

Iran's Health Ministry Spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari Said on Saturday Some 175 More Iranians Have Died From Coronavirus Disease Over the Past 24 Hours as the Death Toll Mounted to 53,448

IRAN NEWS

Two Penalties Given by VAR Decisions Deprived Persepolis of Iran To Win the Asian Champions League After Losing 2-1 to Ulsan of South Korea in the Final of the Champions League Played in Doha

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President Thanks People for Containing 3rd Wave of COVID-19

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – President Hassan Rouhani has expressed gratitude to people for their cooperation in helping contain a third surge in the coronavirus outbreak. President Hassan Rouhani thanked citizens for observing health protocols and restrictions imposed to stem the spread of the disease. “The third wave of the coronavirus outbreak was extremely formidable, but people’s unity, rapport and trust in medical personnel saved the country from this daunting wave,” he noted. The president then touched upon figures and reports on the status of the coronavirus disease in the country. “Fortunately, with the measures adopted, the enforcement of restrictions and people’s cooperation in respecting health protocols, now there are no ‘red’ cities across the country, which has made us very happy and which has been the result of people’s efforts and cooperation,” he noted. However, he noted that any laxity in abiding by health protocols could result in another surge in the disease. **See Page 7**

Iran, Pakistan Open 2nd Border Crossing for Trade Surge



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Pakistani Minister for Defense Production Zubaida Jalal and Iran’s Minister of Roads and Urban Development Mohammad Eslami (R) cut the ribbon during the inauguration of the Rimadan-Gabd border crossing, on Saturday. Iran and Pakistan have inaugurated the second official border crossing for the transfer of goods and passengers. The border point opened during a ceremony on Saturday, with Iran’s Minister of Roads and Urban Development Mohammad Eslami and the Pakistani Minister for Defense Production Zubaida Jalal attending the event. The gateway connects Rimadan, located in Dashtyari country of Iran’s southeastern Sistan and Baluchestan Province, with Pakistan’s Gabb. The Rimadan border crossing has a capacity for exporting and importing goods and transporting Pakistani pilgrims and tourists. The border’s 70-kilometer distance with Gwadar port also enables Pakistani citizens to reach Iran’s strategic Chabahar port, from where they can travel by plane or train to Iran’s religious cities and tourist sites. The connection of the Rimadan border with Pakistan’s Karachi port would pave the way for linking China and Southeast Asian countries to Eastern Europe. In an interview with IRNA news agency, Iran’s Ambassador to Pakistan Mohammad Ali Hosseini said there was only one crossing, Mirjaveh-Taftan, on the 900-kilometer border between the two neighboring states. So, he added, Iranian and Pakistani officials decided to open two more border gateways, Rimadan-Gabd and Pishin-Mand. The envoy also stressed that the inauguration of Rimdan-Gabd border point would increase economic and trade cooperation between Tehran and Islamabad, reduce smuggling and improve the livelihood of border residents as well as the security situation along the common frontier. The Iranian ambassador to Pakistan said: “Increasing the crossings and at the same time developing the border markets will basically secure the interests of the two countries, especially strengthen the security of the two countries in the common border strip.” He said: “With the activity at the new border crossing and the strengthening of markets, we can see trade and economic prosperity between the two countries, especially the neighboring border provinces can benefit from this prosperity.” Hosseini emphasized: “Our expectation is that a joint effort and cooperation will be done with appropriate speed, let the border crossings of the two countries increase and prosper, and let our border markets be strengthened and increased. “This will help the development of these areas, which will have a direct impact on the living standards of the people and will create employment for the border residents of the two countries and a variety of job opportunities,” he said. According to IRNA, the Rimdan border at the zero point of the Iran-Pakistan border is the best route for Iran to reach 37% of the world’s population (Pakistan, China and India); therefore, paying attention to the infrastructure of this border is necessary for the development of trade and economic relations.

Tehran Denies Any New Agreement on Its Nuclear Program

VIENNA (IP) - Iran’s ambassador and permanent representative to the Vienna-based international organizations said that the Reuters headline about IAEA Director-General’s remarks and the revival of JCPOA was sly and misleading. Kazem Gharibabadi stated on Friday night that IAEA Director-General Rafael Grossi has never stated that the revival of JCPOA requires a new agreement. Gharibabadi announced his meeting with Grossi and pointed out that Grossi had stated that he did not mention the need for a new agreement in an interview with Reuters, and the text of his interview is clear in this regard and his talks were about the agency. He highlighted that in the interview with Reuters, Grossi said that in order to make the necessary arrangements for the reversibility of Iran’s actions in case of the revival of JCPOA, a protocol, understanding, agreement, or document is needed within the Agency. **See Page 7**

Majlis Condemns EU’s Anti-Iranian Resolution

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - The Iranian Parliament’s National Security and Foreign Policy Commission issued a statement condemning the European Parliament’s interference in Iran’s internal affairs and calling the resolution imposing sanctions on officials of the Islamic Republic of Iran for alleged human rights violations. The statement issued in response to the European Parliament resolution on the human rights situation in Iran reads: 1. The European Parliament, which passed a resolution opposing the execution and protection of criminals against Iran’s national security, is the same that is silent against the assassination of Iranian scientists and has always been a supporter, and a haven of terrorists. 2. While the officials of the terrorist and criminal Israeli regime have confessed to carrying out the assassinations in Iran, the European officials have never dared to criticize them either because of their affiliation or fear of the Zionists. **See Page 7**

Illegal Migration Has Countless Consequences For Women, Children

TEHRAN (IFP) - A senior Iranian official says illegal migration has numerous repercussions for women and children. Vice President for Women and Family Affairs Masoumeh Ebtekar made the comment while elaborating on the issue of migration. “The issue of migration is a global issue, especially the issue of illegal migration,” he said. “Although migration, per se, can be a positive move, as mentioned in some verses of the holy Koran, ... today we are facing different types of migration some of which cause numerous harms to humans,” she said. “Today, the issue of the ‘World of Citizens’ has emerged, and it needs its own requirements, and if migration is not legal, it will have dire consequences for individuals and countries alike,” Ebtekar noted. “Now, one of the global crises which we are unfortunately witnessing is forced migration due to war, problems and environmental destruction,” she said. **See Page 7**

India’s Oil Imports From Iran May Not Resume Soon Despite Biden

NEW DELHI (IANS) - While the arrival of President-elect Joe Biden at the White House on January 20 is expected to mark a shift in the U.S. policy with far reaching geopolitical implications, sanctions on Iran may not be lifted “overnight”. However, Biden is likely to ease the contours of the sanctions, helping Iran in resuming oil supply into the global market. Although this will lead to softening of global crude prices, India may not be able to begin inward shipment of Iranian oil immediately though India has already diversified its oil supply sources. Iran has been traditionally India’s second largest supplier of oil after Saudi Arabia until 2010-11. Though supply of oil is not an issue for India anymore, the lowering of global prices would come as a boon to for reviving the Covid-19 hit economy. Narendra Taneja, international energy expert told IndiaNarrative.com that a few factors including the willingness for insurers to provide the required cover to oil cargoes from Iran and availability of ships will be important. “Oil imports from Iran may take some time, it depends on how soon the western insurance companies start providing the necessary cover to the oil cargoes. That apart we also need to see how soon the international shipping companies are willing to provide vessels to carry it,” Taneja said. **See Page 7**

UN Chief Calls for Trade With Iran Based on UNSC Resolution 2231

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres has underlined the need for preserving the 2015 landmark Iran nuclear deal, urging the world countries to engage in trade ties with Tehran based on Security Council Resolution 2231 that endorsed the agreement. Guterres made the remarks in the 10th report on the implementation of Resolution 2231, which will be read out during a Security Council meeting on Tuesday. He hailed the nuclear deal, also known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), as a testament to the effectiveness of multilateralism, diplomacy and dialogue, saying the agreement is the best way to ensure a comprehensive, long-term and proper solution to Iran’s nuclear issue and to help promote regional and international peace and security. Guterres also called for the continued commitment of the JCPOA’s signatories to preserve it and highlighted the importance of the deal’s economic benefits for the Iranian people. The JCPOA was reached on July 14, 2015 between Iran and a group of countries then known as the P5+1 — which included the United States, Britain, France, Russia, China, and Germany. It was ratified in the form of UNSC Resolution 2231. In May 2018, US President Donald Trump unilaterally pulled his country out of the JCPOA and re-instated the anti-Iran sanctions that had been lifted under the accord. Under U.S. pressure, Europe has so far been unable to deliver on its contractual obligation to undo the negative impact of Washington’s illegal bans on the Islamic Republic. **See Page 7**

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Rouhani Felicitates Qatar on National Day

TEHRAN (MNA) – President Hassan Rouhani congratulated Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani on Qatar's National Day and expressed hope for further expansion of relations between the two nations.

In a letter to Emir of Qatar on Saturday, Rouhani offered him and the people of the country congratulations on the National Day of Qatar and expressed hope that Tehran-Doha

relations would further deepen in all fields of mutual interest. "The Islamic Republic of Iran and Qatar have always had friendly and close relations. I am confident that this sincere relationship will continue to expand and continue in the future in the interests of the two nations by the cooperation and will of the two countries' officials," Rouhani said.

EU Can't Claim to Advocate Human Rights

TEHRAN (PressTV) - An Iranian human rights official has hit out at the European Parliament for passing a resolution against what it calls "human rights breaches" in Iran, saying those who have a hand in the deaths of scores of Iranian child patients by blocking their access to medicine are in no position to lecture about human rights.

Ali Baqeri-Kani, who heads the Iranian Judiciary's High Council for Human Rights, on Friday condemned the European resolution adopted a day earlier, which deals with the detention and recent executions of a number of dual nationals on convictions ranging from espionage to murder and corruption on earth.

The resolution "asks all EU member states to jointly issue public statements and undertake diplomatic initiatives to monitor unfair trials and visit prisons" where Iranian convicts holding European citizenship are serving time.

It also demanded "targeted EU measures against Iranian officials who have committed serious human rights violations."

In response, Baqeri-Kani slammed the Europeans for their concerted attempts to block the access of Iranian child patients to medicine, among their other violations of the Iranian nation's rights at different historical junctures.

"Currently, the Europeans stand accused of killing tens of Iranian child patients and are thus in no position to claim that they are advocates of human rights," he said.

"It is called modern deception when you prevent the patients from getting access to medicine, while shedding crocodile tears because a sentence has been carried out for a criminal," he said.

"By taking a nation's health and livelihood hostage with the goal of imposing their on illegitimate demands, the Europeans have set a new record in modern savagery," the official added.

The Iranian official further delivered a stern warning to the Europeans over the threat of sanctions mentioned in the resolution.

If the sanctions mechanism is activated, certain European governments will lose their credibility since many officials in Europe have played a crucial part in violating the Iranian nation's rights — including the right to life, health, education and development — through imposing cruel and unlawful sanctions on the country.

He criticized the European Parliament's impudence in supporting a bunch of



criminals merely because of the European passports that they hold and asking the Iranian Judiciary to trample on justice for their sake.

"The Europeans have taken impudence to the level that they even grant Swedish citizenship to a criminal serving jail time for his effective role in the assassination of Iranian nuclear scientists in addition to espionage," he said.

The Iranian Judiciary, the official stressed, will never allow the Europeans to use the dual citizenship of the holders of their passports as a tool to blackmail the Islamic Republic and do even the slightest harm to the nation's cause against foreign dominion.

Baqeri-Kani further pointed to Europe's call for Tehran to let in a special rapporteur on human rights and said, "To inspect human rights violations, there is no need for a trip to Tehran. It would be sufficient to walk around the corridors of the European Parliament to see the terrorists who have the blood of 17,000 innocent Iranian citizens on their hands."

He was referring to Europe's all-out support for the Mujahedin-e-Khalq Organization (MKO), the most hated terrorist cult among the Iranians. Europe has long served as a safe haven for the bloodthirsty MKO terrorists, giving them a platform for organizing terror attacks in Iran and killing civilians.

"The manufacturers and sellers of weapons of mass destruction to [ex-Iraqi dictator] Saddam [Hussein], who brought about the carnage of thousands of Iranian youth, are still beside you and are committing crimes against the Iranian nation from Europe. Please, look around a little so you can easily see the real violators of the Iranian people's rights," he said.

The European resolution singled out, among others, the case of Ruhollah Zam, the administrator of a notorious counterrevolutionary website, who had been convicted of corruption on earth.

Tehran, New Delhi Economies Complement Each Other

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's Ambassador to India Ali Chegeni in his meeting with the Minister of chemicals and fertilizers of India and his deputies pointed to the capacities of the two countries and their complementary economies, and said that the Iranian and Indian products can meet the mutual needs of both sides.

According to the Iranian Embassy in India, both sides in their meeting discussed trade capacities of the two countries in different agriculture sectors, especially in the format of direct and joint investment.

In the field of imports, medical cooperation, pharmaceutical industry, capacities and exemptions of Chabahar Port and benefiting from geographical proximity of both countries were among other issues discussed in the meeting.

Both sides urged the parties to continue efforts to enhance bilateral trade and investigate ways to increase cooperation and further expand bilateral trade relations.

Tehran, Vienna Have Big Cooperating Potentials

VIENNA (IP) - Appreciating Vienna's role in hosting Iran - P5+1 nuclear talks, Iran's ambassador to Austria said that We have jointly demonstrated the effectiveness of diplomacy and how it can help all countries."

Abbas Baqerpour Ardakani spoke about the relations and interactions of Iran and Austria.

Regarding the relations between Tehran and Vienna, he said that 162 years have passed since the establishment of diplomatic relations between Iran and Austria and the signing of the first friendship pact between them. He noted that Iran and Austria's relations date back to five centuries ago and bilateral relations expanded in the nineteenth century, especially in the cultural, social, and scientific dimensions.

Stating that the current bilateral relationship is multifaceted, he pointed out that in the economic dimension, there are many opportunities for investment in Iran, such as energy, road construction and railways, banking and insurance, tourism, research and technology, and the development of southern ports, as well as the routes connecting southern waters to Central Asia.

Iran has also made significant progress in new scientific fields such as biotechnology, nanotechnology, biomedicine, aerospace, etc., Baqerpour said, announcing Iran's readiness to cooperate extensively with Austria in these areas.

Iran's 71th Naval Flotilla Dispatched to Int'l Waters

TEHRAN (MNA) – The 71th Iranian navy flotilla, consisting of the Alborz destroyer and the Khark helicopter carrier, were dispatched to international waters so as to carry out their missions.

The 70th fleet of warships of the Iranian Navy returned to the southern port city of Bandar Abbas on Saturday after carrying out their mission in the international waters of Gulf of Aden and the Bab al-Mandeb Strait.

On the same day, the 71 navy flotilla, consisting of the Alborz destroyer and the Khark helicopter carrier, were dispatched to international waters so as to fulfill their tasks.

Speaking at the welcoming ceremony of this naval fleet who carried out missions in the Gulf of Aden and the Bab al-Mandeb Strait, Second Admiral Jafar Tazkork said, "Ensuring the security of Iran's commercial transportation lines, the Gulf of Aden and the Bab al-Mandeb Strait, conveying the message of peace and friendship of Iran to other countries present in the Gulf of Aden are among the missions of the Iranian naval flotilla."

Stating that security is Iran's red line he stressed that the Islamic Republic will never give up protecting its interests.

In recent years, Iran's naval forces have increased their presence in international waters to secure naval routes and protect merchant vessels and oil tankers against pirates.

In line with international efforts to combat piracy, the Iranian Navy has also been conducting anti-piracy patrols in the Gulf of Aden to safeguard the vessels involved in maritime trade, especially ships and oil tankers owned or leased by Iran

U.S. Must Leave Region



TEHRAN (MNA) – Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif reiterates the necessity of U.S. withdrawal from the region.

In an interview with Afghanistan's Tolo News, Javad Zarif reiterated Iran's emphasis on the US withdrawal from the region after the assassination of Martyr Soleimani.

"Iran has always said that the United States should leave the region."

Iranian Foreign Minister also talked of Afghanistan-Iran relations, Iran's relations with the Taliban, the situation of Afghan refugees in Iran, and the Liwa Fatemiyoun.

He noted that Iran has not yet removed the Taliban from the terrorist group.

About Fatemiyoun, he said, "These are the best forces the Afghan government can use if it wishes."

The full interview will be published in a few days.

Iran believes that the presence of foreign forces is a source of instability in the region and calls for foreign troops for an orderly and responsible withdrawal from the regional countries.

Cruel Sanctions Can Be Defused, Lifted in Dignified Manner

TEHRAN (MNA) – Referring to the recent remarks of Ayatollah Khamenei, Iran's First Vice President said that the oppressive sanctions can be defused and lifted in a dignified manner.

In a tweet, Es'hagh Jahangiri wrote, "The Leader's important emphasis on the need to defuse inhumane sanctions and not to hesitate to delay to lift them even for an hour is due to the fact that sanctions are cruel."

"Now that the maximum pressure has not reached its goal with the resistance of the nation, the oppressive sanctions can be defused in a dignified manner and lifted at the earliest opportunity," he added.

Previously, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Khamenei urged Iranian authorities and people for strengthening in all areas, not trusting the enemy, preserving the national unity and looking for ways to defuse sanctions rather than ways to lift them.

Tehran, Beijing Ties to Be Developed

TEHRAN (IP) - The Iranian ambassador to China expressed hope that relations between the two countries would expand significantly next year.

Iran's ambassador to China in an interview with Phoenix Television broadcast on Friday referred to the fact that China is the great business partner of Iran saying the year 2021 marks the 50th anniversary of establishing formal ties between the two countries and this is the opportunity that should be used to cement bilateral ties.

Referring to the desire of Chinese companies to participate in the large market of Iran, Keshavarzadeh, added: "The two countries in various fields of industry, science and technology, culture, economy, trade, transportation and energy, and many other areas have many potential opportunities to cooperate."

Iran's ambassador to China also condemned the

assassination of Martyr "Mohsen Fakhrazadeh", the prominent Iranian nuclear and defense scientist, and said: "Iran's peaceful nuclear program is not focused on one person and many scientists are involved in this program."

Keshavarzadeh stressed that Iran has no plans to hide and has responded to the requests of the International Atomic Energy Agency, adding: "This is while the Zionist regime has at least 200 nuclear warheads and also obstructs the inspections of the International Atomic Energy Agency."

Regarding the assassination of Lt. General Qasem Soleimani, Commander of the Quds Force of the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps, the Iranian Ambassador to China also said: "Iran reserves the right to retaliate in this regard, and as previously announced, Iran will decide on the time and place and how to retaliate."

Iranian Envoy Slams EU Over Double Standards

PORTUGAL (IP) - Iran's ambassador to Portugal tweeted slamming the EU's double standards, protesting the EU over not condemning executions on U.S. soil.

On his Twitter account, Morteza Damanpak-Jami stated on Friday: "Does the EU really believe that the death penalty is a cruel and inhumane punishment? Then how about the executions of these 10 in the U.S.? Where is the European External Action Service (EEAS) statement to condemn this act in the strongest terms? Shame on your double standard!"

At the end of his tweet, he used HumanRights and Khashoggi hashtags. The Iranian ambassador has attached two photos in his tweet.

The first photo was related to the condemnation of the execution of Ruhollah Zam by the European Union, and the second photo was a tweet of CNN, in which the execution of 10 people this year in the United States were mentioned.

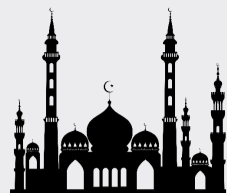
Members of the European Parliament passed a resolution yesterday (Thursday) accusing Iran of what it calls "human rights violations."

Sri Lankan Parliament Speaker Stresses on Unity Against Terrorism

TEHRAN (MNA) – Stressing the need for unity against terrorism, Sri Lankan Parliament Speaker expressed his condolences on the martyrdom of Iranian top nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrazadeh in a recent terrorist attack.

Addressing Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohamad Baqer Qalibaf in a message, the Sri Lankan Parliament Speaker Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena expressed his deep sorrow and condolence over the assassination of Iranian top nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrazadeh.

"On behalf of the Sri Lankan Parliament and for my part, I extend my sincere condolences to you and the Iranian Parliament and the Iranian nation on the tragic loss of a valuable human being", he said, and wished stability and resistance for the family of the Martyr Fakhrazadeh in these difficult times. Stressing that Sri Lanka always condemns such terrorist moves, he said, "This escalation of violence has once again reassured us that there is a serious need for unity against terrorism."



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:02
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:14
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:40
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	07:10

150. Those who deny Allah and His apostles, and (those who) wish to separate Allah from His apostles, saying: "We believe in some but reject others": And (those who) wish to take a course midway- 151. They are in truth (equally) unbelievers; and we have prepared for unbelievers a humiliating punishment. Surah 4. Women (150 - 151)

Majlis Cannot Change Structure of the Budget Bill

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

Speaking in a presser, Abbas-Ali Kadkhodae reacted to claims of some Majlis lawmakers, who have claimed Majlis will reject the government budget bill and will have a new one, and said Majlis is not in a position to change the structure of budget bill but it can change the details and figures in the bill.

He said the GC is concerned about the budget bill and it has always been because the budget bill should be an efficient one and proportionate to the national needs and to cover all sectors. He added the council expects Majlis to review the bill with more care and scrutiny. He reiterated that if Majlis decides to change the whole structure of the budget bill, the council will reject it because it is against the Constitutions.

In response to the question on the Guardian Council's opinion to amend the presidential election law which is being considered and approved by the parliament, Kadkhodae highlighted that until the ratification of the Guardian Council is not received, no comment can be made, and any comment without approval is considered personal.

Amending the law is a measure that the Islamic Consultative Assembly has taken, but it is not yet possible to predict, he stressed.

Responding to the question on "If the COVID-19 outbreak would be acute until the presidential election, are new voting methods will be implemented, Kadkhodae stated that if you mean vote by mail ballots, the law does not allow to do so, but we give our advice and comments to the parliament and the Ministry of Interior.

Working groups have been formed between the Ministry of Interior and the Guardian Council, and if there is no need to amend the law, we will increase the number of polling stations, yet presidential election voting will be electronic.

While congratulating Nurse Day, the Guardian Council spokesman underlined that



the nurses and medical staff carried out their duties perfectly amid the coronavirus outbreak and even some of them lost their lives while combating the disease and saving people's lives.

Condemning Martyr Mohsen Fakhrizadeh's assassination by terrorists, the Guardian Council Spokesman noted that the enemies cannot bear the Islamic Republic of Iran's scientific progress.

On the next year presidential election, he said health of election is the major task of all bodies and safeguarding people's votes is the main task and the other task this year will be the health of voters in the coronavirus condition.

He added that this year all executive bodies and GC should try to plan the elections in a way that all sanitary protocols are observed. On electronizing the election, he said the infrastructures should let the elections be held electronically and the interior ministry is pursuing this idea to prepare the infrastructures and the GC will not oppose e-voting.

On registering for the presidential election, Kadkhodae said that all those who have disqualified in the past also can register for the presidential election but the GC will decide their fates based on the current condition and documents.

He expressed hope the amendment of the presidential election would be completed before the start of registration for the election.

IME Posts Weekly Trade of 703 Tons of Commodities

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) IME witnessed trades of 703,534 tons of various types of commodities worth nearly \$349m last week.



According to a report by the IME's international affair and PR the exchange also traded 361,117 tons of commodities on its mineral and industrial trading floor valued at more than \$201m last week. On this floor, the IME sold 347,862 tons of steel, 9,180 tons of aluminum, 3,440 tons of copper, 120 tons of molybdenum sulfur, 15 tons of precious metals concentrate and 500 tons of zinc.

The IME next trading floor was the oil and petrochemical with 368,613 tons of commodities sold on its both domestic and export rings totaling \$151m.

Commodities sold on this floor were 76,500 tons of vacuum bottom, 132,297 tons of bitumen, 64,199 tons of polymeric products, 38,217 tons of chemicals, 54,500 tons of lube cut, 150 tons of insulation, 2,469 tons of base oil, 50 tons of argon and 1,300 tons of sulfur.

It's worth noting that the agricultural trading floor of the exchanges saw trade of 22 tons of saffron for exportation. The last trading floor was the IME's side market with 700 tons of metal scraps sold on it.

MSC Supporter of Health Defenders And People in Fight With COVID-19

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

ISFAHAN - The CEO of Mobarakeh Steel Company (MSC) says the company has planned and operationalized its actions domestically and internationally concurrent with the outbreak of the coronavirus (COVID-19).



Eng. Hamid Reza Azimian said that some 20,000 people as the personnel and contractor are cooperating with the company, adding that daily presence of the staff in different units, receiving necessary materials of the company from almost 60 percent of the country as well as dispatching products of the company to any part of the country makes it necessary that the health and sanitary protocols in this gigantic complex are fully observed otherwise Mobarakeh Steel Company itself will turn as a source for transmitting the virus.

Azimian emphasized that protecting the human resources in the company in the current special condition is very important, adding that currently by taking necessary measures, the production lines of the company are fortunately functioning with full speed and strength as schedule without any major risk threatening the staff.

He said after the outbreak of COVID-19 Mobarakeh Steel Company has rushed to help the people and has been the supporter of the health defenders, and said the company has allocated a budget around 100b tomans for equipping hospitals and medical centers in Isfahan Province and some underprivileged regions in order that the centers and hospitals could provide necessary equipment for treatment of the COVID-19 infected patients.

He also announced that the company provides hospitals under cover of Medical Science University of Isfahan Province with free oxygen till the virus is contained. He said so far 60 hospitals in Isfahan Province and other provinces are provided with free oxygen and this will continue by the yearend.

Iran Carpet Exports Reach \$47b In 8 Months

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Spokesperson to Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) Ruhollah Latifi says Iran has exported hand-woven carpet worth of \$47.9m in the past eight months which shows only \$800m decline comparing to the same period last year.

Latifi in an interview with IRNA said that exports of gabbe (a variety of Persian carpet) and hand-woven carpets with soft hair and wool stood at \$2.7m in the first eight months while the figure was around \$4.1m last year.

He went on to say that exports of other types of hand-woven carpets were also as much as last year's figure.

Latifi noted that the total value of hand-woven carpets exported by the country in the first eight months last year was around \$48.6m while the figure declined for almost \$755m and hit \$47.9m in the same period.

He blamed the outbreak of COVID-19 and closure of borders for the decline, adding that the decline seems being logical.

He refuted some claims that Iran's carpet exports have slumped significantly, saying that carpet is a commodity which is sold gradually and repatriation of the earned forex from the exports to the country takes long procedure and for this reason some assumptions have been raised over the considerable decline of Iran carpet exports but the IRICA's statistics show no significant change in carpet exports.

In order to boost the carpet exports for earning more forex for the country, the government in its next year budget has allocated a budget around 15.5b tomans.

Exports to Iraq via Qasr-e Shirin Borders Reach \$1b

QASR-E-SHIRIN (IP) - The governor of Qasr-e Shirin, Kermanshah Province, western Iran, said that since the start of the Iranian year (starting on March 21st), more than \$1.2b worth of goods have been exported to Iraq from the borders of Khosravi and Parviz Khan.

Speaking on Friday, Morad-Ali Tatar said the amount of export has increased by 45% in terms of currency and 65% in terms of weight compared to the same period last year.

He added: "Sanctions have deprived us of the possibility of trading with the world economy for many years, and this is while our country's borders are an opportunity to improve the economic situation and help the current situation."

The official stated that Khosravi and Parviz Khan borders are important borders of the country, which in the current situation has had a significant income for the country as well as traders and merchants.

The high representative of the government in Qasr-e Shirin said: "The round-the-clock operation of the official border of Parviz Khan is very important in the conditions of the enemy's sanctions, as well as the problems of Iraq and the coronavirus crisis, and this border has not been closed even for a day."

Tatar noted: "The efforts of all institutions and traders and investors active in this border have played a significant role in the country's economic turnover."

He stated: "Currently, the comprehensive development plan of Parviz Khan is being implemented in this border. With the follow-up of the governor and customs, 74 billion Tomans have been allocated for the comprehensive plan, of which 50% has been attracted so far and the progress of this plan will help exports a lot."

He also noted the significant reduction in fuel smuggling and the settlement of traders at the border.

Pfizer Not Only Option for Iran to Buy Coronavirus Vaccine

TEHRAN (IP) - Head of the National Coronavirus Taskforce's Scientific Committee stressed on Friday that Iran has not ruled out purchase of coronavirus vaccine, saying that the vaccine produced by Pfizer is not the only option for Iran because there are other vaccines that meet the country's conditions.

Talking to IRNA, Mostafa Qane'ei added that two issues matters in buying Pfizer vaccine; one is its price and the other the temperature minus 70 it should be kept and transported to farthest points across the country.

While Iran is able to buy a vaccine whose cold chain is compatible with the country's infrastructure and its price is more appropriate and is produced by a reputable company, there is no reason to buy a vaccine that it completely lacks the infrastructure needed for its transport, he said.

Iran will not replace Pfizer vaccine with those of Russia and China, he said, noting that Europe now also has a vaccine, and AstraZeneca announced that it will produce its own vaccine as many as three billion doses, and in any case, this vaccine does not require a cold chain, and it is also a valid production.

It is a vaccine proposed by the University of Oxford and AstraZeneca has finalized its production, he said, noting that this vaccine, compared to Pfizer vaccine has no problem both in terms of price and amount of production and transmission chain; Therefore, there is not only one option in buying coronavirus vaccine.

Over 80m Tons of Goods Loaded, Unloaded at Ports of Iran

TEHRAN (MNA) - Over 80 million tons of commodities have been loaded and unloaded at the ports of Iran during the first eight months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-November 20), according to the Head of Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) Mohammad Rastad.

Among the mentioned 80 million tons of commodities, oil products with more than 30 million tons and a share of 38 percent stood in the first place, while dry bulk goods with 25 million tons and a share of 31 percent, container goods with 12.3 million tons and a share of 15 percent, general goods with 11 million tons and the share of 14 percent and liquid bulk goods with 1.7 million tons and the share of two percent were in the next ranks, the official announced.

While the coronavirus pandemic has created many limitations for the economic activities all around the world, operations at Iranian ports are underway continuously, and even the U.S. sanctions could not halt activities at the ports. Last week, Rastad said that the country's trade gateways were not closed even a moment despite the sanctions and pandemic, adding that loading and unloading of goods, especially the essential goods, are continuously conducted at the ports.

As announced by the PMO head, loading and unloading of commodities are being conducted continuously at the ports of Iran while the health requirements are completely met.

Rastad has reiterated that all port operations are done observing healthcare protocols and the principles set by the Coronavirus Containment Headquarters.

In the name of God

FIRST ANNOUNCEMENT



ESCO
Esfahan Steel Company

Brief Notice of International Tender No. 9900805

It is hereby notified that Esfahan Steel Company intends to purchase Refractory Material for Tundish's Slide Gate of Casting Station through two-stage international tender. Accordingly, the prospective bidders specialized and experienced in the said area and willing to participate in this Tender may visit Esfahan Steel Co.'s website at www.esfahansteel.ir to get tender document not later than 25.12.2020 and deliver their bids to the following addresses within the set deadlines:

In Tehran: ESCO's office, near to Shahed Alley, Karim Khanezand Boulevard, Vali-e-Asr Ave. Tehran, Iran. Tel No. 0098-21-8891-5657 max. upto Wenseday, 13.01.2021 at 12:00 p.m.;

In Isfahan: Confidential Secretariat of ESCO's Security Department, at the main entrance gate next to Melli Bank, Esfahan Steel Company, 45th km of Zobahan-Shahrekor Highway, Esfahan, Iran or through email address toa@esfahansteel.ir and obtaining email receipt acknowledgment through Tel. No. 0098-315-257-2197 max. up to Monday, 18.01.2021 at 11:00 a.m.

Public Relation of Esfahan Steel Co.

India's Coronavirus Cases Pass 10 Million

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India surged past 10 million coronavirus cases on Saturday, official data showed, the second highest in the world although new infection rates appear to have fallen sharply in recent weeks.

Total cases were 10.0 million, up just over 25,000 in 24 hours, with 9.6 million recoveries and 145,136 deaths, according to the health ministry.

In September, the vast nation of 1.3 billion people had been recording daily new cases of almost 100,000 and looked on track to surpass the United States as the worst-hit country. But the pandemic has accelerated in the U.S. and appears to have lost momentum in India, despite the country being home to some of the most crowded cities on the planet.



Trump Signs Into Law Stopgap Funding Bill

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - President Donald Trump on Friday signed into law a two-day stopgap extension of existing federal funds passed by Congress to avoid a midnight government shutdown, as lawmakers negotiate a \$900 billion pandemic aid bill and as part of \$1.4 trillion government spending package.

The House of Representatives and Senate, with little debate and with only hours to go before government funding expired, gave congressional leaders more time to try to craft a bipartisan COVID-19 aid bill that would ride along with the massive spending legislation.



COVID Vaccines Must Be Made Available Everywhere



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has urged world leaders to ensure COVID-19 vaccines are made available and affordable for "all people" amid mounting concerns stocks could be hoovered up by wealthy nations at the expense of poorer ones.

Addressing Germany's parliament on Friday in a speech to mark 75 years since the founding of the UN, Guterres stressed vaccines must be viewed as a "global public good".

"They must be accessible and affordable everywhere for all people," he said.

His comments came after reports earlier this week suggested the global scheme to deliver COVID-19 vaccines to poorer countries faces a "very high" risk of failure, potentially leaving nations home to billions of people with no access to inoculations until as late as 2024. The COVAX program co-led by the World Health Organization (WHO) is the main global scheme to vaccinate people in poor and middle-income countries around the world against COVID-19.

It aims to deliver 1.3 billion vaccine doses by the end of 2021 to cover 20 percent of the most vulnerable people in 92 poor and middle-income countries, mostly in Africa, Asia and Latin America, at a maximum cost of \$3 a dose.

COVAX said on Friday it had gained access to nearly two billion doses, roughly doubling its supply, with the first deliveries expected in the first quarter of 2021.

But in internal documents reviewed by Reuters news agency, the scheme's promoters say the program is beset by a range of issues - including a lack of funds, supply risks and complex contractual arrangements - which could make it impossible to achieve its goals.

"The risk of a failure to establish a successful COVAX Facility is very high," says an internal report to the board of Gavi, an alliance of governments, drug companies, charities and international organisations that arranges global vaccination campaigns. Gavi co-leads COVAX alongside the WHO.

The failure of the facility could leave people in poor nations without any access to COVID-19 vaccines until 2024, one of the documents says.

Rich countries have already booked most of the currently available vaccine stocks. Guterres meanwhile went on in his address to praise the researchers from German biotechnology firm BioNTech who teamed up with US pharmaceutical giant Pfizer and beat rivals in the race to put the first thoroughly vetted vaccine on the market. He expressed his "deep appreciation for the great contribution" made by the firm's founders, Ugur Sahin and Ozlem Tureci, whose breakthrough vaccine has been granted regulatory approval in a growing number of countries.

He added the UN was committed to providing news and advice people can trust and working to build confidence in the vaccine "guided by science, grounded in facts" to combat what he called the "virus of misinformation".

U.S. Issues New Venezuela-Related Sanctions Over Recent Elections

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The United States has issued sanctions against two individuals and a company that it alleges played a role in "fraudulent elections" in Venezuela earlier this month, a move that was rejected by President Nicolas Maduro as "stupid".

In a statement on Friday, the U.S. Treasury Department said it had sanctioned Ex-Cle Soluciones Biometricas CA, a biometrics company, for providing material support to Maduro, "including by providing goods and services" to help carry out the parliamentary vote.

The department also sanctioned two individuals it alleged acted "for or on behalf of" Ex-Cle Soluciones Biometricas CA: dual Argentine and Italian national Guillermo Carlos San Agustin and Venezuelan Marcos Javier Machado Requena. The sanctions block any assets they may have in the U.S., and prohibit U.S. citizens from interacting with them.

Maduro's political alliance overwhelmingly won the National Assembly elections, which were boycotted by Venezuela's main opposition parties and criticized internationally for being fraudulent.

"The illegitimate Maduro regime's efforts to steal elections in Venezuela show its disregard for the democratic aspirations of the Venezuelan people," U.S. Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin said in the statement announcing the sanctions.

"The United States remains committed to targeting the Maduro regime and those who support its aim to deny the Venezuelan people their right to free and fair elections."

U.S. President Donald Trump's administration has for years heaped pressure on Maduro, issuing numerous rounds of sanctions that have crippled Venezuela's economy and backing his main opponent, Juan Guaido, who has tried to overthrow Maduro.

Guaido, the outgoing National Assembly speaker, urged Venezuelans to boycott the December 6 elections, which he alleged were rigged to favour Maduro, and instead organized a "popular consultation" vote in protest.

Maduro rejected Friday's U.S. sanctions announcement and slammed U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, in particular.



Bulgaria to Expel Another Russian Diplomat Suspected of Spying

SOFIA (Dispatches) - Bulgaria has given a Russian diplomat 72 hours to leave the country after prosecutors alleged he had been involved in espionage since 2017, the foreign ministry said on Friday.

The Russian diplomat is the sixth to be expelled by NATO member Bulgaria since October 2019 for suspected espionage.

Russia's embassy in Sofia said in a statement that the expulsion of its military attache was groundless and that Moscow reserved the right to respond.

"The unreasonable expulsion of the head of the representation of the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation does not contribute to the development of dialogue between our countries in the military sphere or to the strengthening of stability in the Black Sea region," it said.

Bulgarian prosecutors said the Russian diplomat had been seeking sensitive military information, including on the number of American soldiers deployed in Bulgaria during military drills.

Prosecutors said they had evidence that the diplomat had been in contact with a Bulgarian citizen with access to classified information to whom money had been offered. After the announcement of the expulsion, the US and British embassies in Sofia expressed support for Bulgaria's efforts to protect its sovereignty and security.

Earlier this month, Russia's foreign ministry spokeswoman said Moscow was concerned by growing NATO activity in the Black Sea.

She said NATO military drill scenarios included possible attacks on Russian territory, while infrastructure was being upgraded and weapons deployed in Bulgaria and Romania. Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borissov has dismissed such concerns but has confirmed that Bulgaria is upgrading its airports to host eight new F-16 fighter jets it bought from the United States.

It has also ordered two new patrol ships to replace ageing Soviet-era vessels to improve its compliance with NATO standards.

Pakistan Alleges India Preparing for Surgical Strike

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Pakistan's government has alleged that India is preparing to launch a "surgical [military] strike" on Pakistani soil and has called for the international community to help de-escalate the situation between the nuclear-armed neighbors.

Speaking to the press in the United Arab Emirates capital Abu Dhabi on Friday, Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi warned that Pakistan would retaliate if attacked.

"I have learned through our intelligence sources and they have picked up this information that India is planning a surgical strike against Pakistan," said Qureshi.

"This is a serious development and I also have knowledge that they have tried to seek tacit approval from important players who they consider to be their partners." The two countries have fought three full-scale wars since gaining independence from the British in 1947, with tensions remaining high in the relationship in the intervening periods.

Both have been on a high state of military alert since a standoff in February 2019 that saw India bomb territory just inside Pakistan's borders and Pakistan shoot down an Indian fighter jet.

Pakistan later returned the pilot of the downed fighter aircraft, helping to reduce the immediate tensions.

Foreign Minister Qureshi warned that Pakistan would strike back at India "a notch above" if attacked.

"I want to tell India very clearly that Pakistan is fully prepared to respond and to defeat their designs," he said.

"We will do it effectively as we did respond immediately and effectively in February 2019. And we will respond effectively if they choose this path."

India's government did not offer any immediate comment on the allegations.

Pakistan's national security adviser Moeed Yusuf said Pakistan had obtained "very specific and reliable intelligence" of the Indian plans to launch strikes.

"We remind the world that peace is a collective responsibility. The world must prevent India from destabilising the region in its attempt to divert attention from its domestic troubles," said Yusuf.

The two countries frequently accuse each other of sponsoring armed groups or planning attacks against the other.

In September 2016, India claimed to have carried out a "surgical strike" on Pakistan-administered Kashmir to hit armed groups linked to an earlier attack on Indian security forces in Uri town in the Indian-administered Kashmir.

At the time, Pakistan denied Indian forces had ever entered Pakistan-controlled territory.



Mysterious N. Korea Site Reportedly May Be Building Nuclear Components

SEOUL (Reuters) - A mysterious North Korean facility may be producing components for building nuclear bombs, a new report suggests, offering clues to understanding the site near the capital that has perplexed experts and policymakers.

The nondescript cluster of buildings called Kangson on the southwest outskirts of Pyongyang was first publicly identified in 2018 by a team of open-source analysts as the possible location of a facility for secretly enriching uranium, a fuel for nuclear bombs.

But the report by North Korea watchers at the 38 North project, reviewed by Reuters before its release on Friday, says satellite imagery points to the facility making components for centrifuges, the high-tech spinners used to enrich uranium, rather than enriching the fuel itself.

"The characteristics of the site are more consistent with a plant that could manufacture components for centrifuges," writes former International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) official Olli Heinonen in the report.

The imagery suggests the site lacks the infrastructure needed for enrichment, writes Heinonen, a distinguished fellow with the Stimson Center, the Washington think-tank that runs the project.

Pyongyang has denied having secret nuclear sites, an issue that contributed to the failure of a 2019 Hanoi summit between U.S. President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. Denuclearisation talks have remained stalled in part over U.S. assertions that the North is not fully declaring the extent of its programme.

"If the issue of undeclared facilities is going to be a factor in U.S.-North Korea negotiations, as it was in Hanoi, the more we can learn about these suspected facilities, the better we can assess their role and value to North Korea's overall nuclear weapons development," said Jenny Town, deputy director of 38 North.

Friday's report could advance the debate on whether the Kangson site is building machines or using them to create bomb material.

Clandestine enrichment sites would complicate efforts to estimate the number of nuclear weapons produced by the North, which has pushed ahead with enlarging its nuclear deterrent in the absence of a denuclearisation agreement.



Shanon
(adviser)

Zaferanieh Apt (\$3100)
340sq.m, 3bdrs
S/p, Sauna
J, balcony
roof garden
Fully Furn

Pasdaran Villa (\$4000)
1000sq.m
5bdrs, S/p
S, J, balcony
green yard
Fully Furn

Parsian

(\$2300) Niavaran
200sq.m, 3bdrs
S/p, S, J, pkg
L.balcony
F.F

Darrous Apt (\$2200)
240sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, S, J
balcony, pkg, yard, & F.F

(\$6000) Elahieh bldg
4storey bldg
enough pkgs
yard, balcony
F.F

Velenajak (\$1200) 2bdrs, S/p, F.F

Jordan (\$1400)
180sq.m, 3bdrs, F.F

Cell: +98912190787
Shanon_tari@yahoo.com
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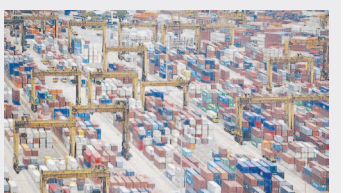
Singapore's November Exports Fall 4.9%

SINGAPORE (Reuters) - Singapore's November non-oil domestic exports (NODX) fell 4.9% from a year earlier, its biggest drop since November 2019, mainly due to lower shipments of petrochemicals and pharmaceuticals.

The drop followed a 3.1% decrease in October. Trade-dependent Singapore is often seen as a bellwether

for the health of the global economy and OCBC Bank analysts said the data highlighted "the still-fragile state of recovery that global trade is expected to face in the coming year."

The analysts said they expected exports from the city-state to rise 3.6% year-on-year in 2020, below the government's official forecast range of 4% to 4.5% growth.



U.S. to Blacklist Dozens Of Chinese Firms

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The United States is set to add dozens of Chinese companies, including the country's top chipmaker SMIC, to a trade blacklist on Friday, two people familiar with the matter told Reuters.

The move, which has not previously been reported, is seen as the latest in President Donald Trump's effort to cement his tough-on-China legacy. It comes just weeks before Democratic President-elect Joe Biden is set to take office on Jan. 20.

The Commerce Department is expected to add around 80 additional companies and affiliates to the so-called entity list, nearly all of them Chinese.

China's foreign ministry said that if true, the blacklisting would be evidence of U.S. oppression of Chinese companies and that Beijing would continue to take "necessary measures" to protect their rights.

"We urge the U.S. to cease its mistaken behavior of unwarranted oppression of foreign companies," ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told a regular news conference in Beijing on Friday. SMIC and the Commerce Department did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The designations by the Commerce Department are expected to name some Chinese companies that Washington says have ties to the Chinese military, including some helping it construct and militarize artificial islands in the South China Sea, as well as some involved in alleged human rights violations, the sources said.

The Trump administration has often used the entity list - which now includes more than 275 China-based firms and affiliates - to hit key Chinese industries.

These include telecoms equipment giants Huawei Technologies Co and 150 affiliates, and ZTE Corp over sanction violations, as well as surveillance camera maker Hikvision over suppression of China's Uighur minority. Shares in SMIC, formally the Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corp, fell 5.2% in Hong Kong on Friday, while its Shanghai-listed shares declined 1.8%. The benchmark indices in the two markets were down less than 1%. SMIC has already been in Washington's crosshairs.

In September, the Commerce Department mandated that suppliers of certain equipment to the company apply for export licenses after concluding there was an "unacceptable risk" that equipment supplied to it could be used for military purposes.

Last month, the Defense Department added the company to a blacklist of alleged Chinese military companies, effectively banning U.S. investors from buying its shares starting late next year.

SMIC has repeatedly said that it has no relationship with the Chinese military. The entity list designation would force SMIC to seek a special license from the Commerce Department before a U.S. supplier could send it key goods, part of a bid by the administration to curb its access to sophisticated U.S. chipmaking technology.

Commerce is also expected to add numerous SMIC-affiliated companies to the entity list, the sources said. SMIC is the largest Chinese chip manufacturer but trails Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co, the industry's market leader. It has sought to build out foundries for the manufacture of computer chips that can compete with TSMC.

Ties between Washington and Beijing have grown increasingly antagonistic over the past year as the world's top two economies sparred over Beijing's handling of the coronavirus outbreak, imposition of a national security law in Hong Kong and rising tensions in the South China Sea.

Saudi Economy Shrinks 4.6% in Q3

DUBAI (Reuters) - Saudi Arabia's economy shrank more slowly in the third quarter as the government eased some coronavirus restrictions but the pandemic-hit oil sector continued to weigh on the broader economy, official data showed.

The economy shrank 4.6% in the third quarter, rebounding slightly from the 7% slump in the previous quarter but marked by declines in both the oil and non-oil sectors, the data showed.



Saudi Arabia is facing its worst economic decline in decades after the COVID-19 pandemic curbed global crude demand and measures to contain it also hurt other sectors.

The world's largest oil exporter said on Tuesday it expects the economy to shrink by 3.7% this year but to swing back to growth of 3.2% next year.

"This negative growth originated mainly from the contraction in the oil sector by 8.2% and a negative growth rate of 2.1% recorded in the non-oil sector," the General Authority for Statistics said on Thursday about the third quarter data.

The private sector, the main focus in Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's plans to diversify the economy away from oil, shrank by 3.1%, while the government sector grew by 0.5%.

Bank of Russia Warns On Inflation Risks

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - The Bank of Russia warned growing risks of higher inflation may leave no room for further monetary easing after it kept the key rate unchanged at a third consecutive policy meeting.

The key rate was kept at 4.25% on Friday, the lowest level on record, after 200 basis points of cuts earlier this year. The central bank left the door open to further monetary easing, but altered the language in the statement to suggest there may not be any further reductions. Russian government bonds fell for the first time in four days.

"We continue to talk about space for easing, but probably not as confidently as before," Governor Elvira Nabiullina said at a news briefing following the rates decision. "There is lots of uncertainty now about the outlook for the economy and inflation."

Inflation has become a political issue, with President Vladimir Putin last week ordering the government to take urgent measures to reduce prices of key staples. The central bank raised its forecast for year-end inflation to 4.6%-4.9% from its previous forecast in October of 3.9%-4.2%. The estimate for the end of next year was kept at 3.5%-4%.

"With headline inflation surging toward 5%, the central bank had little choice but to introduce some hawkish undertones into its statement," said Tatiana Orlova, an analyst at Emerginomics in London. "Still, there is no hint that they could start considering rate hikes if inflation continues to rise."

The central bank said pro-inflationary factors are lasting longer than expected, but monetary policy will still remain accommodative for all of next year. A handful of economists had suggested that the bank may consider a rate increase if inflation continues to climb. Measures to control food prices aren't likely to have a full impact this month, Nabiullina said, adding that price controls shouldn't be implemented before the government has tried out other economic measures to curb volatility.

The jump in inflation was partly caused by a nearly 16% slump in the ruble this year, which has fed through into consumer prices. The currency has appreciated in the past two months, but slumped with other emerging-market currencies on Friday due to a drop in oil prices and reports of a Russian hacking campaign in the U.S.

The hawkish tone dimmed expectations for a cut in the months ahead and 10-year government bonds, also known as OFZs, fell for the first time in four days, lifting the yield three basis points to 5.83%. "A lot was already priced into OFZs, but given the harsh rhetoric, the pressure continues," said Iskander Lutsko, a strategist at ITI Capital in Moscow.

Armenia Prepares to Ban Turkish Imports



YEREVAN (Dispatches) - On December 31, a ban on Turkish imported goods goes into effect in Armenia. And that includes the Mavi shop, an outpost of the global Turkish fast-fashion chain.

The Armenian government announced the ban in late October following Turkey's heavy backing of Azerbaijan in the recent 44-day war. The move was motivated by "the open and evident promotion and support by Turkey of Azeri aggression" and aims to "put an end to the financial proceeds and fiscal revenues of a country with clear hostile attitude," the government said in its official notice announcing the embargo.

The ban will be in effect for only six months, as that is the maximum period that member states of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) can implement unilateral embargos of this type. But the ban can be extended indefinitely. The Armenia-Turkey border has been closed for decades and the two countries do not have diplomatic relations, a legacy of the first war between Armenia and Azerbaijan in the 1990s. But Turkish brands - Mavi clothes, Beko appliances, Golden Rose cosmetics - have nevertheless been popular in Armenia, as they are around the region, prized for their low cost.

One salesperson at the Mavi store said that passers-by will occasionally walk in and berate staff for selling Turkish goods. "But after we announced the liquidation, crowds just stormed the store," the salesperson told Eurasianet, speaking on condition of anonymity. "I guess that's how much nationalism costs."

The salesperson said the shop would likely be replaced by one from a different international brand: "I assume it will be something expensive, something made in Europe can't be the same price as something made in Turkey."

Other Armenian stores that carry Turkish products had been sourcing elsewhere, out of patriotic motives, even before the ban was announced. In the large Yerevan City supermarket chain, about 90% of the products were from Turkey, one of the company's directors, Gevorg Simonyan, told the TV network 5th Channel. "Since the military action, we stopped selling Turkish goods," he said. They are now being replaced with products from Russia, Belarus, and Bulgaria, he said.

Pakistan Returns \$1b of Saudi Arabia's Soft Loan

ISLAMABAD (Reuters) - Pakistan has returned \$1 billion to Saudi Arabia as a second instalment of a \$3 billion soft loan, as Islamabad reaches out to Beijing for a commercial loan to help it offset pressure to repay another \$1 billion to Riyadh next month, officials said on Wednesday.

Analysts say it is unusual for Riyadh to press for the return of money. But relations have been strained lately between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, historically close friends.

With the \$1 billion flowing out, Pakistan - which has \$13.3 billion in central bank foreign reserves - could face a balance of payments issue after clearing the next Saudi instalment.

"China has come to our rescue," a foreign ministry official told Reuters.

A finance ministry official said Pakistan's central bank was already in talks with Chinese commercial banks, including the debt swap option. "We've sent \$1 billion to Saudi Arabia," he said. Another \$1 billion will be repaid to Riyadh next month, he said. Islamabad had returned \$1 billion in July.

A finance ministry spokesman declined comment, saying these are "bilateral confidential issues". The central bank also refused to comment, and the foreign office didn't respond.

The People's Bank of China did not respond to a Reuters request for comment, and Riyadh didn't issue any details after a meeting between Pakistani army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa, and the Saudi ambassador in Islamabad on Tuesday. Although a \$1.2 billion surplus in its current account balance and a record \$11.77 billion in remittances in the past five months have helped support the Pakistani economy, having to return the Saudi money is still a setback.

Saudi Arabia gave Pakistan a \$3 billion loan and a \$3.2 billion oil credit facility in late 2018. After Islamabad sought Riyadh's support over alleged human rights violations by India in the disputed territory of Kashmir, Saudi Arabia has pushed Pakistan to repay the loan. Washington has expressed concerns about Pakistan and other developing countries getting stuck in a Chinese debt trap. It has criticized Beijing's China-Pakistan Economic Corridor plans, involving more than \$60 billion in pledged support for infrastructure projects in Pakistan.

Japan Raises GDP Outlook for FY2021

TOKYO (Reuters) - Japan raised its economic growth forecast for the next fiscal year thanks to its latest stimulus package aimed at speeding up the recovery following the damage wrought by the coronavirus pandemic.

The economy is expected to grow 4.0% in price-adjusted real terms in the next fiscal year starting April 2021, the latest estimate by the Cabinet Office showed on Friday.

The new estimate compared with its previous forecast of 3.4% growth projected in July.

"The economy will recover to its level of before the coronavirus by achieving a 4.0% real growth rate next fiscal year," Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga said at a government meeting to discuss economic and fiscal policy on Friday.

The upgraded economic assessment was underpinned by the government's third supplementary budget, which was approved earlier this week, to fund the \$708 billion stimulus package to help the economy recover from its COVID-induced slump in the second quarter.

The forecast 4.0% growth for the next fiscal year would be the fastest annual expansion on record, if realized, since comparable data became available in 1995, the Cabinet Office said.

The government, which expects the economy will return to pre-COVID-19 levels by January-March 2022 helped by its broad policy support, also cautioned about risks.

Policymakers need to keep a close watch "on downside risks to the economy in Japan and overseas from the pandemic and impacts from moves in financial capital markets," an official at the Cabinet Office said.

The government will use the forecasts to finalize the state budget for the next fiscal year. For the current fiscal year that ends in March 2021, the government cut its gross domestic product forecast to a 5.2% contraction, which would be the biggest annual slump on record.

Previously, it projected the economy to shrink 4.5%. Consumer prices will remain subdued due to weak domestic demand and the government's discount travel campaign to support the tourism industry.

Overall consumer prices are forecast to fall 0.6% for this fiscal year, from a 0.3% decline expected previously.

In fiscal 2021, overall prices will grow 0.4%, the government said, revised down slightly from the previous forecast of a 0.5% increase.

Efforts Underway to Gain Effective Seats in Int'l Sports

TEHRAN (IP) - President of the National Olympic Committee of the Islamic Republic of Iran said the country currently has many seats in international sports, but a small number of them are effective in championship sports and efforts are underway to gain effective seats in international sports.

In a meeting with reporters, Reza Salehi Amiri stated that the requirements for gaining the power of diplomacy in the field of sports are political relations and economic power, and these days a country that can have these two components will be more successful in gaining international hosting and seats.



German Business Morale Rises Unexpectedly in December

BERLIN (Reuters) -High demand for industrial goods, brighter export expectations and government support for companies hit by lockdowns to slow the spread of the coronavirus contributed to an unexpected rise in German business morale in December, a survey showed on Friday.

The Ifo institute said its business climate index rose to 92.1 from an upwardly revised reading of 90.9 in November.

"Companies were satisfied with their business situation," Ifo President Clemens Fuest said. "They are looking at the first half of the year with less scepticism. But the lockdown is hitting some branches hard. The German economy is on the whole showing its resilience."

Germany imposed a hard lockdown on Dec. 16 that forced all non-essential businesses to shut to bring down stubbornly high infection numbers and record-high deaths.

Ifo said only 20% of companies it surveyed sent their responses after Germany took the decision last weekend to go into lockdown.

The new tightening in coronavirus restrictions means that activity will remain subdued at the start of next year before picking up in the second quarter.

Melanie Debono, Europe economist at Capital Economics, said the survey suggested that Germany could avoid a contraction in the fourth quarter.

"All told, the recent tightening in lockdown measures means that services and retail activity will continue to struggle in the near term," she said in a note to clients. "But, on balance, we now think that Germany's economy may expand a touch in Q4 thanks to the continued strong growth in industry."

The government has provided a stimulus package worth billions of euros to support companies, families and freelancers during the pandemic, which is expected to plunge Germany into its worst recession since World War Two this year.

The combination of government aid and demand for German goods from a recovering Chinese economy were limiting the damage from lockdown measures, said Thomas Gitzel, chief economist at VP Bank Liechtenstein.

"The Chinese economy is gaining speed given high foreign demand related to the



coronavirus. This includes masks, furniture and electronic goods in high demand by European and American consumers," he wrote in a note. "Chinese consumers are on the other hand buying German cars and Chinese companies German machines."

Economists warned, however, not to read too much into the upbeat Ifo readings, because the economy is likely to suffer a contraction into the first quarter if Germany extends its hard lockdown beyond Jan. 10.

"Despite the good level of industrial orders, there is still misery in the pipeline," said Alexander Krueger, chief economist at Bankhaus Lampe. The lockdown is reversing the economic recovery, which is not exactly good news."

India Falls 17 Spots on 2020 Human Freedom Index to 111th Rank



NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - The Human Freedom Index 2020, a worldwide ranking of civil, economic and personal freedom, released on Thursday, placed India at the 111th spot out of 162 countries. India ranked 94 on the index in 2019.

India is ahead of China and Bangladesh, which ranked 129 and 139 on the 2020 index respectively. New Zealand, Switzerland and Hong Kong bagged the first three spots. Fred McMahon and Ian Vásquez, the authors of the report, said that they expected Hong Kong's rank to decline in the future, because of China's "aggressive interventions" in the region in 2019 and 2020.

India's scored 6.30 out of 10 in personal freedom and 6.56 in economic freedom. The country's overall human freedom score was 6.43. The index was published by American think tank Cato Institute and Fraser Institute in Canada. It takes into account 76 indicators of personal, civil, and economic freedoms to rank 162 countries from 2008 to 2018. The institutes noted that the world has seen a notable decline in personal freedom since 2008.

"Overall freedom has also declined, though to a lesser degree, over the same time period," they said. "Of the 12 major categories that we measure in the report, all but five have seen some deterioration, with freedom of religion, identity and relationship freedoms, and the rule of law seeing the largest decreases." The United States and United Kingdom are tied at the 17th spot on the index. War-torn Syria ranked the last on the list.

"The report continues to find a strong, positive relationship between freedom and prosperity, but also finds that here is an unequal distribution of freedom in the world," the authors said. "Fifteen per cent of the world's population lives in the freest quartile of countries in the index, while 34 per cent lives in the bottom quartile of countries. The gap in freedom between the most free and the least free countries has also been increasing since 2008."

India has dropped on several global freedom indexes. Democracy watchdog Freedom House's report in October showed that internet freedom in India declined for a third straight year in 2019-'20. The period from June 1, 2019 to May 30, 2020 was under consideration. The watchdog said India had the most number of internet shutdowns in the world, even excluding the ones in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

The Global Economic Freedom Index 2020 released in September showed India drop 26 spots from 79 to 105. The report, prepared by Canada's Fraser Institute, was released in India in collaboration with New Delhi-based think tank Centre For Civil Society. The report pointed out that the prospect of improved economic freedom in India depended on the next generation of reforms in factor markets and in being more open to global trade.

COVID-19 Restrictions Push U.S. Weekly Jobless Claims to Three-Month High

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The number of Americans filing first-time claims for jobless benefits unexpectedly rose last week as a relentless wave of new COVID-19 infections hobbled business operations, offering more evidence that the economy's recovery from the pandemic recession was faltering.

That was underscored by other data on Thursday showing manufacturing activity in the mid-Atlantic region cooled in December, with factories reporting a sharp slowdown in new orders and job growth. But the housing market remains resilient, with homebuilding and permits powering ahead in November, thanks to record-low mortgage rates and pent-up demand.

Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell on Wednesday acknowledged the moderation in economic activity following a record growth spurt in the third quarter.

Powell cautioned that "the path ahead remains highly uncertain." The U.S. central bank kept its main interest rate near zero and pledged to continue injecting more money into the economy through asset purchases.

"The coronavirus pandemic has split the economy in two where the winners are interest-rate sensitive sectors like housing and the stock market, while the losers employed in the leisure and hospitality industries are falling further and further behind," said Chris Rupkey, chief economist at MUFJ in New York.

Initial claims for state unemployment benefits increased 23,000 to a seasonally adjusted 885,000 for the week ended Dec. 12. The second straight weekly increase lifted claims to their highest level since September. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast 800,000 applications in the latest week.

Illegal Migration...

FROM PAGE 1

"Things happened in recent decades and prompted the migration of many Afghans and Iraqis, and we know it has been years that 3 to 4 million of dear Afghan people are living in our country," she said.

"Iran has a good track record when it comes to hosting and supporting migrants, and has tried to offer them the necessary services as well, so much so that they even enjoy free coronavirus treatment services," the vice president underscored. "But other migrations which took place across our region such as [the ones prompted by] problems in Iraq or Afghanistan due to attacks by the ISIS terrorist group resulted in numerous harms," she said.

Ebtekar added international organizations' failure to offer the necessary services has added to the problems.

"Today, the world is facing forced migrations as well as illegal migrations which have gripped many countries," she said. She then touched upon the documentary "The Path of the Wind" by Mona Zandi which depicts the problems facing migrants.

India's Oil...

FROM PAGE 1

Another analyst on condition of anonymity said that the payment mechanism with cash-starved Iran would also have to be re-chalked.

Reports have suggested that Iran could start pumping in 2 million barrels of oil every day, leading to a further drop in global crude prices. Low global crude oil prices would boost India's macro-economic indicators, considering it imports over 80 per cent of its oil needs annually. Oil prices are currently hovering at a 9-month high with the benchmark Brent crude ruling at over \$51 per barrel. The third-largest consumer of oil globally, India imported about 10 million tons of oil in 2019-20. At a time when the Narendra Modi government is battling an acute slowdown—though recent trends show economic recovery has begun—low global crude oil prices will provide the necessary shot in the arm.

India, which requires about 4.5 million barrels a day, has been trying to reduce its dependence on oil supply from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). In 2019-20, India imported just over 78 per cent of its total oil requirements from the OPEC as it increased crude oil imports from U.S..

UN...

FROM PAGE 1

The U.S. withdrawal and the ensuing European failure to protect its business ties with Tehran prompted Iran to suspend parts of its commitments under the agreement.

The UN chief reiterated the significance of initiatives aimed at supporting trade and economic relations with Iran amid the current economic and health challenges caused by the coronavirus pandemic. He encouraged the UN member states to cooperate with the JCPOA parties in creating the necessary conditions required for business with the Islamic Republic based on UNSC Resolution 2231.

Guterres further expressed regret at the unilateral US withdrawal from the JCPOA, saying the re-imposition of anti-Iran sanctions is contrary to the goals set by Resolution 2231. Other measures taken by Washington to restrict activities authorized under the JCPOA may impede the implement of UNSC Resolution 2231, he added.

Elsewhere in his report, Guterres referred to the abortive US attempt to trigger the so-called snapback provision in the nuclear deal.

A new report says 13 countries of the 15-member UN Security Council have expressed their opposition to the U.S. push to trigger the so-called snapback provision in the 2015 nuclear deal aimed at reinstating UN sanctions against Iran.

Guterres said most UNSC members stressed their firm support for the JCPOA and the continued implementation of Resolution 2231, noting that Security Council presidents in August and September showed they were not in a position to act on the August 20 letter written by the US. Touching on Iran's position on the JCPOA, the UN chief said Tehran has declared that it wants to remain in the deal and that all its nuclear countermeasures are reversible.

President...

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"The fact that we do not have any 'red' cities now does not mean this situation is lasting and permanent, and inattention to health regulations will definitely create problems for us," he said.

"So, wearing masks and observing social distancing rules should remain on the agenda, and social meetings as well as family gatherings should be avoided," he said.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the president said the country takes pride in witnessing a positive economic growth rate in the second and third quarters of 2020 despite enemy's sanctions and the COVID-19 pandemic.

He said the country's economic growth is expected to remain positive for the fourth quarter of 2020 and the first quarter of 2021.

Tehran Denies...

FROM PAGE 1

"Of course, the statement of the IAEA Director General that a document is needed for the Agency, in case of revival of JCPOA, does not necessarily have a technical and legal basis, and the necessary reaction in this regard was made on Thursday," he stressed.

Gharibabadi criticized the atmosphere created by the Western media and stated: "Unfortunately, media outlets such as Reuters are pursuing their own political agenda, thereby violating professional and media principles."

On Thursday, IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi was quoted by Reuters as saying that the revival of JCPOA would require the signing of a new agreement.

Majlis...

FROM PAGE 1

3- Whenever the members of the European Parliament were able to put aside the shameless support of the Western countries for the Israeli regime and the terrorists and the murderous dictators, then the public opinion of the world can listen to them. There is no doubt that Westerners, with their negative and dark backgrounds in support of terrorists, dictators, militants, and assassins, are never worthy of criticizing Iran's actions.

4. Years of killings and crimes in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen by US-made terrorists and some European countries and their allied criminals, in which hundreds of thousands of innocent people were massacred in the most heinous way, not only the European Parliament and false human rights claimants did not condemn but they also provided all kinds of assistance and assistance to all the terrorists, which will not disappear from the minds of the nations of the region and from history, and the officials of European countries who were responsible for these crimes must be brought to justice.

5. The Foreign Affairs Committee of the British Parliament shamelessly gives the letters of recommendation against Iran and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps to its government, meanwhile, the history of British aggression and colonization in the world and its crimes against humanity in Iran and many countries in the region has a long list, and the people of the region are also involved in the evil, corruption, and misery of this country.

6. The French government, which is one of the human rights claimants has traces of its crime from North Africa to West Asia to Bab al-Mandab Strait, has become a haven for the most dangerous terrorists, including the MKO, instead of opposing the execution of a criminal who was under the protection of its intelligence agencies, to respond to Macron's anti-human rights rhetoric in support of insulting images against the Prophet of Islam (PBUH) that sparked a wave of anger among Muslims around the world.

7. The Iranian Parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Commission calls on the Foreign Ministry to provide the parliament with the names of European officials who have committed crimes against the Iranian people for comprehensive sanctions.

Members of the European Parliament passed a resolution on Thursday accusing Iran of what it calls "human rights violations." European lawmakers had criticized the execution of Ruhollah Zam in the resolution.

2021 U-17 Euros Cancelled Due to Pandemic

LONDON (Reuters) - The 2021 men's and women's U-17 European Championships have been cancelled due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, UEFA said on Friday.

"Based on a constant monitoring of the development of the pandemic ... the UEFA Executive Committee decided after consultation with all 55 member associations to cancel and/or postpone some of the 2020/21 youth national team competitions," European soccer's governing body said in a statement.

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Rooney's Son Kai Signs for Man United

LONDON (Reuters) - Wayne Rooney's son, Kai, has signed for Manchester United, the former United and England striker said.

The 35-year-old Rooney posted a picture on Instagram alongside his wife Colleen and 11-year-old Kai, who held up a United No. 10 shirt - the number his dad wore for the Premier League club - with his name on the back.

"Proud day. Kai signing for Manchester United. Keep up the hard work son," Wayne Rooney said.

Djokovic Bookies' Favorite To Win 2021 Australian Open, Wimbledon

LONDON (Dispatches) - World No. 1 Novak Djokovic is the favorite to win the Australian Open title in 2021, as per the latest odds being offered by bookmakers. Djokovic also has great odds at two of the three other Slams this year, while Rafael Nadal is the second favorite at most places except the French Open - where he is the unanimous top favorite.

Roger Federer on the other hand is no higher than third favorite at any tournament, and according to some bookmakers even fourth or lower at some.

The 33-year-old Novak Djokovic has won eight Australian Open titles in his career, which is already a record. He will be aiming to win his 18th Major when the tournament begins on 8 February in Melbourne.

On the bet365 website, Djokovic is quoted at odds of 2.10 for winning the 2021 Australian Open, followed by Rafael Nadal and Dominic Thiem at 6.50 each. Roger Federer and Daniil Medvedev are next on the list with odds of 7.00, followed by Stefanos Tsitsipas and Alexander Zverev at 13.00.

Lower down, former World No. 1 Andy Murray and 19-year-old rising Italian Jannik Sinner are both currently quoted at odds of 34.00.

The Ladbrokes site has listed Djokovic as the favorite with odds of 2.20, followed by Dominic Thiem at 5.00, Medvedev at 5.50, Nadal at 6.00, and Roger Federer and Tsitsipas at 11.00 each.

Unibet has Novak Djokovic as the favorite with odds of 2.20, with Medvedev, Nadal and Thiem as joint second favourites at 6.00, followed by Roger Federer at 14.00.

Suter Kicks Off Title Defence With Win

PARIS (Dispatches) - Switzerland's Corinne Suter started the defence of her World Cup downhill title with an impressive victory in Val d'Isere, edging out Sofia Goggia.

The 26-year-old Suter, who claimed both the downhill and super-G globes last season, beat Goggia in the first downhill of the campaign by just 0.11 seconds.

American Breezy Johnson was only nine hundredths of a second further back in third, claiming her first-ever podium finish on the circuit.

It was the injury-plagued Suter's third career World Cup win after one in each of the speed events earlier this year.

She only picked up her first points of the season last weekend in Courchevel with a 20th-placed finish in a giant slalom, after the two super-G races scheduled for Saint Moritz earlier this month were cancelled due to poor weather conditions.

The race was suspended for around 20 minutes after a nasty fall for Austrian Nicole Schmidhofer, who missed a turn and crashed into the net at full speed. She was evacuated on a stretcher.

Klopp Left Perplexed at Premier League's Five-Sub Snub

LONDON (Dispatches) - Liverpool boss Juergen Klopp was once again left scratching his head after Premier League clubs voted once more against allowing five substitutes per side in each game, despite the condensed schedule.

The German, who was crowned by FIFA as the best coach in men's football on Thursday, has been a vocal critic of the league's reluctance to introduce the measure, which has been widely adopted the world over.

"I don't want to create headlines, everyone knows my opinion," Klopp told a news conference ahead of trip to Crystal Palace.

"You have to ask other people about it. There are 10 clubs who voted against it and everyone knows who those clubs are. They voted against something that was not about the competition, not about advantages, only about player welfare and they voted against it.



Meanwhile the ATP announced an update to the 2021 ATP Tour calendar, outlining a revised schedule for the first seven weeks of the season as tennis continues to navigate its return during the COVID-19 pandemic.

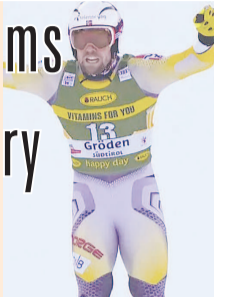
Confirmed details of weeks 8-13 will be announced separately, while all subsequent sections of the 2021 calendar, beginning with the Spring clay-court season from week 14, remain unchanged at this time, with all tournaments planned to take place as originally scheduled.

The opening week of the season will kick off with the ATP 250 Delray Beach Open by VITACOST.com, alongside a new single-year ATP 250 license on hard court in Antalya, Turkey.

Australian Open men's qualifying will take place from 10-13 January in Doha, and the allocated dates of 15-31 January will then allow for travel and a 14-day quarantine period for all players and support staff travelling to Melbourne, in accordance with requirements of Australian public health and immigration authorities. The controlled environment quarantine period will enable players to prepare ahead of a 12-team ATP Cup in Melbourne, played alongside the relocated Adelaide International, as well as an additional ATP 250 tournament, all held in Melbourne.

The Australian Open, the first Grand Slam of the season, will follow from 8-21 February.

Kilde Claims First Victory Of Season



RPM (Dispatches) - Reigning Overall World Cup champion Aleksander Aamodt Kilde powered to his first win of the season on Friday with super-G victory in Val Gardena.

The Norwegian edged out Switzerland's Mauro Caviezel by 0.12 seconds, with veteran Kjetil Jansrud completing the podium.

Marco Odermatt finished ninth to move above Alexis Pinturault at the top of the overall standings, with the Frenchman skipping this race.

Kilde, wearing bib 13, snatched victory from Caviezel -- who was bidding for a second straight super-G triumph after winning in Val d'Isere last week -- with a brilliant run.

It was the 28-year-old's fifth World Cup success and helped him bounce back from a disappointing weekend in France, where he finished 12th in the super-G and fourth in a downhill.

Jansrud was 0.21 seconds slower in making it two Norwegians in the top three.

The 35-year-old now has seven super-G podium finishes at Val Gardena since 2011.

Schalke Sack Baum After 79 Days



BERLIN (Dispatches) - The Bundesliga's bottom club Schalke 04 on Friday confirmed the sacking of Manuel Baum after just 79 days as head coach, with Huub Stevens returning for his fourth stint to try to end their 28-game winless streak in the league.

Schalke are already on their third coach this season as Stevens, 67, replaces Baum, who was appointed on September 30 after predecessor David Wagner was sacked.

At the time, Baum was described as the club's "last bullet" in the fight against relegation. Wednesday's 2-0 home loss to Freiburg left Schalke three matches short of the league record of 31 games without victory, set by Tasmania Berlin in 1965/66.

This home meeting with Arminia Bielefeld, who occupy the relegation play-off spot, is a chance for Schalke to claim a first Bundesliga win since January.

After nearly 30 years in Germany's top flight, Schalke are six points from safety. "The game against Bielefeld has enormous meaning for our club," said Schalke director Jochen Schneider.

"The team needs a new impulse and we trust Huub Stevens and (his assistant coach) Mike Bueskens to bring just that."

New Zealand Draw First Blood in Pakistan T20 Series



AUCKLAND (Dispatches) - New Zealand cruised to a five-wicket win over Pakistan in the first Twenty20 international at Auckland's Eden Park on Friday.

The Black Caps ended on 156 for five with seven balls to spare after losing the toss and being set a target of 154.

Tim Seifert top-scored for the hosts with 57, while debutant paceman Jacob Duffy took four for 33. Pakistan never recovered from a slow start, despite a fighting 42 from stand-in captain Shadab Khan. Haris Rauf was the tourists' best bowler, taking three for 29.

Pakistan had a rocky preparation for the match when 10 of their touring party tested positive for Covid-19 during quarantine after arriving in New Zealand.

Players also received a rebuke from local health authorities for flouting social distancing rules, and were unable to train until they were allowed out of their hotel on December 8.

In contrast, New Zealand were coming off a 2-0 series win over the West Indies and playing in home conditions.

"We looked a little bit rusty out there," Khan admitted, saying the variable pace of the pitch made it tough for Pakistan's batsmen.

"We've had an international game now so definitely in the next game we'll do better."

Man of the match Duffy made a sensational start, dismissing opener Abdullah Shafique for a duck in his first over.

He then claimed the scalps of Mohammad Rizwan and Mohammad Hafeez in his second as Pakistan lost three wickets in three balls to slump to 20 for four.

Khusdil Shah was out for 16 when he mistimed a ball from Ish Sodhi straight to Martin Guptill in the field.

Khan tried to rescue his side's innings, smashing 42 from 32 balls before Duffy coaxed a top edge to Sodhi. Pakistan's attack made early inroads as two quick wickets from Rauf restricted New Zealand to 72 for three at the 10-over mark.

No Arsenal Quick Fix



LONDON (AFP) - Mikel Arteta said everyone at Arsenal knew there would be no "quick fix" as he scrambles for solutions after a disastrous start to the Premier League season.

The Gunners head into Saturday's Premier League match at Everton languishing in 15th place in the table following a 1-1 draw against Southampton.

Arsenal's winless league run now stretches to six matches, with the club enduring their worst start to a top-flight season since 1974/75.

Arteta, though, insisted on Friday the "project" was focused on the long term, with Sunday marking his one-year anniversary in charge.

"I said it from the start that I felt really supported by the owners, by the board, the technical director, and then by everybody at the club," said the Spaniard, who took over following the departure of Unai Emery.

"At the end of the day, it is the feeling that I feel with the staff, with the coaching, with the players, which is the most important -- what chemistry do you have? What understanding do you have? Will they follow you? Do they believe in what you are trying to do?"

"And I have to say 'thank you' because I have not seen anything that goes against what we are trying to do. But it is like anything in this industry, you need results."

Arteta, who guided Arsenal to FA Cup success last season, pleaded for patience from fans. "After a big shake-up, we need to find the stability, and in order to do that, we need time," he said.

"We all knew, at least the people who made the decision with me to start this new project, that this was not a quick fix and it was going to take time."

"When you are shaking things up, things can take a while."