

Iran's Health Ministry Spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari Said on Sunday Some 177 More Iranians Have Died From the Coronavirus Disease Over The Past 24 Hours Bringing the Total Deaths to 53,625

IRAN NEWS

Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Zangeneh Left Tehran for Moscow Yesterday to Review the Latest Developments in the Global Crude Oil Markets With His Russian Counterpart and Officials

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Iran to Wait and See How Biden Will Act

TEHRAN (IFP) - Iran's foreign ministry spokesman says there is a "striking contrast" between U.S. President-elect Joe Biden's comments and Donald Trump's acts, but Iran must wait and see how the incoming administration will act.

Saeed Khatibzadeh touched upon Iran's stance on the U.S. and said, "Iran's position is clear: Whenever the U.S., in practice, returns to its commitments, we will reverse all measures through which we scaled down our obligations."

"What is important to us is action. There is a striking contrast between Mr. Biden's comments and the performance of the current U.S. government. But we should wait and see how the next U.S. administration will act," Khatibzadeh said.

The spokesman said the "maximum pressure" policy adopted by the United States against Iran led to "maximum failure" for Washington.

"Whoever is at the helms at the White House, has no other option than correcting this path," he noted.

He further hit out at the United States for unilaterally pulling out of the deal.

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Iran to Produce Coronavirus Vaccine Under Best Standards

TEHRAN (FNA) - Iranian Deputy Health Minister Iraj Harirchi declared the country's efforts to supply coronavirus vaccine to the nation, saying that the Iran-made vaccine which is in the human trial phase will be produced based on highest standards.

"The producers of Iran-made vaccine have declared that it will be produced based on the best standards," Harirchi said on Sunday.

He added that purchasing coronavirus vaccine from foreign states and joint production with other countries are also on the Iranian health ministry's agenda.

In relevant remarks earlier this month, Iranian Health Minister Saeed Namaki said that the country's home-made coronavirus vaccine will pass the human trial phase and will be prepared for mass-production in the spring.

"We will put the Iranian coronavirus vaccine on the table next spring and we are pursuing its development every moment," Namaki said, addressing a meeting in the Eastern province of South Khorassan.

Elsewhere, he blasted the U.S. for sanctions and obstacles placed on Iran's way to import the needed medicine for patients, saying that despite Washington's hostilities, the Iranian nation prays for the health of the American people.

Leader Commends Nurses for Heroic Sacrifices in COVID Times



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has expressed his gratitude towards the country's nursing staff for their enormous sacrifices during the coronavirus pandemic.

The Leader made the remarks in a live televised address on Sunday on the occasion of the National Nurses Day that falls on the birth anniversary of Zeynab (AS), granddaughter of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

Ayatollah Khamenei felicitated nurses on the occasion, while also condoling with the nursing community, which has lost many of its frontline personnel in the fight against COVID-19.

"Today, nurses are dearer and more honorable in the eyes of the nation than ever before," the Leader noted.

"Nurses are the angels of mercy for patients. This is a true definition, not an exaggeration by any means," Ayatollah Khamenei said.

The Leader said that as part of their profession, nurses tend to both the patient's body and soul, which is a remarkable role.

Ayatollah Khamenei considered such endeavor towards the alleviation of a human being's pain as "one of the most beautiful spectacles in life."

The nurses have been consistently present at hospitals and medical centers during the year-long outbreak, putting their own lives at risk, the Leader remarked. "To be fair, our nursing community performed an enormous task during this period."

Ayatollah Khamenei said prior to the emergence of the COVID-19 outbreak, people would not attach as much importance to the nursing profession as they do now. "However, this is not enough," the Leader said, advising the authorities to revisit the significance they ascribe to the venerable profession.

The virus that swept the country soon after its emergence in central China, has so far infected more than 1.1 million Iranians, including over 53,000 who have lost their lives.

The sheer extent of the outbreak has overstretched Iran's medical staff.

The already uphill battle has been compounded by sweeping sanctions imposed by the United States, which prevent the entry of much-needed medicine and other medical supplies into the country, including the much-needed coronavirus vaccines.

However, Iran has successfully mobilized all of its resources -- with assistance from the military sector -- and has managed to reign in the viral outbreak to a reasonable extent.

The national anti-virus drive has seen the enforcement of large-scale health protocols and restrictions throughout the country.

ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

Why Is Erdogan the Replica of Saddam?

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's behaviors during the past four years and even with conducting sham coup d'etat to eliminate his opponents have created grounds for emerging beliefs in the people of the world especially in the West Asia that he is after revival of Ottoman Empire with the modern mechanisms that if he has naively craved for revival of the Ottoman Empire as a modus operandi for his survival in power, and theatrically and sympathetically showing support to the regional states, one should analyze him in this deep, unsustainable and unbelievable hallucinatory context because this illusion was so that he has made his exhibitiv guards wear dressings of different nationalities in order to show that he intends coexistence with the countries once Britain had chopped them into small pieces from Ottoman Empire and has appointed its agents in power in those countries.

However with what is said, does anybody accept, for instance, him to be concerned about the territorial integrity of Republic of Azerbaijan while he himself has occupied some parts of Iraq and Syria's territories and adventures in Libya? If we believe the West Asia region is at risk of "Christian Zionism", then we should see what relation Erdogan's stances in the recent years has had with this link (UK, U.S. and Israel). From another angle, is it believable a government to claim of forming an empire while it itself has turned into the military colony of the U.S. and the NATO?

Turkish government for almost several decades has been begging to join European Union but each time it has been humiliated by one of the countries and recently by the EU. With these humiliations which even angered Erdogan so that in August 2016 he said, "Europe has been deceiving us for 53 years," and before EU accepts Turkey as its member, the country has started the dream of being an empire and creating a big illusion, should not we consider him an emerging Saddam (Hussein) in the region?

Of course this point is one hundred percent correct that Europeans for decades have made Turkey as the member of its military branch (NATO) and have exploited it in favor of them and 28 European countries are not even ready to share their economic advantages with this country and the output of this approach of Europe and obedience of Turkey has been \$430b of foreign debts for Turkey and it is predicted that this amount of foreign debts, through pledging some part of the country to the World Bank and International Monetary Fund that are run by the U.S. and Europe, may soon hit \$465b.

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INSTEX Failed to Prove Its Efficiency in Past 2 Years

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran says the Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX), the financial mechanism proposed by Europeans to enable Iran to get round U.S. sanctions, has failed to prove itself effective in the past two years.

Majid Takht-Ravanchi, the Iranian ambassador to the United Nations, made the remarks on Saturday in reaction to the UN secretary-general's 10th report on the implementation of the Security Council Resolution 2231, which endorsed the 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and world powers -- the US, the UK, China, Russia, and Germany.

Based on the historic deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Iran agreed to restrict parts of its nuclear energy program in return for the removal of nuclear-related sanctions imposed on the country, mainly by the U.S.

However, in May 2018, U.S. 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.

Iran then threatened to pull out of the deal unless other parties to the JCPOA make up for the reimposition of the U.S. sanctions. The European parties proposed the INSTEX as a special purpose vehicle to circumvent the U.S. bans. However, it has been used only in a very small number of transactions so far.

"The system must prove its efficiency after two years," Takht-Ravanchi said in his Saturday remarks, highlighting the European countries' promise to guarantee that Iran will reap the economic dividends of the JCPOA if it remains in it. After the European parties failed to live up to their commitments to Iran, namely protecting their business ties with Tehran against the American sanctions, Tehran was prompted to go for retaliation on May 8, 2019, exactly one year after the US ditched the multilateral pact, when it began to suspend parts of its commitments on a stage-by-stage basis under Articles 26 and 36 of the JCPOA.

In his Saturday comments, the Iranian ambassador to the UN said Iran's reduction of its nuclear commitments was a result of the other parties' violation of the deal and was within Iran's rights under the JCPOA.

Iran, however, has made it explicitly clear that once the US returns to the JCPOA and lifts all the sanctions, it is ready to reverse all the steps it has taken to reduce its commitments.

Iran, Pakistan to Open Third Border Crossing Soon

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's Minister of Roads and Urban Development Mohammad Eslami has unveiled plans for the opening of the third official border crossing with Pakistan in the near future, according to Iranian media.

The Rimdan border crossing, situated in Iran's southeastern province of Sistan and Balouchestan, was inaugurated in a ceremony on Saturday morning, attended by Iranian Minister of Roads and Urban Development Mohammad Eslami and Minister for Defence Production of Pakistan Zubaida Jalal. "Considering the needs of people in Sistan and Balochistan, other official border crossings will be set up soon," the Iranian minister noted, calling for more attention to and greater investment in this sector.

Iran will soon inaugurate the third border crossing, called Pishin, in cooperation with the Pakistani government, Eslami was quoted by IFP News as saying.

Eslami added that opening of the next official border crossing will enhance trade and commercial exchanges between the two countries and will also facilitate travels by the Iranian and Pakistani people, specifically the residents in border areas of the two neighbours.

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Iran Able to Supply All Defense Needs Domestically

TEHRAN (FNA) - Iranian Defense Minister Brigadier General Amir Hatami said that the country's experts are now able to meet all needs to weapons and military equipment by using indigenous capacities.

"... we are now in a situation that despite enemy's maximum pressure and all-out and cruel sanctions, we supply all internal needs as a result of efforts of our committed specialists in the defense industry, knowledge-based companies and cooperation of our Armed Forces," General Hatami said on Sunday.

He also underlined Iran's superior hand in different scientific and human resources fields, and added, "We rest assured that we will live through this sensitive period of time honorably with resistance."

Webinar Held on Yalda Night to Boost Regional Solidarity

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - A webinar entitled "Yalda, Regional Solidarity" was held under the auspices of the Iranian Foreign Ministry and a number of other organizations to commemorate the ancient festival of Yalda Night and its role in unity among the regional nations.

The webinar called "Yalda, Regional Solidarity" was held on Saturday evening under the aegis of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Centre for Public and Media Diplomacy, the ECO Cultural Institute, Saadi Foundation, and Allameh Tabataba'i University, in order to commemorate the old festival of Yalda and highlight its role in solidarity among the regional people.

Several figures delivered speeches to the videoconference, including President of Saadi Foundation and the Academy of Persian Language and Literature Gholam-Ali Haddad-Adel, Spokesperson of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Head of Centre for Public and Media Diplomacy Saeed Khatibzadeh, President of ECO Cultural Institute Sarvar Bakhti, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to Iran Abdul Ghafoor Liwal, Ambassador of the Republic of Tajikistan to Iran Nizamuddin Zahedi,



Ambassador of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan to Iran Avazbek Abdurazakov, as well as faculty member of the Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies and President of Iran Encyclopedia Compiling Research Centre Ahmad Pakatchi.

In his address to the webinar, Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Saeed Khatibzadeh highlighted the history of the ancient event and its role in convergence and peace among people of the region.

"The Yalda Night, aka Chelleh Night, has been regarded by Iranians as the night of light's victory over darkness and a symbol of equality since ancient times," he added.

The Iranian spokesperson also underlined that the cultural approach to the civilizational sphere of the regional countries has become growingly stronger, as these cultural elements are known as factors unifying the regional people.

The spokesperson of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and head of Centre for Public and Media Diplomacy finally noted that the Yalda Night will be inscribed as a regional intangible cultural heritage on the UNESCO's list next year.

Iran's "Imports for Exports" Policy Needs More Work

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The Head of Iran-Iraq Chamber of Commerce Yahya Al-Ishaq called the policies such as 'imports for exports' helpful, but it must be accelerated.

"The coordination should also improve," he said.

"Iran's foreign trade problems cannot be solved with the current foreign exchange policies based on export vs import, but full coordination between foreign exchange and fiscal and trade policies should help," Al-Ishaq said.

Emphasizing the need for policy coordination, he said that the government had to apply a set of coordinated monetary, fiscal and exchange rate policies and trade policies.

He explained that during the last two years, the CBI was responsible for market regulation through foreign exchange and trade policies.

Referring to the changes in The Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade, he said that since Alireza Razm-Hosseini took office as the Minister of Industry, he changed the trade policies such as the 'import for export' system and using the other currencies in bilateral relations.

Al-Ishaq added that today the government allowed to import essential goods such as wheat, oil, rice and medicine in exchange for demand for Iraq's debt to Iran.

'Iraq owes over \$5 billion to Iran due to import of oil, gas and electricity,' he said.

'With other countries such as Pakistan and South Korea, the 'import for export' policy can solve some of the problems,' he said.

Majlis, Gov't Coordinate to Reform Budget Bill



TEHRAN (IP) - Iran's parliament speaker says the necessary coordination between parliament and government has been made for the budget reform bill.

Speaking at a parliament session on Sunday, Iran's Majlis Speaker Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf said the parliament's most important agenda is the 2021 budget bill.

He said the budget determines the path of progress of countries. The most expert estimates should be included in the budget so that the country's roadmap be a path for people's welfare.

Qalibaf stated that solving people's problems is a priority of the parliament, and this could be solved with coordination and unity.

He added that all unrealistic estimates must be avoided in the budget bill and the real reforms will be made in the bill.

The parliament speaker also congratulated National Nurses' Week will be celebrated throughout the country from December 16-22, saying that the nurses took the risk so that the others would suffer less.

Iranian People Entitled To Lifting of Sanctions

TEHRAN (IFP) - A senior Iranian official says Iranian people have the right to see sanctions lifted.

Vice President for Legal Affairs La'ya Joneydi said the pressure of sanctions was so much that the Rouhani administration was not able to keep public contentment at a high level.

In an interview with the Hamshahri newspaper, the senior official touched upon sanctions as well as several other key issues. In her comments, she referred to the legislation passed by Iranian lawmakers to push for the lifting of sanctions.

She said if the plan is implemented logically and all pillars of the Establishment work towards the proper implementation of the initiative, things will go well.

"Otherwise, there will be problems," she noted.

The vice president then said political competition is something necessary. "Part of the health of the political power structure lies in these political rivalries; so, we shouldn't think wrongly. The openness of the competitive atmosphere for political parties and factions means people's political rights are being exercised," she said.

She also mentioned the governments' drawing up of the Citizens' Rights Charter, saying the move is a tool to help implement Chapter three of the Constitution which concerns people's rights.

FM Spokesman Says Pompeo Obsessing With Tehran Again

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Foreign Ministry spokesman has strongly reacted to the latest claim by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo about Washington's persistent intention to pursue peace in dealing with the Iranian people, saying the outgoing American diplomat is obsessing with Iran again.

In a tweet on Friday, Pompeo claimed that the United States has always sought peace with the people of Iran while the Islamic Republic has been oppressing its nation and seeking conflict and violence against the West over the past 41 years and said this is the country's true nature.

"The outgoing Mr. #WeLiedCheatedStole is obsessing with Iran again," Saeed Khatibzadeh said in a post on his Twitter page on Saturday, referring to Pompeo, the former CIA director who admitted last year to misdeeds during his time in intelligence.

During his lecture at Texas A&M University in April 2019, Pompeo shared a personal anecdote as "a bit of an aside" how he came to defy his West Point honor code stating that "a cadet will not lie, cheat, steal, or tolerate those who do."

He admitted, "I was the CIA director. We lied, we cheated, we stole. It was like we had entire training courses... it reminds you of the glory of the American experiment."

Khatibzadeh explained that the reality is that U.S. regimes "have long plotted coups & waged wars against Iranians and their neighbors."

The Iranian spokesperson emphasized that the U.S.-led coups and wars have led to the killing of "countless" people while most vulnerable Americans were "abused as cannon fodder."

Iran, Pakistan Have Strategic Approach to Strengthen Ties

ISLAMABAD (IRNA) - Consul General of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Pakistan's south western city of Quetta terming the inauguration of the Rimdan-Gabd cross-border gateway "a historic step" said on Sunday that Iran and Pakistan have a common strategic approach to strengthen bilateral relations.

Hassan Darvishvand said in an exclusive interview with IRNA in Islamabad that December 19, on which the second official border crossing was opened, is a memorable day in the historical relations between the two friendly and brotherly countries, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

He noted Iran was the first country to recognize the Pakistan in 1947 and set up its embassy in Karachi. Also, the historical developments of Pakistan and the difficulties and misfortunes that have befallen this country, such as catastrophic wars and natural disasters which have caused great suffering to the people of Pakistan, Iran has always stood by the Pakistanis.

"Similarly, Pakistan has also supported Iran and was one of the first countries to congratulate Imam Khomeini on the victory of the Islamic Revolution of Iran," he said.

He added the Iranian people will never forget the support of the Pakistani government and people in the eight-year Iraqi-imposed war on Iran.

The Counsel General expressing his views said that Iran and Pakistan have a common border of more than 900 kilometers.

He added: Both countries together have a population of over three hundred million people which has created a very large market in the region.

Hassan Darvishvand noted that economies of the two countries have not been able to take full advantage of the potential available in bilateral trade.

He said that according to official statistics from relevant sources in Iran, the total official trade between the two countries has never crossed the \$1.5 billion mark in the best of circumstances, while Pakistani official sources put the figure at a much lower figure of \$500 million.

He added: Regardless of the significant difference between the official statistics of trade between the two countries, which should be examined instead, this volume of trade is in no way in line with existing capabilities and cannot satisfy the governments of the two countries.

Gov't Expands New COVID-19 Cash Handouts to 10m More People

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Iranian government says new COVID-19 cash handouts will be available to an extra 10 million people as it intensifies efforts to mitigate the economic impacts the coronavirus pandemic.

Iranian president's deputy for economic affairs Mohammad Nahavandian said that the monthly 1-million rial (\$4) cash handouts that had originally been targeted at 30 million individuals for a period of four months will expand to include another 10 million people.

Nahavandian said the decision had come after consultations between the government and the parliament.

The Iranian parliament had ratified a motion earlier this month that obliged the government to provide assistance to nearly 60 million people to help them cope with the economic impacts of ongoing government-mandated closures that are meant to curb the spread of COVID-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus.

The administrative government of President Hassan Rouhani had its own economic rescue plan to compensate for losses suffered by people during a third wave of the spread of the disease. However, Rouhani said on Saturday that the government would distribute the cash based on a joint plan between the government and the parliament.

The cash handouts, which mostly target people and households with no fixed salaries and those not covered by insurance schemes, are extra to two fixed payments of nearly \$10 disbursed to an average of 50 million households on a monthly basis.

The measures are meant to ease the economic pressure of the pandemic in Iran, where over 1.150 million people have been infected with the virus since it was first spotted in the country in late February.

Taliban Not off Iran's List of Terror Groups Yet

TEHRAN (IFP) - Iran's foreign minister says the country has not yet removed the Taliban from its list of terrorist groups despite supporting the negotiations between the militant group and the Afghan government.

In an interview with Afghanistan's TOLO News channel, Mohammad Javad Zarif once again highlighted the need for the withdrawal of American troops from the region.

He made the comment after TOLO News explained that Iran has insisted that U.S. troops must leave the region following the U.S. assassination of top Iranian general Qassem Soleimani.

"We've always said that," Zarif reiterated.

Zarif was also asked whether Iran has drawn a line between the Afghan militia group Liwa Fatemiyoun, also known as Fatemiyoun Brigade, and Afghan nationals.

"If the Afghan government is interested, these can be the best forces that can help Afghanistan," he replied.

As announced TOLO News, the full interview with Zarif will be aired at 21 pm on Monday, December 21, 2020.

MPs Make Changes to Presidential Election Law

TEHRAN (IP) - During Sunday's open session of the parliament, the Iranian lawmakers examined the bill to amend the presidential election law.

The MPs approved that all Expediency Council and the Supreme National Security Council's members could register for the presidential election.

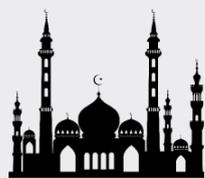
Previously, the law only allowed the registration of the Expediency Council's secretary and the Supreme National Security Council's secretary.

Members of the Islamic Consultative Assembly of Iran opposed the proposal to lift the ban on military registration to run for the presidential election.

At the parliament open session, Bostanabad MP Gholamreza Nouri-Ghezeljeh had suggested that senior commanders of the armed forces with the rank of major general and above would be allowed to run for the presidency, which was opposed by the MPs.

Following the Presidential Election Law's amendment, the MPs approved the terms of the presidential candidates.

Out of a total of 242 MPs present, the parliament agreed with the specific and general terms of the presidential candidates with 151 votes in favor, 35 against, and 14 abstentions.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:02
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:15
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:41
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	07:11

152. To those who believe in Allah and His apostles and make no distinction between any of the apostles, we shall soon give their (due) rewards; for Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful.
153. The people of the Book ask thee to cause a book to descend to them from heaven: Indeed they asked Moses for an even greater (miracle), for they said: "Show us Allah in public," but they were dazzled for their presumption, with thunder and lightning. Yet they worshipped the calf even after clear signs had come to them; even so we forgave them; and gave Moses manifest proofs of authority.
Surah 4. Women (152 - 153)

Jakarta Keen to Develop Trade Ties With Kerman Province

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Indonesian Ambassador to Iran Ronny Prasetyo Yuliantoro said that Indonesia is willing to develop trade and economic cooperation with Iranian province of Kerman.

Speaking in the online meeting of Kerman-Indonesia joint commission of economic cooperation, Yuliantoro said MoUs earlier signed on economic cooperation between Kerman provincial officials and Indonesian business activists, but, after imposition of sanctions against Iran, relations were not materialized.

Indonesia needs pistachio imports which should be supplied by Kerman businessmen, he added. Meanwhile, Iranian Ambassador to Indonesia Mohammad Azad said volume of Iran-Indonesia trade was about \$2b before U.S. withdrawal from Iran nuclear deal known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and it reduced and amounted to over \$1b in 2020.

Thanks to joint cooperation between Kerman province of Iran and Java of Indonesia,



both sides can sign sisterhood agreement, he noted.

He suggested forming consortium and business groups to advance economic cooperation.

Chairman of Kerman chamber of commerce Mehdi Tabibzadeh, for his part, said that the grounds for economic cooperation have been explored.

He singled out some factories in Kerman province, whose raw materials are supplied by Indonesian partners.

He added that Indonesia is one of the important countries for Iran and Kerman Province, adding that the chamber has studied the grounds for bilateral trade as he believes in a win-win trade for both sides.

Tabibzadeh further said that some of Iran's best plants are active in Kerman that they use raw material which is provided by Indonesia or can be provided by this country.

He said Kerman Province is after exporting its products to Indonesia and in return the province would import its needed products.

He added that the chamber has invited all officials of the major industrial units in the province to prepare the ground for a bigger trade with Indonesia.

ESCO Wins Plaque of Customer Satisfaction

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

ISFAHAN – Esfahan Steel Company (ESCO) won the accolade for customer satisfaction in the 10th national conference on customer satisfaction which was held in Tehran on Wednesday.



The member and spokesman of the Majlis presiding board Dr. Mohammad Hossein Farhangi one of the distinguished guests of the conference addressing the participants said that economic activists play a very important role in the national economic boom, adding that when their activities are accompanied with the customer satisfaction, it can turn into a popular brand and in this case it will remain forever. He added that customer satisfaction can be a reciprocal relation in order that economic enterprises do not merely generate wealth and they also observe other factors in their production that the customer likes.

Farhangi also noted that boosting satisfaction of the customer is one of the promoting and branding solutions.

Meanwhile head of engineering sales and marketing of ESCO Mr. Alireza Abbasian said that the company meets major industrial and construction demands of the society by producing industrial and constructional coils, different types of rails and different types of construction sections, and the company as the first and biggest producer of constructional and industrial sections is known as a universal brand in the domestic and international market. He reiterated that the company has always been concerned about the needs of its customers and in the process of production and sales, this approach is prioritized and observed.

He said 75 percent approval of the customers is a proof for this claim that the company has won the satisfaction of the customers. He reiterated that the company by conduction of polls in different periods monitor the customer satisfaction and improves its performance.

Abfa of Isfahan Launches R&D Center

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

ISFAHAN – Head of Human Resources and Research Department of Water and Wastewater Company of Isfahan Province (Known as Abfa of Isfahan Province) says the company has launched the research and development center on the occasion of the Research Day, noting that the center would boost research in the company.

Majid Ghobadian said that the company by centralizing all research pilots and sporadic researches in the wastewater treatment units, and universities has launched this center in order that all academic researches, researchers and experts of the industry in the national level gather in a centralized place for their activities.

He then highlighted some considerable research actions of the Abfa in the recent two years and said the project of "National Comprehensive System of Water and Wastewater", its experimental test, forming specialized workgroups comprised of managers and experts, defining and forming the new structure of the strategic committee of research of the company, processing and defining the research priorities and calling them to the scientific and research centers have been of the major research activities of the company in the past two years.

Ghobadian added that compiling and publishing the book of "History of Water and Wastewater in Isfahan Province" has been put on the agenda, adding that Water and Wastewater Company of Isfahan Province as the first independent organization which has been established in 1960s to take responsibility for provision and distribution of drinking water as well as collecting, treating and disposing the wastewater of metropolis of Isfahan, and for this reason, the company has put on agenda interviews with experts, managers, staff and collecting some documents about the activities of the company in the past decades for compiling the book on the 55-year-old history of the company.

He also pointed to some research projects conducted by the company in recent years.

Professor Mohammad Sharif Malekzadeh;

Reforming Economic, Social and Service Structures in an intelligent context



Empowering the unity of society for the implementation of Islamic social justice is an important issue and should always be considered by the government. At the same time, economic resilience should be considered with an important prerequisite in the form of resilience and reform of economic, social and service structures in an intelligent context. Professor Mohammad Sharif Malekzadeh has addressed this issue in his "smart, transparent, resilient" economic development model. He has written a note which you can read below.

Creating regional opportunities by taking advantage of extraterritorial facilities

The "smart, transparent, resilient" model of economic development is a model derived from pathology. This model is based on identifying the "triangle of corruption, instability in decision-making and decision-making, lack of intelligent and comprehensive monitoring systems resulting from national interests and needs." Accordingly, the strengthening and reform of economic, social and service structures in an intelligent context is considered. Empowerment of the whole society in order to achieve Islamic social justice is also important. Intelligent, transparent, and hassle-free rules and regulations must also be enacted. In addition, this model creates attractive regional opportunities by taking advantage of extraterritorial facilities in the region. Also, establishing stability in decision-making and identifying national interests and needs is another point.

Corruption, the termite of the failure to develop development plans

Corruption is the termite for the failure of development programs. Corruption is caused by lack of transparency and lack of access to information for all members of society. This termite, when accompanied by instability in decision-making and decision-making, no longer eats particles, but shakes the pillars and framework of countries' development programs. It therefore becomes a national threat. This is a major threat to our lack of regulatory intelligence. These rules are also opaque, cumbersome and bureaucratic. This leads to rent and corruption. Lack of systematic intelligence is also a destructive period of the information technology services pandemic.

We have talked about resistance economics in an idealistic way

In view of the above, I would like to present the statistics, the positive actions taken by the highest supervisory member. These statistics show that we are facing a structural weakness in the occurrence of corruption. This problem has not been solved for many years. Do not doubt that information rent, lack of supervision, lack of seriousness, belief in resistance economics and, most importantly, entrusting key matters to people who do not have the experience and expertise of the day, play an important role in the formation of these



corrupters. At the same time, being accountable to their managers is effective. Corruption will both undermine the implementation of development projects and undermine public confidence in the government. We have all talked about the resistance economy only in an idealistic way over the years. This idea has been cleverly put forward by the Supreme Leader. But we have never set the right pattern for that. Although there are several programs in this field, but perhaps most of their weakness has been the designers' lack of belief in the essence of the subject.

The importance of strengthening and modifying structures in the smart bed

I believe that economic resilience is important in reforming economic, social and service structures. This will never be possible without empowering the whole community. I believe that this empowerment will lead to the realization of Islamic social justice. In recent years, our country has suffered a lot from instability in decision-making and poor management. Without stability, the development model will not be successful. To create managerial stability, the work must be left to the specialist. Alhamdulillah, today the country has elites because of the holy Islamic system. Competent people, in many cases, have either not been hired at all, or have not been properly helped. Accurate knowledge of the needs of society and the national and systemic interests is very important.

Special look at regional opportunities

We need regional opportunities with extraterritorial capabilities. In my proposed model, I have a special focus on regional opportunities. I

believe that no model is ineffective in regional events. There will be no pattern that does not affect the region. Accordingly, in this model, I consider the regional use of extraterritorial facilities as the main axes of development. I believe that doing so will lead to constructive communication, socio-political stability, greater security and sustainable regional development. Therefore, the area will be handed over to the residents of the area. Achieving "smart, transparent, resilient" economic development requires a 100% return to the constitution. The third chapter of the country's constitution is dedicated to the issue of the rights of the nation. Article 19 of the Constitution states that the people of Iran have equal rights, regardless of ethnicity or tribe. Race and language will not make a difference. According to this principle, racism is void in any form. No one should claim superiority over others under the pretext of such differences. In order to achieve its goals, according to another principle of this law, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran is obliged to eliminate undue discrimination and create fair facilities for all in all material and spiritual fields.

Immoral or dishonest behavioral corruption

Corruption is an immoral or dishonest act committed by a person in power for personal gain. That is, a person in a position betrays his professional ethics by abusing his position. The effects of this betrayal affect a nation. "The law is the expression of the public will," said Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In my opinion, the law is the result of the will of the whole society that has ratified it. The law is the chapter of speech; Because the law comes from the will of the nation and the demands of a nation lie in it. The important question is whether in recent years, law enforcement and supervisors in the face of corruption have paid attention to the law? I repeat that this country has suffered from corruption, mismanagement and lack of transparency.

The need to create attractive national opportunities

According to this model, conditions for innovation in social structures must be provided. Attractive national, competitive business opportunities must also be created. We need to create a society that is smarter and innovates to increase productivity and solve various problems.

Increase productivity in the smart platform

Intelligence leads to increased productivity and problem solving based on innovative solutions. If that happens, we must give the intelligentsia and the elite of society a chance. Of course, we should consider these issues not in the think tank but in the decision-making rooms and in social structures.

Based on this, I offer suggestions in various fields, including innovative reforms in the financial system and the smart city project (to the transportation structure). It also includes an intelligent healthcare network.

U.S. Begins Rolling Out Moderna Vaccine

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - The first of millions of doses of Moderna's Covid-19 vaccine were being prepared Saturday for shipping to locations across the United States, a top official said, hours after it was authorized for use in the hardest-hit country in the world.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced late Friday that it had granted emergency approval for the vaccine, a week after it did the same with the vaccine from Pfizer and BioNTech.

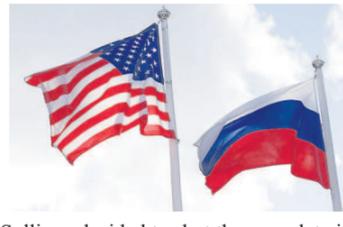
"Distribution of the Moderna vaccine has already begun," said General Gus Perna, who is overseeing the massive logistical operation as part of the government's Operation Warp Speed.



U.S. to Halt Work at Two Consulates in Russia

MOSCOW (Reuters) - The United States is halting work at two consulates in Russia, the State Department said, citing safety and security issues at the facilities where operations had been curtailed over COVID-19.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in consultation with Ambassador John Sullivan decided to shut the consulate in Vladivostok in the Far East and suspend operations at the consulate in Yekaterinburg, a State Department representative said in a statement emailed to Reuters on Saturday. The decision, part of "ongoing efforts to ensure the safe and secure operation of the U.S. diplomatic mission in the Russian Federation," did not affect Russian consulates in the United States, the statement said, without offering detailed reasons for the move.



Armenians March to Mourn War Victims, Demand PM Resigns



YEREVAN (Dispatches) - Thousands of Armenians have marched through the capital Yerevan to commemorate the soldiers killed in a six-week conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh region in which Azerbaijan made significant territorial gains.

The conflict and the deaths on the Armenian side have increased pressure on Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, whom the opposition accuses of mishandling the conflict by accepting a Russian-brokered ceasefire last month, to resign.

Pashinyan led Saturday's march, held on the first of the three days of mourning, driving up to the Yerablur military cemetery to light incense on the graves of fallen soldiers along with other senior officials.

"The entire nation has been through and is going through a nightmare," Pashinyan said in a video address before the memorial march. "Sometimes it seems that all of our dreams have been dashed and our optimism destroyed," he said.

Still, the prime minister's opponents seemed unsatisfied with his address, with many of them shouting "Nikol, you traitor!" and engaging in scuffles with his supporters and police. Police dispersed the protesters to clear the way for Pashinyan and his security guards covered him with shields and umbrellas as protesters attempted to hit him with eggs.

Later in the day, about 20,000 opposition supporters marched across Yerevan for a memorial church service for the victims of the conflict.

Also on Saturday, 14 retired military generals issued a statement calling for the resignation of the government over its handling of the latest fighting.

"He must not desecrate the graves of our children," Misak Avetisyan, who lost a son in the war, told reporters.

The grief-stricken father said the prime minister should get down on his knees and "beg for forgiveness".

"This war did not have to happen," said former Prime Minister Vazgen Manukyan who the opposition says should replace Pashinyan. He said Armenia under Pashinyan had lost "all allies".

Pashinyan's critics have called on supporters to stage a national strike from December 22.

A member of the Pashinyan-led procession said the prime minister should not be blamed for the mistakes of previous leaders. "He is not guilty of anything," said Karo Sargsyan.

Pashinyan, a former newspaper editor, was propelled to power in 2018 after he channelled widespread desire for change into a broad protest movement against corrupt post-Soviet elites.

But after the war with Azerbaijan, many now say Pashinyan has betrayed Armenia's interests.

Numerous public figures including the influential head of Armenia's Apostolic Church, Catholicos Garegin, have called for Pashinyan's resignation.

As part of the peace deal, Russia deployed nearly 2,000 peacekeeping troops to Karabakh. More than 5,000 people including civilians were killed during the fighting between the ex-Soviet rivals, who also fought a war in the 1990s over the mountainous region.

Trump Says Cyberattack Under Control

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - President Donald Trump on Saturday downplayed a massive cyberattack on US government agencies, declaring it "under control" and undercutting the assessment by his own administration that Russia was to blame.

"I have been fully briefed and everything is well under control," Trump tweeted in his first public comments on the hack, adding that "Russia Russia Russia is the priority chant when anything happens" and suggesting without offering evidence that China "may" also be involved.

Trump's response was in sharp contradiction to comments a day earlier from Secretary of State Mike Pompeo about both the source and the severity of the attack. Pompeo had said the breach -- which cyber experts say could have far-reaching impact and take months to unravel -- was "pretty clearly" Russia's work. "There was a significant effort to use a piece of third-party software to essentially embed code inside of U.S. government systems," Pompeo told interviewer Mark Levin, alluding to widely used security software from Texas firm SolarWinds.

"This was a very significant effort," Pompeo added, "and I think it's the case that now we can say pretty clearly that it was the Russians that engaged in this activity."

Trump's tweets left administration spokespeople scrambling to reconcile the conflicting takes. CNN said White House officials had made plans Friday to release a statement directly blaming Russia, before it was abruptly pulled back for unclear reasons.

It was far from the first time the president has played down apparent threats from Russia, starting with his refusal to recognize interference by Moscow in the 2016 election despite the clear finding of US intelligence agencies. Russia has denied involvement in the latest attack, but several officials in and out of the US government have pointed the finger at Moscow, and none at Beijing.

There was no immediate reaction from China. Dramatic details about the extraordinarily wide attack have emerged even as President-elect Joe Biden prepares to take office next month amid already high tensions with Moscow. Biden has expressed "great concern" over the breach.



Lebanon Police Scuffle With Students Protesting Tuition Hikes

BEIRUT (Dispatches) - Lebanese riot police on Saturday scuffled with students protesting a decision by top universities to adopt a new dollar exchange rate to price tuition -- equivalent to a major fee hike.

Near the entrance of the American University of Beirut (AUB) in the city's Hamra district, security forces fired tear gas to disperse protesters who were trying to approach the main gate. Students responded by throwing water bottles and other objects at riot police blocking their path.

It was not immediately clear if there were any injuries.

The protest came in response to a decision by AUB and the Lebanese American University (LAU), another top private institution, to price tuition based on an exchange rate of 3,900 Lebanese pounds to the dollar.

The nosediving currency is still officially pegged at around 1,500 pounds to the greenback. The move has prompted fears that other universities could follow suit, potentially leading to an exodus of students from private institutions while public universities remain underfunded and overstretched.

Hundreds of students had gathered in Hamra earlier Saturday in a protest they billed a "student day of rage".

They chanted anti-government slogans and called for affordable education in a country mired in its worst economic crisis since the 1975-1990 civil war.

Later in the evening, some torched dumpsters to block the street and vandalised banks before security forces pushed them out.

Over the past year, the Lebanese pound has lost up to 80 percent of its value on the black market, where on Saturday the dollar was selling for at least 8,200 pounds.

Universities have struggled to adapt to the de facto devaluation as prices nationwide have soared. Commercial banks have halted dollar transactions and restricted withdrawals of Lebanese pounds, in moves that have starved many of their savings.

According to the United Nations, more than half of Lebanon's population is now living in poverty.

Global COVID-19 Cases Surpass 75m

LONDON (Reuters) - Global coronavirus infections surpassed the 75 million mark on Saturday, according to a Reuters tally, as several nations around the world begin vaccinating against the virus.

Britain this month became the first Western country to start immunizing with the COVID-19 vaccine developed by Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech, followed by the United States which has now also approved a vaccine from Moderna.

There have been 18.65 million new cases in the past month, the highest reported for a 30-day period since the pandemic started.

Europe remains the region with the most cases - 21.6 million cases - followed by North America with 17.9 million, Latin America with 14.5 million and Asia with 13 million.

In Europe, a million new cases were recorded over just five days, with Russia and France reporting more than 2 million cases since the coronavirus outbreak began. The United Kingdom and Italy both have approximately 1.9 million cases each.

The United States became the first country in the world to record more than 300,000 deaths on Monday. The nation is reporting more than 2,500 deaths daily, according to a Reuters analysis of data from the previous seven days.

Hospitals across the United States have begun giving the first shots of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine.

The United States remains the country with most cases - more than 17 million since the outbreak started - followed by India and Brazil respectively. With just 4% of the world's population, the United States has about 23% of all global cases.

Brazil registered a single-day record of 70,000 new cases on Wednesday, joining the United States and India as the only countries to have reported more than 7 million total infections. With almost 180,000 confirmed fatalities, the South American nation has the second-highest death toll in the world.

On Saturday, India exceeded 10 million coronavirus infections. India has prepared to deliver 600 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines to the most vulnerable people in the next six to eight months.



Venezuela to Shut All-Powerful National Constituent Assembly

CARACAS (Dispatches) - Venezuela's National Constituent Assembly, a pro-government legislature created in 2017 that was widely criticized for undermining democracy, will cease operations by the end of the year.

President Nicolas Maduro said the assembly, known as the ANC, is no longer necessary following December 6 elections that will usher in a new parliament dominated by ruling Socialist Party legislators.

The current parliament's term ends on January 5. Maduro in 2017 called for the creation of the ANC following months of opposition protests that left more than 100 people dead.

The all-powerful institution was officially designated to reform the constitution, but in practice ended up supplanting the opposition-controlled legislature and sacking public officials who challenged the government.

"The main objective of this National Constituent Assembly was to restore the peace of the republic, internal security, national union and the stability of the country," Maduro said in a ceremonial session on Friday. "And today I can say, National Constituent Assembly, mission accomplished."

The opposition boycotted the election that created the ANC. The United States and Europe called it the consolidation of a dictatorship and a disavowal of the democratically elected legislature.

Despite being in existence for three years, the ANC did not reform the constitution.

Instead, it legislated a raft of measures including an anti-hate law widely used to jail government critics, stripped a group of opposition legislators of parliamentary immunity and sacked former Chief Prosecutor Luisa Ortega, who had fallen out with Maduro.



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parquet fl
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Parsian

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S/p, S, J, pkg
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ECB Raps Italy Over Cashback Plan

MILAN (Reuters) - The European Central Bank has complained to Italian Economy Minister Roberto Gualtieri that measures to spur electronic payments in the country undermined the goal of a neutral approach to means of payment.

In a letter dated Dec. 14 published on the European Union legal website, the ECB said the programme of incentives launched by Rome to reduce reliance on cash appeared to be "disproportionate".

The letter was signed by Yves Mersch, who on the same day ended his mandate on the ECB's executive board. "The ECB would appreciate that the Italian authorities give due consideration to the above observations by honoring the obligation to consult the ECB in the future where applicable," the letter said. Reacting to the letter, the Treasury said it would press on with the plan adding the ECB opinion was not binding.



Russia's Economy Loses Momentum Amid COVID-19 Resurgence

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - The Russian economy contracted in quarter 2 by 8 percent and quarter 3 by 3.4 percent. This negative momentum is expected to continue in quarter 4 amidst the resurgence of the pandemic, according to the World Bank's latest Russia Economic Report (#44 in the series). The report also says that fiscal, monetary and social policies put in place have helped contain the impact of the pandemic-induced crisis to date.

Russian economic growth is projected at -4 percent in 2020, a less severe contraction than the forecast in September. The revision reflects the better-than-anticipated economic performance in quarter 3. Consumer and business confidence is expected to improve assuming a vaccine deemed safe and effective is rolled out; this would pave the way for a gradual rebound at 2.6 and 3.0 percent in 2021 and 2022, respectively.

However, a more adverse scenario suggesting a sharp growth in new COVID-19 cases continuing in the second half of 2021 could further weigh on economic activity. In such a case, GDP in 2021 is projected to grow by 0.6 percent, with consumers and investment demand affected more deeply, and to increase by 2.8 percent in 2022. Countercyclical fiscal policy and sizeable macro-fiscal buffers have helped contain the impact of the crisis. The general government deficit is expected to reach 4.6 percent of GDP in 2020, compared to a surplus of 1.9 percent of GDP in 2019. After a stronger fiscal stimulus in 2020, Russia's fiscal consolidation in 2021-2022 will be deeper than in other emerging markets and developing economies and become a drag on growth.

"Given relatively low public debt, sizeable macro-fiscal buffers, and expected relatively modest pick-up in growth, Russia has some fiscal space for a more gradual fiscal consolidation," said Apurva Sanghi, the Lead Economist for the World Bank in Russia.

The effects of the pandemic have touched various spheres of the Russian economy: the unemployment rate increased to 6.3 percent in October 2020, the highest in eight years. Approximately half a million jobs have been lost in each of three large sectors: manufacturing, construction, and retail and hospitality services between the second quarters of 2020 and 2019. The national poverty rate increased to 12.6 percent and 13.2 percent in the first and second quarter of 2020, respectively. The economic deceleration could have led to an increase to 14.2 percent in 2020; however, relevant adopted policies may fully offset the impact of the crisis on the poverty rate, with the 2020 rate is projected to be around or slightly below the level projected for the year before the pandemic.

This year, the report also assesses how regional and global value chains (GVCs) have contributed to Russia's development over the past two decades as well as the potential for GVCs to drive future economic growth.

"There are opportunities to drive Russia's long-term economic growth, by deepening and expanding Russia's participation in manufacturing and services global value chains," said Renaud Seligmann, the World Bank Country Director in Russia. "In turn, these opportunities could help promote Russia's National Goals aimed at developing exports of high-tech manufactured and agricultural goods, creating jobs in these sectors, and speeding up Russia's technological development."

Ban on Food Aid Restrictions Blocked at WTO

GENEVA (Reuters) - World Trade Organization members were at odds over a proposal that would ban countries from restricting food aid deliveries, potentially complicating the response to a feared COVID-fueled humanitarian catastrophe next year.

The proposal was one of two related to the pandemic that failed to make headway at a three-day meeting of the Geneva-based trade body, an outcome its spokesman described as "disappointing" in a difficult year for the institution.

The 164-member WTO, currently leaderless and with no functioning appeals body for trade disputes, is facing the biggest crisis in its 25-year history. U.S. Ambassador Dennis Shea, in his final major address to the organisation this week, described "wide divergences among the membership" and said the WTO had underperformed.

However, critics blame the Trump administration for its difficulties, saying Washington has hamstrung the WTO by blocking the appointment of a new director-general and opposing judge appointments to its top court.

Close to 100 countries voiced support for the food aid proposal, originally submitted by Singapore, which envisaged a ban on export restrictions on food intended for the World Food Programme (WFP).

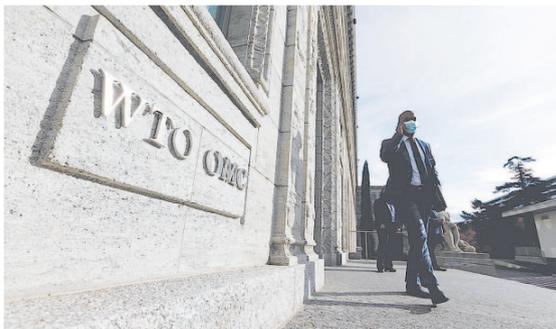
The U.N. agency, which won a Nobel Peace Prize this year for its work combating global hunger, has warned that 2021 will be "catastrophic" with famines possible due partly to the fall-out of the COVID-19 pandemic.

WTO spokesman Keith Rockwell said WTO members, who must decide by consensus, could not agree. Some countries appeared to have concerns the proposal might impinge on their own domestic food security, he added, saying India was among them.

WFP's Tomson Phiri said that a ban would have been a "shot in the arm" for his organisation, describing how blockages had delayed rice deliveries to West Africa earlier this year.

The other proposal on which WTO members could not agree was a waiver on IP rights for COVID medicines, Rockwell told reporters, confirming the outcome of a meeting last week.

The appointment of a new WTO director-general was also raised at Friday's meeting and there was still no consensus. "I think what the last three days have shown us very clearly is that we need a DG," Rockwell said.



Iraq Devalues Its Currency by a Record

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) - Iraq devalued its currency by about 20% against the dollar, the biggest cut on record, as the cash-strapped government faces an economic crisis brought about by low oil prices and crude-production cuts.

The central bank reduced the official rate to 1,450 dinar per dollar, the first devaluation since 2003, it said in a statement. That's from about 1,190 previously. Dollars will be resold to local banks at 1,460 dinar apiece.

The world's third-largest oil exporter is taking the steps to avoid depleting its foreign-currency reserves after the coronavirus sapped demand for energy and caused prices to collapse. The government last month sought upfront payments in exchange for a long-term crude-supply contract to help mitigate its dire financial situation.

"The devaluation was inevitable given the drop in oil prices and the budgetary pressures Iraq is facing. The government says that this is a one-off and won't be repeated, but we'll see if that will be the case. It is also important to watch the popular response to the resulting increase in living costs and the government's austerity program."

Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi, who came to power in May, has warned that the government will struggle to pay civil servants without raising more debt. That's threatening a repeat of the upheaval that last year brought down the government and saw hundreds of protesters killed.

Demonstrators at a rally at Tahrir Square at the end of October bemoaned corrupt politicians, daily power cuts, dilapidated hospitals, crumbling roads and a lack of jobs, and urged the government to ignore OPEC output cuts.

The International Monetary Fund expects Iraq's economy to shrink 12% this year, more than that of any other OPEC member under a production quota, and that its budget deficit will reach 22% of gross domestic product.

Malaysian Economy Showing Signs of Recovery

KUALA LUMPUR (Dispatches) - Signs of recovery are showing with Malaysia posting a smaller contraction of 2.7 percent in Q3 2020 compared to a 17.1 percent in Q2 2020. Fiscal measures like cash transfers and wage subsidies have boosted household spending with private consumption contracting 2.1 percent in Q3 2020 compared to 18.5 percent in Q2 2020. However, the recent surge in COVID-19 cases and renewed movement controls could slow recovery down due to uncertainties surrounding the deployment of an effective vaccine and the robustness of a rebound in global growth that will influence

growth prospects. Containing the pandemic and protecting the most vulnerable remain the topmost near-term priorities.

The report expects Malaysia to return to its pre-pandemic trend at a modest pace over the medium term. As health risks diminish and the economy continues to recover, focus will need to gradually shift from these near-term policies to facilitating necessary economic adjustments to enable new growth in the post-pandemic environment.

"Seizing new growth opportunities and overcoming potentially long-lasting challenges brought on by the COVID-19 crisis will necessitate bold structural reforms in the medium term," said Datuk Seri Mustapa Mohamed, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department in charge of the Economy. "Malaysia needs to take advantage of its recovery from this crisis to emerge as a more durable and inclusive economy in a structurally different post-pandemic future. This edition of the World Bank Malaysia Economic Monitor presents a timely analysis that will help us navigate in planning for a good recovery."

"The COVID-19 crisis has emphasized the importance of taking a dynamic view of policy in addressing the ongoing crisis, with a clear set of strategies for different phases of recovery, to manage difficult trade-offs between providing relief today and supporting recovery and growth tomorrow" said Ndiame Diop, World Bank Country Director for Brunei, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand.

The COVID-19 crisis has also drawn attention to the food system and the continued relevance of food security as well as the need for food policy to focus on a wider range of risks and opportunities. The report's special focus on the agriculture sector highlights the need for Malaysia to modernize and diversify its agrofood sector and better integrating it with its more dynamic "farm-to-fork" food economy. This will help advance other national priorities, including that of shared prosperity.

Pakistan, Azerbaijan to Intensify Full Spectrum of Bilateral Relations

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Pakistan and Azerbaijan agreed to enhance and diversify bilateral trade to its optimal potential and expand cooperation in the fields of energy, agriculture, science and technology, railways and education.

This was agreed during the 2nd Round of Pakistan-Azerbaijan Bilateral Political Consultations (BPC) held in a virtual mode.

The Pakistan side was led by Foreign Secretary Sohail Mahmood, while the Azerbaijan delegation was headed by Deputy Foreign Minister Ramiz Hasanov, a press release issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs here said. It was emphasized to take tangible steps to improve mobility of businessmen, students and tourists, including through early commencement of direct flights between the two countries.

The two sides reviewed the full spectrum of bilateral relations, including cooperation in the political, trade and economic, energy, defence, education and culture arenas.

Guided by the vision and direction of the respective leaders, Prime Minister Imran Khan and President Ilham Aliyev, there was strong mutual desire to further expand the economic and trade ties, deepen cultural cooperation, and strengthen connectivity between the two brotherly countries.

Agreeing that bilateral relations were of exemplary quality, the two sides affirmed the resolve to take the overall relationship to a new level.

Reiterating Pakistan's principled support on the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh, the Foreign Secretary extended felicitations on the historic success in liberation of Azerbaijan's occupied territories.

Deputy Foreign Minister Hasanov thanked for Pakistan's support, which won profound admiration by the government and people of Azerbaijan.



Both sides expressed satisfaction on mutual cooperation at the international fora, especially at the United Nations and OIC and reaffirmed their continued support to each other on all issues of mutual interest at the global and regional forums.

The Foreign Secretary recognized Azerbaijan's valuable support to Pakistan on the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) at various international fora, including at the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Contact Group on Jammu and Kashmir.

He briefed the Azerbaijani counterpart about the grave situation in IIOJK, marked by gross violations of human rights, illegal attempts to change the demographic structure of the occupied territory, and intensification of ceasefire violations by the Indian side on the Line of Control (LoC), threatening peace and security.

The Foreign Secretary stressed that the international community needed to take practical steps to address the grave situation and to facilitate peaceful resolution of the Jammu and Kashmir dispute in accordance with UN Security Council resolutions and the wishes of the Kashmiri people.

Austria Readies Extra 1b Euro Aid For Lockdown-Hit Business



ZURICH (Reuters) - Austria expects to pay out an extra nearly 1 billion euros (\$1.23 billion) in support for companies hit by a new lockdown that the government imposed to curb the spread of the coronavirus, Finance Minister Gernot Blumel said on Saturday.

Austria will go into its third lockdown after Christmas and lift it earlier for people who get tested, the government said on Friday. The new lockdown comes 11 days after a second lockdown ended.

Blumel said companies in November and December had made more than 120,000 requests worth 2.2 billion euros in compensation for revenue lost as a result of the clampdown, of which around 1.8 billion euros had already been paid out.

The scheme will be extended until the end of the year at a cost of up to 300 million euros in direct aid. The government is also working on a package for companies indirectly hit.

"In sum we expect costs of nearly 1 billion euros," he told a news conference.

Separate programs to subsidize fixed costs and help cover losses run until the pandemic ends.

The new lockdown will start on Dec. 26. Shops, restaurants, theatres, museums and schools will reopen the week of Jan. 18.

Austria will, however, let ski resorts open their lifts despite the lockdown, though Austria's provinces will also have their say. Face masks must be worn inside lifts.

Austria is introducing a quarantine requirement over the holiday season for almost all of Europe that appears to at least partly aim at deterring visits by skiers from neighboring countries.

The army said on Saturday it was deploying more soldiers to help police enforce controls at the borders with Germany, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia and Italy under the new lockdown regime.

Kish Ready for Hosting Permanent ECO Int'l Exhibitions

TEHRAN (MNA) – Managing Director of Kish Free Trade Zone (KFTZ) Gholam-Hossein Mozaffari announced that Kish Island is ready to establish a permanent exhibition for ECO member countries.

“In the past two years, important events have been held on Kish Island in terms of contributing to the important and regional ECO agreement, such as holding an economic event affiliated to ECO

member countries in December 2019 and the establishment of a permanent ECO secretariat in Kish,” he said.

“During this period, representatives of ECO member countries traveled to Kish in several groups and individually, and the establishment of a secretariat in Kish was one of the ambassadors’ suggestions due to the facilities and conditions of the island,” Mozaffari added.



Transforming Trade, Backing Productive Capacities Key to Fixing Global Economy

LONDON (Dispatches) - The COVID-19 crisis has been both an accelerator and a decelerator for already rooted trends in the global economy. On the downside, the pandemic hit amidst widening inequality, declining economic prospects, mounting vulnerabilities to climate change, and a weakened multilateralism.

But there is a solid route out of a fractured picture: expanding the transformative productive capacities of all could form the core of a new, more resilient multilateral consensus for accelerating achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This according to UNCTAD’s Secretary-General, Mukhisa Kituyi, who outlined that the pandemic demands new economic and intellectual beginnings in his new report to member States. The report sets the scene for the UN trade and development body’s quadrennial conference due to take place next year in Barbados.

“Building productive capacities that facilitate structural transformation and economic diversification will be vital to overcoming the current fractured global economic landscape and addressing the new challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Dr. Kituyi.

In his report, Transforming Trade and Development in a Fractured, Post-Pandemic World, Dr. Kituyi lays out the key issues on which UNCTAD member States could find consensus and frames the discussion for the fifteenth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, or UNCTAD 15, where the organization’s mandate is updated and adapted to new and emerging needs.

Postponed by one year, UNCTAD 15 will now be held from 3 to 8 October 2021 in Bridgetown, Barbados.

In the report, Dr. Kituyi warns that achieving the SDGs needs a new multilateralism for a changed globalization. He calls for the mass mobilization of resources to achieve the global goals and a move in international support from band-aids to better aid. “Since the last session of the UNCTAD conference four years ago, fractures and fault lines have deepened across the world economy, compromising the achievement of the SDGs,” Dr. Kituyi said.

“These fractures include widening inequalities that have fueled popular discontent with globalization, deepening digital divides and uneven vulnerabilities to climate change.”

“These fractures also include a growing disconnect between investment in the real economy and exuberant financial markets that have left the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development underfinanced and yet have kept debt burdens growing and illicit financial flows rising,” he added.

“The multilateral system has itself shown increasing signs of fracturing, as it has come under mounting stress due to tensions over trade and technology and rising economic nationalism.”

The answer, Dr. Kituyi says, lies in fostering inclusive structural transformation, building wealth while respecting planetary boundaries, and improving fiscal space and access to international liquidity for developing countries.

Presenting his report to member States on 11 December, Dr. Kituyi urged nations to use UNCTAD 15 as an opportunity to heal multilateral wounds, build a “resilient multilateralism”, and address economic fractures that have allowed the COVID-19 pandemic to impact ambitions for achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

“I believe there is hope for a way forward. The strong national policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic are accelerating a revival of needed industrial policies and suggest



a changing paradigm that reaffirms strong developmental States,” Dr. Kituyi said.

The report describes how capturing new opportunities in international production will imply rebalancing development strategies between global, regional and domestic demand. For example, the report calls for the Bridgetown deliberations to embrace decarbonization and digitalization alike as a form of global structural change that puts transformative productive capacities at the heart of adaptation and prosperity.

In this way, pandemic-related stimulus could play an important role in channelling green investment towards renewable energy generation, clean transportation and energy-efficient construction.

Dr. Kituyi says there could also be an emphasis on blue recovery efforts, especially given the grave challenges faced by small island developing States, with the collapse of tourism and explosion of debt burdens that have accompanied COVID-19.

In addition, UNCTAD 15 will need to focus on stepping up efforts at improving fiscal space and access to international liquidity for developing countries, including by using all parts of the development finance architecture and making it work more effectively as a system.

It also means advancing UNCTAD proposals for improving debt restructuring, new issuance of special drawing rights and supporting a global “health Marshall Plan”.

The new task ahead of multilateralism will be reconciling resurgent state involvement in the economy, which has been catalyzed by national pandemic responses, with the need for a “better-governed globalization” and a stronger international response.

Recent efforts to reform the United Nations development system are only now starting to make use of the full breadth of the organization’s economic expertise, including that of UNCTAD, on progress towards achieving the global goals, Dr. Kituyi said, adding that an enabling global economic environment for the SDGs is more than the sum of collective national and individual agency efforts.

It requires a strengthened United Nations focus on the productive side of economic sustainability that fully uses the global expertise of all to support the achievement of the SDGs of all countries, he said.

Why Is Erdogan...

FROM PAGE 1

Unfortunately losses in consecutive gambles instead of awakening Erdogan have pushed him towards worse gambles, exactly like the gambles he did during eight years of devastating war of Saddam Hussein with Iran and for a couple of months with Kuwait which led to destruction of him and his Baath Party. Turkey is today moving in the same direction. Let’s regard the remarks of Diyarbakir representative to Turkish Parliament. Hisyar Ozsoy is representative of city of Diyarbakir in Turkish Parliament. In one of the parliament open sessions he launched a scathing attack at Erdogan government’s foreign policy and accused him of domestic projection and conquest with the mentality of becoming an emperor.



Speaking during the parliament session for reviewing the next year budget bill, Ozsoy who is a member of Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) said, “Look! What Turkey is exporting to the Middle East and the world? Soldiers, military equipment and if it does not have them, it exports thug paramilitary to Syria. It does it or as you know it dispatches paramilitary to Libya. Everybody knows it, everybody in the world. But those who say that we are in an anti-colonialism war, a little bit earlier than your claim and recently former U.S. Ambassador to Iraq and Turkey James Jeffrey in an article published in the Al-Monitor news website has said that I recommend you to read ... Do you know what he says? He says ‘We need Turkey very much because we really can’t “do” the Middle East, the Caucasus or the Black Sea without Turkey. And Turkey is a natural opponent of Russia and Iran.’ “We can’t” can have a lot of meanings.”

The lawmaker adds “Jeffery says ‘We can’t take any action without Turkey in Black Sea, Middle East and the Caucasus and even it is needed we should end Syria war with the assistance of Turkey but we should not give the victory as a gift to Iran and Russia.’ He also says ‘We use Turkey’s military power in the war in Syria’ and I will not any longer go through the rest of his article. I has repeatedly in this podium said here that Turkey does not have any humanitarian and innovative foreign policy. Erdogan foreign policy is totally interventionist and where he sees vacuums, he moves to take advantage of them.”

Ozsoy continues, “Turkish foreign policy is dominated by colonial powers. It means its policies are in line with meeting the demands of colonial powers and they even tell us to do this in order that they financially support us. Look! There are some days that I have been hearing and all of you have also heard about the budget that they say there is no reason to worry about it. Turkey is a NATO member and the U.S. is gradually leaving the region and it wants Turkey to fill this gap. For days, I have been openly hearing it. These are not my words, these are what the Western powers say that Russia is present in Libya and Syria, of course in Syria, but actually Russia and Iran are both present there and ultimately we put Turkey as the NATO member against them. They say for almost 70 to 80 years Turkey has been part of Western bloc and been trying to turn into one of the NATO powers, it means it has 70 to 80 years of background from 1950 till today which is a 70-year background. Today we have reached a point that the U.S., EU and European Council all of them have reached this point to sanction us.”

This is an analysis of a Turkish parliament lawmaker who derides the claim of fight with imperialism and clandestinely accuses Turkey of being lackey of Imperialism. Exactly like Saddam was afflicted with it verbally and practically.

Iran to Wait...

FROM PAGE 1

“The JCPOA remains part of a binding UN resolution and all members of the world body are required to abide by it, but the US, as a signatory to the deal, stopped being a party to the agreement [by unilaterally withdrawing from it] and afterwards Washington blatantly violated Resolution 2231 by failing to make good on its commitments and impeding the implementation of obligations by others,” he said.

“The Europeans, too, have seriously failed to deliver on their commitments by failing to fulfil their obligations with regards to the lifting of sanctions,” he said.

Elsewhere in his comments, the spokesman noted Iran should rely on its domestic potential to meet its needs as reliance on foreign resources will never ensure the country’s long-term interests.

He also said Tehran welcomes negotiations within the region, but the JCPOA is off limits.

“If [by negotiations] some countries mean holding talks on the JCPOA, first [it should be noted that] the JCPOA is not supposed to be renegotiated; moreover, the JCPOA is an issue of our national security and is none of anybody’s business except Iran,” he said.

China Issues National Security Rules on Foreign Investment



SHANGHAI (Reuters) - China published rules on Saturday for reviewing foreign investment on national security grounds, potentially broad measures that it insisted did not amount to protectionism.

The review system announced by the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) covers foreign investments in military sectors and the acquisition of controlling stakes in such sectors as energy, natural resources, agriculture, internet technology and financial services.

“Only by tightening the fence against security risks can China lay the solid foundations for a new round of opening up that is broader, wider and deeper,” the commission said.

This was in line with international practice and would help balance the economic benefits of further opening with the need to ensure national security, the NDRC said.

The announcement comes as U.S. President Donald Trump ratchets up tensions with China in his final weeks in office. Washington added dozens of Chinese companies to a trade blacklist on Friday.

Publishing the investment rules is “not protectionism or backtracking from opening-up policies,” the NDRC said, asserting that “opening up without protection is not sustainable.”

Major economies like the United States, the European Union, Australia, Germany and Japan have established or improved their review mechanisms on foreign investment in recent years, it said.

The new system will establish a body dedicated to security reviews, headed by the NDRC and the Ministry of Commerce. The rules, which take effect in 30 days, follow a foreign investment law published last year aimed at broadening market access for overseas investors.

Last year’s foreign investment law made it clear China would set up a review mechanism for foreign investment, and foreign companies and trade associations have been awaiting the new rules so that they can make investment decisions, the NDRC said.

U.S. on Pace for Slowest Population Growth

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - The United States is on pace for the slowest population growth in a century amid the coronavirus pandemic, according to analysts, and economists worry it will hamper economic recovery.

The number of American residents is expected to increase by just 700,000, or about 0.2%, in 2020,

according to Moody’s Analytics. That would put the country on its slowest pace since 1918, when the country faced a Spanish Flu pandemic and World War I, according to USA Today.

The trend could “make the economy less dynamic,” Moody’s chief economist Mark Zandi told the outlet. “Fewer people means fewer homes (purchased), fewer cars, fewer vacations.”

Zandi estimated that about a quarter-percentage point of this year’s projected 3.5% decline in the US economy was attributed to the drop in population growth.

The coronavirus has already killed more than 310,000 people in the U.S. and is projected to cost nearly 540,000 lives by April, according to the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington. But the virus has also been linked to a predicted decline in birth rate, potentially resulting in up to 500,000 fewer births next year, according to the Brookings Institution. The pandemic has also resulted in an unprecedented decline in immigration, with new visa issuances down 84% from last year, according to State Department data.

The confluence of rising mortality and declining birth and immigration rates threatens to exacerbate the country’s years-long decline in population growth and threatens to impact the economy.

“Economic growth is driven by a combination of productivity and population, the number of workers,” Michael Graetz, a former senior Treasury Department official and co-author of “The Wolf at the Door: The Menace of Economic Insecurity and How to Fight It,” told Salon. “So when you’ve got a smaller number of workers, you’re going to have a smaller economic growth.”



U.S. population growth has been in decline for years. The Census Bureau estimated that the country’s population has grown just 8% over the last decade, the slowest rate since the 1930s, when the Great Depression and immigration restrictions slowed population growth to 7.2%, according to The Wall Street Journal. And the problem is hardly limited to the U.S., with many

European and Asian countries seeing even slower growth rates. The long-term trend has resulted in an aging population, with the number of retirees rising by an estimated 37% over the last decade, while the fertility rate fell to its lowest level since the government began tracking it in the early 1900s.

Economists are concerned about “dependency ratios,” said Graetz, who is now a professor at Columbia University. “Retirees and children are not producing wage income. So the decline in the birth rate reduces the dependency ratio because it reduces the number of children.”

With the ratio of workers to retirees increasing, “more of the workers’ income will have to go to support expenditures on retirees unless those expenditures are dramatically cut,” he said, referring to Social Security benefits and health care expenses.

The most obvious way to address the slowdown is to increase immigration, Graetz argued. But President Donald Trump’s immigration restrictions already reduced net migration into the country from around 1 million to fewer than 600,000 last year, and the coronavirus is likely to slash that figure by another 250,000, Zandi estimated.

The USA Today report noted that President-elect Joe Biden is expected to reverse many of the Trump administration’s immigration restrictions. And fertility rates are expected to grow slightly by 2028, while still falling below the replacement-level rate. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that the U.S. population will hit 374 million by 2046, down by 10 million from its estimate two years earlier.

The slowed population growth’s economic impact is just one long-term implication of the pandemic. The closure of businesses and social distancing restrictions have resulted in an accelerated transition to technology, Graetz noted.

Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race Cancelled

SYDNEY (AFP) - Australia's gruelling Sydney to Hobart yacht race was called off for the first time in 76 years on Saturday because of an escalating coronavirus outbreak, organizers said. The often brutal 628-nautical mile (1,163-kilometre) bluewater classic was due to start on Boxing Day, but with parts of Sydney locked down after a new cluster of Covid-19 cases, it was cancelled. "We are bitterly disappointed to cancel the race this year especially considering the plans and preparations we had put in place to have a Covid safe race," said Cruising Yacht Club of Australia (CYCA) commodore Noel Cornish.

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Golovkin Batters Szeremeta for World Title

MIAMI (Dispatches) - Gennady Golovkin made boxing history by knocking down Kamil Szeremeta four times en route to a seventh round TKO over the overmatched Polish challenger to retain his IBF world middleweight title. The 38-year-old Golovkin floored the soft-punching Szeremeta in the first, second, fourth and seventh rounds in a one-sided fight to surpass Bernard Hopkins for the most ever defences at 160 pounds with 21. "It was a lot of fun," said Golovkin of Kazakhstan. "I come back. I told you I would come back after Canelo (Alvarez) fight."

Messi Equals Pele Goal Record But Barca Held to Draw

MADRID (Dispatches) - Lionel Messi scored his 643rd goal for Barcelona on Saturday to equal Pele's record of goals for a single club as the Spanish giants were held 2-2 by Valencia.

Messi, 33, headed in from Jordi Alba's cross after his first-half penalty was saved to equal the mark set by the Brazilian great for Santos.

"These figures are impressive, we will never have a player so effective at this club," admitted coach Ronald Koeman.

"That's why he is the No.1. What he's done for this club, it is impressive."

But Messi was eventually left frustrated on Saturday as a dogged Valencia forced a draw to leave Barcelona eight points behind leaders Atletico Madrid, who beat Elche 3-1 earlier in the day.

"There were times tonight with good football, we had total control of the match, especially after leading 2-1 where we tried to get the third, but there were also times when we lost the ball in the danger zones," added Koeman.

"What worries me is that sometimes the team doesn't know what the game is about."

"We know we're a team that always likes to attack and score goals, but there are also times when you have to defend and control the game."

"But the race for the title is not yet lost, we are far behind, but it's a very complicated season for everyone. In two months, the situation may be totally different."

Barcelona started slowly and went a goal behind to Mouctar Diakhaby's unchallenged header from a corner after half an hour.

Antoine Griezmann earned the penalty that led to Messi's record-equalling goal when the France attacker was nudged over by Jose Gaya.

Messi's spot-kick was saved by Jaume Domenech but the ball rebounded and from Alba's dinked cross, the Argentina forward headed the ball into the net to draw level with Pele.

Barcelona went ahead thanks to a superb scissor kick from Uruguay's Ronald Araujo.

But Valencia's pressure was rewarded when Maxi Gomez got in front of Barca central defender Oscar Mingueza to turn in a cross and equalise.

Philippe Coutinho drove a shot just wide with 12 minutes remaining and Messi curled a free-kick wide but Barcelona were forced to share the points.

Luis Suarez scored twice from close range in



a 3-1 victory for Atletico to move Diego Simeone's side three points clear at the top.

In a tight first half at the Wanda Metropolitano, Atletico wasted a clear chance to take the lead when France forward Thomas Lemar drove the ball straight at Elche 'keeper Edgar Badia as the defence opened up.

Suarez was far more clinical in the 41st minute as the Uruguay forward got the slightest of touches to steer Kieran Trippier's cross past Badia to take the lead.

The former Barcelona and Liverpool attacker then stretched to poke the lively Yannick Carrasco's pass into the net in the 58th minute.

Lucas Boye's powerful header gave Elche hope in the second half but substitute Diego Costa, who has not hidden his frustration at being relegated to the bench since Suarez's arrival, fired in a penalty with ten minutes remaining to wrap up the three points for Atletico.

"I'm very happy to be able to play again," Costa told Movistar after the game.

"I have taken some hard blows but I always pick myself up again. It's hasn't been easy but I have enough strength to fight."

Real Sociedad stay second but remain three points behind after giving up a one-goal lead to lose 2-1 at Levante.

Sociedad, who have played three more games than Atletico, were ahead in the 22nd minute when Swedish international Alexander Isak scored.

Roger levelled just six minutes later before Jorge de Frutos grabbed the winner three minutes from time.

Villarreal are fourth thanks to a 3-1 win over Osasuna with Gerard Moreno scoring twice to take his season total to eight goals.

Goggia Wins Second Val D'Isere Downhill

PARIS (Dispatches) - Olympic champion Sofia Goggia won Saturday's World Cup downhill, relegating into second Corinne Suter who had got the better of her in the season-opening downhill at the French resort 24 hours earlier.

American Breezy Johnson repeated her third place in Friday's downhill to ensure an identical podium.

Goggia beat the World Cup downhill champion Suter by 24 hundredths of a second to join her at the top of the discipline's standings.

This was the 28-year-old Italian's eighth World Cup success. "It wasn't a perfect run," she said.

"I could have been quicker in some sections but my technique was up to surgical standard."

In the race for the overall World Cup winner Switzerland's Michelle Gisin who was ninth here moves into second place behind Petra Vlhova.

Lakers Favorites to Defend NBA Title

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - The Los Angeles Lakers have been installed as overwhelming favorites to win back-to-back NBA titles according to results of the league's annual general managers survey released Friday.

The Lakers, who won a 17th NBA crown two months ago in the Orlando quarantine bubble, were backed by 81% of GMs taking part in the survey to successfully defend the title.

It follows an abbreviated offseason which saw the Lakers strengthen an already formidable roster led by LeBron James and Anthony Davis.

The Lakers have added German point guard Dennis Schroder from the Oklahoma City Thunder and Montrezl Harrell from the Los Angeles Clippers as well as Spanish veteran Marc Gasol.

The roster moves are largely seen as significant upgrades for the Lakers, who tip-off their new campaign against the Clippers at Staples Center next Tuesday.

The Clippers were picked as second favorites by 11% of GMs surveyed while the Brooklyn Nets and Miami Heat also picked up votes.

In the individual predictions, Milwaukee's Giannis Antetokounmpo was tipped to win Most Valuable Player honors for a third straight season by 32% of GMs, ahead of Dallas Mavericks star Luka Doncic, who polled 21%.

The Lakers duo of Davis and James each received 18% of votes, while former MVP Kevin Durant, who is returning this year after missing the entire 2019-2020 campaign through injury, received 7% of votes.

Antetokounmpo and Doncic were also deadlocked amongst GMs asked to choose the player they would sign if starting a new franchise.

Miami's Erik Spoelstra was named as the best head coach in the NBA ahead of the Toronto Raptors' Nick Nurse and the San Antonio Spurs' Gregg Popovich.

Kilde Doubles Up at Val Gardena



ROME (AFP) - Reigning overall champion Aleksander Aamodt Kilde added Saturday's World Cup downhill to his super-G success at Val Gardena the day before to take the lead in his pursuit of a second straight big crystal globe.

He took the honours by 22 hundredths of a second from American Ryan Cochran-Siegle. It was Norwegian Kilde's sixth win on the World Cup circuit, with half of that haul coming on the same Saslong slope as he also won the downhill there in 2018.

World Cup super-G champion Beat Feuz was third, at 0.54sec.

Kilde heads the overall standings on 335 points from Swiss rival Marco Odermatt (290 pts) and France's Alexis Pinturault (276 pts) who elected to bypass these two races at Val Gardena.

Ronaldo Scores Twice as Juventus Defeat Parma

MILAN (Dispatches) - Cristiano Ronaldo scored a double as Juventus thrashed Parma 4-0 on Saturday to move within one point of Serie A leaders AC Milan.

The Turin giants, chasing a 10th straight league title this season, remain unbeaten after 13 matches this term.

Ronaldo, who missed a penalty in the midweek 1-1 draw with Atalanta, made amends with his third brace in four games.

Third-placed Juve sit level on points with Inter Milan, who welcome Spezia to the San Siro when AC Milan also visit Sassuolo.

Ronaldo started up front alongside Alvaro Morata in Parma, with Paulo Dybala not even on the bench after suffering a muscle injury.

Juve made a slow start to the match, needing 42-year-old goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon to make an excellent save to prevent Juraj Kucka giving Parma the lead.

Instead, the visitors forged ahead midway through the first half as Dejan Kulusevski side-footed home after good work from Alex Sandro.

The game was all but over three minutes later, as Morata crossed for Ronaldo to power an emphatic header past home goalkeeper Luigi Sepe and into the bottom corner.

Parma were fortunate not to fall further behind before half-time, with Ronaldo curling narrowly off target and Leonardo Bonucci bundling wide from close range.

The 35-year-old Ronaldo made completely sure of the three points shortly after the restart, collecting Aaron Ramsey's pass and drilling the ball into the net left-footed.

The Portuguese star has now scored 12 Serie A goals this season -- two more than AC Milan's Zlatan Ibrahimovic and Inter Milan's Romelu Lukaku -- in only nine appearances.

Andrea Pirlo's men needed Buffon to make another good save from Kucka to preserve their clean sheet, before Juventus centre-back Matthijs de Ligt had a goal ruled out at the other end.

Morata got the goal his all-round display deserved in the 85th minute, nodding in his 10th of the campaign in all competitions.



Australia Clinch First Test Against India

ADELAIDE (Dispatches) - A devastated India crashed to their lowest ever score of 36 on Saturday as Australia ran riot to win the opening Test in Adelaide by eight wickets after Josh Hazlewood and Pat Cummins produced a bowling masterclass.

India started the third day of the pink-ball Test on nine for one and with a 62-run lead, looking to build a competitive second innings total for the hosts to chase.

But their hopes were left in tatters by a wicket with bounce and deviation as Hazlewood took 5-8, including his 200th Test wicket, and Cummins 4-21. Wicketkeeper Tim Paine claimed five catches as the bowlers found the edge.

"I didn't expect it to come that quick, I was expecting a real dogfight," said skipper Paine. "To hang in, give our bowlers a chance, and then turn up and start the day the way we did, full credit to our bowling attack again."

"It's nice to get off to a good start. Chuffed with the way we bowled in this Test." It was an incredible Indian collapse, with no batsman reaching double figures during a capitulation that lasted less than 22 overs, in contrast to their battling first innings' 244.

That included skipper Virat Kohli, who fell for four and now heads home for the birth of his first child, leaving his stunned team to face three more Tests, starting in Melbourne on Boxing Day, without him. Ajinkya Rahane will assume the captaincy.

"It's very hard to put those feelings into words," said a disconsolate Kohli. "We had a lead of 60-odd when we arrived, and then just collapsed. We played two days of good cricket to get in a position and then just lose it in an hour. It really hurts."

India's previous Test low was 42 against England at Lord's in 1974. Their 36 was the joint fourth lowest of all time, with New Zealand's 26 facing England in 1955 at Auckland the worst ever. The carnage left Australia, who scored 191 in the first innings, needing 90 to win, with out-of-form Joe Burns hitting a confidence-building 51 not out, including a six to win the match. Matthew Wade made 33 and Marnus Labuschagne six with Steve Smith not out one.

