

Spokeswoman for Iran's Ministry of Health Sima Sadat Lari Announced On Friday That some 132 More Iranians Lost Their Lives in the Past 24 Hours Because of COVID-19 as The Death Toll Mounted to 54,440

IRAN NEWS

The World Steel Association in Its Latest Statistics Reported That Iran Steel Production Has Experienced 13% Growth Over the Past 11 Months of 2020 While Global Steel Production Declined by 1.3 Percent

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CBI Transfers Foreign Funds Needed to Buy COVID-19 Vaccine

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – The government has finally worked out a solution to pay for foreign supplies of coronavirus vaccines, says the country's chief banker, amid a series of harsh financial restrictions imposed on the country by the United States.

Central Bank of Iran (CBI) governor Abdolnasser Hemmati said on Thursday that he had ordered transfer of 200 million euros from CBI funds in a foreign bank for purchase of coronavirus vaccines.

In an interview with the state TV, Hemmati said that the CBI had used two banks in Turkey and in Europe and a branch of an Iranian bank to transfer the funds from South Korea to a Swiss bank processing payments related to a vaccine scheme run by the World Health Organization.

He said that the Office of Foreign Assets Control in the U.S. had granted a special permit to the South Korean bank to release part of the Iranian funds that have been blocked in the country because of U.S. sanctions.

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Iran Rejects U.S. Claims About Threatening Election Officials

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Iranian UN mission spokesman Alireza Miryousefi dismissed claims by US security officials and agencies about Iran's role in influencing and interfering with the 2020 US election.

"Iran is not involved in inciting violence and creating unrest in the United States," Miryousefi said in an email to Reuters.

"Iran itself is the largest victim of cyber-attacks, including Stuxnet, and has always emphasized the need for the establishment of a global mechanism to prevent cyber-attacks at the United Nations, and at other international institutions," he added.

The remarks came after U.S. security agencies claimed on Wednesday they had "highly credible" information indicating that "Iranian cyber actors" were responsible for creating a website earlier this month featuring death threats aimed at U.S. election officials.

Those targeted by the website included FBI director Christopher Wray and Christopher Krebs, the former CISA director who was fired by U.S. President Donald Trump after publicly vouching for 2020 election results showing Joe Biden defeated Trump.

Judiciary Chief Urges All To Abide by Law



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – Judiciary Chief Hojjatolislam Seyed Ebrahim Raisi during his visit to North Khorasan Province on Thursday said capitalizing the law is the first stage of implementation of justice in the society and therefore nobody is allowed to breach the law in any condition, and urged all to respect implementation of the law in the country.

In meeting with the elites and some people of the province, Hojjatolislam Raisi said if a state body has power, it should not unilaterally cancel its obligations to the people because it damages the public trust.

He said all should know that in realm of their works and responsibilities, they should boost justice in order that people could feel implementation of the law. He added all services should be distributed among the people fairly.

Raisi also emphasized attention to the social damages and called for minimizing them, adding that criticizing the social damages is a prelude to correcting the lifestyle and the duty of elites and people regarding this issue is very important in order that people get an Islamic lifestyle.

On the spread of using the cyber space, he said this technology is spreading widely and growing fast, so if it is not managed, the country will be unable to stop the growth of the social damages.

He added that cyber space should not be an opportunity for gambling, corruption, prostitution and harming the national economy and fraud or violate the privacy of the people because in this case the people cannot comfortably make use of this space.

Raisi also pointed to the importance of the duty of a judge, saying that a judge issues verdict based on evidences and all should help him to discover the truth and issue the fair verdict. He added that dear judge is the judge who is not influenced and does not accept any recommendation from owners of wealth and power.

He also urged all media outlets to make the public acquainted with their rights and this will make the job easier for the people and the judiciary when people turn to the courts.

India Acquires Heavy Cranes for Chabahar port

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India's operations at Iran's strategic Chabahar port are set to get a boost with the delivery in January of four heavy cranes, months after a deal with a Chinese state-run firm for the equipment was cancelled amid the border standoff.

In September, India had cancelled a contract with Shanghai Zhenhua Heavy Industries worth almost \$30 million for four rail-mounted quay cranes, required for moving heavy cargo, citing delays by the Chinese company in supplying the equipment ordered in 2017.

Following a fresh tender for cranes with 65-tonne capacity, the equipment was procured from a Western company and is now expected to reach Chabahar by next month, people familiar with developments said on condition of anonymity. They declined to give further details in view of sensitivities linked to US sanctions on Iran, though Chabahar port has been granted a waiver. The people further said the Iranian side had made a request to the Indian government for railway equipment, including locomotives, signalling gear and equipment for railway stations, to bolster operations on both Chabahar-Zahedan and Khaf-Herat railway lines.

The Iranian side has suggested this equipment can be provided by India under a \$150 line of credit that was proposed some years ago, the people said.

These developments come in the wake of the opening on December 10 of a major section of the 220-km Khaf-Herat railway link, which will ultimately connect Khaf in Iran and Roznak in Afghanistan's Herat province, and a decision by Tehran in November to complete the 628-km Chabahar-Zahedan rail line, which runs from the port to near the Afghan border, with its own funds instead of waiting for the participation of the Indian Railway Construction Limited (IRCON). "Iran has decided to complete all the infrastructure on its side and India is welcome to join in all the projects. For example, they can supply the railway equipment and develop other facilities such as refineries and petro-chemical industries in the Chabahar free trade zone," one of the people cited above said, adding the Chabahar-Zahedan rail link is expected to be completed by July 2021.

The external affairs ministry said recently that IRCON had completed a feasibility study and was awaiting a decision from the Iranian side to name a nodal authority. However, it is believed that there was hesitation on the part of private firms to deal with a company linked to the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Committee (IRGC), which has been sanctioned by the U.S.

Amid reports that some quarters are calling for the Khaf-Herat rail link to be extended south towards the Pakistan border, the people noted that there is interest in taking the line northwards to Uzbekistan and suggested India could play a key role in such a venture.

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ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian



Collapse, the Main Aim of Hackers

The U.S. in President Donald Trump era has had a special difference with other editions of presidencies in the U.S. history and the difference has been that the decision-makers in the White House were not military. In this four-year period, Trump has always accused previous administrations of expending which has not benefitted the U.S. in the whole world, and especially in the West Asia. This method of administering the country by Trump has led to restriction in the U.S. military budget and massive withdrawals from the U.S. ambitious stances in any part of the world by the U.S. military.

Emergence of morale lacking ambition and motivation in all military elements and its spread to the security structure has made the U.S. suffer from multidimensional confusions. That the U.S. with such deafening propagation and even with explicit claim of fight with terrorism and with fell to assassination of Martyr Qassem Soleimani and his comrades in Iraq is one of these confusions. That the U.S. in its haplessness regarding managing the COVID-19 pandemic accuses China is one of these confusions. That the U.S. presidential election structure has turned into an unusual bipolarity with norm-breaking behaviors is one of these confusions.

Of course, by writing this article I mean mostly attention on a strange confusion that has targeted the U.S. cyber system. In the news it has been reported that the U.S. after discovering a cyber-attack has noticed that the attack has been underway for over ten months with the most complicated methods and also realized that its control and its methods of prevention and defense against it had no plans, and it has not found yet the possible discovery of the source and trace of these attacks.

The U.S. president has recently assured that the cyber-attack is under control. Experts believe that under control in view of the U.S. officials means shutting down the cyber systems that for the time being that the systems could remain immune from the Russian detriment. Of course, despite different U.S. officials' charges against Russian hackers, Russians have strongly denied those charges and have asked the U.S. officials to show down genuine, logical and documented evidence for their claim.

However American officials are not sure that Russians have a hand at this cyber-attack and they have not presented any evidence and document on Russian engagement in this attack and speculations believe this idea that Americans have moved on course to accusing Russians. However what is seen in the U.S. media climate is that the U.S. cyber army has been inflicted with heavy and irrecoverable blows.

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Iran Foreign Trade at \$9.52b in 9 month

TEHRAN (MNA) – In the first nine months of the current Iranian year, 110 million tons of goods worth \$52 billion were exchanged between Iran and various countries.

According to Head of Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) Mehdi Mirashrafi, during the first nine months of the current Iranian year (ending December 20), 110 million tons of goods worth \$52 billion were exchanged between Iran and various countries.

Of the said amount, exports stood at 85.2 million tons at a value of \$25.1 billion, the official informed.

As he said, a comparison of non-oil exports with the same period of the previous year in terms of weight and value shows a decrease of 17 percent and 20 percent, respectively.

Considering the conditions caused by the outbreak of the Covid-19 epidemic and the cruel US sanctions, this amount of exports proves the efforts made by the Iranian producers and exporters, and the exports figures are expected to rise up in the coming months, the official said.

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info@irannewsdaily.com

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EC Starts Reviewing FATF Bills

TEHRAN (MNA) – Expediency Council Chief revealed the beginning of reviewing Financial Action Task Force (FATF) bills at the Council.

Speaking in an open session of the Expediency Council, Ayatollah Amoli Larijani said, “Reviewing the FATF bills was put atop agenda of the Expediency Council according to the recommendation of Leader of the Islamic Revolution.”

Accordingly, members of the Council will examine and review the FATF bills,

regardless of any orientation by the political groups and currents, in line with maintaining interests and benefits of Iranian people and country, he stated.

Following the request of President Rouhani and the recommendation of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, the first joint meeting of the commissions related to the issue was held at the Expediency Council on Tue. Dec. 22, he said, adding, “These meetings will continue until the final result is achieved in line with maintaining interests of people and the Establishment.”

Iran Doing All in Its Power To Eliminate U.S. Sanctions

TEHRAN (PressTV) - President Hassan Rouhani says the Islamic Republic is doing all in its power to neutralize and eliminate unjust and illegal sanctions imposed on the country by the administration of outgoing U.S. President Donald Trump.

“We are doing all we can to render these sanctions ineffective and eliminate them and everybody must work to this end. All three branches [of the government] must join hands under the guidance of Leader [of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei] and I promise people that they will see better days in terms of livelihood, health, and shattering of [U.S.] sanctions,” the president said while addressing a ceremony held to inaugurate a number of the Ministry of Petroleum’s projects on Thursday.

Rouhani called the sanctions “the joint work of the U.S.’ radicals, Zionists, and the reactionary regional regimes.”

Rouhani reiterated Ayatollah Khamenei’s assertion, saying, concerning the sanctions, the first step to be taken was to help neutralize or lessen their effect. “The second action [we should take] is to eliminate and break down the sanctions,” the president noted, citing the Leader.

He referred to the Islamic Republic’s success in replacing its oil exports, which the enemy had sanctioned, with petrochemical sales as an instance of its triumph in the face of the illegal bans.

“We should extinguish the blaze [billowing in the form] of the sanctions as soon as



possible. We don’t need anybody’s pity,” he said.

The Iranian president said by potentially relieving the sanctions, the enemy would not have done Iran any additional and undue favor, adding that by stopping the sanctions, the Americans would have actually just “stopped their crime” against the Iranian people.

The chief executive promised the people that they would be witnessing better conditions concerning their livelihood and health system towards the end of the year and throughout the upcoming one.

Iran’s recent inauguration of a whole host of developmental projects “delivered a big blow to the global arrogant powers that had sought to enforce an [all-out] closure on the country,” Rouhani hailed.

Nursing “inchoate ideals,” he said, they wanted to have our people stand in long queues for bread. However, 30 years of U.S.-led economic war did not realize this objective as would not as many more, the president asserted.

“I believe that this war has lasted out its duration,” he said, reminding that Trump, the last of the U.S. presidents, who was “viciously” leading this warfare, is going through the last moments of his political career.

Iran Recognizing Only Quds as Capital of Palestine

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Assistant to the Speaker of Parliament for International Affairs Hossein Amir Abdollahian on Thursday said that Iranians only recognize one country called Palestine whose capital is Quds.

Amir Abdollahian noted that Netanyahu’s fate is over and the Zionists have no future in the region.

He described the normalization of relations between the heads of several Arab countries with the Israeli regime as a ridiculous show, adding that the only result of the Zionist presence in the region is the escalation of insecurity which will have consequences for everyone.

Nowadays, Zionists are in the worst domestic political situation, and the political impasse within the Zionist regime and weakness and fear against resistance are the two major components of the fake regime, he underscored. Iran has always welcomed comprehensive cooperation based on the principles of neighborhood and brotherhood, Amir Abdollahian stated.

The regional states must rely on their common power and never forget the evil and occupying nature of Zionists and their American supporters, he further noted.

Iranian, Swedish Diplomats Discuss Yemen Crisis

TEHRAN (IFP) - Senior advisor to Iran’s foreign minister in special political affairs Ali-Asghar Khaji held talks with Sweden’s Special Envoy for Yemen Peter Semneby.

During a videoconference call on Wednesday, the two sides discussed the latest political developments in Yemen as well as the dire humanitarian situation in the Arab country.

In their talks, they highlighted the importance of pushing on with mutual cooperation in order to help settle the Yemen crisis politically.

They also underscored that the international community is determined to increase humanitarian aid to Yemeni people, especially at a time when the country is gripped by the coronavirus outbreak.

The Iranian official said the Yemeni National Salvation Government remains committed to its commitments under the Stockholm agreement and is

implementing it unilaterally. He lambasted the Saudi Coalition’s failure to keep its side of the bargain under the deal, and expressed hope the international community will adopt measures for the accord to be revived and fully implemented.

He also appreciated efforts by the UN secretary general and his special envoy for Yemen to advance the peace plan in the Arab country.

Khaji further underscored the importance of ending military strikes in order to prevent the worsening of the humanitarian disaster in Yemen.

The Swedish official, in turn, said Tehran and Stockholm have a lot in common and have made attempts to contribute to a political settlement of the Yemen crisis.

He noted Iran and Sweden enjoy great potential to play an active role in resolving the Yemen crisis, calling for closer coordination in that regard.



Belgrade Boosting Ties With Tehran a Priority

BELGRADE (IRNA) - Chairman of Serbian Parliament’s Foreign Affairs Committee Zarko Obradovic on Thursday hailed Tehran-Belgrade growing ties, saying that promoting all-out relations with Iran is a priority for his country.

In a meeting with Iran’s Ambassador to Serbia Rashid Hassanpour, he added that Iran is a large country, and although Serbia is a small in size and population, it enjoys a good status in terms of international role.

Serbia and Iran have great potential for expanding cooperation, especially in the fields of energy, agriculture, transport and tourism, he said, noting, “We must not allow international issues to negatively affect bilateral relations. We appreciate Iran for taking principled stances in support of national sovereignty and territorial integrity of countries.”

Iran’s ambassador, for his part, said that independence in action and adherence of countries to the accepted principles and commitments determine their weight and credibility in the international arena.

Iran is determined to enhance cooperation with the Republic of Serbia in the important region of Balkan. Parliamentary cooperation has always contributed to collaborations in other areas, he said.

Hassanpour further noted that Iran has always welcomed and supported positive and constructive dialogue and interaction in relations with countries, and has even taken the lead in this regard. Iran’s nuclear deal with the G5 is seen as the culmination of this approach.

Zarif Warns Trump Against Adventurism after Anti-Iran Threat



TEHRAN (IFP) - The Iranian foreign minister has lashed out at U.S. President Donald Trump for levelling accusations and threats against Iran.

In a tweet, Mohammad Javad Zarif wrote “Donald Trump uses a worthless photo to recklessly accuse Iran.”

“Last time, the U.S. ruined our region over WMD fabrications, wasting \$7 trillion and causing 58,976 American casualties,” he added.

“Far worse this time. Trump will bear full responsibility for any adventurism on his way out,” he added.

His comments came after Trump warned Tehran in a Twitter post that he would hold “Iran responsible” in the event of a fatal attack on Americans in Iraq.

“Our embassy in Baghdad got hit Sunday by several rockets,” the U.S. president tweeted earlier on Thursday, adding, “Three rockets failed to launch. Guess where they were from: IRAN.”

He then circulated rumors of “additional attacks” against Americans in Iraq, warning Iran to “think it over.”

Trump was pointing to Sunday’s rocket attack on the U.S. embassy in the Iraqi capital, Baghdad. He also attached to his tweet an unauthenticated picture of three rockets.

U.S., Its Allies Seeking To Destroy Yemen

TEHRAN (MNA) – Criticizing the silence against the crimes of the Saudi coalition in Yemen, Iranian ambassador to Sana’a Hassan Irlu said that the U.S. and its allies seek to destroy Yemen.

In a tweet on Thursday, Irlu said, “During 2100 days of aggression and siege, there is a catastrophic outcome by all standards, these are the goals of the Saudi war against the Yemeni people “destroying the human being .. and the stone .. and the trees ..” and this is America’s project and its tools in the region.”

It should be noted that 569,283 houses, 177 universities and higher education institutions, 1393 mosques, 399 tourist centers, 389 hospitals and clinics, and 1099 schools and colleges were destroyed due to the attacks of the Saudi coalition.

According to a source in the Liaison and Coordination Officers Operations Room to monitor violations, the Saudi-led coalition violated the Stockholm Agreement over 6,000 times in November in Al Hudaydah.

The Saudi-led coalition violated the Stockholm ceasefire 6,569 times in November by 1,199 artillery shells and 4,960 various bullets, in addition to the development of 23 fortifications in Al Hudaydah, the report added.

Iran Not to Allocate Budget For UN 2030 Agenda

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The budget needed for UN Education 2030 Agenda has not been considered in the next Iranian year’s budget bill (Starts on March 21, 2021), the Iranian Minister of Education said.

“The PBO had mistakenly put the Education 2030 Agenda in the 2015’s budget lines, which was eventually removed from the budget law,” Mohsen Haji Mirzaei, Minister of Education, said.

Responding to the question on holding in-person exams, he said that “We gave authority to the school councils.”

“We also identified the methods of remote exams and made them available to every school,” he said.

The Minister of Education said that we prefer to have in-person exams, but in the case of the National Committee on Combating Coronavirus opposition, it will be held in absentia.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, is a set of seventeen global goals for 169 specific areas developed by the United Nations during a deliberative process involving its 193 member states on 25 September 2015.

20th Int’l Exhibition of Home Appliances Kicks Off

TEHRAN (IP) - The 20th International Exhibition of Home Appliances kicked off in Tehran on Friday in full compliance with health protocols.

The 20th International Exhibition of Home Appliances is held in the absence of public visitors due to containment efforts made concerning the coronavirus outbreak.

After making the necessary coordination with the National Task Force for Fighting Coronavirus, this four-day exhibition is held in full compliance with health protocols in the presence of 175 production units.

The slogan of the exhibition is: “Production Shines in the Struggle against Sanctions.”

At the same time as the 20th International Exhibition of Home Appliances is physically held in Tehran, a virtual exhibition has been provided for units that couldn’t attend and other people.

According to the Ministry of Industry, Mines and Trade of Iran, about 3 million refrigerators, washing machines and televisions have been produced in the country in the last 8 months.

Iran-Azerbaijan Joint Economic Commission to Convene in January

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Head of Iran’s Presidential Office Mahmoud Vaezi said on Thursday that the joint economic commission of Iran and Azerbaijan will be held early January.

Vaezi pointed out that Azerbaijan’s Deputy Prime Minister Shahin Mostafayev visited Iran on Tuesday and noted that among the most important agreements made on the trip were the construction of a new power plant in Nakhchevan Autonomous Republic and a bridge in Astarachay, as well as Iranian companies’ participation in reconstruction of liberated areas.

He said that after the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia, conditions have changed and using the new conditions needs negotiations about several issues.

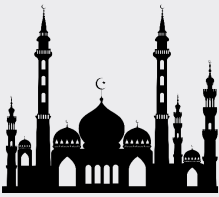
He added that according to the talks, Iran and Azerbaijan are to cooperate in making tractors, buses, and medicines and said Iran is supposed to build these factories in Azerbaijan.

Referring to the preferential trade agreements made on the visit, Vaezi said it was decided that the joint economic commission of Iran and Azerbaijan be held in Tehran in three weeks.

He went on to say that with the new developments, the relations between Tehran and Baku will expand.

Answering a question about Jolfa railroad, he said Iran was connected to the USSR and Europe through this railway, but it is not anymore.

He added that the issue was discussed in the meetings and if conditions between Azerbaijan and Armenia become calmer, the railroad will reactivate.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)

■ Evening (Maghreb)

■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)

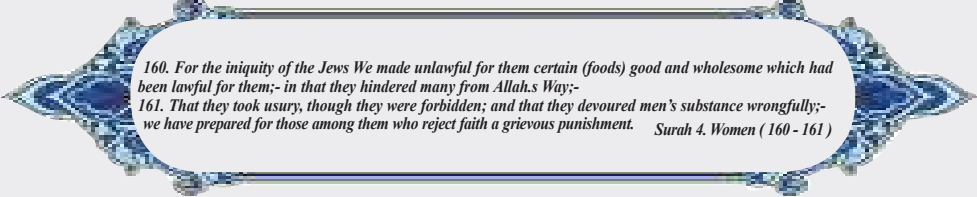
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise

12:05

17:17

05:43

07:13



160. For the iniquity of the Jews We made unlawful for them certain (foods) good and wholesome which had been lawful for them;- in that they hindered many from Allah's Way;- 161. That they took usury, though they were forbidden; and that they devoured men's substance wrongfully;- we have prepared for those among them who reject faith a grievous punishment. Surah 4. Women (160 - 161)

Tehran, Tashkent Striving To Boost Bilateral Trade

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Deputy Head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) for International Affairs Mohammad-Reza Karbasi in an online meeting with the Chairman of Association of Exporters of Uzbekistan Mr. Muhtar Umarov explored ways for boosting trade between Iran and Uzbekistan and called for reducing customs tariff, reducing cost of transportation and providing required facilities for rail transportation which are the prerequisites for the growth of trade and investment in Iran and Uzbekistan.

Mr. Karbasi in the meeting said restoring and boosting ties with the neighboring countries is of the main priorities of Iran, and Uzbekistan due to its deep historical, cultural and economic commonalities as well as its special geographical location is of great importance to Iran.

He then pointed to Iran's strategic geographical position which is considered as the gateway for Uzbekistan's link to other countries. He added Iran's economy due to its vast infrastructures, huge potentials, many efficient production units, and skillful human recourses is the center of attraction for international economic centers.

Karbasi then pointed to Iran's capabilities in technical and engineering services, adding currently Iranian companies are active in road, tunnel and building construction sector in the regional states and have gained considerable experiences.

He said since Uzbekistan is rich in gold, uranium and copper mines, both countries can have joint and constant cooperation in this field. He then added that agriculture, horticulture, foodstuff, dried fruits, iron, steel, tile, ceramic and chemical fertilizers are of the other fields that both countries can cooperate for expanding their economic relations.

Karbasi also pointed to the outstanding progress of Iranians in nanotechnologies and

biotechnology, adding that both countries can share their experiences and technical knowledge in those fields. He further said removing banking hurdles and problems, reducing the cost of transportation, offering required facilities in the rail transportation and increasing the number of active wagons between both countries are the prerequisites of bilateral trade and investment growth between Iran and Uzbekistan.

Karbasi added the trade volume between Iran and Uzbekistan has surpassed from \$186m in 2018 to some \$424m in 2019. He also criticized Turkmenistan's lack of cooperation for emerge of some problems in the transportation of goods between Iran and Uzbekistan which are transited via Turkmenistan. He said it is expected Uzbek officials to have talks with their Turkmen counterparts for resolving problems.

He also criticized Uzbekistan Customs Office for its high tariffs regarding Iranian goods, adding that talks have begun for signing preferential trade agreement for a logical tariff rate, and its implementation needs necessary supports of Uzbekistan decision-makers in the economic field.

He also announced signing of a MoU on cooperation between ICCIMA and Uzbekistan Chamber of Commerce aimed at forming a joint committee between Iran and Uzbekistan.

Then Umarov, for his part, highlighted achievements and progresses of his country in the foreign trade, industries and tourism, and emphasized his countries move towards international markets.

He said the association is comprised of big and capable Uzbek companies and it has a private exhibition, 14 offices in different provinces of Uzbekistan and trade offices in several countries.

Umarov noted that products of the companies which are the members of the association are high quality and they are active in different fields like construction products, furniture, foodstuff, etc.

According to the statistics, Iran and Uzbekistan trade volume stood at \$424.2m in 2019 as Iran's exports were around \$204.6m. The statistics also show that the trade volume of both countries grew by 38 percent in 2019 comparing to 2018.

Talks Underway With Foreign Investors to Expand Major Airport

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran is in talks with three foreign investors to build the second terminal of its primary international airport in Tehran, the Imam Khomeini Airport (IKA), under an expansion plan which was abandoned by the French in 2017, a senior official says.

The airport, 30 kilometers southwest of Tehran, is currently operating at an annual handling capacity of 7 million passengers through its first terminal, T1. In June, President Hassan Rouhani opened Salam Terminal dedicated to pilgrims. Built by Iranian companies, it has a capacity to handle 10 million passengers a year, but it is not part of IKA's master expansion plan.

The second terminal, formerly known as Iranshahr, has long been on the cards for development. In January 2016, French industrial group Bouygues signed a preliminary deal to build and run T2, but the company as well as its fellow French partner Aeroports de Paris canceled the \$2.8 billion agreement in 2017, citing failure to get financial backing from international banks which feared US reprisals.

Iran had hired the Netherlands Airport Consultant Company (NACO) as its main adviser in the project to expand IKA's capacity to 35 million passengers. NACO and the French companies were among scores of international firms which rushed to Iran as the country re-opened for business after the lifting of sanctions in early 2017, but they withdrew after President Donald Trump pulled the US out of a nuclear deal with Iran and reimposed the sanctions.

Bouygues had signed a memorandum of understanding in January 2016 to build and operate a terminal at IKIA to handle 20 million passengers a year.

Access to Iran's 83-million market, with an annual output of more than \$400 billion, has always been tantalizing to foreign developers and investors, even during sanctions.

"We are negotiating with three foreign investors to complete Terminal 2 at Imam Khomeini Airport and increase its capacity to 35 to 40 million passengers per year," Managing Director of Imam Khomeini Airport City Mohammad Mehdi Karbalaei said in an interview with Fars.

The official did not name the foreign companies, only saying they will partner with Iranian entities to carry out the project. Karbalaei said the architectural plan of T2 is ready, but negotiations are being held up because of the coronavirus situation as well as economic and political issues.

The idea to build IKA was conceived before the Islamic Revolution in 1979, with original designs prepared by a US consortium in order to make it a regional air travel hub but the airport was inaugurated only in May 2004.

Karbalaei put the airport's current handling capacity at 10 million, saying the ultimate plan is to build a third terminal, T3, to raise the capacity to 90 million passengers a year.

The airport lies along the main highway linking Tehran to Bandar Abbas port in the Persian Gulf, with access to the top tourist cities of Isfahan and Shiraz. A high-speed railway between Tehran to Isfahan is about to connect through IKA. It will have four major zones: an aviation zone, a free economic zone, a special economic zone and a mixed-use zone which will be linked by road and rail to four corners of Iran in a "smart" transport network.

Even in its current shape, IKA is Iran's second customs gateway through which \$5 billion worth of goods flow into the country, according to Karbalaei. "The cargo coming through IKA customs is smaller in volume and weight, but it has a higher value. For example, the entire mobile phones of the country are imported through the Imam Khomeini Airport customs."

Iranian Firms May Join Reconstruction of Nagorno-Karabakh

BAKU (IP) - Iran's ambassador to Baku and the chairman of the Board of Small and Medium Business Development Agency of Azerbaijan examined Iranian companies' presence in reconstructing the liberated areas in Nagorno-Karabakh.

The Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Baku Abbas Mousavi stated on his Twitter account on Wednesday that he had met with Orkhan Mammadov, chairman of the Board of Small and Medium Business Development Agency of Azerbaijan.

He said: "In this meeting, the opportunities for advancing cooperation of the

companies and entrepreneurs of Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan in various fields, especially in the liberated areas, were examined."

Mousavi added: "Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan will soon sign a document on cooperation for the participation of Iranian companies in the reconstruction of the liberated areas in Nagorno-Karabakh."

Iranian companies have already announced their readiness to participate in reconstruction projects in the liberated areas of the Republic of Azerbaijan in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Recent Tensions Had No Impact on Tehran-Ankara Trade

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Head of Iran-Turkey Joint Chamber of Commerce Mehrdad Saadat Dehghan says in the current condition that everyday a new sanction is imposed on Iran, revealing details of some joint actions and trade activities may be against the country's interests, and it may force the other side to withdraw from cooperating.

Speaking to ILNA regarding Iran Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade's agreement with his Turkish counterpart on imports of goods in exchange for Iran's frozen assets in Turkey, Mr. Saadat said that importing goods in exchange for the frozen assets is to the benefit of Iran and will be. He added that if some action is to be taken, it should not be magnified.

He noted that in the current condition that everyday a new sanction is imposed on the country, revelation of details of these issues may be against the country's interests, and it may force the opposite party to withdraw from cooperation.

Saadat that the chamber is working to find solutions for the problems of the country and there are several solutions, adding that it does not mean that nobody wants to work with the country, on the contrary, in the economic and trade issues there are many countries keen to cooperate with Iran. He noted that private sectors work together and they do not have any problem but this trade should not be noisy because it will ultimately harm our interests.

On the effects of recent tensions between Iran and Turkey on their trade, he said recent tensions have not have any effect on the trade, and trade diplomacy still goes on. He noted that the chamber does its best that such political issues do not have any impact on the economy and it has been so far successful.

He admitted that economic relations with Turkey are not as the chamber expects and it has different reasons but he predicts a bright future in the trade relations of both states, adding that Turkey has realized that relations with Iran are good for them and Iran in the current sanction condition has realized that it needs Turkey as a strategic country and continues its interactions.

Iran Self-Sufficient In Natural Gas Supply

TEHRAN (Shana) – The CEO of the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) said Iran if sully self-sufficient in natural gas supply and has no imports.

Hassan Montazer Torbati said, "We do not import gas and the needs of the whole country are met from domestic sources for the time being."

Referring to the prospects of Iran's gas exports to neighboring countries, Torbati touched on the recent meeting of Iranian Minister of Petroleum Bijan Zangeneh with the Minister of Energy of the Republic of Azerbaijan, saying, "I have not seen Mr. Zangeneh yet to talk to his about his meeting, but in terms of network structure, in the past, Iran's gas exported to the former Soviet Union via Azerbaijan; now the necessary infrastructure is available up to the border and in Azerbaijan, so there is no problem in terms of infrastructure and it depends on the agreements and contracts that will be signed in the future."

He further said exporting gas to neighboring countries is Iran's long-term plan.

"Gas export contracts are long-term and cannot be decided in the short term. One of our plans in the long term is to export gas to neighboring countries, so given the plans we have to increase production and optimize consumption, there is no need to worry about this issue. Seasonal concerns should not affect long-term, annual plans either," he said.

Gov't Spends \$1b in Petchem Projects In Western Provinces

TEHRAN (Shana) – Oil Minister Bijan Zangeneh said the country has launched petrochemical projects in the western provinces of Urmia, Ilam and Hamedan which are totally worth a billion dollars in investment.

Addressing a ceremony to inaugurate the projects, Mr. Zangeneh said: "Today is a celebration of prosperity and leap of production for western Iran."

He stated that the total value of the three projects of olefin and SRU units of Ilam Petrochemical Plant, Hegmataneh Petrochemical Project and the potassium sulfate unit of Urmia Petrochemical Plant is close to one billion dollars, and said: "All these projects are in western provinces of the country and today is a celebration of prosperity and production leap for western Iran." He noted that Iran's petrochemical revenue in 1997 was merely \$2 billion per year which reached \$11b by 2013 and is planned to cross \$25b by 2021.

Furthermore, plans are underway to bring the sector's revenue to \$37 billion by 2026. The Oil Minister stated that 17 petrochemical projects with an investment of 11.4 billion dollars and a capacity of 25 million tons per year will be put into operation this calendar year (which began on March 21).

Olefin and Sulfur Recovery Units of Ilam Petrochemical Plant came on stream with a total production capacity of 750,000 tons per year and an investment of €866 million.

Speaking to Shana, the plant's CEO, Hassan Najafi-Semnani, said construction of the plant began on 2003 with 4 process units of SRU, olefin, heavy polyethylene and ancillary services with the aim of completing the value chain, removing poverty in the region and generation of jobs.

He stated that the heavy polyethylene unit and ancillary services of Ilam Petrochemical Plant officially came online in 2014, adding: "By inauguration of the olefin unit, the feedstock of the heavy polyethylene unit, which has been received from the West Ethylene Pipeline, will be supplied from this unit." The CEO of Ilam Petrochemical Company further added that the SRU of the facility was developed with €56m of investment and has been built to sweeten the olefin feedstock, adding: "The sweetened feedstock will be transferred to the olefin unit for production of ethylene, propylene, pyrolysis gasoline and liquid fuel."

Najafi-Semnani said the SRU is fed by 349,000 tons of C3+ fraction and heavier sulfur fractions and 416,000 tons of C5+ fraction and heavier sulfur fractions, and continued the annual production capacity of this unit is 331,000 tons of desulfurized of C3+ fraction and heavier and 401,000 tons of C5+ fraction and heavier. Najafi-Semnani went on to add that the unit is financed by €810 million, adding the total value of the unit's annual production is \$439 million and the surplus sales value is \$235 million. 305,000 tons of ethylene produced by olefin unit is consumed in heavy polyethylene unit and sale of the surplus ethylene is 153,000 tons.

The two units generate 1,700 jobs during its installation, and 250 direct and 870 indirect jobs while operating. Potassium Sulfate Unit of Urmia Petchem Plant will also operate with an annual production capacity of 40,000 tons of potassium sulfate and 50,000 tons of hydrochloric acid.

Construction of the unit began in 2018 in order to complete the value chain and the development of downstream industries. The project was completed in less than 24 months by domestic experts, and today (Thursday, December 24) it is coming online as one of the projects in the second petrochemical leap of the country.

This unit has been built with an investment of 585 billion Iranian rials. It is fed with 22,800 tons of sulfuric acid and 34,000 tons of crude potassium chloride annually. The unit is designed with annually 40,000 tons of potassium sulfate and 50,000 tons of hydrochloric acid production capacity.

Hegmataneh Petchem Plant is the first producer of medical grade granulation powder and PVC in the country with an annual capacity of 45,000 tons.

The license to establish Hegmataneh Petrochemical Plant was issued by the National Petrochemical Company in September 2002.

This project was built with an investment of \$30 million and 3,000 billion Iranian rials on a 15-hectare land 10 km in the Hamadan-Tehran artery.

Hegmataneh Petrochemical Plant is fed with an estimated 45,000 tons of vinyl chloride monomer per year and the sales value of the products based on the base price of 2016 is estimated at \$35 million per year.

The technical savvy of this unit belongs to the Italian company IGS and has been built with the participation of the private sector and the National Petrochemical Company in three process, utility and offsite units.

Afghan Women's Rights Activist Shot Dead

KABUL (Dispatches) - Gunmen on motorbike shot dead a women's rights activist and her brother north of Afghanistan's capital Thursday, officials said, as a wave of assassinations ravages the violence-wracked country.

Freshta Kohistani, aged 29, was the second activist to be killed in two days after a prominent pro-democracy advocate was gunned down in Kabul on Wednesday.

Their murders follow a similar pattern seen in recent weeks, in which prominent Afghans have died in targeted killings in broad daylight, several of them in the capital.



20 People Killed as Migrant Boat Sinks

TUNIS (Dispatches) - At least 20 African migrants died when their boat sank off Tunisia on Thursday as they tried to cross the Mediterranean to the Italian island of Lampedusa, a Tunisian security official said.

The coastguard rescued five people and was searching for about 20 others who were still unaccounted for, the official told Reuters. The coastline near the Tunisian port city of Sfax has become a major departure point for people fleeing conflict and poverty in Africa and the Middle East and searching for a better life in Europe.

"The boat sank about six miles from the coast of Sfax. Twenty bodies were recovered, five others were rescued, and all are from sub-Saharan Africa," the security official, Ali Ayari, said.



UK, EU Finally Secure Brexit Trade Deal



LONDON (Dispatches) - The United Kingdom and the European Union have agreed on a post-Brexit trade deal after months of torturous negotiations, averting the prospect of a chaotic and acrimonious divorce at the end of this year.

The deal, announced on Thursday, came just one week before the UK is due to exit the EU's single market and customs union on December 31.

"The deal is done," UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson tweeted, as he posted a photo of himself with both thumbs raised in celebration. Delivering a televised address, Johnson hailed striking what he called "the biggest trade deal yet", adding that the UK had taken back control of its laws, borders, and fishing waters.

"We have completed the biggest trade deal yet, worth 660 billion pounds a year, a comprehensive Canada-style free trade deal between the UK and the EU," he said. Johnson urged Britons to make the most of what he called the country's soon-to-be status of a "newly and truly independent nation".

Addressing the EU, he added: "We will be your friend, your ally, your supporter and indeed, never let it be forgotten, your number one market."

The deal will ensure the UK and the 27-nation bloc can continue to trade in goods without tariffs or quotas, smoothing trade worth hundreds of billions of pounds – and euros – a year between the pair.

Still, there will be some major changes come January 1, when more rules and increased bureaucracy will come into effect. How Britons and Europeans travel, live and work between the country and continent will also change. EU and British negotiators were up all night working on the agreement, reportedly fuelled by takeaway pizzas, as they hashed out final details at the Berlaymont in Brussels, the headquarters of the European Commission.

Johnson and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, meanwhile, spoke several times by phone. "Parting is such sweet sorrow," von der Leyen said in Brussels shortly after the deal was announced. "It is time to leave Brexit behind. Our future is made in Europe."

"We have finally found an agreement. It was a long and winding road but we have got a good deal to show for it. "It is fair, it is a balanced deal and it is the right and responsible thing to do for both sides."

EU Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier, speaking alongside von der Leyen, said: "Today is a day of relief, but tinged by some sadness as we compare what came before with what lies ahead. "The clock is no longer ticking, after four years of collective effort and EU unity to preserve peace and stability on the island of Ireland, to protect the citizens and the single market, and to build a new partnership with the UK."

The deal comes more than four years after a slim majority of Britons voted to quit the EU in a June 2016 referendum on membership of the bloc.

U.S. Congress Fails to Agree to Boost Stimulus Checks

WASHINGTON (AFP) - Republicans on Thursday blocked an effort to amend the hard-won pandemic relief package to more than triple direct payments to struggling Americans, something demanded by President Donald Trump.

After months of partisan bickering, legislators late Monday finally approved a \$900 billion stimulus package to help families and businesses struggling to survive the hit to the economy from the coronavirus before millions lose their benefits.

The legislation includes one-time payments of \$600 to most taxpayers, but Trump dropped a bombshell on the celebrations this week, hinting he might veto the bill unless the amount was increased to \$2,000.

Democrats, who have been pushing for months to increase pandemic support, cheered his statement, and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi challenged Republicans to support an amendment to boost the dollar amount.

The Democrat-controlled House of Representatives held a Christmas Eve "pro forma" session, normally a brief affair with little business, in an effort to win bipartisan approval to send the revised payments to Trump's desk for signature.



Trump Administration Pushing \$500m Arms Sale to Riyadh

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Donald Trump's administration plans to authorise the sale of nearly \$500m in weapons to Saudi Arabia before the United States president leaves the White House, U.S. media outlets have reported, a move that one expert slammed as "a moral outrage".

Citing two unnamed sources familiar with the issue, Bloomberg reported that the State Department notified Congress on Tuesday that it was moving ahead to issue a licence for the sale of precision-guided, air-to-ground munitions to Riyadh, estimated to be worth \$478m.

U.S. weapons manufacturer Raytheon Technologies Corp will be able to sell the weapons directly to the Saudis when it receives the license, Bloomberg said.

The Washington Post also reported that the weapons would be produced in the Persian Gulf kingdom as per the terms of the deal, which has been in the works since early 2019. The agreement also includes a \$97m internal security communications system, the newspaper said. News of the proposed sale, which Al Jazeera could not independently confirm, came as Trump entered the final weeks of his presidency.

The Republican leader has been a staunch supporter of Saudi Arabia, a longtime U.S. ally, and the country's de facto leader, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, making strong U.S.-Saudi relations a pillar of his administration's Middle East policy.

Trump also personally shielded Crown Prince Mohammed, also known as MBS, from criticism about Saudi Arabia's human rights record, the assassination of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, and the war in Yemen, among other contentious issues.

The war in Yemen began in 2014 when Houthi rebels seized control of large swaths of the country, including the capital, Sanaa.

The conflict escalated in 2015 after Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates assembled a U.S.-backed military coalition in an attempt

to restore the government of Riyadh-backed Yemeni President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi.

U.S. politicians have criticised Trump's unwavering support for Riyadh and, in particular, the administration's continued aid to Saudi-led forces in the war-torn country, which faces a dire humanitarian catastrophe.

Qatar Reports Airspace Violation By Bahraini Fighter Jets to UN

DOHA (Dispatches) - Qatar has reported airspace violations by four Bahraini fighter jets to the United Nations Security Council and the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

In a letter addressed to Security Council members and to the UN's Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, Qatar's ambassador to the UN said Bahraini military aircraft violated Qatar's airspace by flying over the country's territorial waters on December 9, 2020, state-run Qatar News Agency reported.

The letter expressed Qatar's strong condemnation of these actions which it perceived as a violation of its sovereignty and regional security, adding that these violations were blatantly inconsistent with Bahrain's obligations under international law.

These violations are considered an escalation that further raises tensions in the region, the letter said, adding that the incident was not the first of its kind.

Qatar called on Bahrain to halt these "provocative and irresponsible acts", and urged the kingdom to abide by international law and the rulings of the International Court of Justice.

Bahrain, along with Saudi Arabia, the United Arab

Emirates and Egypt, abruptly severed ties with Qatar in June 2017, accusing the country of backing "extremists" among other allegations that Doha strongly denies.

They imposed wide-ranging punitive measures, including banning Qatari planes from their airspace, closing Qatar's only land border with Saudi Arabia and expelling Qatari citizens.

In July this year, the ICJ – set up in 1946 to rule in disputes between UN member states – rejected an appeal by the blockading quartet against a decision by the world civil aviation body in favor of Qatar over sovereign airspace.

In 2018, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) ruled it had the jurisdiction to handle a dispute brought by Qatar, which accused its neighbours of violating a convention that regulates the free passage of its passenger planes through foreign airspace.

But the four allies disagreed, saying the ICAO was not the right body to judge in the dispute and had asked the ICJ to declare the aviation body's ruling "null and void and without effect".

The move comes amid reports that efforts to end the PGCC crisis have proved fruitful and a resolution is imminent.



Pakistan Army Says Soldier Killed by Indian Shelling in Kashmir

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches)

- A Pakistani soldier was killed in border clashes with Indian forces in the disputed Himalayan region of Kashmir on Thursday, Pakistan's military has said.

The soldier was killed in Satwal sector on the Pakistani side of the Line of Control (LoC), the de facto border that divides Kashmir into two parts controlled by Pakistan and India.

"Pakistan's army responded effectively to Indian firing, causing substantial damage to Indian troops and men," said Pakistan's military media wing, the Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR), in a statement.

The incident comes two days after a 50-year-old woman was killed and three people were wounded in the Tatta Pani and Jandrot areas.

Pakistan blamed India for the incident.

Border clashes have increased in recent weeks.

Pakistan accused Indian troops of deliberately opening fire on a United Nations vehicle carrying two observers on the Pakistani side of Kashmir earlier this month.

According to Pakistan's foreign ministry, Indian forces have committed more than 3,000 ceasefire violations this year in which 28 people were killed and more than 250 injured.

Pakistani authorities summoned a senior Indian diplomat at least three times last week to protest against ceasefire violations.

India does not routinely share data on its shelling in Pakistan but also records civilian casualties due to what it describes as shelling from the Pakistani military.

The nuclear-armed South Asian neighbours have already fought two of their three wars over Kashmir, a region both sides claim in full but administer parts of.





Farmanieh (\$2500)
250sq.m, 3bdrs
S/p, Sauna
J, balcony
fireplace
Fully Furn

Shanon (adviser)

Naavaran Villa (\$5000)
1000sq.m
5bdrs, S/p
S, J, balcony
green garden
Fully Furn

Parsian

Apt
Nice view
Gheitarieh
240sq.m, 3bdrs
S/p, S, J, pkg
Large balcony
marble floor
(\$2600)
F.F

Zaferanieh Apt (\$1500)
130sq.m, 2bdrs, S/p, gym, F.F

Jordan Apt (\$1700)
220sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, & F.F

bldg
Farmanieh
Brand new
5storey, 20bdrs
S/pool, S, J, gym
green yard, pkgs
parquet floor
Semi Furn
(\$20000)

(\$1000)
Sa'adat abad
140sq.m, 2bdrs
S/p, S, J, & F.F

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Singapore Posts Record 10 Straight Months of Deflation

SINGAPORE (Reuters) - Singapore's main price gauge contracted for a record tenth consecutive month in November, data showed on Wednesday, with prices down 0.1% from a year earlier.

The falling streak is the longest since 1991, the earliest period when percentage changes on core inflation data became available on the Singapore Department of Statistics website. The Southeast Asian economy's core prices last contracted for nine consecutive months during the 2008-09 financial crisis.



Venezuela Resumes Direct Oil Shipments To China Despite U.S. Sanctions

VARACAS (Reuters) - Venezuela has resumed direct shipments of oil to China after U.S. sanctions sent the trade underground for more than a year, according to Refinitiv Eikon vessel-tracking data and internal documents from state company Petroleos de Venezuela (PDVSA).

Chinese state companies China National Petroleum Corp (CNPC) and its listed subsidiary PetroChina - long among PDVSA's top customers - stopped loading crude and fuel at Venezuelan ports in August 2019 after Washington extended its sanctions on PDVSA to include any companies trading with the Venezuelan state firm.

The imposition of the sanctions was part of a push by the Trump administration to oust Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, but they failed to completely halt the South American nation's oil exports or to loosen Maduro's grip on power.

PDVSA's customers instead boosted shipments to Malaysia, where transfers of cargoes between vessels at sea have allowed most of Venezuela's crude to continue flowing to China after changing hands and using trade intermediaries.

PDVSA and Venezuela's oil ministry did not reply to requests for comment.

A U.S. Treasury Department spokesperson said on Nov. 25 that "those engaged in activity in the Venezuelan oil sector risk exposure to sanctions."

The first tanker to resume transport of Venezuelan crude directly to China was the Kyoto, identified by shipping monitoring service TankerTrackers.com while loading 1.8 million barrels of heavy crude at Venezuela's Jose port in late August.

At least one other tanker, the Warrior King, is discharging Venezuelan crude at China's Bayuquan port, while two vessels listed in shipping database Equasis as being owned by CNPC units loaded oil in Venezuela in November, according to PDVSA's loading schedules and shipping documents, and Refinitiv Eikon data.

Singapore court documents seen by Reuters show shares in the companies that own the two vessels - the Xingye and the Thousand Sunny - were transferred to CNPC units earlier this year.

Following publication of this story, a CNPC spokesman said the two tankers were no longer owned by CNPC at the time of the loading. He provided no further details of the sale of the tankers and Reuters was unable to confirm it independently. The CNPC spokesman said the company and its subsidiaries had suspended oil trading with Venezuela.

The Kyoto, chartered by a company called Wanneng Munay according to an internal PDVSA document, discharged at China's Dalian oil terminal in early November after covering a large portion of its route to Asia in a so-called "dark voyage," with its location transponder offline, Refinitiv Eikon data showed. Wanneng Munay is among a group of more than a dozen Russian-registered companies with no known prior oil trading experience that have emerged as PDVSA customers in recent months.

The emergence of these firms has allowed PDVSA to continue shipping oil to Asian destinations in recent months despite withdrawals by established customers like India's Reliance Industries and Thailand's Tipco after the U.S. Treasury ended their exemptions to sanctions.

Wanneng Munay could not be reached for comment. The company that registered its webpage, Moscow-based OGX Trading, told Reuters in October the firm had not been able to start trade activities as planned due to the coronavirus. Monte Nero Management SA, operator of the Kyoto, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

China to Lower Import Tariff on More Products in High Demand for 2021

BEIJING (Reuters) - China will lower import tariffs on more products in high domestic demand for next year, including medical equipment, raw materials for baby powders, high-tech equipment and some commodities, the finance ministry said.

For 2021, China will implement temporary import tariffs, which are lower than the most-favoured-nation tariffs, on 883 products, up from 859 products taxed at temporary rates in 2020.

The tariff changes are made to satisfy domestic demand and boost the technology development of Chinese industries so that a "great circulation" of the domestic economy would be formed, said the ministry.

Facing hostilities from the United States, Beijing has unveiled a "dual circulation" strategy for the next phase of its economic development, in which it would rely mainly on "domestic circulation" - the internal cycle of production, distribution, and consumption, supported by innovation and upgrades in the economy.

To improve people's livelihood, China will exempt import tariffs on some anti-cancer drugs and raw materials of rare disease drugs, while import duties on artificial heart valves, hearing aids, as well as some raw materials for baby powders, are to be lowered.

Beijing will also lower import duties on parts, raw materials, and industrial equipment used in its new infrastructure and high-technology push, in order to meet domestic demand. Emission-filtering devices for diesel engine vehicles would also see their import rates cut as a result of the government's environmental drive.

Asia's Capital Markets to Focus on Vaccine in 2021

HONG KONG (Reuters) - A coronavirus vaccine trade could emerge in Asia's capital markets in 2021 with dealmakers confident the record-breaking pace of raisings in the past year should be maintained in the new year.

Equity capital markets (ECM) deals in the Asia Pacific region, including Japan, totalled \$439.1 billion in 2020, the highest ever, which accounted for 41% of the world's total of \$1.06 trillion according to Refinitiv data.

The contribution by the Asian region to the global total value of capital raisings was the most since 2010 which advisers attributed to some countries, led by China, emerging from the pandemic faster than the rest of the world.

In Asia, healthcare deals recorded the strongest growth in the past year, up 148.6% in terms of money raised, and bankers believe

the global roll out of the coronavirus vaccine will see the sector dominate the local capitals market again in 2021.

"There is a window of opportunity for COVID-related trades to raise money in 2021," said Selina Cheung, managing director of Asia ECM origination at UBS in Hong Kong.

"We expect to see more health-related and vaccine companies coming to the market in the first half." The pace of capital market activity throughout the year surprised dealmakers who had expected reduced activity until unprecedented liquidity from governments and central banks began flooding the global system.

Almost \$7.5 trillion has been spent by global central banks in 2020 to cushion the economic impacts created by coronavirus, according to the IMF's annual report published in November.

"A lot of people did not expect this level of activity in the market but it's been very welcome and it's been a good boost to the economy as it has injected a lot of capital that has been needed," said Kenneth Ho, Managing Director of ECM at Haitong International.

"The market is driven by liquidity and it should remain in place for a while to come."

Hong Kong will finish 2020 as the world's second most popular IPO venue behind the Nasdaq with 119 deals worth \$31.21 billion, the Refinitiv data showed.

"We see a sizeable pool of companies that have reached a certain scale in their business where they are ready to become public, and we expect investors in 2021 will continue to be open to looking at such companies across different sectors," Credit Suisse's head of ECM for Asia Pacific, Johnson Chui, said in regard to Hong Kong's IPO prospects.

The \$37 billion Ant Group IPO, shelved in November when China announced a new regulatory regime for fintech companies, would have propelled Hong Kong to the top of the global rankings.

Mega deals like Kuaishou Technology, which could raise up to \$5 billion, and JD Logistics which is aiming to raise up to \$2 billion, according to Reuters reports, are being closed watched for the first half of the new year.

Supply Squeeze Won't Ease On Global Stocks and Bonds in 2021

LONDON (Reuters) -An unrelenting squeeze on the supply of global shares and sovereign bonds shows little sign of easing next year, with companies and central banks predicted to be big buyers of these securities in direct competition with investors.

The supply mismatch could help to sustain the decade-long bull run in global equities and also keep bond yields at very low levels.

A string of high-profile initial public offerings, as well as emergency secondary listings, this year raised almost \$1 trillion in new equity, Dealogic data shows.

Yet this flood of new equity issues did not end the supply squeeze on stocks as mergers and private equity deals continued to suck shares out of the market

On bonds meanwhile, government borrowing is at record levels, but much of it is heading straight into central bank bond-buying programs. Central banks now hold around half the sovereign bonds in Britain, the euro zone and Japan.

Many policymakers have recently topped up asset-purchase schemes, so that the crowding-out of private investors from public bond markets looks set to continue.

JPMorgan analyst Nikolaos Panigirtzoglou estimates the net equity demand/supply mismatch next year around \$1.1 trillion.

He expects demand for shares to increase by \$600 billion from this year, while supply drops by \$500 billion as buybacks and private equity-led leveraged buyouts recover further. (LBO).

Buybacks, often blamed for draining equity supply, were constrained this year by regulators and by companies' own capital needs. U.S July-September buybacks were some 42% below year-ago levels, S&P Dow Jones Indices data shows.

But following a recent go-ahead from the Federal Reserve, several big U.S. banks have announced 2021 buybacks.

Vaccines, a consumer spending rebound and low interest rates could "trigger higher enterprise spending. This should lead to an increase in buybacks," S&P/DJI analyst Howard Silverblatt said of the outlook for 2021.

Also, the ranks of equity buyers are being swollen by record numbers of private investors who are taking advantage of abundant stimulus-fuelled liquidity to trade equities via apps such as Robinhood.

These players, who often help to drive wild first-day gains in newly-listed shares, accounted for a quarter of stock market activity this year, versus 10% in 2019, brokerage Citadel Securities estimates.

Asian Business Confidence Gains Steam



SINGAPORE (Reuters) - Asian firms turned most optimistic in the fourth quarter this year, a Thomson Reuters/INSEAD survey showed, as business activity picked up in the region and COVID-19 vaccines started rolling out in Western countries ahead of their Asian launch.

The outlook for Asian companies in the next six months tracked by the Thomson Reuters/INSEAD Asian Business Sentiment Index jumped to 62 this quarter from 53 in the third quarter.

The latest number according to the survey of 101 firms across 11 Asia-Pacific countries was the highest since the fourth quarter of 2019. A reading above 50 indicates a positive outlook.

"There's a sense of optimism going forward," said Antonio Fatas, Singapore-based economics professor at global business school INSEAD.

"Things are getting better but they are getting better with still a dose of uncertainty. The effect of the crisis is very different across sectors," he added, noting the weakness in the transport sector due to curbs on global travel.

Still, more than half the respondents polled flagged persistent cases of the novel coronavirus as well as the possible scarcity of vaccines in parts of the world - at least initially - as their biggest risk.

While the United States and Britain have already started vaccinating their populations, few Asian countries expect to get significant amounts of coronavirus vaccines in coming weeks.

Some Asian countries are still running their own late-stage trials of vaccines, while others are allowing time to check for any side effects in people inoculated elsewhere.

A quarter of the companies in the survey, which was conducted between Dec. 4-18, were most concerned about businesses cutting jobs, which would hurt consumption.

Yet others flagged as their top risks a withdrawal of stimulus by central banks, and newly elected United States President Joe Biden keeping a tough line on China.

U.S. Economy Losing Speed as Year Winds Down

WASHINGTON (Reuters) -The number of Americans filing first-time claims for unemployment benefits unexpectedly fell last week, though remaining elevated as more businesses face restrictions and consumers hunker down amid an explosion of new COVID-19 cases.

The raging pandemic and delays by Congress to approve another rescue package are sapping energy from the economy as the curtain closes down on a brutal year. Other data on Wednesday showed consumer spending dropping in November for the first time since the recovery from the coronavirus recession started in May. Spending was depressed by a plunge in income.

Even housing, the economy's star performer is getting tired, with sales of new single-family homes tumbling to a five-month low in November. The reports followed on the heels of data on Tuesday showing consumer confidence slumping to a four-month low in December.

They bolstered analysts' predictions of a sharp slowdown in growth in the fourth quarter after fiscal stimulus led to a historic surge in gross domestic product in the third quarter. "The economy lost momentum in November," said Chris Low, chief economist at FHN Financial in New York. Initial claims for state unemployment benefits fell 89,000 to a seasonally adjusted 803,000 for the week ended Dec. 19, the Labor Department said.



Economists polled by Reuters had forecast 885,000 applications in the latest week.

Including a government-funded program for the self-employed, gig workers and others who do not qualify for the regular state unemployment programs, 1.3 million people filed claims. There were about 20.4 million people collecting unemployment benefits in early December.

Congress on Monday approved additional fiscal stimulus worth almost \$900 billion, but economists said this was too little and too late. President Donald Trump has threatened not to sign the relief bill because he wants Congress to raise the amount in the stimulus checks to \$2,000 for individuals, instead of the \$600 that is in the legislation.

Faghani, Best 2020 Asian Referee

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iranian referee was chosen as the best Asian referee in 2020.

The International Federation of Football History and Statistics (IFFHS) has announced the selected team for the Asian continent, including the name of a referee.

Alireza Faghani is a veteran referee of Iran's football who has continued his work in Australia in 2020 and has now been selected as the best referee by IFFHS.

Faghani is a 42-year-old Iranian referee who has been active in the international arena for the past two decades.



China-Bound Turkish Export Trains to Rev Up Trade

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkish and Chinese officials on Wednesday said that the bilateral exchange of goods and regional economic cooperation will grow in the coming period after the first freight train carrying goods from Turkey to China completed its historic trip.

The remarks came on the sidelines of a welcoming ceremony for the train that departed Istanbul on Dec. 4 and arrived in Xi'an, the capital city of Shaanxi province in central China, on Saturday.

"We are happy and proud that Turkish goods have reached China, one of the largest markets in the world, in 13 days by railway, following the trail of the historical Silk Road," said Trade Minister Rushar Pekcan, attending the ceremony via video link.

"These trips will increase and continue regularly. And we will make every necessary contribution to this," Pekcan noted.

"This historical journey has gone down in history as a success of Turkey and our exporters and has been an important milestone in our country's export adventure."

Also attending the ceremony, Transport and Infrastructure Minister Adil Karaismailoglu said the export train proved to the world that a new era in rail freight transportation between Europe and Asia has begun, expressing hopes it would be a "strong breath for our new achievements."

"New ones will be added to these achievements exponentially with mutual trips twice a week between the two countries in 2021," Karaismailoglu noted.

The fact that the first export train successfully completed its journey to China "has been the biggest proof that a big dream is now a reality," the minister stressed.

Pekcan added that the train would contribute to a sustainable and balanced development of Turkey-China relations in the coming period.

The first train covered 8,693 kilometers (5,402 miles) as it passed through two continents, two seas and five countries. It traveled across Georgia, Azerbaijan, the Caspian Sea and Kazakhstan to reach Xi'an.

The journey included more than 2,300 kilometers in Turkey, 220 in Georgia, 430 in Azerbaijan, 420 across the Caspian Sea, 3,200 in Kazakhstan and 2,100 in China. The train followed the Middle Corridor Trans Caspian International Transit Route via the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) railway.

A second train also departed late Sunday and passed beneath the Bosphorus through Istanbul's Marmaray tunnel early Monday.

Carrying 1,400 fridges in 42 containers, on Wednesday it passed through the eastern Kars province before it crossed Turkey's border at the Akhalkalaki Station in Georgia.

Pekcan said the export train constituted a beautiful start of railway transport from Turkey to the Far East.



"Together, we are witnessing the revival of the Middle Corridor with rail transport, which we believe will contribute to the enrichment of European and Asian trade with mutual shipments," the minister said.

"I hope that this and our trips that will continue after this will contribute to our country's exports, as well as to mutual trade between Turkey and China and even global trade."

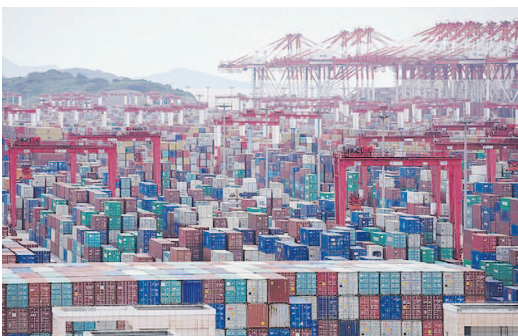
Both Pekcan and Karaismailoglu particularly stressed the importance of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway providing the shortest rail link between Europe and Asia.

The line was established in cooperation between Turkey, Azerbaijan and Georgia within the scope of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which aims to connect Asia, Africa and Europe via roads and sea lanes.

It provides freight and passenger links between Europe and China. It was launched in October 2017.

The line reduces the freight transportation time between China and Turkey from one month to 12 days, while the whole route between the Far East and Western Europe takes 18 days with the integration of the Marmaray tunnel, Karaismailoglu explained.

Global Cargo Logjam Deepens, Delaying Goods Bound For Retailers, Automakers



LOS ANGELES (Reuters) - Amazon seller Bernie Thompson shifted half of his production out of China to reduce his business risks and still found himself in the crosshairs of logistical chaos besetting the movement of goods around the globe.

A surge in demand for furniture, exercise equipment and other goods for shoppers sheltering at home in a worsening COVID-19 pandemic has upended normal trade flows.

That has stranded empty cargo containers in the wrong places, spawning bottlenecks that now stretch from factories to seaports. Container ship operators ferry the majority of consumer goods, and transportation and trade sources warn that prolonged industry disruption could cause shortages and complicate the global economic recovery.

Thompson, founder of Washington-based Plugable Technologies, sells work-from-home staples like laptop docking stations. He diversified sourcing to be less reliant on a single country for manufacturing and less exposed to U.S. tariffs on Chinese goods.

Things did not go as planned and now, like many other importers, he is concerned about keeping enough product in stock. "We've moved production out of China and moved ourselves right into a disadvantage," said Thompson. His new factory in Thailand was first to suffer delays of about four weeks, in part because shipping companies routed empty containers to the top priority U.S.-China trade lane.

Those logistical snags cascaded and now his remaining shipments from China - the world's No. 1 manufacturer - are postponed by as much as three weeks.

And he is not alone - U.S. retailer Costco Wholesale Corp and Honda Motor Co Ltd in the United Kingdom have also suffered delays. "Everyone's trying to squeeze through this narrow opening all at once," said Rick Woldenberg, chief executive of Illinois-based Learning Resources which supplies educational toys to Amazon.com and other major retailers.

It can "really screw up your plans," he said. Container ships have been sailing at full load since August - something that has not happened in a decade, said Peter Sand, chief shipping analyst with trade association BIMCO.

Rolf Habben Jansen, chief executive of Germany's Hapag-Lloyd, told investors that the container line was "deploying every available ship".

Russian Currency, Oil Prices Will Recover in Early 2021

MOSCOW (TASS) - Russia's national currency will continue strengthening following oil prices, experts polled by TASS suggest. They project the oil price to rise to \$55 per barrel in early 2021, whereas the ruble's exchange rate - to 72 rubles per the US dollar.

Despite the recent news about a new strain of the coronavirus, experts expect the global economy to recover in 2021. "That will stir up the demand for risky assets, including the ruble and currencies of other emerging markets," Finam's analyst Andrey Maslov said.

The concerns around 2021 subsided as coronavirus vaccines appeared, VTB Capital's Chief Economist for Russia and the CIS Alexander Isakov said, adding that the downward pressure of the epidemiological environment is of far less relevance today.

The U.S. presidential election also imparted a positive impulse to the market, Head of Tinkoff Investments Premium's department Evgeny Dorofeev added.

Among external factors that will trigger growth, experts mentioned the monetary easing policies of the world's largest central banks. "Amid interest rates close to zero, global institutional investors will be forced to boost investments in riskier instruments to make sure earning yield targets are reached," Maslov noted.

For Russia the risks of intensified sanctions pressure that are partially included in the price of the Russian currency, are rising, Dorofeev also suggests. Maslov believes that this factor is difficult to predict, adding that its share will depend on the foreign policy of the new US administration regarding Russia and the severity of possible sanctions.

As the 'coronacrisis' factor becomes less relevant in 2021, oil demand may be expected to gradually increase as well, "particularly if borders open and the number of passenger flights go up," Chief Analyst at Alfa Capital Maxim Biryukov said.

Apart from existing OPEC+ oil output restrictions, the China's and India's oil demand is growing, Maslov said, noting that



those countries are the world's biggest oil importers.

According to Alfa Capital's base case scenario, the price of Brent crude oil will range between \$50 and \$55 per barrel in early 2021. Finam estimates the possible range at \$47-55 per barrel. Tinkoff Investments Premium expects the Brent oil price at \$50-60 per barrel in the long run.

A negative scenario suggesting long and deep lockdowns in Europe and the US, delays in vaccination may well bring the price of Brent oil to \$40-45 per barrel, Biryukov added.

Maslov even does not rule out a decrease of the Brent price to \$40 within a year in case of local corrections on financial markets. However, a scenario suggesting its decrease below that mark in the first quarter of 2021 is hardly probable, Isakov noted.

In case of economic revival investors will be willing to invest funds in riskier assets, which gives space for strengthening of currencies of emerging markets on the horizon of several months, Dorofeev said.

Russia weaning itself off oil and gas dependency, says Putin. Alfa Capital expects the return of the interest of global investors in Russian assets to contribute to the ruble's strengthening in early 2021 to 67-70 rubles per the US dollar in its base case scenario. A negative scenario will push the dollar up to 78-80 rubles, "which is unlikely without new factors that change the fundamentals dramatically, appearing," Biryukov said.

VTB Capital projects the dollar's exchange rate at 72.5-74 rubles in the first quarter of 2021, and at 74.5-76 rubles in a negative scenario with the oil price of \$40 per barrel. Moreover, in case of the risk premium equal to that in August, the upper bound of the ruble's weakening may total 78 rubles, Isakov added.

According to Finam's projections, in case of realized geopolitical and sanctions risks it is entirely possible that the dollar and the euro will hit their 2020 peaks against the ruble and exceed 80 rubles and 93.3 rubles, respectively.

India...

FROM PAGE 1

India, Iran and Uzbekistan held their first trilateral meeting focused on Chabahar port on December 14 and the people said this body is now expected to meet every three months to push forward the joint use of the strategic trade and transit facility on the Gulf of Oman to enhance regional connectivity.

"Given its extensive presence in Afghanistan, India can play a role in helping to develop the Khaf-Herat rail route and extend it to Uzbekistan. Despite the sanctions and the Covid-19 pandemic, the Khaf-Herat line was opened and it will help boost landlocked Afghanistan," the person cited above said. In May 2016, India Ports Global and Iran's Aria Banader Iranian Port and Marine Services Company signed a deal to equip and operate the Shahid Beheshti terminal at Chabahar port, with a capital investment of \$85.21 million and annual revenue expenditure of \$22.95 million, on a 10-year lease.

Collapse...

FROM PAGE 1

One should take this point into consideration that the U.S. Administration has suffered heavy blows in several occasions and has lost many of its classified documents and secrets of its state-of-the-art technologies but in none of the previous occasion it had been involved with such a structural confusion.

The biggest hacking action that one can see its result openly is the manufacture of the fifth generation of fighter jets by China that by employing the confidential designing knowhow and technologies of the U.S. F-35 and F-36 in less than three years bore fruit, and the Chinese unveiled and flew their fighter jets before the Americans unveiled their F-35s.

Although data and information about the military technology is of great importance, the biggest concern of the Americans is not limited merely to the military technology and hacking some parts of air systems information but this concern is about the more strategic dimensions which will have more perils in the longtime. Let's have a look back at what one of the American news agencies, the Associated Press, has covered on this issue recklessly, "Could Hackers Have Obtained Nuclear Secrets? COVID-19 Vaccine data? Blueprints for Next-Generation Weapons Systems?"

This type of speculations by the media is stated while it shows itself that these media outlets do not have actually any certain achievement and the amount of their information is very little and it is mostly speculations because if they had had anything special, they would not have passed it very easily and they would go for exposing the elements and currents, and would take the issue into the political scene.

In this complicated case, probably it may take several weeks, several months or even more time for experts of the digital sleuths combing through U.S. government and private industry networks to get the answers that show the infiltration holes and methods of hacking. Experts say these hackers are consummate pros at covering their tracks. What's seems clear is that this campaign — which cybersecurity experts says exhibits the tactics and techniques of Russia's SVR foreign intelligence agency — will rank among the most prolific in the annals of cyberespionage.

However Americans should be asked, with taking into consideration of the past experience of their sophisticated drone being hacked and being landed on the land of the Islamic Republic of Iran, how they have dared to dispatch their nuclear submarine to the Persian Gulf and they have not feared the route of it towards northern coasts is not been traced.

It seems the aim behind hacking systems in different organizations in the U.S. from the Treasury Department and industries to the intelligence agencies is to wear out and to disappoint the American systems of getting the gesture of being a super power and to accept the federative collapse that fortunately by the U.S. refrain from retreating its political stand and insistence on its false ambition of being a super power, it itself foments more the materialization of hackers'

CBI...

FROM PAGE 1

The chief banker said that the CBI would pursue the case "relentlessly" until the payment is finalized.

The announcement came a day after Iranian President Hassan Rouhani dismissed unconfirmed reports suggesting that Iran may fail to make payments needed to obtain supplies of vaccines to battle COVID-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus.

Rouhani said Iran would take delivery of abundant supplies of the vaccine from abroad while it pursues plans for manufacturing an effective and safe version of the vaccine at home. Hemmati said Iranians should rest assured that the purchase and import of the COVID-19 vaccines would be carried out as soon as possible.

He said that the CBI would also continue its efforts to earmark hard currency needed by domestic pharma companies to set up manufacturing facilities for a home-made version of the vaccine.

Iran Foreign Trade...

FROM PAGE 1

He added that Iran's exports destinations in the said timespan included China with imports of 20.6 million tons (\$6.4 billion), Iraq with imports of 20.8 million (\$5.9 billion), the UAE with imports of 11.4 million tons (\$3.3 billion), Turkey with 5.4 million tons (\$1.8 billion) and Afghanistan with 1.8 million tons of imports (\$1.7 billion). In the said time, Iran imported 25 million tons of goods worth 26.8 billion, while the figures registered one percent and 16 percent decrease, respectively, he said.

Iran has been a customer of China, the UAE, Turkey, India, and Germany in this period, Mirashrafi added.



Chinese Star Swimmer Doping Ban Overturned

GENEVA (Dispatches) - Chinese swimmer and triple Olympic champion Sun Yang won a huge victory seven months before the Tokyo Olympics with Switzerland's top court overturning an eight-year doping ban.

The 29-year-old -- the first Chinese swimmer to win Olympic gold -- will now have a chance to state his case again at a second hearing by the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS), based in the Swiss city of Lausanne, before the Tokyo games next year.

LICENCE HOLDER: SOKHAN GOSTAR INSTITUTE

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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Blvd., Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran
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Trippier Hit With 10 Week Ban for Betting Breaches

LONDON (Dispatches) - England international Kieran Trippier has been banned for 10 weeks and fined £70,000 (\$94,000) for breaching betting rules, the Football Association (FA) announced.

The 30-year-old Atletico Madrid defender's worldwide ban from all football and football-related activity will run until February 28. Trippier's ban takes force with immediate effect.

The former Tottenham Hotspur star -- who was one of England's standout performers in their run to the 2018 World Cup semi-finals -- denied the seven charges.

8 IRAN NEWS

SPORTS

SATURDAY DECEMBER 26, 2020

Man Utd and Spurs Move Into League Cup Semis

LONDON (Dispatches) - Manchester United left it late to book their place in the League Cup semi-finals with a dramatic 2-0 win at Everton, while Tottenham joined them in the last four after beating Stoke 3-1 on Wednesday.

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's side dominated for long periods of their quarter-final at Goodison Park, but it took until the 88th minute before Edinson Cavani broke the deadlock.

The former Paris Saint-Germain striker's fourth goal for United since joining on a free transfer in October came at the same venue where he opened his account for the club last month.

Anthony Martial bagged United's second goal in stoppage time.

After a rocky period that raised questions about Solskjaer's future following their exit from the Champions League, United have recovered their equilibrium.

They are third in the Premier League and have won their last three matches in all competitions.

United last lifted silverware when they won the Europa League in 2017 and Solskjaer says they are "desperate" to end that barren run.

The Norwegian, who won nine major trophies as a player with United, took charge at Old Trafford in 2018 and saw his side lose in three semi-finals last term.

He now has a chance to go one better this season after United joined holders Manchester City, Tottenham and second-tier Brentford in the League Cup semi-finals.

Everton made only three changes from the 2-1 win over Arsenal, with Dominic Calvert-Lewin and Richarlison both starting in attack.

In contrast, Harry Maguire and Bruno Fernandes were the only United players to retain their places after the 6-2 rout of Leeds at the weekend, with Paul Pogba returning to the starting line-up.

But it was United who dominated and Robin Olsen kept out Cavani's close-range effort before Mason Greenwood's header clipped the far post.

Solskjaer sent on Marcus Rashford and Martial in the second half and it proved an inspired move.

With just two minutes left before a



penalty shoot-out, Martial slipped a pass to Cavani, who drove a superb strike past Olsen from the edge of the area.

Martial then slotted home with virtually the last kick after Everton were caught throwing too many players forward.

Jose Mourinho accused Tottenham midfielder Dele Alli of creating "problems" for his own team during their win against Stoke

Wales forward Gareth Bale made the most of a rare start to put Mourinho's team ahead at the Bet365 Stadium.

But Alli was at fault when his flamboyant flick was intercepted in the build-up to Jordan Thompson's equaliser for Stoke.

Alli's latest mistake drew an angry response on the touchline from Mourinho, who rebuked the star before substituting him minutes later.

Ben Davies put Tottenham back in front with his first goal since 2017 before England captain Harry Kane sealed Spurs' place in the semi-finals.

But it was Alli's public dressing-down that took the spotlight, with the England international's wretched season hitting a new low in his first start since November 26.

Mourinho made it clear the 24-year-old had to take the blame for his latest blunder.

"Yes, for me a player that plays in that position is a player that has to link and create and not to create problems for his own team," said Mourinho.

Manchester United will face bitter rivals Manchester City in the League Cup semi-finals after a dramatic win at Everton while Tottenham will host Brentford in the semifinal.

Maradona Suffered From Liver, Kidney Heart Disorders

Buenos Aires (Dispatches) - Argentina football legend Diego Maradona was suffering from liver, kidney and cardiovascular disorders but there were no signs of alcohol or narcotics consumption in his autopsy, the public prosecutor said.

World Cup winning captain from Mexico '86, Maradona died of a heart-attack on November 25 at the age of 60.

The public prosecutor in San Isidro, a northern suburb of the capital Buenos Aires, published the results of Maradona's autopsy late on Tuesday night.

It was ordered as part of an investigation into his death to see if there was any negligence or recklessness in the health care he was provided.

At the end of his life he was suffering from a variety of illnesses including cirrhosis, heart disease and kidney failure.

The toxicology analysis showed there was no alcohol or narcotics in his blood or urine but Maradona was taking anti-depressants, an anti-psychotic drug and various other medication to treat ulcers, convulsions, dependencies and difficulties in expelling waste. Maradona had battled cocaine and alcohol addictions during his life.

Celtics Edge Bucks to Open NBA Season

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Boston Forward Jayson Tatum banked in a game-winning three pointer over Giannis Antetokounmpo with 1.5 seconds left to give the Celtics an 122-121 NBA season-opening victory over the Milwaukee Bucks.

Antetokounmpo, the two-time defending NBA Most Valuable Player, had a chance to tie it from the free-throw line with four-tenths of a second left, but the Greek superstar missed his second free throw after being fouled at the rim and the Celtics came away with the win on their home floor.

"Ever since I was a kid I wanted to be in that position," Tatum said of stepping up despite a relatively poor shooting night.

He finished with 30 points but connected on just 12 of 28 shots from the floor.

"I don't know what my field goal percentage was, but I know I played terrible," said Tatum, who also pulled down seven rebounds and handed out two assists. "But it's a team game. Everybody contributed. It's the first one of the season, so it felt good to get a win."

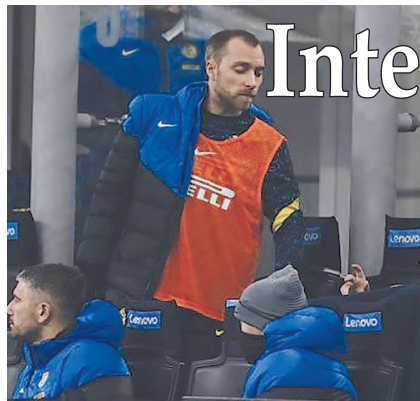
Jaylen Brown led the Celtics with 33 points, five rebounds and four assists

Antetokounmpo, who last week signed a five-year contract extension reportedly worth a record \$228 million, led Milwaukee with 35 points, 13 rebounds, two assists and two blocked shots.

Khristian Middleton added 27 points and 14 rebounds for the Bucks, who finished the 2019-20 regular season with the best record in the NBA but fell to the Miami Heat in the Eastern Conference semi-finals.

The nail-biter in Boston was one of a dozen games on the second night of the 2020-21 season. It was supposed to be 13, but Houston's home opener against the Oklahoma City Thunder was postponed as Covid-19 concerns -- including James Harden's violation of anti-virus protocols that cost the superstar a \$50,000 fine -- left the Rockets with less than the required eight players available to stage the game.

Harden was ineligible after the league found he attended a party on Monday in violation of protocols prohibiting players from attending indoor gatherings of more than 15 people.



Inter Confirm Eriksen on Transfer List

MILAN (Dispatches) - Christian Eriksen could have played his last match for Inter Milan, with club CEO Giuseppe Marotta confirming Wednesday the Danish midfielder was on the transfer list.

The former Tottenham midfielder missed Inter's final game before Christmas at Verona on Wednesday, with Italian media reporting he had returned to Denmark to be with his wife who is due to give birth to their second child.

"Eriksen is among the transfers," Marotta told Sky Sport before the game.

"It's not a punishment but he has struggled to settle into the squad... so it is right to give him the opportunity to find more space elsewhere."

The Danish international arrived from Spurs on four-and-a-half-year deal in January for a reported fee of 27.5 million euros (\$32.6 million) including bonuses.

But the 28-year-old has scored just four goals in 38 appearances.

This campaign he has not played an entire match in 12 games -- eight in the league and four in the Champions League -- and not scored or set up a goal.

He has been linked with moves to French champions Paris Saint-Germain, or a return to the Premier League with Arsenal or Manchester United.

Messi's Record Untouchable

LONDON (Dispatches) - Lionel Messi's all-time goalscoring record for one club will never be broken, former England and Barcelona forward Gary Lineker has predicted.

Messi beat Pele's record of 643 goals for one club when he scored Barcelona's third goal, and the 644th of his Barca career, in the 3-0 win against Valladolid on Tuesday.

Records are there to be broken, as Messi has proved, but Lineker says this one is untouchable. "To beat Messi's 644 goal record, someone will have to score an average of 43 goals a season for 15 years....for one club," Lineker, now a BBC presenter, tweeted alongside an incredulous icon.

"This is a record that no one thought would ever be beaten. It will never be beaten again."

The 33-year-old Argentina star rewrote the history books on Tuesday when he collected Pedri's neat backheel and struck the ball past goalkeeper Jordi Masip in the 65th minute.

Messi scored his first goal for Barca in 2005. His has beaten the total Pele amassed for Brazilian club Santos from 1956 to 1974. "When I started playing football I never thought I would break any records. And even less the one I achieved today," Messi posted on Instagram.

"I can only thank all those who helped me over the years, my teammates, my family, my friends and all those who support me every day."

Messi's latest career landmark comes in the wake of his failed pre-season bid to quit Barca after they were thrashed 8-2 by eventual winners Bayern Munich in the Champions League quarter-finals.

That showdown between the club and the six-time Ballon d'Or winner has been put to one side as he continues to excel on the pitch, although he said in an interview this week that he had had a "very bad time" this summer. "I see Messi happy. He is working hard, and he is a very important part of our attacking game," said Barca coach Ronald Koeman after Tuesday's win.

Messi now has his sights on Pele's record for most international goals by a South American. He has 71 compared to Pele's 77 for Brazil. Unlike Pele though, he is yet to win a World Cup. Messi's Argentina side lost to Germany in the 2014 World Cup final.



Federer, Serena Among Entries for Australian Open

LONDON (Dispatches) - Roger Federer and Serena Williams were among the entries announced Thursday for the coronavirus-disrupted Australian Open, with tournament director Craig Tiley vowing a "happy Slam" after months of painstaking planning.

All the world's top players have signed on, led by world number ones Novak Djokovic and Ashleigh Barty. There was a question mark over Swiss great Federer, who warned this month he was in a "race against time" to be fit after two rounds of knee surgery.

But he has begun training in Dubai and was among those entered to play at Melbourne Park as he targets a seventh title.

U.S. superstar Williams, who like Federer turns 40 next year, is also committed as she once again attempts to pull level with Margaret Court as a 24-time Grand Slam champion. Her last triumph at the majors came in Australia in 2017 when she was pregnant.

"There are so many great storylines for AO 2021," said Tiley.

"Serena is gunning for her eighth title while Novak, who often seems invincible at Melbourne Park, is going for a record ninth title."

"Our own world No.1 Ash Barty will return to Grand Slam competition, as will Roger Federer as he comes back from injury."

The opening Grand Slam of the year, which will be played in front of at least 50 percent of normal crowds, has been pushed back three weeks until February 8.

All players must undergo a mandatory 14-day quarantine on arrival, during which they will constantly be tested for Covid-19 but allowed to train for five hours a day in a bio-secure bubble. "Although the AO will look a bit different to previous years, the safety of everyone is our top priority," said Tiley.

"We have the opportunity to stage a very safe, and happy Slam, and give the players the experience of competing in front of crowds again, something they've missed for most of this year."

