times claimed that Araqchi had tried to pass on to Biden’s advisers through intermediaries Tehran’s insistence that the United States return to Iran deal unconditionally before any talks resume.

The Iranian Foreign Ministry immediately denied the claim, saying the report was completely made-up. The ministry said that no direct or indirect contact had been made between Tehran and the Biden camp.

Tehran Calls for...

FROM PAGE 1

The Iranian envoy censured Washington’s approach on the non-proliferation regime and expressed concern over the possibility of the US conducting nuclear test explosions, saying the move undermines international peace and security.

Gharibabadi stressed that a possible resumption of the tests would breach a treaty on the moratorium on such practices, and also violates the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation efforts.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Iran’s permanent representative to Vienna-based international organizations touched on Saudi Arabia’s nuclear program and called on the kingdom to join the NPT.

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Iran Happy...

FROM PAGE 1

The JCPOA was signed between the Islamic Republic and the P5+1 group of countries, the U.S., the UK, France, Russia, and China plus Germany, and ratified in UNSC Resolution 2231.

However, Trump unilaterally pulled his country out of the JCPOA in May 2018 and reinstated the anti-Iran sanctions that had been lifted by the deal. The Trump administration also unleashed the so-called maximum pressure campaign and targeted the Iranian nation with the “toughest ever” restrictive measures.

Following Washington’s exit from the deal, the remaining European parties failed to fulfill their end of the bargain under U.S. pressure, prompting Iran to move in May 2019 to scale back its JCPOA commitments under Articles 26 and 36 of the accord covering Tehran’s legal rights. U.S. president-elect Biden has, however, pledged to rejoin the accord, which was inked when he was vice president. Rouhani further said, “In 2015, the world public opinion had been wrongly swayed to believe that Iran would not fulfill its commitments. However, we have proved in the JCPOA that we are the most committed country in the world. We negotiate hard and obsessively, but if we sign [a deal], we will honor our promise. This is while even the P4 + 1 countries failed to implement their obligations.”

He highlighted the U.S. isolation at the UN given its failure to garner support for its anti-Iran resolutions.

“In those days [prior to the deal], the P5+1 group was against us, but today the United States is isolated and all countries, except for one or two small puppet states dependent on America, oppose the U.S.’s withdrawal from the JCPOA,” Rouhani emphasized. The world has learned about the resistance of the Iranian nation, he said, noting, “We are standing on our own feet, but at the same time, if [the opposite side] returns to its commitments, we will also return to all our commitments.”

India’s Basmati...

FROM PAGE 1

The rise in shipments comes on the heels of Pakistan making a bid to make inroads in the Iranian market after India and other countries complained of payment delays.

“People are getting the payments for basmati exports from Iran but they are delayed. Shippers raised a hue and cry when they were delayed. The concern over late payments remains,” said Setia, also the executive director of Chaman Lal Setia Exports that sells basmati under Maharani brand.

According to a multinational company’s export official, basmati exporters were taking a risk by selling to Iran but they had changed their strategy. “Exporters are stocking up the rice and selling there. They have set up distribution points. This is helping them continue exports,” the official said. It also indicates that Pakistan’s attempts were not paying off. Though India, which accounts for 70 percent of the world’s basmati production, exports to more than 200 countries, Iran alone accounts for 34 percent of the shipment. In 2019-20, Iran was the biggest importer of basmati, buying 13.19 lakh tons valued at \$1.23 billion compared with 14.83 lakh tons worth \$1.55 billion the previous year.

In 2019-20, 44.54 lakh tons of basmati was imported against 44.14 lakh tons the previous year. The earnings were, however, lower at \$4.33 billion versus \$4.72 billion. In October this year, veteran Pakistani journalist Muhammad Ziauddin tweeted that Iran was in the process of shifting its basmati rice import from India to Pakistan.

The 33 percent rise in basmati export comes after AIREA reported a drop in shipments during the April-July period. The drop was reported at a time when prices were on the downswing due to projections of higher production this year. Basmati production was estimated to increase 10 percent this year to 6.13 million tonnes, mainly on a five percent increase in the area under cultivation. In Iran, payments were being held up as the country’s central bank delayed allocation of the currency to Iranian traders to buy basmati and other commodities. This initially prevented Indian exporters from entering into new contracts. AIREA said in June that 2.5 lakh tons of basmati valued at Rs 1,700 crore had got stuck at Iranian ports. Payments from previous shipments were also pending, it said. This seems to be in the past now.

The problem was on account of the slide in the value of the Iranian rial against the U.S. dollar. It dropped to one of its lowest in June, hit by the US sanctions that have derailed crude exports. The country’s revenue from oil has plunged to \$8 billion from \$100 billion in 2011. The rial is now trading at 250,000 to the dollar, recovering from 300,000 in early October.

Tehran Calls for...

FROM PAGE 1

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Iranian Oil...

FROM PAGE 1

Venezuela—under socialist leader Nicolas Maduro, long at odds with Washington and under American sanctions—has also started buying Iranian gasoline. And Syria resumed Iranian oil imports this year, according to shipping trackers and an Iran oil official.

Iranian shippers have gone to increasing lengths to evade sanctions, switching off radio transponders to avoid tracking, while operators transporting Iranian crude have changed their ships’ names or doctored bills of lading.

More recently, they have begun transshipments of oil in regions once thought to be too risky, including waters off the coast of U.S. allies Iraq and the United Arab Emirates, according to people familiar with the matter.

American officials acknowledge that Iran is exporting oil, but say sanctions have still caused severe economic consequences for the country, including sending the rial sharply lower.

Most oil buyers and shippers stopped trading with Iran after Washington slapped a full embargo on Iran’s crude shipments after the Trump administration pulled out of the Obama-era nuclear pact with Tehran in 2018.

Iranian traders and some prospective buyers said they were expecting U.S. pressure to ease once Mr. Trump leaves office.

The Iranians “need to sell oil, and we need energy,” said one official in Italy, formerly a top customer for Iranian crude. Purchases will restart quickly once sanctions are lifted, this official said.

Meantime, resurgent Asian economies are seizing upon the steep discounts Iranian traders are offering. An adviser to a large Chinese oil company said Iran was offering rebates of as much as \$1 a barrel for crude. Traders are also selling refined products at lower prices.

Commodities trader Ali Amiriravi said Iran was offering a discount of \$70 a metric ton of propane, making it 16% cheaper than Saudi Arabian propane. Buyers in China, India and South Korea have all sought Iranian crude, according to another Iranian trader, who said he has discussed cargoes but had yet to finalize a sale.

In March, Syria resumed Iranian oil imports after the trade was halted by indirect U.S. pressure. Washington forced some countries that had allowed Iranian tankers to register under their flag to revoke those registrations. Iran resumed sales to Syria by sending its own fleet of Iranian-flagged vessels.

This summer, oil-rich Venezuela started buying Iranian gasoline after its refineries all but shut down, in part because of separate American restrictions on Caracas.



## Grealish Handed Nine-Month Driving Ban

LONDON Aston Villa captain Jack Grealish was given a nine-month driving ban on Tuesday after crashing his Range Rover during the coronavirus lockdown in March. Grealish was sentenced at Birmingham Magistrates' Court after previously pleading guilty to two charges. The 25-year-old's vehicle hit two parked vehicles in Dickens Heath, Solihull, West Midlands. As well as the driving ban, England midfielder Grealish was also fined £82,499 (\$110,271).

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## Two Newcastle Players Not Well at All With Virus

LONDON (Dispatches) - Newcastle coach Steve Bruce said on Tuesday two of his players are "not well at all" after contracting coronavirus. The Magpies' Premier League match against Aston Villa on December 4 was postponed and the club's training ground was closed for more than a week after an outbreak of the illness among Bruce's squad. Defender Federico Fernandez was one of a number of players infected, but he is in contention to face Leeds on Wednesday after his latest negative test.

# Man City Held to Home Draw; Chelsea Lose

MANCHESTER (Reuters) -Manchester City's hopes of closing the gap on the Premier League pacesetters were frustrated as they were held to a 1-1 draw at home to lowly West Bromwich Albion on Tuesday.

City took the lead on the half hour when Raheem Sterling did well to work his way to the byline and pull the ball back to Ilkay Gundogan who expertly side-footed home.

But West Brom, second bottom of the league, drew level two minutes before the break when a shot on the turn from Semi Ajayi hit City defender Ruben Dias and deflected past wrong-footed goalkeeper Ederson.

The hosts camped in West Brom's half throughout most of the second period but Slaven Bilic's side showed tremendous determination and defensive solidity.

City had late chances though -- Kevin De Bruyne went close with a free kick that West Brom keeper Sam Johnstone did well to reach while Sergio Aguero blasted wide from a good position.

Johnstone did well again in stoppage time to keep out a close-range Gundogan header and denied another great opportunity for Sterling who headed straight at the keeper.

After 12 games Pep Guardiola's City are in sixth place, five points behind leaders Tottenham Hotspur and Liverpool who both have 25 points and face each other at Anfield on Wednesday.

"It is not about the points (off the top), you have to win games like this," said Guardiola.

"We know it, we drop points. These are the ones you have to win. It's not far away to the top of the league but you have to beat West Brom at home," he added.

"You don't have to be so clever to see the gap between this year and previous years (in our results). It is not confidence, Sergio Aguero is injured for four months, but we create chances, we are



there we just can't score."

Bilic was proud of the way his team stuck at their task for 90 minutes.

Meanwhile Wolverhampton Wanderers' Pedro Neto struck a stoppage-time winner as they came from behind to beat Chelsea 2-1 in the Premier League on Tuesday.

Frank Lampard's visiting side had the better of the first half at Molineux and centre-half Kurt Zouma powered a header against the bar just before the break.

In-form French forward Olivier Giroud then fired Chelsea ahead in the 49th minute, meeting a Ben Chilwell cross with a superb angled volley at the near post that goalkeeper Rui Patricio was unable to stop cross the line.

But Wolves drew level in the 66th minute when Daniel Podence cleverly created space for himself in the box and then drove a slightly deflected shot past keeper Edouard Mendy.

Wolves were then awarded a penalty, 10 minutes from the end, when Pedro Neto went down inside the box as he was approached by Reece James but the decision was overturned after a VAR review showed there had been no contact.

But Portuguese forward Neto decided the encounter late in added time when he finished off a counter-attack, running at Kurt Zouma before drilling the ball into the bottom corner.

Chelsea, who have now lost back-to-back games, remain fifth on 22 points from 13 games, three behind leaders Tottenham Hotspur and Liverpool who meet at Anfield.

## Messi Salary At Barca Unsustainable

BARCELONA (Reuters) - Lionel Messi's salary is too big for Barcelona due to their financial predicament, presidential candidate Emili Rousaud has said, adding that he wishes to keep the club's all-time top scorer on a reduced contract.

Messi, who sought an exit from Barca in the close season, has less than seven months remaining on his deal with the club where he has spent his entire career. He is free to negotiate with rival clubs from January.

Former Barca vice-president Rousaud, who resigned this year out of protest at how the club was being run by then chief Josep Maria Bartomeu, said Messi would accept a lower salary if he could be convinced the club will return to winning ways.

"In the club's current situation Messi's salary is not sustainable, so we'll have to reach an agreement with him. We will present an attractive project to him," Rousaud told Spanish newspaper AS on Tuesday.

"What matters most here is the sporting project. When Messi said he was leaving he didn't mention money. He has the highest salary in the world, no-one earns more than him, he doesn't want to leave because he earns too little.

## New Zealand Beat West Indies by Innings

WELLINGTON (Reuters) - New Zealand took a little over an hour to wrap up a comprehensive innings and 12 runs victory in the second test against West Indies on the fourth day at the Basin Reserve on Monday to seal a 2-0 series sweep.

The tourists resumed on 244-6 with captain Jason Holder on 60 and Joshua Da Silva on 25 but were dismissed for 317 midway through the first session, still 12 runs from making the hosts bat again after they scored 460 in their first innings.

New Zealand dismissed the visitors for 131 in their first innings early on Sunday and captain Tom Latham had little hesitation in enforcing the follow on.

The home side also won the first test in Hamilton by an innings and 134 runs.

The victory put New Zealand level with Australia on 116 points at the top of the International Cricket Council test rankings and they moved to third in the table for the World Test Championship final at Lord's next year.

"Clinical is probably the word to use," Latham told reporters. "The way we were able to set the game with the bat on the back of Henry's innings was outstanding.

## European Tour Unveils 2021 Calendar

LONDON (Reuters) - The European Tour on Tuesday announced its global schedule for the 2021 season featuring 42 tournaments in 24 countries, with each of the four Rolex Series events offering an increase in prize money.

The 2021 schedule will also see the return of 18 tournaments which were either cancelled or postponed in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Three of the Rolex Series events -- the season-opening Abu Dhabi HSBC Championship (Jan. 21-24), the Aberdeen Standard Investments Scottish Open (July 8-11) and the BMW PGA Championship (Sept. 9-12) -- will have a prize fund of \$8 million, an increase of \$1 million from previous editions.

The fourth and final Rolex series event, the season-ending DP World Tour Championship in Dubai (Nov. 18-21), will have its prize money boosted by \$1 million to \$9 million.



received no news on an extension to his current deal which expires in June 2022.

"So many things that aren't true have been said in relation to my contract," he said.

Agnelli insisted on Monday the 27-year-old, who suffered with coronavirus for six weeks earlier this year, "has already received an offer that places him among the 20 highest paid in Europe".

## Juve Awaiting Dybala Response on Contract Offer

TURIN (Dispatches) - Juventus president Andrea Agnelli said Monday the Italian champions were awaiting an answer from Argentina forward Paulo Dybala on a contract offer which would make him "among the 20 highest paid footballers in Europe".

Dybala scored his first Serie A goal in five months on Sunday during a 3-1 win over Genoa, telling journalists afterwards he had

"We are calmly awaiting an answer," Agnelli said during an awards ceremony in Turin. "The positive news is the return to scoring. Paulo had a tough time after the coronavirus, with a slow recovery.

"I was delighted to hear his declaration of love for Juve, it's reciprocated. We see Paulo as a future captain of the team. Already now he often wears the armband.

"He knows he has the offer, we are waiting serenely for an answer."

Dybala joined Juventus from Palermo in 2015 and has scored 97 goals for the club, winning eight major trophies, including five Serie A titles.

He has often been linked with a move away in recent months and was reportedly close to signing for Premier League sides Manchester United and Tottenham last year.

"We are also waiting for one (response) on the pitch, his ambition is to be among the top five (players) in the world, and we want to support him. He is still not there and he knows this," added Agnelli.

## Benzema Fires Real Level With Liga Leaders Sociedad

MADRID (Dispatches) - Karim Benzema spared Real Madrid's blushes on Tuesday with the winning brace which shot the reigning champions to a 3-1 win over Athletic Bilbao that draws them level on points with La Liga Leaders Real Sociedad.

Frenchman Benzema headed home a cross from Dani Carvajal with 16 minutes remaining to put Real ahead against battling Bilbao, who had fought back to level earlier having lost Raul Garcia to two quickfire bookings in opening minutes.

Toni Kroos had given the hosts the lead in Madrid with a thumping strike on the stroke of half-time, but Ander Capa rocked the capital club six minutes after the break when he shot past Thibaut Courtois at the second time of asking.

The 32-year-old Benzema had other ideas however, putting his team in front before making sure of the points in stoppage time with a clinical finish after collecting Luka Modric's pass.

Third-placed Madrid gained their fourth straight win in all competitions and are equal on 26 points with Sociedad, who face troubled Barcelona at the Camp Nou, and local rivals Atletico Madrid.

Tuesday's match was the game in hand which Real had on Sociedad, while Atletico have played two games fewer than their two title rivals.

Barca are nine points back but play one of their two games in hand in the hope of giving some momentum to what has been a miserable season so far.



## Arteta Vows To Stop Arsenal Blip

LONDON (Dispatches) - Mikel Arteta insists he is strong enough to cope with the pressure of Arsenal's dismal run as the Gunners boss dismissed their recent struggles as merely a "blip".

Arteta has faced calls for his sacking after Sunday's 1-0 home defeat against Burnley condemned Arsenal to their worst start to a season since 1974.

Arsenal have lost their last four home league games -- their worst sequence since 1959 -- and another defeat at the Emirates Stadium against in-form Southampton on Wednesday would pile further pressure on Arteta.

The Spaniard was given a vote of confidence by Arsenal technical director Edu on Monday, but Arteta admitted he had to shoulder the responsibility for the team's five-match winless run in the league.

Adamant he still retains the backing of his players, Arteta told reporters on Tuesday: "My feeling is yes but this is a question for them obviously. "When I see the reaction and the way they try, there's not one bit that worries me that they're not trying their best, that's for sure.

"And in terms of Edu and (Manchester City manager) Pep (Guardiola), they obviously showed their appreciation, because in good moments it's very easy.

"In difficult moments when you have people like them giving you support and two people that know very, very well what we've been through here, obviously it's much appreciated."

Languishing in 15th place after seven defeats in their first 12 league games, Arsenal are closer to the relegation zone than the top four.

Arteta is not concerned that Arsenal now face an unthinkable relegation battle and is confident that results will turn soon.

