

Iran's Health Minister Saeed Namaki Says That the Health Ministry Is Going to Employ 20,000 Nurses To Meet the Needs of Medical Sections and Hailed Efforts of Nurses During the COVID-19 Era

IRAN NEWS

The Iranian Army's Spokesperson Brigadier General Shahin Taqikhani Says That Martyr Lt. Gen Soleimani Is Iran's Honor And Pride, and Called for Necessity of Continuing His path

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President Says Constitution Needs Amendment

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - President Hassan Rouhani says the Iranian Constitution may need amendment some 31 years after its final revision. Emphasizing the special place of the Constitution in the country, the president stated that the Constitution actually explains the system, the framework of different branches of the system, their relationship with each other, and, more importantly, people's relationship with the government. Speaking on Monday in the meeting of constitutional law and citizenship rights for reviewing the process of ratification of the constitution, Hassan Rouhani referred to Imam Khomeini's (RA) emphasis on the "Islamic Republic" system and said, "If our system was not a republic and the republic aspect was not in it, and the election was not the basis, I don't think this system would remain until today".

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COVID-19 Kills 191 More Iranians

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Some 191 more Iranians have died from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) over the past 24 hours bringing the total deaths to 53,816, Iran's Health Ministry spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari said on Monday. Sima Sadat Lari said that with the 191 new victims, the country's total COVID-19 deaths mounted to 53,816. Some 6,151 new cases of infection with the COVID-19 were found over the past 24 hours, some 9914 of whom have been hospitalized, she added. Sadat Lari noted that 894,366 patients out of a total of 1,164,535 infected people have recovered or been discharged from the hospitals. Some 5,519 other COVID-19 patients are in critical condition and being treated in intensive care units, the spokeswoman said. She added that 7,097,556 tests have so far been carried out in Iran. She noted currently, 205 cities are in the orange zone, and 243 are in the yellow zone.

JCPOA Parties Online Meeting Ends With Issuing Statement



TEHRAN (IFP) - The foreign ministers of Iran, France, the UK, Germany, Russia, and China – the remaining signatories to the 2015 nuclear deal officially known as the JCPOA – had an unofficial online meeting on Monday, December 21, 2020.

At the conclusion of the talks, the top diplomats released a joint statement, the full text of which follows:

1. A Ministerial Meeting of the E3/EU+2 (China, France, Germany, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, and the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy) and the Islamic Republic of Iran, the participants of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), was held virtually on 21 December 2020. The meeting was chaired by the EU High Representative Josep Borrell.
2. JCPOA participants re-emphasized their commitment to preserve the agreement and stressed their respective efforts in this regard. They discussed that full and effective implementation of the JCPOA by all remains crucial and discussed the need to address ongoing implementation challenges, including on nuclear non-proliferation and sanctions lifting commitments.
3. Ministers underscored the important role of the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) as the sole impartial and independent international organization mandated by the UN Security Council to monitor and verify the implementation of the nuclear non-proliferation commitments under the JCPOA. They stressed the importance of continued good faith cooperation with the IAEA.
4. Ministers recalled that the JCPOA, as endorsed by UN Security Council resolution 2231 (2015), remains a key element of the global nuclear non-proliferation architecture and a significant achievement of multilateral diplomacy that contributes to regional and international security. Ministers reiterated their deep regret towards the US withdrawal from the agreement. They stressed that resolution 2231 remains fully in force.
5. Ministers agreed to continue dialogue to ensure full JCPOA implementation by all sides. Ministers acknowledged the prospect of a return of the U.S. to the JCPOA and underlined their readiness to positively address this in a joint effort.

Monday's virtual meeting of parties to the agreement — the first at the level of foreign ministers in over a year — came as the deal is in what German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas called a "downward spiral" caused by a mixture of strong U.S. pressure on Iran and Tehran's violations of the accord.

The remaining countries that signed the agreement with Iran — Germany, France, Britain, China and Russia — have been trying to keep it from collapsing after the unilateral withdrawal of the United States in 2018.

The three European powers have expressed hope that with the change of administrations in Washington, the U.S. could be brought back into the deal, whose goal is to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear bomb — something Tehran insists it doesn't want to do.

President-elect Joe Biden has said he hopes to return the U.S. to the deal, which was negotiated while he was vice president. "We are standing at a crossroads today," Germany's Maas told reporters in Berlin, adding that the deal's survival or otherwise will be determined in the coming weeks and months.

The European powers stressed Monday that "just a commitment" to the accord on everyone's part is not enough, Maas said. "To make possible a rapprochement under Biden, there must be no more technical maneuvers of the kind we have seen plenty in recent times — they would do nothing but further undermine the agreement," he added. "The opportunity that is now being offered — this last window of opportunity — must not be squandered," Maas said. "We made that very clear today to Iran in particular."

Rockets Target U.S. Embassy in Baghdad

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) - A barrage of rockets has targeted Baghdad's heavily fortified Green Zone, causing minor damage to the U.S. Embassy compound and residential areas in the international zone. An Iraqi military statement said "an outlawed group" launched eight rockets on December 20 targeting the Green Zone, the location of embassies and government buildings. Most of the rockets landed near an empty residential complex and checkpoint, injuring one Iraqi security person. The U.S. Embassy said its defense systems engaged the rockets and called on the Iraqi government to take action to prevent such attacks by militia groups. "These sorts of attacks on diplomatic facilities are a violation of international law and are a direct assault on the sovereignty of the Iraqi government," the U.S. Embassy said in a statement. U.S. officials have blamed Iran-backed Iraqi militia for carrying out a string of attacks on U.S. interests in the country, prompting Washington to threaten a diplomatic and military withdrawal from the country. Several militia groups in October announced a brief suspension of attacks on U.S. interests on condition that a timetable would be presented for U.S. forces to leave Iraq. That truce came to an end on November 18 with a rocket strike on the U.S. Embassy. The United States confirmed in early December it was partially withdrawing some staff from its embassy in response to rising tensions with Iran and Iraqi militia groups.

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Nine Killed in Kabul Car Bomb Targeting Afghan MP



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8 SPORTS

Man United Thrash Leeds 6-2, Tottenham Stumble Again



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U.S. Top Sanctions Enforcer Better Stop Human Rights Brag

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran warns Canada to be accountable for its role as the prime abettor of the US's sanctions against the Islamic Republic rather than throw irresponsible and groundless blames at the country under the guise of human rights advocacy. "A government that has done its utmost to block transfer of medicine to Iran is in no position to take a podium and speak about human rights," Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said in Tehran on Monday. "Canada has provided most cooperation with the White House to prevent shipment of medicine to the Iranian nation," he added, addressing a weekly press briefing that was being held via a video conference. "I warn the Canadian foreign minister and government to be accountable for their actions," the spokesman said.

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Iran Ambassador Calls for Partnerships To End Illegal Arms

NAIROBI (Dispatches) - Iran Ambassador to Kenya Dr Jafar Barmaki has called for proactive action among African countries to address emerging challenges including internal strife. Barmaki says despite efforts to address a variety of issues affecting the continent, conflicts, violent extremism, terror and transnational crimes remains a challenge in some parts of Africa. This he says has attracted the attention of the African Union which has partnered with member states to lead the 2020 initiative on putting an end to illegal arms within the continent. The ambassador spoke during the launch of the World Cartoon Festival on Applying Arts and Culture in Silencing the Guns in Africa, a competition that invites works of art from Cartoonists across the globe. The competition will run from December 2020 to May 2021. "This festival will accelerate the two calls to action by assimilating the 2020 and the 2021 themes which will enhance promotion of African culture and fast track silencing the guns initiative," He said.

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TEDPIX Falls 2,800 Points on Monday

TEHRAN (MNA) - TEDPIX, the main index of Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), dropped 2,708 points to 1.436 million on Monday. Over 9.8 billion securities worth 107.03 trillion rials (about \$2.548 billion) were traded at the TSE on Monday. The first market's index fell 2,414 points, and the second market's index lost 3,951 points. The index stood at 1.413 million points at the end of the previous week. During the past week, the indices of Iran Khodro Group, Social Security Investment Company, Saipa Company, Tejarat Bank, Esfahan Oil Refining Company, and National Iranian Copper Industry Company were the most widely followed indices. TEDPIX, which had been experiencing a surprisingly rising trend since the last days of the previous Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19), hit the record high of two million points on August 2, but then it began to drop, coming down to 1.2 million points. After a period of correction, the index has been recently climbing.

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Afghan National Security Adviser Due in Tehran

TEHRAN (MNA) – The National Security Adviser of Afghanistan Hamdullah Mohib is to pay a visit to Tehran to meet and hold talks with Iran's Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council Ali Shamkhani.

The Afghan official will arrive in Tehran today (Tuesday) for a one-day visit.

He will discuss bilateral issues, the Afghan peace process, and regional developments with his Iranian counterpart.

Iran, Symbol of Resistance in the World

TEHRAN (IP)- Secretary of the Expediency Council, stated that those who want to know the meaning of resistance must pay a visit to Iran because it is the center and capital of resistance.

On the sidelines of 'Resistance Radio' inauguration held at IRIB on 20th Dec 2020, Mohsen Rezaee stated that for more than 200 years the U.S., UK, and Europe had assaulted the countries, and Muslims have thought retreating is the best policy to have invaders' mercy, but they were wild and savage.

Iranians have shown and proven they are the symbol of resistance in the world and this is one of the main achievements of the Islamic Revolution because the Islamic world has waited for a resistance movement and Iran has started it, he noted.

Yemeni, Syrian, and Afghan children's voices must be heard when they have been bombarded by Israel and Saudi Arabia, Rezaee added.

No one thought that the Palestinians, in the beginning, with stone and now with missile stand firmly against Israel and defeat them, no one ever thought that Yemenis and Lebanese would access sophisticated missiles and drones, stressed Secretary of the Expediency Council.

When Saddam Regime attacked the Islamic Republic of Iran, the US and UK have stopped selling the armed to Iran, and we single-handed has resisted, and right now Iran has achieved Precision Strike Missile which targeted the US Ayn al-Assad airbase in Iraq, and the US was unable to react, Mohsen Rezaee highlighted.

Resistance is our miracle, and we should not retreat, Iran has taught resistance to the world, Yemen and Syria, the official added.

Lt. Gen. Qasem Soleimani is the Islamic world and Iran's hero, many countries in the world cried and saddened when he was assassinated by the terrorists, he is the symbol of resistance and fighting against terrorism, he underlined.



The terrorists are savage and cruel by assassinating Soleimani. They even do not have mercy on themselves, they attack blacks, and murder them, they suffocated an unarmed black man as we all watched, he mentioned.

"By the resistance, we did not let Iraqis occupy Iran's provinces during the war," he said.

The next speaker in the ceremony was Yemen's ambassador to Tehran Ibrahim Mohammad Mohammad al-Deilami.

The ambassador also discussed Lt. Gen. Qasem Soleimani's character and said that he was the symbol of resistance.

Lt. Gen. Qasem Soleimani assassination is a century's crime like the Deal of the Century, Ibrahim Mohammad Mohammad al-Deilami said.

Lt. Gen. Qasem Soleimani has trained many to resist and fight against terrorism, stated the ambassador.

Some Arab states are normalizing their ties with the U.S. and Israel and think they are winners, but they would not get what they want and their aims, he outlined.

MPs Lambast Europe Over Imposing Sanctions on Iran

TEHRAN (IP) - In a statement, Iranian MPs condemned some European countries' actions to impose sanctions on the officials of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

"We, the representatives of the great and proud nation of Islamic Iran, condemn the interventionist and ridiculous move of the European Parliament in imposing sanctions on officials of the Islamic Republic of Iran for alleged human rights violations," the statement reads.

"The European Parliament, which passed a resolution opposing the execution and protecting the criminals against Iran's national security, is the same body that has remained silent in the face of the cowardly assassination of an innocent Iranian scientist, and furthermore, it has always been a supporter of terrorists, including MKO terrorist group whose hands are stained with the blood of 17,000 defenseless Iranian citizens," he said.

"People who deliberately prevent innocent and sick Iranian children from accessing medicine and are the killers of dozens of sick Iranian children are violating the right to life, the right to health, the right to employment, the right to education, and the right to development by imposing illegal and oppressive sanctions on the Iranian nation," added the statement.

"Instead of supporting criminals, members of the European Parliament should abandon the shameless support of Western countries for Zionists, terrorists, and child-killing dictators, and abandon double standards," it concluded.

Iran, Pakistan to Open One More Border Gateway

TEHRAN (IRNA) -Director General for Asia-Pacific Department of Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPO) Reza Aghazadeh said that the third cross-border gateway with Pakistan will open until February 2021 after the second gateway opened last week on Rimadan-Gabd border point.

Aghazadeh added that according to the Prime Minister of Pakistan Imran Khan's instruction, Pishin-Mand border crossing will open between the two countries by February 2021, and the official border crossings will reach three points.

This has a considerable impact on increasing trade ties between the two countries, Aghazadeh added.

In addition, with Iran's offer to expand border markets, the Pakistani side also has raised the establishment of six border markets by sending the text of a memorandum of understanding (MOU), he added.

Iran and Pakistan on Saturday opened a new border crossing point, in a move set to bolster trade between the two neighboring countries. The Rimadan-Gabd border gateway was officially thrown open in the presence of officials from the two countries, becoming the second border crossing between the two states.

Iran Envoy Upbeat With Enhanced Ties With Russia

MOSCOW (IRNA) - Iranian Ambassador to Moscow Kazem Jalali said that despite of the US cruel sanctions against Iran, Tehran-Moscow relations have evolved.

In his Twitter account, Jalali said on Sunday night that the two countries have witnessed serious achievements in the relations.

He added that the cooperation of the Islamic Republic of Iran as one of the founders of OPEC and the Russian Federation as one of the members of OPEC Plus and one of the biggest producers of crude oil to strike balance to the global energy market is so important, the global energy turbulence market which is still under the influence of waves from unilateralism, sanctions, and coronavirus outbreak.

Jesus Hates All This Oppression, State Terrorism



TEHRAN (IP) - The Chief of Iran's judiciary said that the justice seekers of the world should know that Jesus Christ hates all this oppression, corruption and state terrorism and the killing of human beings in the world.

Chief of the judiciary, Hojjatoleslam Seyed Ebrahim Raisi congratulated the birth of Jesus Christ (PBUH) to God-worshippers, right-seekers, and justice seekers and said: The message of Jesus Christ (PBUH) is an invitation to God, justice, peace, and friendship, and those who do injustice toward the nations under the name of Christianity have nothing to do with Him.

Raisi added: "Jesus (PBUH) hates all this oppression, corruption and terror, especially the state terrorism of the American regime, and if he were living, he would not be satisfied with all the oppression against the people of the region, especially the oppressed people of Palestine and the children of Yemen and he could not stand it either."

Addressing the true followers of Prophet Moses (PBUH) and Prophet Jesus (PBUH), he emphasized that these two great prophets hate the crimes committed by abusing the Jewish and Christian titles in the world, and such acts are rejected by all divine prophets.

Official Says Human Trial of Iranian COVAC to Be Done This Week

TEHRAN (IP)- Member of the scientific committee of National Task Force for Fighting Coronavirus and a researcher on the Iranian COVID-19 vaccine production project said that all preparations are ready for the start of the human phase of the vaccine and will be done this week.

Minoos Mohraz said on Monday that this vaccine's human trial has different phases and it will be injected to 56 people in the first phase.

She explained that the vaccine is given twice to these people; The first vaccine injected produces antibodies in the body after a while, but the main antibody that creates immunity is produced after the second injection.

Mohraz noted that the Iranian vaccine company's actions have been registered with the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the World Health Organization (WHO). Without FDA permission, a new phase of the vaccine would not have been possible.

If the test is successful and gets a manufacturing



license from the FDA, it looks like the vaccine will enter the domestic market by late spring, the official stated.

Until the domestic vaccine is made, it is necessary to prepare imported vaccines, and the relevant authorities are working hard to achieve this, she noted.

Noting that two of the vaccines have been approved up to now, she said: "We are having some trouble buying vaccines due to U.S. sanctions, but the government is following up."

She stressed that vaccines should now be available for high-risk groups and medical staff, such as nurses and physicians who deal directly with patients.

Mohraz had previously announced that the number of candidates for the COVID vaccine human trial in the country is high. People can only participate if they are completely healthy, have not contracted COVID-19, and are between 18 to 50 years old.

According to her, the candidates participating in this trial will be covered by insurance and given a gift.

Gov't Orders Fresh 50% Wage Hike for Nurses

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The government has announced that nurses in hospitals and care homes across the country would see their wages increase by another 50 percent with immediate effect amid various support schemes introduced by authorities to help the healthcare system cope with surging number of coronavirus patients.

Kamel Taghavinejad, a deputy health minister, announced the pay rises on Sunday which coincided with the National Day of Nurse in Iran.

The announcement came following a televised speech by the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei in which the leader emphasized the need for more support for nurses and health staff during the pandemic.

Taghavinejad said that wages of Iranian nurses had increased for a first time during the pandemic in March when the country reported first cases of the virus.

He said with the two pay hikes implemented, nominal nursing wages would double to a range between 70 million rials (\$280) per months for new recruits to 100 million rials (\$400) for more experienced staff. Nurses would be compensated for extra work related to the pandemic by nearly 25 percent of their wages, he said.

Iran has significantly increased funding for the health sector this year as it battles one of harshest outbreaks of the disease in the Middle East. The government has authorized some 52,000 new recruitments in the sector with more than half of the vacancies allocated to nurses.

Taghavinejad said that over 35,000 new nurses would be employed by the government as part of the new recruitment drive in the health sector.

Baku, Tehran Mull Progress of HPP Projects

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Azerbaijan and its southern neighbor Iran have discussed the construction of hydroelectric power plants (HPP) on Araz River on the two countries' borders.

Progress on construction of HPPs was discussed during the meeting of the relevant Technical Commissions in the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic on December 14-16, the energy ministry has reported.

The sides discussed the tasks over the construction and commissioning of Ordubad and Marazad hydroelectric power plants and the construction and commissioning of Khudaferin and Maiden Tower hydro junctions and hydropower plants on Araz River. The main topic of discussion of the meetings was the work done on Khudaferin by Iran, the calculating of the damage to the flooded territories of Azerbaijan, among others.

It was noted that within the meeting, the area under construction of the Ordubad Hydroelectric Power Station was reviews on the spot, and detailed discussions were held on the acceleration of the construction process.

Additionally, in connection with the construction of Marazad HPP, the parties exchanged views on cooperation opportunities. The two countries agreed to cooperate for the construction of Marazad-Ordubad hydroelectric power plants in 2016.

It should be noted that Azerbaijan's trade with Iran amounted to \$274 million, thus making Iran Azerbaijan's largest trading partner among the Persian Gulf countries in January-October 2020. Out of the total turnover, export from Azerbaijan to Iran amounted to \$34.5 million, while the import from Iran amounted to \$239.4 million.

In the name of God SECOND ANNOUNCEMENT

ESCO Brief Notice of International Tender No. 9900805
Esfahan Steel Company

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

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

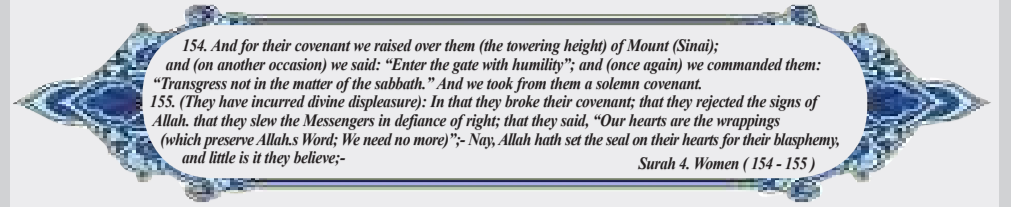
In Isfahan: Confidential Secretariat of ESCO's Security Department, at the main entrance gate next to Melli Bank, Esfahan Steel Company, 45th km of Zobahan-Shahrekord Highway, Esfahan, Iran or through email address toa@esfahansteel.ir and obtaining email receipt acknowledgment through Tel. No. 0098-315-257-2197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

Public Relation of Esfahan Steel Co.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:03
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:14
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:41
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	07:11



154. And for their covenant we raised over them (the towering height) of Mount (Sinai); and (on another occasion) we said: "Enter the gate with humility"; and (once again) we commanded them: "Transgress not in the matter of the sabbath." And we took from them a solemn covenant. 155. (They have incurred divine displeasure): In that they broke their covenant; that they rejected the signs of Allah, that they slew the Messengers in defiance of right; that they said, "Our hearts are the wrappings (which preserve Allah's Word; We need no more)"; - Nay, Allah hath set the seal on their hearts for their blasphemy, and little is it they believe;-
Surah 4. Women (154 - 155)

UAE-Israel Normalization Targeting Iran Trade

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN—A member of board of directors of Confederation of Iranian Industry says normalization of the UAE's ties with Israel means that Iran should change policy of transit of goods and trade from the UAE to other countries because this route is now getting risky and dangerous.

Speaking to ILNA, Mehdi Karimi Tafreshi talked about recent developments in the region, especially in the UAE and normalization of ties between the UAE and Israel.

He said despite protests from Palestinian groups and leaders, since the normalization of UAE and Israel, both countries have so far signed several agreements. He said Israeli media have claimed that after these agreements, Israel's current \$300m exports to the UAE will bounce and become hundreds of millions of dollars.

Tafreshi said that UAE is one of the oil-rich countries and one of the major investors in the Middle East and it is also one of the most advanced trade centers in the world, adding that for this reason, Israelis are keen to increase its trade with this country with an eye on boosting its trade in the Persian Gulf market.

He said according to estimates, some 300 Israeli companies are active in the UAE whose activities are through international companies and normalization of ties will actually reduce the heavy costs of those Israeli companies which are active through international companies.

Tafreshi reiterated that UAE rulers and officials are keen to boost their role in the region due to competition with Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia, and intend to replace Saudi Arabia as major actor in the region. He said Israelis are aware of it and want Arab countries to help



them in advancing their goals, noting that Israel with this agreement essentially has targeted Iran while the Emiratis are pursuing other goals and this issue may overshadow the UAE's ties with other Islamic partners.

He said Israel by normalization of ties with the UAE can change its source of providing energy and for this reason Turkey had negative reaction to the normalization.

Tafreshi added that during the sanctions, Iran decided to shift its transit focus from the UAE to other countries and development of Chabahar Port was put on its agenda. He said Iran should take this point seriously and it should shift its transit focus from the UAE to other countries as soon as possible before the UAE is fully dominated by Israelis.

He noted that in recent years some Iranian traders have shifted from the UAE to Qatar, Oman and Turkey and it seems it more traders do it in the upcoming years.

Tafreshi noted that the UAE is one of the important trade partners of Iran and it seems the main goal of normalization has been to target Iran's economic advantages and so Iran should gradually reduce its trade dependence on the UAE and should use other options like developing Chabahar Port as new replacement.

Too Soon to Talk about Iran's Return to Oil Market



TEHRAN (IFP) - Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zangeneh, who is visiting Moscow to discuss the latest developments in the global oil market, says it is still too early to talk about Tehran's return to the market.

Speaking to reporters upon arrival in the Russian capital, Zangeneh said he will hold meetings with Russian officials and oil companies during the trip.

"However, our most important discussion is on the latest developments in the global oil market, which is in a sensitive situation," he added. Zangeneh pointed to the key role of Russia in OPEC+ and added, "For several years, Russia has been playing a very constructive and effective role in OPEC+, along with members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and other allies."

Pointing to the recent meeting between Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak and Saudi Energy Minister Abdulaziz bin Salman, he said that consultations between OPEC members and their allies have always been effective.

During his stay in the Russian capital, the Iranian petroleum minister is to hold separate talks with Deputy Prime Minister Novak and Energy Minister Nikolai Shulginov.

The Ministers of Petroleum and Energy, members and non-members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), the OPEC Plus Coalition, recently decided to facilitate an agreement to reduce their oil production to 500,000 barrels per day in January 2021 and have monthly meetings to review further adjustments in the coming months.

Pakistan Emphasizes Expansion Of Maritime Ties With Iran

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Rahim Hayat Qureshi, Ambassador of Pakistan to Iran, said Islamabad emphasizes the development of maritime and economic relations with Tehran.

"Pakistan emphasizes the development of maritime relations, the establishment of passenger shipping lines, and economic activities of both sides," he said in a meeting with the Sistan-Baluchestan Ports and Maritime Department's Director-General Behrouz Aghaei in Chabahar Port.

"Activation of passenger and cargo shipping lines, officializing land and water borders, exchange of goods and passengers, visits of Iranian and Pakistani officials to each other countries will help further develop relations because we have many cultural and social commonalities," the envoy said.

He expressed content about the made investments in Chabahar port by Iran.

He noted that in the joint economic commission of Iran and Pakistan, various issues should be raised and the necessary review should be done in order to meet some of the demands in a bid to increase mutual trade and economy.

"We are trying to get more familiar with the capacity of both countries so that investments can be made in both states," he said.

The Torfehnegar Group of Companies Won the 11th Golden Statue of Consumer Protection



planning. They need to take more action. They should also always be recognized as a symbol of pioneers in this field IT among their peers and the people. He added: "The success of an economic enterprise is closely related to the needs of consumers." This issue is highlighted in the Consumer Protection Act. This issue should be made an important principle in society by economic enterprises. Members of the conference Executive Council attended the celebration. Dr. Abbas Tabesh, Deputy Minister of Ministry of Industry Mine & Trade and Head of the Consumers and Producers Protection Organization, accompanied him. The group of companies was one of the companies that were honored as selected units. On Tuesday, the 25th of December, the Deputy Minister of Ministry of Industry Mine & Trade and the Head of the Consumer Protection Organization attended the ceremony. The members of the board of directors of this organization, the deputy of consumer goods, the deputy of inspection and investigation of violations, the director general of economic networks supervision, the director general of the provincial affairs coordination office, the head of public relations of the organization, the chairman of the consumer rights association and the representative of the standard organization. Together with Shahram Shakoori, CEO of Tarfehnegar Holding

achievements of the one-way collection." The presence of the head of the organization is a good start to build the infrastructure for providing support services. These services are provided from sixteen hours per day to twenty-four hours and 24 h ,7 days. Following the ceremony, Dr. Majid Arghandehpour, Head of the Executive Department of the Protection Organization, spoke about the National Day for the Protection of Consumer Rights. "Torfehnegar Group is one of the selected companies that has participated in evaluating and supporting stakeholders," he said. This group has been one of the leading companies in the mechanization activities of guilds. "Today, the one-way collection carries start-up and start-up activities. Entrepreneurship and Innovation Management Organization has also been established. The company received its first certification in 2008. The company has been successful so far and has been active. In 2011, he received a silver statue. He has also received a golden statue since 2012. "The compiler is a pioneer in mechanizing guilds and producing software." Dr. Akbar Taghavi, Director General of Supervision of Distribution and Economic Networks of the Organization, said: "Torfehnegar Holding Group consists of five companies. This collection is the largest software family in the country with more than seven hundred thousand users. This collection has about seven hundred sales agents. This company has forty-five percent of the country's software sales share and produces specialized products of guilds. Torfehnegar Company received the ninth golden statue from the Consumer Protection Organization. This is the eleventh period that has received the certificate and the golden statue of consumer protection. The most famous brand owned by Torfehnegar is Holo brand, the latest of which is offered in the cloud space.

Shahram Shakoori, CEO of Torfehnegar Holding, said: "We are one of the software-based knowledge companies and this has made our work more difficult. We produce software and anyone can have their own ideas about it. Gaining customer satisfaction in this area is difficult. Most of our clients do not have access to a professional accountant or professional IT manager. Satisfaction with Holo, however, has been above ninety-five percent. Undoubtedly, this statue motivates us a lot. "This statue shows that the Consumer Protection Organization has seen the hard work of our colleagues and has valued this group." "Implementing consumer rights is a difficult task," said the head of the Consumer Rights Protection Organization. "I hope you get the golden statue for ten years in a row and then become a member of the policy council according to our policies. We were worried about three million traditional guilds under Covid 19. There is one union in the world for every two hundred people. In Iran, there is one union unit for every twenty-five people. "If the distribution network is improved and implemented online, the problems will be minimized and our progress will be significant." Shahram Shakoori continued: "In our country, there are many small trade unions that need to be mechanized and manage goods in the country." "In the form of a mosaic design, we created an assistant under the name of My Holo for business owners so that they can sell online in a low-cost online platform." "We currently have 85,000 active users on this platform."

According to the public relations of the Consumers and Producers Protection Organization, due to Covid 19 and the need to comply with health protocols, the National Day of Consumer Protection Conference was not held in March 2009. Abbas Tabesh, Deputy Minister of Ministry of Industry Mine & Trade and Head of the Protection Organization, launched a new initiative aimed at promoting a culture of respect for consumer rights. He praised the efforts of companies that have won the Consumer Protection Award. He attended a number of these companies and awarded them the National Statue of Consumer Rights.

In these meetings, Mr. Tabesh expressed his hope that, given the sensitivities of the nineties and the general expectations of these companies, the mentioned units should act in accordance with the expectations of the society. They must achieve significant success in providing services to consumers with proper planning and respect for consumer rights. The head of the Consumers and Producers Protection Organization said: "This valuable statue is the result of evaluating the one-year performance of the enterprise in 2019." This assessment has been carried out by various relevant regulatory and executive bodies, including the Protection Organization, the National Standard Organization of Iran, the National Association for the Protection of Consumer Rights, the Central Bank, the Ministry of Economy and Finance, the Agricultural Jihad, Government Punishments, the Ministry of Industry Mine & Trade, Planning and Budget and other institutions. Relevant done. The level of public expectations from these companies as a consumer protection enterprise will be much higher than last year. Therefore, these companies are expected to promote a culture of respect for consumer rights through careful and appropriate



and Board of Directors, they were present at the head office of Tarfehnegar Holding. They held the statue donation ceremony in full compliance with the health protocols. Shahram Shakoori welcomed the head of the Support Organization. He described his presence as a new chapter in the organization's activities. "All the hardships have overshadowed the three areas of industry, mining and trade," he said. Your presence makes the managers and staff happy. He added: "New conditions have been formed in the type of business and meeting the needs of consumers of goods and services around the world after the outbreak of the Covid virus. He also explained about the new online service of Holo software in the framework of My Holo platform. This software provides the possibility of providing all the needs of society, economic groups and guilds. Training, retail and wholesale needs will also be met. This site has been launched for different guilds. In this ceremony, he mentioned the new software services and mechanization of guilds. He said: "Providing a software solution for two hundred and fifty different classes is one of the serious

Sudan, Ethiopia to Hold Border Demarcation Talks

KHARTOUM (Dispatches) - Sudan and Ethiopia will hold negotiations next week to delineate their shared border, a statement from Sudanese Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok's office said on Sunday.

The talks will be held on Tuesday, a week after Ethiopian forces reportedly ambushed and killed Sudanese troops along the border. "Hamdok and his Ethiopian counterpart Abiy Ahmed on Sunday discussed the meeting of the committee for delineating the borders which will be held on December 22," the statement said. The two leaders met on the margins of a summit under way on Sunday in Djibouti of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), an East African regional bloc comprising eight countries. Hamdok is the current head of the IGAD.



C. Africa Opposition Coalition Calls for Delay to Elections

BANGUI (AFP) - An opposition coalition in Central African Republic on Sunday called for postponement of elections a week before the vote, as the party of ex-president Francois Bozize denied claims that it was attempting to stage a coup.

The Coalition of the Democratic Opposition (COD-2020) made the call a day after the government said Bozize intended to march on the capital with his men, as a separate group of rebel forces seized control of key routes to Bangui.

Newly consolidated rebel forces control a huge chunk of the country and their recent surprise announcement of unity has heightened tensions ahead of the December 27 presidential and legislative elections.



Nine Killed in Kabul Car Bomb Targeting Afghan MP



KABUL (Dispatches) - A car bomb targeting an Afghan lawmaker killed nine people and wounded more than a dozen in Kabul on Sunday, officials said, the latest attack to rock the capital.

Kabul has been hit by a wave of deadly violence in recent months despite the Taliban and government engaging in peace talks to end the country's long conflict.

Sunday's bombing targeted parliamentarian Khan Mohammad Wardak who was injured in the attack, officials said. "Nine people were killed and 20 others were wounded in the car bomb," Interior Minister Masoud Andrabi told reporters, adding that all the casualties were civilians.

The ministry said in a separate statement that women and children were among those wounded by the "terrorist attack". A security source said the car bomb detonated in the west of the capital.

"It was a powerful explosion that has caused a lot of damage to houses in the vicinity," the source said.

Television footage showed at least two cars on fire, with plumes of thick black smoke billowing into the sky.

An aide to lawmaker Wardak said the attack occurred when he was travelling in his convoy, and five of his bodyguards were among the wounded.

"The enemies of Afghanistan carried out a terrorist attack on Khan Mohammad Wardak," President Ashraf Ghani said in a statement condemning the bombing.

"Terrorist attacks on civilian targets and facilities will endanger the opportunity for peace," he added.

No group has so far claimed responsibility for the attack, and the Taliban denied their involvement.

The jihadist Islamic State has claimed responsibility for some of the recent attacks in Kabul.

Dozens of people, mostly students, were killed when IS jihadists attacked two education centres, including one at Kabul University that saw gunmen open fire on classrooms.

The group has also claimed a series of recent rocket attacks in and around Kabul.

Later on Sunday, a roadside bomb blast in west Kabul killed one civilian, police said, adding two other bombs were dismantled in the area.

Kabul has seen a spate of targeted assassinations of prominent figures in recent months, including top officials, journalists, clerics, politicians and rights activists. Last week a deputy governor of Kabul province was killed when a bomb attached to his vehicle detonated while he was on his way to work.

Vice President Amrullah Saleh, a strong opponent of the Taliban, was appointed in October to lead a taskforce to curb the violence in Kabul.

Saleh's programme was popular with people in the capital, which prompted the Taliban to launch new attacks in an attempt to discredit him, said Sayed Nasir Musawi, an independent Kabul-based political analyst.

Biden's Options for Russian Hacking Punishment: Sanctions, Cyber Retaliation

WILMINGTON (Reuters) - President-elect Joe Biden's team will consider several options to punish Russia for its suspected role in the unprecedented hacking of U.S. government agencies and companies once he takes office, from new financial sanctions to cyberattacks on Russian infrastructure, people familiar with the matter say.

The response will need to be strong enough to impose a high economic, financial or technological cost on the perpetrators, but avoid an escalating conflict between two nuclear-armed Cold War adversaries, said one of the people familiar with Biden's deliberations, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The overarching goal of any action, which could also include stepped-up counter cyber espionage efforts, would be to create an effective deterrence and diminish the potency of future Russian cyber spying, the person said.

The unfolding crisis - and the lack of visibility over the extent of the infiltration into the computer networks of federal agencies including the Treasury, Energy and Commerce Departments - will push to the front of Biden's agenda when he takes office on Jan. 20. President Donald Trump only acknowledged the hacking on Saturday

almost a week after it surfaced, downplaying its importance and questioning whether the Russians were to blame.

The discussions among Biden's advisers are theoretical at this point and will need to be refined once they are in office and have full view of U.S. capabilities.

Biden's team will also need a better grasp of U.S. intelligence about the cyber breach before making any decisions, one of the people familiar with his deliberations said. Biden's access to presidential intelligence briefings was delayed until about three weeks ago as Trump disputed the Nov. 3 election results.

With Trump taking no action, Biden's team are concerned that in the coming weeks the president-elect may be left with only one tool: bluster, according to one of the people familiar with his options.

"They'll be held accountable," Biden said in an interview broadcast on CBS on Thursday when asked about how he would deal with the Russian-led hack. He vowed to impose "financial repercussions" on "individuals as well as entities."

"The most serious attention must be paid to information security, to the fight against extremism and against corruption," he added. He also told members of the agency to pay particular attention to risks posed by conflicts "simmering" near the country's borders.

Clashes have again been reported between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh enclave despite a Russian-brokered ceasefire. Weekly anti-government protests continue in Belarus. "I expect that the Foreign Intelligence Service will continue

to respond flexibly to the highly changeable international context, actively participating in identifying and neutralising potential threats to Russia, and improving the quality of its analytical materials," Putin said.

Putin Tells Spy Agency Staff to Keep Up the Good Work

MOSCOW (Reuters) - Russian President Vladimir Putin said the foreign intelligence service was exceptionally important for protecting the country, in comments made soon after it was accused by some of being behind a major hack on U.S. government departments.

Speaking at an event commemorating 100 years since the founding of the SVR foreign intelligence service, Putin said the agency and other security services were a crucial guarantee of Russia's "sovereign, democratic, independent development."

Some international cyber researchers have suggested that Russia's SVR foreign intelligence service may have been behind an unprecedented attack on U.S. government computer systems first reported by Reuters last week.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said on Friday that Russia was responsible for the attack. The Kremlin has always denied Moscow's involvement in cyber attacks against the West. It has said that Russia had nothing to do with this latest assault. Putin told attendees of the event, which also marked the Day of the Security Services Worker, that it was important to continue developing the work of counterintelligence agencies. "I know what I'm talking about here," Putin, a former KGB agent, said, in comments shared on the Kremlin website. "And I rate very highly the difficult professional operations that have been conducted."

"The most serious attention must be paid to information security, to the fight against extremism and against corruption," he added. He also told members of the agency to pay particular attention to risks posed by conflicts "simmering" near the country's borders.

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to respond flexibly to the highly changeable international context, actively participating in identifying and neutralising potential threats to Russia, and improving the quality of its analytical materials," Putin said.

Nigeria Jihadists Kill Five Soldiers, Kidnap Dozens of Civilians

BORNO (Dispatches) - Five Nigerian soldiers were killed by Islamic State-aligned jihadists and dozens of civilians were kidnapped in a separate attack, military sources said Sunday, in the latest violence to grip the north of the country.

A military convoy was hit in northeast Borno state on Saturday, and militants also attacked a transport convoy in the same region a day before, abducting 35 people and killing one woman.

Nigeria's Boko Haram and a splinter group, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), have killed 36,000 people and displaced around two million as part of a decade-long conflict.

Deadly attacks and kidnappings by jihadists in the northeast and criminal gangs in the northwest have intensified in recent weeks.

Saturday's attack on the military convoy took place

outside of Mafa, 44 kilometres (27 miles) north of the regional capital Maiduguri.

"The terrorists fired an RPG (rocket-propelled grenade) on the convoy which hit one of the vehicles with five soldiers in it," one security source said.

"All the five were killed."

The insurgents seized two vehicles in the attack, said a second source who gave the same toll.

ISWAP split from the mainstream Boko Haram six years ago and rose to become a dominant group.

The jihadist group focuses on military targets, raiding bases, ambushing troops and planting mines on the roads, but recently they have been attacking and abducting civilians.

Dozens were kidnapped late Friday by ISWAP militants at a fake checkpoint in Garin Kuturu village outside Jakana, 25 kilometres from Maiduguri.



Nepal President Dissolves Parliament, Elections Set for Next Year

KATHMANDU (Dispatches)

- Nepal's president has dissolved Parliament at the request of Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli's cabinet and announced that general

elections would be held in April and May, more than a year ahead of schedule.

Sunday's move plunges the Himalayan country, which has seen revolving-door governance since street protests restored multi-party democracy in 1990, into political turmoil as it battles the coronavirus pandemic.

President Bidhya Devi Bhandari's office said in a statement the next vote will be held on April 30 and May 10, as recommended by the cabinet following an emergency meeting. Oli, 68, pushed for a fresh mandate after the ruling Nepal Communist Party (NCP) accused him of sidelining his party in government decisions and appointments. He had led an alliance with former Maoist rebels to a landslide victory in 2017.

"The prime minister has lost the majority in the parliamentary party, central committee and the secretariat of the party," said Bishnu Rijal, an NCP central committee member. "Instead of seeking a compromise within the party, he chose to dissolve Parliament." Sandwiched between China and India, politics in Nepal is also influenced by the priorities of its giant neighbours. India has been pushing back against Beijing's growing clout in a country that New Delhi considers its own back yard.

Oli aide Rajan Bhattarai said the prime minister had acted in response to the backlash from his party, which had also asked him to consider quitting as its president. Politicians and social media users said the ruling party should have tried out other political combinations to run the country instead of calling an untimely election when its tourism-dependent economy has been battered by the pandemic.

Nepal's 2015 charter does not give the prime minister the prerogative to dissolve Parliament without exhausting alternatives, constitutional expert Bipin Adhikari said. "It is unconstitutional at the first sight," he said, adding that the decision could be challenged in the Supreme Court, which may take a couple of weeks to decide its legality.



Shanon
(adviser)

Zaferanieh Apt (\$4000)
400sq.m, 4bdrs
S/p, Sauna
J, L.balcony
roof garden
pkg, & F.F

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

Parsian

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

Velenjak Apts
(\$1300) 130sq.m, 2bdrs
(\$2000) 220sq.m, 3bdrs
both with S/p, S, J, & F.F

(\$5000)
Elahieh bldg
4storey, 17bdrs
yard, pkg lots
recently renovated

Sa`adat abad (\$1600)
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Apple Temporarily Shuts California Stores

NEW YORK (Reuters) - Apple Inc has temporarily shut all of its 53 stores in California because of a coronavirus outbreak and 16 stores in the United Kingdom following restrictions introduced by the government in London, a spokesman said.

The company said on Friday it was temporarily shutting some stores in California following a surge in COVID-19 cases, sending the iPhone maker's shares down in trading

after the bell. That announcement covered at least 12 stores.

"Due to current COVID-19 conditions in some of the communities we serve, we are temporarily closing stores in these areas. We take this step with an abundance of caution as we closely monitor the situation and we look forward to having our teams and customers back as soon as possible," the spokesman said in an emailed statement.



Fisheries Dispute Threatens To Sink Post-Brexit Trade Deal

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - Negotiations for a post-Brexit trade deal were deadlocked and threatened by failure on Sunday, as both sides dug in their heels over access to the UK's rich fishing waters.

The European Parliament had fixed Sunday as the last moment it could accept a text of any accord if MEPs are to ratify it before Britain leaves the EU single market in two weeks.

But both sides of the intense negotiations in Brussels now expect the talks to blow past what is only the latest in a series of missed deadlines, and both insist that the other must back down over fish. Without a deal, Britain's participation in the European project would end with a new cross-Channel tariff barrier to sharpen the shock of unravelling a half-century of ever deeper political and economic partnership.

"We're continuing to try every possible path to an agreement, but without a substantial shift from the (European) Commission we will be leaving on WTO terms on 31 December," a British government source said.

But a European diplomat had told AFP that Brussels had made its best offer and it was down now to UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson -- now distracted by a worsening coronavirus crisis at home -- to decide whether he wants a deal.

"It could well continue over Christmas, now the UK is still making up its mind whether it is willing to pay the price for unprecedented access to the internal market," he said.

"The EU has been clear this weekend that it is willing to compromise on fish. But it will bail at putting EU fishermen structurally out of business. The narrow path to a deal has now become a single goat track, about to peter out."

The tough talk came as the negotiators scramble to secure a pact before December 31. No deal would risk chaos at EU and UK borders, where a pre-deadline rush of freight trucks has already caused long tailbacks.

Britain intends to assume control over its waters on January 1, but is ready to allow continued access to EU fishing fleets for a transitional period under new terms. UK negotiator David Frost wants Britain to take back more than half the fish currently assigned under the EU quota system, under a three-year agreement.

The European side insists the UK can not have tariff-free access to the EU single market as a whole unless it agrees to take back only a quarter of the fish quota -- and that the transitional period would last seven years.

The issue is highly charged for both Britain and EU members with northern fishing fleets like France, the Netherlands, Belgium and Denmark, and diplomatic sources admit the whole trade package could collapse. "We cannot accept a deal that doesn't leave us in control of our own laws or waters," the UK government source said, arguing that the EU was "continuing to make demands that are incompatible with our independence".

EU fishermen fear losing any access to the rich UK fishing waters will threaten their livelihoods. "We are in the throes of being sold down the river," the European Fisheries Alliance said in a statement, urging EU negotiator Michel Barnier to stick by them.

Time is very short to reach an accord.

The European Parliament had highlighted a deadline of midnight (2300 GMT) on Sunday to receive a deal for review if MEPs are to ratify it before the end of the year. Their UK parliamentary counterparts are in recess, but can be recalled within 48 hours to do likewise. But EU capitals have not acknowledged any deadline -- and officials say they could provisionally ratify the agreement to avoid the economic shock of a no-deal divorce.

Oman to Cut Electricity, Water Subsidies in January

DUBAI (Dispatches) - Oman will start reforming its expensive system of subsidies in January by shifting the focus of its electricity and water spending to its poorest citizens, the government said on Sunday.

The plan, along with labor laws, privatizations and new taxation, is aimed at reducing a yawning fiscal deficit expected to come to 10% of economic output this year, according to an International Monetary Fund forecast.

Oman has piled up debt over the past few years and is rated below investment-grade by all major credit ratings agencies. The government said the new subsidy system for electricity and water will exclude households earning more than 1,250 rials (US\$3,260) a month.

Families with income of less than 500 rials will continue to receive government support in utility bills, the government media office said in a statement. For other classes, subsidies will depend on the number of family members.

The new plan will start running in January and eligible Omanis have to apply starting on Sunday.

It was unclear if foreign residents will also benefit from the new system.

Oman has also begun preliminary discussions with some Persian Gulf countries about financial support.

Low oil prices and the economic slowdown caused by the coronavirus outbreak have strained the finances of Oman, a relatively small energy producer.

New ruler Sultan Haitham bin Tariq al-Said has shaken up the government and state entities, and in October approved introducing value-added tax from next April to boost state revenues.



IMF Projects Qatar's Economy to Grow at 2.7% in 2021

DOHA (Dispatches) - Qatar's economy is likely to witness strong recovery next year as International Monetary Fund (IMF) has projected Qatar's GDP growth of 2.7 percent in 2021.

"A gradual recovery—with real GDP growth projected at 2.7 percent in 2021—will be supported by increasing gas production and the rebound in domestic demand. Risks to the outlook are mainly driven by the global outlook and tilted to the downside," said IMF in a statement, yesterday.

An IMF team, led by Mercedes Vera-Martin, held virtual meetings from December 6-14, 2020, to discuss recent economic and financial developments and outlook.

"The swift response in implementing containment measures helped limit the health impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The authorities' swift response—with strict prevention and containment measures and one of the highest per-capita testing rates in the world—allowed the country to resume all economic activities since September. Qatar has also provided medical and financial pandemic relief to many other countries around the world," said Vera-Martin in a statement. According to IMF risks to the outlook are mainly driven by the global outlook and tilted to the downside. They stem from uncertainty about the global growth recovery, success and speed of vaccination and pandemic resolution, and oil prices, whose outlook depends on the global recovery. Upside risks to the outlook arise from a successful resolution of the regional diplomatic rift and a stronger-than-anticipated global growth rebound.

"According to latest financial soundness indicators, the banking sector remains wellcapitalized and liquid. While the moratorium on loan repayments provides an opportunity for banks and businesses to adjust to the new environment, the continued proactive monitoring of credit portfolio risks will support banks' role in the economic recovery. We welcome the continued cooperation across financial sector regulators to strengthen the regulatory and supervisory frameworks," said IMF.

N. Korea Vows to Redevelop Mountain Tour Site

SEOUL (AP) - A top North Korea official has visited a mountain resort that had been jointly run with rival South Korea and discussed efforts to unilaterally rebuild it into "a cultural resort envied by the whole world," state media reported Sunday.

Some experts say North Korea may be putting pressure on South Korea in order to benefit from an economic engagement as the pandemic is aggravating North Korean economic woes.

During a trip to the Diamond Mountain resort, Premier Kim Tok Hun "stressed the need to build the tourist area our own way in which national character and modernity are combined while in good harmony with the

natural scenery," the Korean Central News Agency reported.

Kim said North Korea aims to turn the mountain area into "the one well-known for serving the people and a cultural resort envied by the whole world." He and other officials discussed the design and construction of "a world-level hotel, golf course, skiing ground," according to KCNA.

North Korea had operated a joint tour program at the mountain with South Korea for about 10 years before it was suspended following the shooting death of a South Korean tourist there in 2008. About 2 million South Korean tourists had visited the resort, a rare source of foreign currency for the impoverished North.

When relations improved in recent years, the two Koreas pushed to restart stalled joint economic projects including the Diamond Mountain tours. But Seoul was eventually unable to do so without defying punishing U.N. sanctions imposed over the North's nuclear program.

Late last year, an angry North Korea pushed for the destruction of South Korean-made hotels and other facilities at the resort and demanded South Korea send workers to the site to clear out the buildings. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un called the South Korean facilities "shabby" and "unpleasant-looking."

But in January, North Korea postponed the demolition plans out of concerns about the spread of the coronavirus.

North Korea has said it hasn't found a single virus case, a claim disputed by many outside experts. A major outbreak in North Korea could have devastating consequences because its health system remains fragile. The pandemic has also caused a massive blow to the North's economy, along with the U.N. sanctions and a spate of natural disasters this summer.

Kazakh President Urges CIS States for Greater Cooperation

NUR-SULTAN (Dispatches) - Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev participated in the meeting of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Council of Heads of State held via a videoconference, reported Akorda press service. The meeting explored aspects of cooperation within the CIS,



prospects for its development, and efforts to counter the coronavirus pandemic.

Taking part in the meeting were President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko, Acting President of Kyrgyzstan Talant Mamytov, President of Moldova Igor Dodon, President of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon, President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev, Chair of the Council of the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of the CIS Member States Valentina Matviyenko, and Chair of the Executive Committee and Executive Secretary of the CIS Sergei Lebedev. Addressing the assembled heads of state, Tokayev noted that the meeting takes place amid multiple problems in the global economy and international politics that were exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic.

"In these conditions, our absolute priority is in maintaining social and economic stability, ensuring basic incomes and employment. However, this cannot be achieved without entirely restarting trade and economic relations. Intensified efforts are needed to further liberalize mutual trade in the region by removing barriers and restrictions. It is important to focus on attracting investments, the effective use of transit and transport potential, and on deepening industrial cooperation and developing horizontal ties across the regions," said Tokayev.

He noted the importance of adopting the agreement on mutual trade of services, raising the issue of environmental protection, introducing green solutions as well as facilitating digitization.

As chair of the CIS Interstate Environmental Council in 2021, Kazakhstan proposes to explore the possibility of aligning approaches and harmonizing national legislation in this area and to establish a working group on coordinating the digitization effort. Close cooperation between the member countries remains crucial.

"Yes, we may have different economic potential, our historical vision, and even, as the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict showed, our geopolitical worldviews can also be different. But the main thing is that the people of our countries want to live in peace, and to be friends with one another. Our task is to avoid situations that might divide our people, but rather seek ways and opportunities for mutually beneficial cooperation and for bringing the CIS countries closer under the conditions of strategic turbulence. We should think about multilateral interaction in the post-pandemic world with all its challenges and complexities," said Tokayev. He also noted that the CIS enjoys a well-deserved status in the international community.

China Targets Reasonable Monetary Policy



BEIJING (Dispatches) - China said it will implement "reasonable" monetary policy next year and ensure fiscal plans are "sustainable," signaling it will limit its stimulus measures as the economy continues to recover.

The comments were published by state media Friday after the Communist Party's annual Central Economic Work Conference. The ruling party uses the event to set its policy framework for the coming year, with analysts expecting a renewed focus in 2021 on slowing the pace of debt growth and insulating the economy from tensions with the U.S.

The language around monetary and fiscal policy was a change from earlier guidance, indicating a more measured approach to stimulus in 2021 after this year's boost. At the same time, authorities vowed there wouldn't be a quick reversal as the economy's rebound "is not yet solid."

China should "maintain necessary support" for the recovery, "make policy operations more precise and effective" and "make no sharp turn," the conference decided.

The ruling party is expected to flesh out details of its policies and publish more precise targets when the National People's Congress meets, usually in March.

China is the only major economy expected to grow this year, thanks to its effective control of the coronavirus and fiscal and monetary stimulus. The recovery so far has relied on surging property and state-led infrastructure investment, with private-sector manufacturing investment and household consumption lagging behind last year's levels.

Goldman Sachs Group Inc. economists, led by Zhenhan Li, see the fiscal deficit target returning to 3% of gross domestic product from 3.6% this year and credit growth slowing.

"Although cyclical policy would normalize next year from this year's significant expansionary stance, we believe the likelihood of a 'policy cliff' is low and the government would be mindful of the timing and magnitude of exit/reduction of policy support," they said.

Iran Elected Chair of APA Committee On Social, Cultural Affairs

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – A parliamentary group representing Iran in the latest meeting of the Asian Parliamentary Assembly (APA) Bureau was elected as the chair of APA Standing Committee on Social and Cultural Affairs.

The Secretariat of the Asian Parliamentary Assembly held the first Bureau session of the assembly in Turkish capital Ankara last week.

Participants in the event unanimously elected the parliamentary group of Iran as the chair of APA Standing Committee on Social and Cultural Affairs.

The meetings were attended by parliamentary delegations from Turkey, Iran, Russia, Iraq and Bahrain as members of the APA presiding board.



Pandemic Exposes the Vulnerability of Italy's New Poor

MILAN (AP) - The coronavirus pandemic did not produce Elena Simone's first budgetary rough patch. The 49-year-old single mother found herself out of the job market when the 2008 global financial crisis hit Italy and never fully got back in, but she created a patchwork of small jobs that provided for herself and the youngest of her three children.

That all changed with Italy's first COVID-19 lockdown in the spring. With schools closed, so went Simone's cafeteria job. Her housecleaning gigs dried up, too. While others returned to work when the lockdown ended, Simone stayed frozen out. "There was a period when I was only eating carrots," she recalled from her kitchen decorated with colorful plush characters shaped like vegetables.

For the first time in her life, Simone needed help putting food on the table. At a friend's urging, she enrolled for access to the food stores operated by Roman Catholic charity Caritas. Her eligibility covers her through January, and she hopes to be off the charity rolls by then "to make room for people who need it even more."

The charity serving more than 5 million people in the Milan archdiocese, Caritas Ambrosiana, says the pandemic is revealing for the first time the depths of economic insecurity in Italy's northern Lombardy region, which generates 20% of the country's gross domestic product. Simone, who has two adult children and a 10-year-old son at home, is typical of Italy's new poor. These are people who managed to get by after the 2008 financial crisis, staying off the radar of Italy's welfare system by relying on informal, gray-market jobs and the help of friends and family.

But between Italy's near-total spring lockdown, the introduction of a partial lockdown when the virus surged again in the fall and the continued toll the pandemic is taking on Italy's economy, the slim threads that allowed people to weave together employment have snapped.

Nowhere in Italy is this more evident than in Lombardy, where COVID-19 first exploded in Europe. Italian agriculture lobby Coldiretti estimates that the virus has created 300,000 newly poor people, based on surveys of the dozens of charity groups operating in the region.

Caritas Ambrosiana provided help to 9,000 people during the spring lockdown, 20% of whom reported that their financial situation had "drastically" worsened over the 10-week closure. In October, nearly 700 families requested food aid for the first time.

Nationally, one-third of all people seeking help from Caritas during the pandemic are first-time recipients, and in a reversal of usual trends, most are Italians and not foreign residents.

More than 40 organizations provide food on a daily basis in Milan, Italy's financial capital. One of the largest, Pane Quotidiano, serves some 3,500 meals a day. Many of those in need once worked in restaurants and hotels, which have been particularly penalized by the coronavirus restrictions, or as domestic help.

"It is even more widespread than we knew, especially for a rich city like Milan," Caritas Ambrosiana spokesman Francesco Chiavarini said. "These precarious jobs were lost. And we don't know when or if they will be restored."

Researchers at Milan's Bocconi University said in a working paper for the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development that blue-collar workers without college degrees paid the heaviest price for Italy's virus restrictions. Half reported a drop in their salaries, compared with just 20% of the top earners, and many did not have the luxury of working remotely.

"What we are seeing is a substantial increase in inequality," Bocconi University researcher Vincenzo Galasso said.



Those without solid job contracts are the most exposed in the pandemic that has already killed over 68,000 people in Italy, the highest death toll in Europe.

Simone discovered too late that her cafeteria contract described her as an occasional worker, meaning she had no basis to request government support to replace lost income. Her cleaning jobs were off the books altogether, and she has recovered only two of the dozen she held before the pandemic.

Even when workers qualify for Italy's public-private short-term layoff scheme, the money has arrived late and is generally inadequate to cover a family's basic expenses. Chiavarini said. Basic coverage is 400 euros (\$490) a month, yet monthly rents in a city like Milan start around 600 euros (\$735).

Food security is emerging as a key issue as the pandemic enters winter.

Progetto Arca, which runs shelters and provides other social services in Milan, started operating a food truck last month after seeing that homeless people who had filled their stomachs with restaurant and bar handouts were going hungry during the partial fall lockdown when many establishments had closed. And isn't just the homeless coming by the food truck. On a recent night, a well-dressed man in a quilted jacket and dress trousers waited off to the side until the line had dissipated. He identified himself as a lawyer but declined further comment and asked not to be photographed as he took away two hot meals and two bags of food for the next day, one for his companion waiting at home.

So far, government moratoriums on evictions and the firing of contracted workers have helped keep a cap on what charity workers see as an emerging poverty crisis.

"When these are lifted, we will see the real price that we need to pay for this pandemic," Chiavarini said. "We celebrate Milan as the capital of innovation, but beneath these skyscrapers of which we are so proud, there is a hidden world where people are living in conditions of real precariousness."

U.S. Top Sanctions...

FROM PAGE 1

Khatibzadeh's reprimand came less than a week after remarks by Canada's Foreign Affairs Minister Francois-Philippe Champagne concerning the Islamic Republic.

Speaking to CBC News Network, Champagne alleged that he did not believe that the mistaken downing of a Ukrainian airliner by Iran's air defenses in January "can be blamed on human error."

Ottawa lays strong claim to upholding human rights and regularly accuses Iran of violating universal principles.

Champagne also said he was concerned about the quality of information that was to be released by the Islamic Republic in the form of an investigative report on the tragedy. An Iranian air defense unit mistakenly shot down Flight 752 of the Ukrainian International Airlines that month shortly after take-off from Tehran en route to Kiev.

Khatibzadeh said Canadian officials have been coming up with such "meddlesome and unacceptable" remarks since the immediate aftermath of the plane crash.

"They have engaged in most obstructive measures, despite not having any distinct legal position" on the matter, he said. The spokesman called such remarks "politically-charged," expressing regret that Canadian politicians were seeking to exploit the issue.

"I invite the Canadian foreign minister and government to observe diplomatic manners and know their limits and positions," Khatibzadeh said. "Otherwise they will receive a different response."

Khatibzadeh said Iran had not missed a single date in completing its investigation into the tragedy with the help of all of its relevant bodies in line with its domestic and international responsibilities.

He said the technical report that has resulted from the investigation was ready and due to be released "today or tomorrow," adding that the Ukrainian side and the other concerned parties would be sent a copy online.

Iran's entire official apparatus, including the Foreign Ministry, has been left distressed by the tragedy, the spokesperson said.

He pledged that the country was expending all of its efforts to ensure maximum transparency in matters related to the incident, and would even complain to the International Court of Justice if it were not satisfied with the investigative process and punishment of those who were responsible for the tragedy.

Separately, the official addressed recent remarks by Jack Sullivan, U.S. President-elect Joe Biden's national security advisor-designate, that Washington considered rejoining the 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and world powers to be a "feasible and achievable" option.

He said he had to examine Sullivan's remarks in more detail, but any potential resumption by the United States of its international commitments under the deal "has to manifest itself in action, not just in words."

Khatibzadeh reminded that the U.S. is in egregious violation of its obligations under the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2231 that has endorsed the nuclear accord, and has to return to its contractual obligations.

Washington left the agreement that is officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2018, despite the multi-party nature of the deal and its enshrinement as a Security Council's ratification. It then returned the draconian sanctions that the JCPOA had lifted.

Iran, in return, started a set of nuclear countermeasures, and announced following General Soleimani's assassination that it no longer recognized the limits that it was supposed to implement under the agreement.

However, Khatibzadeh said, "If the opposite side returned to its commitments, we would reverse the reduction in our commitments too."

The official, meanwhile, denounced the European Parliament's recent resolution that supposedly sanctioned a number of Iranian officials, whom the European legislature accused of violating human rights.

In the resolution, the European body criticized Iran's recent execution of Rouhollah Zam, a recognized Western-affiliated anti-Iran propagandist, who used to engage in extensive subversive measures against the Islamic establishment and the Iranian nation.

Khatibzadeh called the measure "one-sided, hackneyed, threadbare, and unacceptable," questioning how the EP had passed such a measure, while failing all the time to either denounce the US economic war on Iran and prevent European countries from abetting the warfare.

Iran Ambassador...

FROM PAGE 1

Barmaki said the initiative to silence guns in Africa was greatly affected by the coronavirus pandemic but emphasized on the need to assimilate the 2020 and the 2021 themes to achieve the intended purpose.

"In our efforts to keep this important initiative alive, and to show our Support as the Republic of Iran to Africa, the art festival will go through to next year giving artists all over the world an opportunity to participate and cultivate change," He said.

German Factory Races to Churn Out Covid-19 Syringes



BERLIN (Dispatches) - The battle against Covid-19 has delivered not just a vaccine at record speed but also a spike in demand for the billions of syringes needed to administer it.

One German factory is already busily churning out the little plastic tubes and is confident global needs can be met. "There won't be a shortage of syringes, even if we are facing a big challenge," said Otto-Philipp Braun, co-director of Almo, Germany's leading syringe manufacturer.

At the company's production site in the central German town of Bad Arolsen, the loud hum of machinery fills the hall. Employees man the assembly lines, wearing masks, hair nets and occasionally ear plugs.

They churn out disposable syringes 24 hours a day, seven days a week, destined for use in Germany and more than 140 other countries around the world.

One machine moulds high-quality plastic granules into thin, one-millilitre syringes, while another spits out the pistons that fit snugly inside the cylinder and are needed to push out the vaccine. The plastic piston is green, matching the logo of German parent company B.Braun, a giant in the medical devices industry and still owned by the Braun family.

A total of 64 syringes with pistons are assembled every 13 seconds. Every year, Almo churns out more than two billion syringes of various kinds.

The needles that can be added to the injection devices are produced by a B.Braun subsidiary in Malaysia. The company intends to spend 30 million euros on an additional assembly line, partly to cope with increased demand for the Covid-19 jobs.

The first orders have already rolled in from Germany's BioNTech, whose vaccine developed with US giant Pfizer is already being administered in some countries, and from CureVac, another German company whose vaccine candidate is in final stage trials.

President...

FROM PAGE 1

Emphasizing that the republic aspect, elections and the votes of the people are the foundation that has maintained this system well, the President said, "It is very important that the basis of our system is people's votes, while the legitimacy of the system is, of course, the religious framework".

"The Islamic aspect of the system has always been considered as a pillar, but in its republic aspect, I want to emphasize that people's votes play a very fundamental role, but in our country, unfortunately, we do not have a partisan system," said Rouhani. Rouhani added, "When you rely on the people's votes, people should come and vote, and if you do not have a partisan system, it will be a bit difficult, that is, people's choice will be a bit difficult with all the babel close to the elections, which would be a bit easier in a partisan system".

The President also emphasized that our system is not a partisan one in the constitution, and the constitution is not based on the partisan system, which means we vote for individuals in the elections and do not vote for a party, be it the Parliament, the City Council or Assembly of Experts". Rouhani stated, "We do not have a party filter either, things are done through the Guardian Council or wherever it is, but in any case, it is not a partisan one. We have such problems that we have to think about; For example, revising the constitution at a time when it is needed is fine".

"Of course, constitutions throughout the world are usually amended in a long time, but now the constitution has not been amended for thirty-one years. Amendments were made at the end of Imam Khomeini's (RA) life, but in these thirty-one years, the constitution has not amended, and it may need to be amended sometime," said the President. Referring to the importance of discussing the inclusion of the partisan system in the constitution, the President continued, "One time in one of the committees of the Expediency Council, we predicted, discussed and approved a framework on the election law and the general policies of the partisan system election law, which stopped for some reason".

Rouhani emphasized that the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran is a good one in the world, to which we can be proud, and said, "Since 1979 when this constitution was drafted, especially in the sections related to people's rights in Chapter 3, there are clear and modern principles that can be presented in the world as a modern constitution, which, of course, may have some flaws and should be amended". Pointing out that our understanding of the constitution is not the same, the president added, "It is predicted that when we need to interpret the constitution, which institution will do that, but before we reach an interpretation, it is very important to know what understanding we have of this law".

Rouhani said that even the pillars of the system, namely the government, parliament, and judiciary do not have a common understanding and do not think alike, and sometimes there may be disagreement on even important issues, saying, "Sometimes we hear some members of parliament say that they should oversee the performance of ministers, which is an incomplete interpretation of the constitution". The President stressed that overseeing the performance of ministers and the government only means questioning, investigation and impeachment, but overseeing the work of ministers and coordinating and resolving disputes between ministers is one of the duties of the president, saying, "The word 'oversee' has not been mentioned in the constitution for the parliament to oversee the work of the government".

The president stressed, "Article 113 of the constitution has several issues, one is to determine the position of the president, in which it is mentioned that the president is the second official and the highest official of the country after the Supreme Leader, and immediately after that it says that he is responsible for the implementation of the constitution, that is, the person who is the highest official after the leader is responsible for the implementation of the constitution".

Rockets Target U.S...

FROM PAGE 1

U.S. officials say the temporary staff reduction came ahead of the first anniversary of the U.S. strike that assassinated Iran's top general, Qasem Soleimani, and Iraqi militia leaders outside Baghdad's airport on January 3.

Soleimani's assassinating and that of leading Iraqi paramilitary figure Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis led Iraq's parliament to pass a nonbinding resolution calling for the exit of all foreign troops from Iraq.

U.S. officials say Iran or allied militia could carry out a possible retaliatory strike around the anniversary.

Tension spiked again across the region following the assassination of Iranian nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhri-zadeh near Tehran in late November. Iran has blamed Israel and, indirectly, the United States, raising the possibility that Iran or one of its regional proxies will retaliate.

Switchboard:
(+98) (21) 44253448

Public Relations Tel:
(+98)(21) 44253450

Editorial Board: 44253449

Public Relations Fax:
(+98)(21) 44253395

Advertising Department:
Tel/Fax:(+98) (21) 44253335-9/44253234

Website:
http://www.irannewsdaily.com

E-Mail Address:
info@irannewsdaily.com

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Pinturault Wins World Cup Giant Slalom

PARIS (Dispatches) - France's Alexis Pinturault won the giant slalom in Alta Badia on Sunday to take the overall lead in the men's World Cup alpine skiing.

Pinturault, who won Olympic bronze in the event at the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Games, was 0.46sec faster than Norway's Atle Lie McGrath with Swiss Justin Murisier third at 0.79sec.

Pinturault leads Aleksander Aamodt Kilde in the overall World Cup standings after the Norwegian finished sixth on Sunday over a second off the pace.

Volland Helps Monaco End Losing Streak

PARIS (Dispatches) - Germany striker Kevin Volland scored his sixth Ligue 1 goal as Monaco battled to a 1-0 win at bottom club Dijon on Sunday to snap a three-match losing streak.

Successive defeats by Lille, Marseille and Lens had seen Monaco slip nine points behind Lille heading into the weekend.

Their win on Sunday moved the sixth-placed principality club within seven points of current leaders Lyon, although Lille and Paris Saint-Germain will both be eyeing top spot when they meet later in the day.

Man United Thrash Leeds 6-2, Tottenham Stumble Again



LONDON (Dispatches) - Manchester United bolstered their Premier League title aspirations by demolishing Leeds 6-2 in the first league meeting between the sides for 16 years on Sunday.

Scott McTominay and Bruno Fernandes scored twice as United's counter-attacking threat tore apart Marcelo Bielsa's attacking approach to move the Red Devils up to third, five points behind leaders Liverpool with a game in hand.

"It could have been 12-4, it was that kind of game. It was fantastic from the first minute," said United boss Ole Gunnar Solskjaer.

"We had a plan to get after them, go forward and Scott gets two goals in the first three minutes."

The much-anticipated clash as a historic rivalry was renewed lacked the fervour of a full Old Trafford in the stands, but more than delivered on the field.

United have made a series of slow starts this season, but put the result almost beyond doubt inside three minutes thanks to two goals from McTominay.

The Scotland international burst forward from his deep role in midfield to smash home Fernandes's pass from outside the area and then slotted home Anthony Martial's through ball.

Bielsa was among the finalists for FIFA's coach of the year this week for guiding Leeds back to the top flight.

However, the Argentine's determination to play in the same wide-open style no matter the opposition backfired as the visitors were 4-0 down inside 37 minutes.

"Whether it is 5-0, 0-5, or 0-0, you know it is going to be frantic and hectic because they have an attitude and style that makes you have to work and you have to earn it," added Solskjaer.

"Just imagine if that had 75,000 people here. It would have gone down as one of the best Man Utd performances against Leeds."

Meanwhile Tottenham's Premier League title challenge suffered a huge blow as Leicester moved above them into second

with an impressive 2-0 away win on Sunday.

Jamie Vardy's penalty and a Toby Alderweireld own goal moved the Foxes four points behind leaders Liverpool as for once Harry Kane and Son Heung-min failed to dig Spurs out of trouble.

Jose Mourinho's men were top of the table until a last-minute winner for Liverpool gave the champions a 2-1 victory on Wednesday but they are now six points behind Jurgen Klopp's team.

Leicester have six wins from seven away games in the Premier League this season and fans will begin to dream of a repeat of their 2016 title triumph.

"I thought over the course of the game we were outstanding and it was a very good win for us," Leicester boss Brendan Rodgers told Sky Sports.

But he added: "We have to start winning at home. The group is learning all the time and that's why we're nowhere near the finished product."

Klopp described Spurs as a "counter-attacking monster" but their deficiencies when not allowed the ability to break were exposed by Leicester's clever game plan.

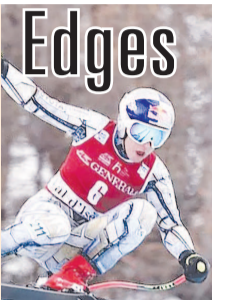
The Foxes did not leave themselves exposed and posed the greater threat in transition.

A cagey first half of few chances saw James Maddison's long-range shot well held by Hugo Lloris, while Kane headed over Son's corner.

But Tottenham were undone by a moment of madness by Serge Aurier in the closing seconds of the opening period when he barged into Wesley Fofana just inside the area.

A VAR review was needed before referee Craig Pawson pointed to the spot and Vardy drilled home his sixth spot-kick of the league season.

Ledecka Edges Suter in Super-G



PARIS (Dispatches) - Olympic champion Ester Ledecka won the first World Cup super-G race of her career on Sunday, edging Corinne Suter in Val d'Isere.

Czech skier and snowboarder Ledecka finished in 1min 24.64sec, just 0.03sec ahead of Swiss Suter, who won the small globe for the discipline last year, with Italy's Federica Brignone third 0.35sec off the winning time.

The race was the first World Cup super-G of the season after the first two scheduled races of the season in Saint-Moritz were cancelled.

The victory leaves Ledecka, who won the Olympic super-G and the parallel giant slalom in snowboard in Pyeongchang in 2018, top of the World Cup standings in the discipline.

Despite winning the Olympic gold, Ledecka had never finished on a World Cup super-G podium before Sunday. The victory was her second on the circuit, after a downhill in Lake Louise last December.

Slovak Petra Vlhova finished sixth to increase her lead in the overall standings after her closest challenger Michelle Gisin of Switzerland came in ninth.

Visitors have begun to arrive in the resort of Val d'Isere in the last two days with the start of French school holidays and, although the race was held behind closed doors, a few curious people were able to enjoy Sunday's competition standing in the surrounding ski slopes.

Benzema Stars as Madrid Join Atletico at La Liga Summit

MADRID (Dispatches) - Karim Benzema was described as "phenomenal" after scoring the opening goal and creating two others as Real Madrid won 3-1 at Eibar on Sunday to move level on points with city rivals Atletico at the top of La Liga.

Benzema and Luka Modric scored inside the first 13 minutes in the Basque Country to put Zinedine Zidane's men on their way to a fourth straight league win, with Lucas Vazquez scoring a late third after Garcia Kike pulled one back for Eibar.

"He is decisive. What he does is phenomenal," said Real coach Zinedine Zidane in praise of French compatriot Benzema.

"Not just in terms of goals. I'm repeating myself on Karim, but he doesn't just score goals. Karim brings clear-sightedness to our game, that's very important.

"When he scores it's even better, but beyond that he is very important to us."

Real sit behind Atletico on goal difference, but have the better head-to-head record, which is how level teams are split at the end of the season.

Diego Simeone's Atletico have two games in hand, though, after Saturday's 3-1 success against Elche.

Fifth-placed Barcelona are eight points adrift of the Madrid pair following their 2-2 draw with Valencia.

Gladbach Fine Thuram Month's Wages

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Borussia Moenchengladbach fined striker Marcus Thuram one month's salary, to be paid to a charity, on Sunday for spitting on an opponent the previous day.

"Marcus has accepted this and has also offered to engage with this social cause on his own behalf," the club's sporting director Max Eberl said in a statement.

Thuram was sent off after a video review showed him spitting in the face of Stefan Posch of Hoffenheim as the two argued during a Bundesliga match.

With Gladbach down to 10 men, Hoffenheim scored a late goal and won 2-1.



Sane Warned to Shape Up Fast at Bayern

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Bayern Munich chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge has laid down the law to Leroy Sane, telling the former Manchester City winger that he needs to start delivering for the European champions.

A string of disappointing performances by Sane since he joined in a 50-million-euro (\$61 million) move in the summer was capped on Saturday when he was removed just half an hour after entering the field as a substitute in Bayern's 2-1 win against Bayer Leverkusen.

"We put everything possible in play" to acquire the German international, Rummenigge told Sport 1 TV, "and now he has to justify it".

"He hasn't yet really got into the DNA of Bayern. His task now has got to be to make his talent bear fruit," the former Bayern forward said.

Rummenigge added: "I think he has got a good future ahead of him. We're prepared to support any player but we have demands too. He must now take the next step."

Sane, 24, admitted he had been surprised to be yanked off before the final whistle, telling Bild newspaper: "That is not something that has happened to me before."

Veteran midfielder Thomas Mueller acknowledged that coach Hansi Flick's decision to remove Sane before the end of the game had been "a bitter pill to swallow" for the winger.

Flick is believed to be unimpressed by Sane's work rate and willingness to work for the team and with France forward Kingsley Coman in fine form since he scored the winning goal in the Champions League final, Sane has mainly been used as a substitute.

Real Madrid Want Reform of Club Football Competitions

MADRID (Dispatches) - Real Madrid president Florentino Perez on Sunday said the coronavirus pandemic had increased the need for the creation of a new elite league.

"Football needs new formulas to make it more competitive, more exciting, and stronger," Perez told club members at the annual meeting held online on Sunday.

Perez also said that the pandemic had cost Real Madrid 106 million euros (\$130 million) in lost income, but cost-cutting meant the club had still managed to make a 313,000-euro profit.

The biggest clubs have long lobbied for European competitions to be structured in a way that guarantees them a greater share of the revenue.

"This model needs a new impulse," he said. "The impact of Covid-19 strongly demands new changes. Football has to face this new time."

"Reforming football cannot wait and we have to get down to it as soon as possible. The biggest clubs in Europe have millions of fans spread across the world. We have the responsibility to fight for this change," he added.

The latest plan for a Super League surfaced through a series of leaked emails and documents in November 2018 which suggested that many of Europe's biggest clubs were working on plans for a 16-team Super League to kick off as early as 2021.

When Josep Maria Bartomeu stood down as president of Real's great rivals Barcelona in October he called for "a future European Super League" which "would guarantee the financial stability of the club".

UEFA, the governing body of European football, immediately reiterated its "strong opposition" to the idea.



Federer Training, Committed to Playing Australian Open

MELBOURNE (AFP) - All the world's top players, including 20-time Grand Slam champion Roger Federer, are expected to be in Melbourne for the coronavirus-disrupted Australian Open, tournament organiser Craig Tiley said.

The opening Grand Slam of the year, in front of at least 50 percent of normal crowds, has been pushed back three weeks until February 8 with all players to undergo a mandatory 14-day quarantine on arrival.

The delay could be pivotal for Federer, who admitted last week he was in a "race against time" to be fit as his recovery from two rounds of knee surgery takes longer than expected.

Tiley said he had been in touch with the 39-year-old and he was going through his normal pre-season training routine in Dubai.

"Every player, including Roger, has made a commitment to travel to Melbourne to play," he said after confirming the new start date on Saturday.

"We have been in touch with him and his team and it's been three days now, he's hit for the first time in Dubai. He's in his normal pre-season training routine. "He did say to us that February 8 was a more suitable date for him in terms of preparing for the Australian Open," Tiley added. "But a lot will depend on how he responds to his surgery in the next two to three weeks of training."

Federer has won the Australian Open six times. But after losing in the semi-finals to Novak Djokovic, missed the rest of the Covid-interrupted 2020 season following surgery and could only watch as Rafael Nadal matched his record 20 Grand Slam titles with a 13th victory at the French Open.

The men's and women's qualifiers will be held in Doha and Dubai respectively from January 10-13, with players arriving in Melbourne from January 15 on special charter flights for their quarantine.

