

Iran Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Denounces 'Lady of Heaven' Film, Produced by the UK-Backed Pseudo-Shia Groups, as a West's Plot to Sow Discord Among Muslim World

IRAN NEWS

Iran's Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian Is Reportedly Expected to Visit Baghdad Next Tuesday as Iraqi Officials Will Likely Seek Convincing Him to Extend the Deadline on Payments

VOL. XXVI, No. 7128 TEHRAN Price 40,000 Rials

www.irannewsdaily.com

MONDAY DECEMBER 28, 2020 - DEY 8, 1399

2

DOMESTIC

Gov't to Buy COVID-19 Vaccines in Current Month



> SEE PAGE 2

3

DOMESTIC

Iran Petchems Revenues Hit \$110b in 7 Years



> SEE PAGE 3

4

INTERNATIONAL

COVID-19 Pandemic Will Not Be the Last



> SEE PAGE 4

8

SPORTS

Arsenal Beat Chelsea, Man Utd Denied by Leicester



> SEE PAGE 8

No Trace of British Virus in Iran

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Health Minister Saeed Namaki said that no case of the faster-spreading strain of COVID-19 has been reported in the country, expressing pleasure with the decreasing number of coronavirus patients in Iran.

"We have never seen any trace of the mutated British virus in Iran, but the viruses can spread rapidly in all countries and the only solution is the practice of social distancing and we should take care," Namaki said on Sunday.

He also added that the country's conditions considering the number of new coronavirus patients is improving, noting that the number of people who have passed away of COVID-19 virus infection in the past few days has also reduced.

Namaki said no Iranian region is now labeled Red in terms of the outbreak, adding that 108 cities and towns are marked orange and 340 others are in the status of alert (yellow).

He added that the rate of coronavirus infections and deaths in the country has decreased, with near zero new fatalities and infections in some provinces.

See Page 7

Gov't Seeks at Least 2.3m bpd Oil Output

TEHRAN (IRNA) - President Hassan Rouhani announced here on Sunday that the government not only pursues daily production of 2.3 million barrels of oil but also expects the Ministry of Petroleum to prepare the ground for rising the volume even further.

All international and domestic capacities should be used to help Iran fulfill its rightful market, President Rouhani said at an economic session held in Tehran this morning.

Speaking about the U.S. economic war against Iran, the President said next year's budget bill the government presented to the Parliament focuses on the ways experiences gained during the fight against the economic war and the sanctions can be manipulated.

Those experiences will help nullify the sanctions, make the pressures ineffective, improve welfare and remove obstacles on production, the President added.

Next year's budget bill is coherent, wise, definite and target-oriented, he underlined, noting that the approval of the bill will prove the government's determination to solve the problems.

See Page 7

Foreign Companies Signaled Positive Pulses on the U.S. Return to JCPOA



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Head of Iran's National Petrochemical Company (NPC) Behzad Mohammadi says major foreign companies have signaled positive pulses regarding the U.S.'s probable return to the JCPOA, saying the petrochemical industry will see more projects to come on stream this year.

Speaking in a press conference on the National Petrochemical Industry Day, Mohammadi said that 17 projects with the investment of \$11b will come on stream by the end of the current Iranian calendar year, adding that so far 9 projects have been inaugurated and the remaining eight projects will be inaugurated by the yearend. He noted that by inauguration of the remaining projects, 25m tons will be added to the capacity of the industry and it will increase to 90m tons per year. He admitted that due to the coronavirus pandemic there has been some delay and one or two projects may be inaugurated next year.

He said petrochemical industry is strengthening its position in the country as the industry number one and it is also strengthening its position in the national economy more and more. He noted the valuable achievements of this industry indicate the ineffectiveness of the imposed sanctions against its companies and managers.

Mohammadi pointed to the production sector in the petrochemical industry, saying that the number of production complexes was 55 last year and currently it is 64 complexes and it will reach 70 by implementation of the new projects.

He said almost 30 percent of the petrochemical projects are consumed in the country and 70 percent are exported to different countries.

He referred to the diversity of products, saying that currently 90 types of petrochemical products are produced in the country as 18 are polymeric and they are produced in 333 grades.

On the probability of the U.S. return to the nuclear deal with Iran, the JCPOA, and effects of it on the development of petrochemical industry and rise in the exports, he said this change would help the country in the fields of transfer of technology and above all attraction of foreign investment between 80 to 180 billion dollars, noting that foreign investment can definitely boost the industry.

Mohammadi added that currently they have not started talks with any foreign company but they have received positive pulses from some major foreign companies on the possible return of the U.S. to the JCPOA.

Iraqis Condemn U.S. Assassinating of Anti-Terror Commanders

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) - A group of Iraqi people have held a rally in Baghdad to condemn the U.S. assassination of anti-terror commander Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani and his top Iraqi comrade Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis ahead of the first anniversary of the drone strike.

The Saturday rally, which was held in Baghdad's Tahrir Square, was attended by dozens of Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), better known as Hashd al-Sha'abi, and their supporters.

Iraq's Shafaq News reported that military vehicles and ambulances were accompanying the demonstrators in support for their protest.

The Iraqi police also closed all the streets leading to the place where protesters from various parts of the capital had gathered together.

U.S. terrorists assassinated IRGC Quds Force Commander General Soleimani and PMU Deputy Commander Muhandis along with their companions, by targeting their vehicles outside the Baghdad airport on January 3.

The act of terror was carried out under the direction of the outgoing White House occupant, with the US Defense Department, the Pentagon, taking responsibility for the strike.

Both distinguished commanders were viewed by the world's freedom-seeking people as the key figures in defeating Daesh, the world's most notorious terrorist group, in the Middle East battles.

Several million people attended the funeral processions held for the commanders in the Iraqi cities of Kadhimiya, Baghdad, Karbala and Najaf as well as the Iranian cities of Ahvaz, Mashhad, Tehran, Qom and Kerman.

The U.S. assassination of General Soleimani and Muhandis drew a wave of condemnation from officials and movements across the world, and triggered furious public protests in denunciation of the heinous act.

The IRGC fired volleys of ballistic missiles at two US bases in Iraq on January 8. According to the US Defense Department, more than 100 American forces suffered "traumatic brain injuries" during the counterstrikes. The Corps, however, says Washington uses the term to mask the number of the Americans, who perished during the retaliation.

ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian



China Waiting for Iran's 2021 Presidential Election

The climate of region in the past century has not been like today so apt in favor of China for investment. The Chinese have invested billions of yuans in southern Pakistan and they have found the climate for investment so conducive than ever. The MoU on cooperation and \$400b investment with Iran in the hands of Chinese are waiting for a sustainable political climate in Iran.

The Chinese have pinned their hopes on the 2021 presidential election in Iran for political and economic stability in the country. The U.S. Administration can scream loudly over this event. It makes no difference whether Trump Administration screams or Biden's Administration is forced to do it.

The U.S. after three years of steadily declining during the Donald Trump's Administration has sharply deteriorated in 2020. Beijing and Washington have traded blame over the coronavirus pandemic and remained locked in an endless trade war, competed over 5G networks and other technologies, and clashed over rights abuses in Xinjiang and Hong Kong (among other issues).

The U.S. Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) in an article published in its website said, "U.S. President-Elect Joe Biden will have to grapple with all these challenges from day one in office. In this roundup, CFR experts look back on significant moments over the past year that will have lasting implications for the relationship and offer their analysis on what to expect under Biden. In the weeks following the U.S. presidential election, administration officials have undertaken a flurry of activities related to Tibet, Taiwan, financial decoupling, and the South China Sea, adding to the vast edifice of initiatives they have constructed over the past four years."

The website continued, "While it may appear as though these last-minute actions will make it more difficult for the incoming Biden administration, the opposite is true. The more policies the Trump administration piles on, the greater the leverage and range of options it leaves for the Biden team. The Biden administration will have the luxury of deciding how much to retain of what the Trump team has built. Some decisions, such as whether to maintain tariffs on \$370 billion worth of Chinese goods, will be challenging. The tariffs have hurt the U.S. economy, but they have also given the United States economic leverage. Other moves, including reviving the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue with Australia, India, and Japan; elevating the U.S.-Taiwan relationship; and sanctioning officials and companies suspected of human rights abuses in Xinjiang, are likely here to stay."

See Page 7

Iran One-Month Trade Touches at \$7.3b

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran has had some \$7.3 billion worth of trade with different world countries over the past Iranian calendar month of Azar (ended on Dec 20), according to Rouhollah Latifi, the spokesman of Iran's Customs Administration.

Latifi said that Iran's exports accounted for some \$3.6 billion of the amount, while the rest \$3.7 billion were Iran's imports from other countries.

Iran's trade in the month of Azar shows a 17% growth in comparison to the preceding month with a 1.6-billion-dollar increase, he said.

Iran's trade used to stand at \$6.3 million a month earlier when the country exported some \$3.2 billion of commodities and imported nearly \$3.1 billion to its trade partners, the official added.

China, Iraq, the UAE, Turkey, and Afghanistan were respectively the top five destinations for Iranian commodities over the one-month period, Latifi said.

He also said that China, the UAE, Turkey, India, and Germany were respectively the top five countries that exported commodities to Iran during the period under study.

See Page 7



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Media Hype on Afghan Nationals Dismissed

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Ministry of Intelligence in a statement on Saturday rejected false news against Afghan nationals as media hype.

Pointing to the spread of some fake news and rumors against Afghan nationals on social media and cyberspace, warning and creating fear for the Afghan nationals in the society, the information center of the Intelligence Ministry announced in a statement that the publication of such news by the Ministry of Intelligence is not correct.

The statement emphasized that the only authentic information of the ministry's news is the Center for Public Relations and Information of the Intelligence Ministry.

Gov't to Buy COVID-19 Vaccines in Current Month

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran has planned to buy COVID-19 vaccines in the current Iranian month in parallel with manufacturing domestic vaccines, Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli said.

Rahmani Fazli made the remarks in a program broadcasted by Iranian television on Saturday night.

He said that President Hassan Rouhani has stressed the need for buying vaccines from abroad before the domestic versions are manufactured.

Mostafa Ghanei, the official with COVID-19 national task force said earlier that the Iranian vaccine is most probably to be available by early summer.

Elderly people as well as those with underlying diseases, which are estimated to be 1.8 million people, have been prioritized as the first group to be vaccinated, Rahmani Fazli said.

The second group of people that have to be vaccinated are health workers and others who have the most contact with infected people, the minister added.

He touched upon the upcoming presidential elections due for late spring and said that creating atmosphere for competitive election is the most important factor contributing to the participation of people.



The minister said that the coronavirus pandemic has put impacts on preparatory works for the procedure of the elections, citing the need to observe social distancing at the polling stations.

"I have no concern about the process of voting as we can create a better condition by prolonging the voting hours and increasing the number of ballot boxes," Rahmani Fazli said.

"We are not sure whether or not to allow organizing rallies for election campaign," he said, however, underlining the role of television and virtual space in the course of the election campaign.

Budget Bill Needs Major Amendment

TEHRAN (IP) – Majlis Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf says the budget bill needs major amendment as the budget operating deficit has grown by 117 percent over the previous year, while expenditure has grown by 47 percent and revenues by about 10 percent.

Speaking at an open session of the Islamic Consultative Assembly on Sunday, Qalibaf said that the most important issue these days is reviewing next year's budget bill.

The budget is the most important annual governing document of the country, in which both macro and basic economic orientations are reflected, and it has a tangible impact on the lives of the people, he added.

He stated that the dependence of the budget on oil should be reduced to zero, saying that oil resources should not be spent on the country's current expenditures.

The drivers that boost production and employment must come from this source, and the government must create sustainable resources that do not harm people's livelihoods, businesses, or the country's production, he pointed.

The speaker of the parliament referred to the coronavirus outbreak and stressed that the parliament's main priority is on the health of the people and the elimination of problems and limitations.

Qalibaf assured the people that the parliament will cooperate with the government to finance the production of domestic vaccines and the purchase and import of foreign vaccines.

MPs Condemn U.S. Blacklisting of Al-Mustafa University

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Lawmakers in the Iranian parliament have denounced illegal US sanctions against Al-Mustafa International University, a religious studies institution based in the holy city of Qom.

In a statement issued on Sunday, more than 175 MPs condemned the designation of the university as a target of the U.S. Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC).

The Treasury announced the blacklisting earlier this month, claiming that Al-Mustafa University's foreign branches were being used as "a recruitment platform" by the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) for intelligence gathering and operations.

The Iranian lawmakers said, "Those fighting against science and the opponents of humankind's transcendence have once again revealed their true face. This time, they have targeted with their blind sanctions a great institution such as Al-Mustafa University, which is one of the most prestigious international educational

institutions concerned with promoting science and spirituality in the world."

"This measure is undoubtedly a sign of the helplessness and despair of the arrogant US government in the face of the Iranian nation's scientific and cultural progress," they added.

"The revolutionary parliament considers the unwise boycott of the scientific center an immoral and illegitimate act contrary to all international standards, strongly condemns it, and declares its firm support for the glorious institution."

On December 10, the university said the US sanctions against it "only signify antagonism towards science."

It stressed that its graduates are known across the globe as promoters of rationality and moderation, and its scientific publications are aimed at spreading peace, friendship, and fraternity among nations.

It further held Washington responsible for creating terrorist outfits such as Daesh and providing support for reactionary regional regimes.

Iran Updates List of Americans Involved in Assassination of Gen. Soleimani

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – The Iranian Judiciary has added new names to the list of American individuals involved in the January assassination of top commander Lt. General Qassem Soleimani to 48, an official said.

The Judiciary has stepped up efforts to prosecute the Americans who ordered and perpetrated the assassination of General Soleimani, the spokesperson for a popular committee on marking the first anniversary of martyrdom of the Iranian commander said on Sunday. According to Hossein Amir Abdollahian, the number of the main elements accused of complicity in the U.S. assassination of the top commander has increased from 45 to 48.

He said six countries have been given warrants from Iran's Judiciary so far for the arrest of the culprits.

The former deputy foreign minister also noted that a harsh revenge for the assassination of General Soleimani has been put on the Islamic Republic's agenda.

Iran's Judiciary announced in November that it has formed a committee to chase and track down those accused of complicity in the US assassination of the popular general.

The U.S. assassinated General Soleimani, the commander of the Quds Force of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), along with Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, deputy head of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) or Hashd al-Shaabi, and their companions by targeting their vehicles outside Baghdad International Airport on January 3.

No Hostile Flying Object Able to Penetrate Iranian Sky

TEHRAN (FNA) - Deputy Commander of Iran's Khatam al-Anbia Air Defense Base General Mohammad Yousefi Khoshqalb underlined the country's advanced integrated air defense systems, saying that no enemy flying object can open its way into Iranian skies successfully.

"Along with all tools and equipment, we have a fully mechanized and very extensive surveillance and monitoring network, which we use extensively both along the borderlines and inside the country as well as around the defense points, and we can seriously say that the country's airspace is insecure for enemy's missiles, guided

bombs, fighters and stealth and spy drones," General Khoshqalb said.

He added that the integrated air defense system has not allowed any hostile flying object to penetrate into Iran, noting that all points of the country are equipped with multi-layered active or passive monitoring and tracking systems.

Elsewhere, General Khoshqalb referred to the capabilities of Iran's home-made Bavar 373 missile system, saying that in the recent drills of the Iranian Armed Forces, the missile shield could successfully track, intercept and destroy the hypothetical enemy's electro-optic-guided target with a low radar cross section with first missile fire.

Iran Strongly Warns Israel Against Any Aggression

TEHRAN (IP) - In a stark warning to Israel, Tehran said that it would give a strong and massive response to any Israeli aggression against Iran's national interests.

"Israel must know that our response to aggression against our national security will be strong and massive," an Iranian official said on Saturday afternoon.

"Israel is looking for excuses to drag the region into a tension that creates chaos in the last days of the Trump presidency," the official told Aljazeera. An Israel Army spokesman told a Saudi newspaper on Friday that Israeli submarines were quietly operating everywhere.

The Iranian warning came against a backdrop of heightened tensions between Iran and Israel and the United States, just a few days before the first martyrdom anniversary of Iran's top military official Qassem Soleimani, who was assassinated in an American drone strike near Baghdad airport on January 3, 2020 while visiting Iraq.

5m COVID-19 Test Kits Produced Monthly

TEHRAN (MNA) – Five Iranian knowledge-based companies are making their best efforts to produce 5 million COVID-19 test kits monthly.

The Secretary of Biotechnology Development Headquarters of the Vice-Presidency for Science and Technology Mostafa Ghanei said that Iranian companies have been producing coronavirus related medicine since the beginning of the pandemic.

He went on to say that knowledge-based companies are capable of producing 5 million COVID-19 test kits monthly.

Ghanei had already stated that the Islamic Republic of Iran has stood at the first rank in West Asia in terms of biotechnology and vaccine production and is among the top five producers of biotechnology products in Asia.

Production of face masks, alcohol-based disinfectants, ventilators, relevant medicines to reduce adverse effects and pulmonary inflammations are of the products that were produced at the initiative taken by the Headquarters in this period.

Search Starts for 7 Missing Crews of Landing Craft Capsized in PG

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iranian maritime authorities say they have launched a search operation for seven crew members of a landing craft vessel that capsized in the Persian Gulf on Friday.

An official at the local department of the Ports and Maritime Organization of Iran in the southern Iranian province of Hormozgan said on Saturday that the capsized vessel had been discovered earlier in the day in a location 25 miles (42.2 kilometers) southeast of Larak Island in the Strait of Hormuz.

"Given the unfavorable weather conditions and the darkness, the maritime rescue operation started today 26 December with more quality and quantity," said Esmail Makizadeh.

Makizadeh would not elaborate on the causes of the incident. He said that passing vessels and rescue forces from neighboring countries had been informed about the seven missing sailors. The official said the landing craft relayed a distress signal on Friday evening indicating that it had started taking on water.

A lifeguard boat was dispatched from the Iranian island of Qeshm to provide help but it took until Saturday afternoon to locate the overturned vessel, he said.

A later report by the IRIB News said that the landing craft vessel was carrying road construction equipment from the United Arab Emirates to Iran's southern port of Bandar Abbas when it capsized. The report quoted Makizadeh as saying that one of the sailors of the vessel was Indian.

Larak is a small island located 10 kilometers to the southeast of Qeshm. The IRIB News report said Iran's meteorological organization and local officials had issued special shipping forecasts to warn about bad weather conditions in the region on Friday.

Asian Anti-Drugs Body Lauds Iran's Fight Against Narcotics



TEHRAN (IFP) - The Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Centre for Combating Illicit Trafficking of Narcotic Drugs, Psychotropic Substances and their Precursors (CARICC) has praised Iran for its fight against illicit drugs and its heavy contribution to the capabilities of the center.

In a meeting with Iranian Consul General in Kazakhstan Mohsen Faghani in Almaty, CARICC Director Rustam Miralizoda further underlined the need to promote bilateral and regional cooperation in the war on drugs.

He noted more than 950 tons of narcotics were seized by Iranian police last year, and that fighting the global scourge of narco-trafficking requires collective cooperation and efforts by the international community.

Miralizoda then touched upon the history of the establishment of the CARICC.

"This institution was set up in 2007 by Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and the Azerbaijan Republic, with its Secretariat located in Almaty," said the CARICC director.

He said several other countries also have observer seats at the center.

The CARICC chief said member states coordinate their efforts in the fight against narcotics in the region, facilitate cooperation among them to prevent the transit of illicit drugs through those countries, devise mechanism for collaboration among officials of member states, contribute to and run joint international efforts in that regard, and exchange and analyze relevant intelligence and information on fighting narcotics.

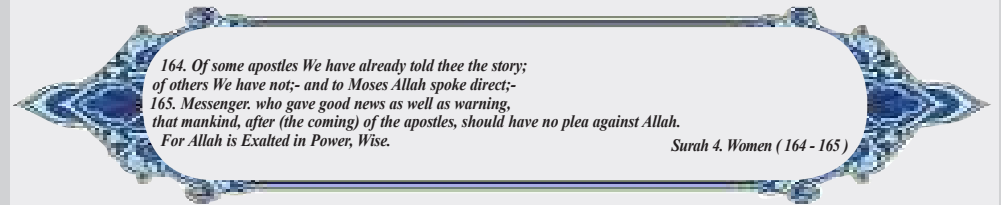
He further congratulated Iran on having joined the center, and said Iran's membership will considerably boost the CARICC's potentialities and capabilities.

The Iranian official, in turn, underlined the need for cooperation among regional and international institution in the war on drugs, saying the cooperation of institutions such the CARICC and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) with Iran, which is at the forefront of the campaign against narcotics, will contribute to tackling this problem.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:06
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:19
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:44
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	07:13



Iran Petchems Revenues Hit \$110b In 7 Years

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Secretary of the Association of Petrochemical Industry Corporation (APIC) Mr. Ahmad Mahdavi yesterday said that Iran's revenues in petrochemicals in the past seven years have surpassed \$110b, adding that customers of Iran's petrochemical products have continued to buy even in the sanctions era.

Speaking in a press conference on the occasion of National Petrochemical Industry Day, Mahdavi said that since mid-March 2018 when NIMA forex system was launched, 75 percent of the forex resulted from the petrochemical products exports have been repatriated to the country and been offered at the NIMA system, and the remaining 25 percent has been spent for imports of catalysts and equipment and it has been in accordance with the government approvals.

He said petrochemical industry is the driving force of development and economic progress of the country, adding that all believe that attention to the rich hydrocarbon resources can save the national economy and will stop raw material sale.

Mahdavi added that Iran's petrochemical production capacity will increase to \$85m tons by the end of the year and the amount will be increased more next year.



He said this year the industry has distributed 700,000 tons more of its products in the domestic market and it has happened while the GDP growth has been negative, and if the companies had exported it, they would have earned \$650m.

Mahdavi noted that 10 petrochemical projects with capacity of 17m tons will come on stream by the yearend and two more projects will come on stream by the end of next year, adding that there has been no halt in production or development in this sector and the progress has been significant.

He went on to say that the petrochemical sector has earned \$110b in the past seven years, adding that in the past seven years, the industry earned \$76b through exports and some \$30b of the products was distributed in the domestic market and the total earning has been around \$110b.

Mahdavi reiterated that petrochemical sector ranks first in exports and repatriation of forex resulted from exports to the country and offering in the NIMA system.

He noted that next year the petrochemical production will reach 100m tons.

Tehran, Baghdad Delineate Roadmap for Five-Year Cooperation

TEHRAN (IFP) - Minister of Cooperatives, Labour and Social Welfare Mohammad Shariatmadari says Tehran and Baghdad have delineated a joint five-year cooperation road map.

In a virtual meeting with his Iraqi counterpart Adel Al-Rikabi, the Iranian minister also expressed hope that with the setting up of a joint committee, the two countries will be able to settle issues of mutual interest.

Shariatmadari said Tehran-Baghdad cooperation in the field of cooperatives can help boost mutual economic collaboration as well.

He underlined creating jobs and entrepreneurship, labour, social welfare, rehabilitation and the exchange of workforce are among other fields where the two sides can work together closely.

The Iranian minister noted enemies have failed to drive a wedge between the two countries.

He underlined Iran always stood by Iraq when Iraqi people were fighting terrorists.

Shariatmadari expressed hope the further promotion of cooperation between the two sides will contribute to the establishment of peace and tranquility in the region.

The Iranian minister also praised the move to issue visas to nationals of both countries free of charge as of May 2019, saying it could boost activities in the tourism sector.

"Nearly 6 million Iranian and Iraqis can visit the two countries annually, which amounts to great potential for the enhancement of mutual economic and cultural relations.

The Iraqi official, in turn, stressed the importance of boosting mutual cooperation on different fronts.

COVID-19 Loss on Iran Domestic Economy Estimated at Nearly \$26b

TEHRAN (PressTV) – A new analysis shows that the spread of the COVID-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus pandemic, has cost Iran nearly \$26 billion in losses suffered in the domestic section of the economy.

A Saturday report by the official IRNA news agency cited figures from a government-affiliated website focused on the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic which showed that total losses inflicted on the Iranian economy excluding foreign trade had exceeded 1,090.25 trillion rials for the period from late February to late December.

The figure amounts to \$25.958 billion on the government-mandated exchange rate and is equal to \$4.234 billion when calculated on the market price of the US dollar.

Iran has seen one of the largest outbreaks of COVID-19 in the Middle East region with nearly 1.2 million infections and nearly 55,000 deaths recorded in the past 10 months.

The country has been grappling with the double burden of the American sanctions and the economic impacts of closures imposed by the government to curb the spread of the disease.

The analysis covered by IRNA showed that COVID-19

spread had affected nearly three million jobs in Iran while it had led to a 60-percent reduction in demand for services.

It said private manufacturing had declined by 65 percent during the pandemic months while nearly 57 percent of manufacturers and businesses have been grappling with insufficient supply of raw materials because of the pandemic and restrictions related to the disease.

The study estimated that the COVID-19 loss on Iran's agriculture and food sector had amounted to 110 trillion rials (\$440 million), adding that the tourism and hospitality sector had lost nearly 9 trillion rials (\$360 million) because of the pandemic.

The highest loss, however, has been recorded in Iran's health sector where lower revenues for hospitals and laboratories, the increased costs of supplying medical equipment and increased wages had led to nearly 250 trillion rials (\$1 billion) in losses for the sector.

The report said that the pandemic-related restrictions on trade had caused a significant decline in Iran's foreign revenues, adding that the annual value of non-oil exports from the country in the year to late March is expected to decline by more than 27 percent to \$30 billion.

Tehran, Yerevan Discuss Gas Exports, Barter



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The heads of the Iranian and Armenian delegations have held constructive talks on gas exports and extension of a gas-for-electricity barter contract.

Following a meeting with Hakob Vardanyan - Deputy Minister of Energy Infrastructures and Natural Resources of the Republic of Armenia, Amir Hossein Zamaninia, Iranian Deputy Petroleum Minister for International Affairs and Trade, said today (Saturday, December 26): "In today's meeting, the two delegations of Iran and Armenia discussed expansion of energy relations for the long term and agreed on the main points."

He added: "Discussions about some technical issues concerning gas export and gas-for-electricity barter were postponed to the near future, after which a long-term contract will be signed in this regard."

"We have been negotiating for a year and a half on gas exports and the extension of the gas barter contract with Iran. The talks that took place today were one of the most constructive ones," said Hakob Vardanyan.

He said: "The two delegations tried to take into account the mutual interests of the two countries."

In 2004, Tehran and Yerevan signed a 20-year gas and electricity barter agreement, according to which Iran's exported gas will be used by power plants in Armenia, and in return, Iran will import electricity from Armenia which started importing gas from Iran in mid-2009.

Iranian Companies Ready to Enter Halal Marketing

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Deputy Head of National Center for Cyberspace Amir Khorakian on Saturday announced the appropriate capacity of Iranian stores which provide cell phone applications to enter the Halal marketing of countries in the region.

Pointing to Iran's success in designing and producing a variety of mobile applications in the region, Khorakian said that since the growth and development of the applications have taken place inside the country, it is more proportional to the Islamic culture and identity.

Considering Iran's good relations with neighboring Muslim countries and close cultural proximity to countries such as Afghanistan, Qatar, Oman, Lebanon, Iraq, and Syria, he reiterated that a great capacity for the Iranian mobile applications stores is to develop the Halal content market.

Referring to the 30 percent growth in app stores' cooperation with Iranian developers, he noted that based on the statistics and information provided by some Iranian applications stores in total, the stores have been installed more than 60 million times during 2019-2020.

Iran, Turkey to Launch Permanent Center for Technology Exchange

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The second meeting of the Joint Executive Committee between Iran Small Industries and Industrial Parks Organization (ISIPO) and Small and Medium Industries Development organization (KOSGEB) of Turkey was held via video-conferencing.



At the same time with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the organizations in charge of small and medium industries in Iran and Turkey, which was aimed at improving economic and trade cooperation and competitiveness of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) in the world markets, the Action Plan of the MoU was discussed, exchanged and agreed at the second meeting of its Joint Executive Committee.

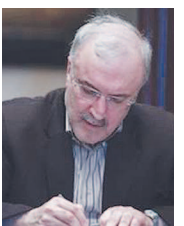
According to the agreed action plan, cooperation in the field of technology exchange, establishment of a permanent technology exchange center between Iran and Turkey, transferring experiences in the field of business, cooperation between the mutual investment guarantee fund, holding investment- attracting meetings, holding face-to-face meetings between Iran and Turkey and holding consultant training courses were among items decided to be developed and implemented.

Iran's exports to Turkey reached 5 billion and 46 million dollars last year, and 4 billion and 995 million dollars were imported.

Health Minister Hails MSC for Its Support in Fight With COVID-19

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

ISFAHAN – Health Minister Dr. Saeed Namaki in a letter addressing the CEO of Mobarakeh Steel Company Eng. Hamid Reza Azimian hailed and thanked the company's backing and financial support and provision of equipment in line with fight with COVID-19.



In his letter, Dr. Namaki pointed to the significance of continuation of empathy by other officials and expressed hope that very soon the country could witness the return of health and liveliness among its dear people.

It is noted that since the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak, Mobarakeh Steel Company has rushed to the assistance of defenders of health and has earmarked 100b tomans of budget for equipping the hospitals and medical centers of Isfahan Province and some other less privileged areas in the country in order that they could purchase necessary equipment for treatment of COVID-19 infected patients.

The company in line with observing its social responsibilities has earmarked the mentioned budget for purchasing equipment like ventilators, detergents, disinfectants, face masks and other necessary items.

Provision of free oxygen for hospitals under coverage of Isfahan Province Medical Science University by MSC until the containment of COVID-19 has been one of the other effective actions of the company regarding its support of health and sanitary front of the country, and this action was taken at the time when some profiteers were trying to take advantage of the shortage of oxygen in the market for their financial benefits.

So far 60 hospitals in different provinces have benefitted from the company's free oxygen supply and it will continue until the end of the year while this move of the company has been followed by other steel-makers for provision of free oxygen to the medical centers.

Import of Turkish Ready-Made Clothes by Iran Down

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Export of ready-made clothes from Turkey to Iran decreased by 93.18 percent from January through October 2020, compared to the same period of 2019, reaching \$9.6 million, the Turkish Ministry of Trade said.

In October 2020, Turkey exported ready-made clothes worth \$1.6 million to Iran, which is 5.99 percent less than in the same month of last year, said the ministry. The export of ready-made clothes from Turkey to foreign markets edged down by 5.8 percent in the past ten months of 2020, compared to the same period of 2019, making up \$13.9 billion. According to the ministry, Turkey's export of clothes made up 10.3 percent of the country's total exports for the mentioned period.

In October 2020, Turkey exported ready-made clothes worth over \$1.8 billion to international markets, which is 19.6 percent more compared to the same month of 2019, the ministry said. Turkey's clothing exports for the reporting month accounted for 10.7 percent of the country's total exports. Over the past 12 months (from October 2019 through October 2020), Turkey exported ready-made clothes worth over \$16.8 billion abroad.

Tunisia Extends Five-Year-Old State of Emergency

TUNIS (Dispatches) - The Tunisian presidency has announced a six-month extension of the country's state of emergency, in place since a 2015 attack on a presidential guard bus claimed by the ISIL (ISIS) group.

President Kais Saied "decided on the six-month extension of the nationwide state of emergency from December 26, 2020 to June 23, 2021", a statement said. The state of emergency was first declared on November 24, 2015, following the attack on the presidential guard, which killed 12 people.

The measure, extended continuously since late 2015, grants exceptional powers to the country's security forces. It allows measures to "ensure the control of the press" and for strikes and meetings that "create disorder" to be banned.



Turkish Opposition TV Station Shuts After 26 Days

ISTANBUL (AFP) - A private Turkish TV station that aired pro-Kurdish opposition views has shut down less than a month after launch, underscoring press freedom concerns in a country often chastised by rights groups.

Olay TV, owned by businessman and former minister Cavit Caglar, began broadcasting on November 30 but was pulled off the air on Friday.

Its staff announced its closure live on air. Caglar said he pulled out of the venture because the station's editorial line veered too close to the pro-Kurdish opposition, while the editor claimed he had bowed to government pressure.



COVID-19 Pandemic Will Not Be the Last



LONDON (Dispatches) - The coronavirus crisis will not be the last pandemic, and attempts to improve human health are "doomed" without tackling climate change and animal welfare, the World Health Organization's chief said.

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus also condemned the "dangerously short-sighted" cycle of throwing cash at outbreaks but doing nothing to prepare for the next one, in a video message marking Sunday's first International Day of Epidemic Preparedness.

The WHO director-general said it was time to learn the lessons from the Covid-19 pandemic.

"For too long, the world has operated on a cycle of panic and neglect," he said.

"We throw money at an outbreak, and when it's over, we forget about it and do nothing to prevent the next one. This is dangerously short-sighted, and frankly difficult to understand."

The Global Preparedness Monitoring Board's September 2019 first annual report on world readiness for health emergencies -- published a few months before the novel coronavirus broke out -- said the planet was woefully unprepared for potentially devastating pandemics.

"History tells us that this will not be the last pandemic, and epidemics are a fact of life," said Tedros.

"The pandemic has highlighted the intimate links between the health of humans, animals and planet," he added.

"Any efforts to improve human health are doomed unless they address the critical interface between humans and animals, and the existential threat of climate change that's making our earth less habitable," he said.

The novel coronavirus has killed at least 1.75 million people and nearly 80 million cases have been recorded since the outbreak emerged in China last December, according to a tally from official sources compiled by AFP.

"In the past 12 months, our world has been turned upside-down. The impacts of the pandemic go far beyond the disease itself, with far-reaching consequences for societies and economies," said Tedros.

But the Ethiopian former health minister said the coronavirus crisis should not have come as a surprise, given the repeated warnings.

"We must all learn the lessons the pandemic is teaching us," he said.

Tedros said all countries should invest in preparedness capacities to prevent, detect and mitigate emergencies of all kinds, and called for stronger primary health care provision.

The UN health agency's chief said that with investments in public health, "we can ensure that our children and their children inherit a safer, more resilient and more sustainable world".

Biden Slams Trump for Refusing To Sign COVID Relief Bill

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Joe Biden, the president-elect of the United States, has urged Donald Trump to sign into law an \$892bn COVID-19 funding and relief bill that would provide much-needed support to Americans hit hard by the virus and an economic downturn caused by the pandemic.

In a written statement on Saturday, Biden, who is set to take office on January 20, accused the outgoing president of an "abdication of responsibility" that could have "devastating consequences".

"It is the day after Christmas, and millions of families don't know if they'll be able to make ends meet because of President Donald Trump's refusal to sign an economic relief bill approved by Congress with an overwhelming and bipartisan majority," Biden said.

"This bill is critical. It needs to be signed into law now."

Trump stunned Republicans and Democrats alike when he said this week he was unhappy with the massive bill, which provides a one-time \$600 payment to US citizens earning less than \$75,000 a year and extends unemployment benefits that expire at the close of December 28.

Without Trump's signature, about 14 million people could lose those extra benefits, according to Labor Department data. A partial government shutdown will also begin on Tuesday, as the bill comes attached with \$1.4 trillion in normal government spending. This could put millions of government workers' incomes at risk, unless Congress can agree to a stop-gap government funding bill before then.

The U.S. has reported more than 18.7 million cases of COVID-19 since the crisis began and more than 330,000 deaths linked to the virus, according to a tally from the Johns Hopkins University -- the highest totals in the world.

"It's a chess game and we are pawns," Lanetris Haines, a self-employed single mother of three in South Bend, Indiana who stands to lose her \$129 weekly jobless benefit, told The Associated Press news agency.

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Nashville Officials Investigating More Than 500 Leads

NASHVILLE (Dispatches) - Authorities in the United States are searching a home near Nashville, Tennessee, after a powerful blast tore through the city's downtown area early Christmas morning, damaging dozens of buildings and injuring three people.

Citing law enforcement officials, the Associated Press first reported Saturday that investigators had identified a person of interest in connection to the motor home that exploded about 6:30am local time (12:30 GMT) on Friday.

Investigators were searching a home in Antioche, about 19km (12 miles) south of Nashville, that is associated with that person, the news agency said.

In a Saturday afternoon news briefing, US Attorney Don Cochran said investigators had received more than 500 tips from the public since the powerful blast occurred in downtown Nashville, the capital of the state of Tennessee and legendary home of country music in the US.

"Every single one of those is being followed up by a team of investigators. That's the stage we're at in this investigation. We are still continuing to follow every lead that we have and we will continue to do so until we find out what's happened," Cochran told reporters.

The FBI is in charge of the continuing investigation, and officials from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, as well as local police, are also involved.

They have not released any information yet about a motive or who was responsible for the blast.

Officials have said a recreational vehicle exploded after a recorded message warned that "a bomb would detonate in 15 minutes".

The blast, which police said they believe was "an intentional act", damaged numerous buildings in the downtown area and sent debris and large plumes of black smoke into the air. Three people suffered non-life-threatening injuries.

Cochran said the scene of the explosion "is like a giant jigsaw puzzle created by a bomb that throws pieces of evidence across multiple city blocks".

"I am confident in the team we have, that we will get to the bottom of this," he added.

On Saturday morning, Tennessee Governor Bill Lee said he had toured the site of the explosion.

"The damage is shocking and it is a miracle that no residents were killed," he tweeted.

Lee said he sent a letter to Donald Trump requesting that the U.S. president issue an emergency disaster declaration to get support from the federal government to help in the recovery efforts.

The governor said preliminary reports showed that 41 businesses were damaged.



Niger Heads to Polls

NIAMEY (Reuters) - Niger voted in an election on Sunday that is expected to lead to the first transfer of power between two democratically elected presidents in a country reeling from Islamist violence.

Former interior minister Mohamed Bazoum, the ruling party's candidate, is the overwhelming favourite to succeed President Mahamadou Issoufou, who is stepping down after two five-year terms leading the largely desert country of 23 million.

Bazoum, 60, has promised continuity with Issoufou's policies, while also vowing to clean up pervasive corruption.

"If I am lucky enough to win this election, you will have chosen someone who is ready from day one," he said in a campaign video.

Niger faces twin security crises. It has suffered repeated attacks near its western borders with Mali and Burkina Faso from militants linked to al Qaeda and Islamic State. Near its southeastern border with Nigeria it faces attacks from Boko Haram. Hundreds of soldiers and civilians have been killed in the last year alone. The economic situation is also critical. More than 40% of the population lives in extreme poverty, and the COVID-19 pandemic has slowed growth to a crawl, compounding the effects of climate change and low prices for top export uranium.

Bazoum faces 29 other candidates, who will hope to force a second round by denying him an outright majority of the vote.

Hama Amadou, who finished runner-up in the last election, was barred from running because of a criminal conviction, leaving the opposition without an obvious figurehead. But last week, Amadou's party called on its supporters to turn out for Mahamane Ousmane, who was president from 1993-1996.

"After my candidate was disqualified, I didn't have the motivation to come out and vote," said Ali Hama, an Amadou supporter. "But with the new instructions, I am going to vote."

A peaceful transfer of power would be a milestone for Niger, which has experienced four coups since gaining independence from France in 1960.

It would also stand in stark contrast to Ivory Coast and Guinea, whose presidents this year used constitutional changes to extend their tenures to three terms, raising fears of a democratic backslide in West Africa.





Shanon
(adviser)

Elahieh Apt (\$2500)
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marble fl
Fully Furn

Darrou Villa (\$4000)
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5bdsr, S/p
S, J, & pkg
marble fl
green yard
Fully Furn

Parsian

(\$3000)
Mahmoodieh
300sq.m, 4bdrs
S/p, S, J, gym
roof garden, pkg
Fullu Furn

Jordan (\$1200)
140sq.m, 2bdrs, pkg, F.F

(\$7000)
Fereshteh bldg
1000sq.m, 4storey
17bdrs, yard, S/p
enough pkg lots
recently renovated

Niavaran Apt (\$1600)
160sq.m, 3bdrs, & F.F

Jordan Office (\$5000)
250sq.m, 3bdrs, & pkgs

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Britain, EU Release Full Text of Post-Brexit Trade Deal

LONDON (AFP) - Britain and the European Union on Saturday published the full text of the post-Brexit trade agreement aimed at governing their relationship when the UK definitively leaves the bloc's single market in just five days' time.

The document, which is more than 1,200 pages long, lays out detail on trade, law enforcement and dispute settlement among other arrangements between Britain and

the EU after the UK leaves the single market and customs union on 31 December.

In the foreword to the copy of the text published by the UK government, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said the agreement had been "carefully judged to benefit everyone" and preserve "free trade for millions of people in the United Kingdom and across Europe".



China to Leapfrog U.S. as World's Biggest Economy by 2028

LONDON (Dispatches) - China will overtake the United States to become the world's biggest economy in 2028, five years earlier than previously estimated due to the contrasting recoveries of the two countries from the COVID-19 pandemic, a think tank said.

"For some time, an overarching theme of global economics has been the economic and soft power struggle between the United States and China," the Centre for Economics and Business Research said in an annual report published on Saturday.

"The COVID-19 pandemic and corresponding economic fallout have certainly tipped this rivalry in China's favor."

The CEBR said China's "skillful management of the pandemic," with its strict early lockdown, and hits to long-term growth in the West meant China's relative economic performance had improved.

China looked set for average economic growth of 5.7% a year from 2021-25 before slowing to 4.5% a year from 2026-30.

While the United States was likely to have a strong post-pandemic rebound in 2021, its growth would slow to 1.9% a year between 2022 and 2024, and then to 1.6% after that.

Japan would remain the world's third-biggest economy, in dollar terms, until the early 2030s when it would be overtaken by India, pushing Germany down from fourth to fifth.

The United Kingdom, currently the fifth-biggest economy by the CEBR's measure, would slip to sixth place from 2024.

However, despite a hit in 2021 from its exit from the European Union's single market, British GDP in dollars was forecast to be 23% higher than France's by 2035, helped by Britain's lead in the increasingly important digital economy.

Europe accounted for 19% of output in the top 10 global economies in 2020 but that will fall to 12% by 2035, or lower if there is an acrimonious split between the EU and Britain, the CEBR said.

It also said the pandemic's impact on the global economy was likely to show up in higher inflation, not slower growth.

"We see an economic cycle with rising interest rates in the mid-2020s," it said, posing a challenge for governments which have borrowed massively to fund their response to the COVID-19 crisis.

"But the underlying trends that have been accelerated by this point to a greener and more tech-based world as we move into the 2030s."

Turkey Will Break Economic "Triangle of Evil" With Reforms

ANKARA (Reuters) - Turkey will bring in structural reforms to break the "triangle of evil" of interest rates, inflation and exchange rates, President Tayyip Erdogan said on Saturday, adding Ankara was determined to form a system based on production and employment.

Erdogan promised a slate of judicial and economic reforms last month, leading to expectations of the possible release of politicians, including Kurdish ones, and human rights advocates from jail. But Erdogan's recent comments on court rulings and criticism aimed at his government have fuelled scepticism about his pledge.

Speaking via videolink at a ceremony in Ankara, Erdogan said 2021 would be "the year of democratic and economic reforms" and that efforts to present the reforms to parliament would move "as soon as possible".

"We hope to overcome troubles from economic attacks and the pandemic measures as soon as possible. By speeding up structural



reforms, we are determined to form a system based on production and employment and breaking the interest rates, inflation and exchange rates triangle of evil," Erdogan said.

"We are not carrying out democratic reforms because anyone forced us to, but because our people deserve them," he added.

Erdogan has called interest rates the "mother of all evil" and says he believes high rates stoke inflation - counter to monetary theory. He has

often characterised Turkey's economic woes as the result of foreign attacks on the economy. Turkey's central bank hiked interest rates by 200 basis points to 17% on Thursday, seeking to cool double-digit inflation and bolster its credibility under new governor Naci Agbal.

Turkey has also faced criticism from rights groups and its Western allies for a widespread crackdown following an abortive coup in 2016, under which thousands of people from the military, public and private sector were detained, sacked or arrested.

Millions of Americans Lose Jobless Benefits

PALM BEACH (Reuters) - Millions of Americans saw their jobless benefits expire on Saturday after U.S. President Donald Trump refused to sign into law a \$2.3 trillion pandemic aid and spending package, protesting that it did not do enough to help everyday people.

Trump stunned Republicans and Democrats alike when he said this week he was unhappy with the massive bill, which provides \$892 billion in badly needed coronavirus relief, including extending special unemployment benefits expiring on Dec. 26, and \$1.4 trillion for normal government spending.

Without Trump's signature, about 14 million people could lose those extra benefits,

according to Labor Department data. A partial government shutdown will begin on Tuesday unless Congress can agree a stop-gap government funding bill before then.

After months of wrangling, Republicans and Democrats agreed to the package last weekend, with the support of the White House. Trump, who hands over power to Democratic President-elect Joe Biden on Jan. 20, did not object to terms of the deal before Congress voted it through on Monday night.

But since then he has complained that the bill gives too much money to special interests, cultural projects and foreign aid, while its one-time \$600 stimulus checks to millions of struggling Americans were too small. He has demanded that be raised to \$2,000.

"Why would politicians not want to give people \$2,000, rather than only \$600?... Give our people the money!" the billionaire president tweeted on Christmas Day, much of which he spent golfing at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Palm Beach, Florida.

Many economists agree the bill's aid is too low but say the immediate support is still welcome and necessary.

A source familiar with the situation said Trump's objection to the bill caught many White House officials by surprise. While the outgoing president's strategy for the bill remains unclear, he has not vetoed it and could still sign it in coming days.

On Saturday, he was scheduled to remain in Mar-a-Lago, where the bill has been sent and awaits his decision. Biden, whose Nov. 3 electoral victory Trump refuses to acknowledge, is spending the holiday in his home state of Delaware and had no public events scheduled for Saturday.

India to Become 3rd Largest Economy by 2030

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India, which appears to have been pushed back to being the world's sixth biggest economy in 2020, will again overtake the UK to become the fifth largest in 2025 and race to the third spot by 2030, a think tank said on Saturday.

India had overtaken the UK in 2019 to become the fifth largest economy in the world but has been relegated to 6th spot in 2020.

"India has been knocked off course somewhat through the impact of the pandemic. As a result, after overtaking the UK in 2019, the UK overtakes India again in this year's forecasts and stays ahead till 2024 before India takes over again," the Centre for Economics and Business Research (CEBR) said in an annual report published on Saturday.

The UK appears to have overtaken India again during 2020 as a result of the weakness of the rupee, it said.

The CEBR forecasts that the Indian economy will expand by 9 per cent in 2021 and by 7 per cent in 2022.

"Growth will naturally slow as India becomes more economically developed, with the annual GDP growth expected to sink to 5.8 per cent in 2035."

"This growth trajectory will see India become the world's third largest economy by 2030, overtaking the UK in 2025, Germany in 2027 and Japan in 2030," it said.

The UK-based think tank forecast that China will in 2028 overtake the US to become the world's biggest economy, five years earlier than previously estimated due to the contrasting recoveries of the two countries from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Japan would remain the world's third-biggest economy, in dollar terms, until the early 2030s when it would be overtaken by India, pushing Germany down from fourth to fifth. The CEBR said India's economy had been losing momentum even ahead of the shock delivered by the COVID-19 crisis.

The rate of GDP growth sank to a more than ten-year low of 4.2 per cent in 2019, down from 6.1 per cent the previous year and around half the 8.3 per cent growth rate recorded in 2016. "Slowing growth has been a consequence of a confluence of factors including fragility in the banking system, adjustment to reforms and a deceleration of global trade," it said.

The COVID-19 pandemic, the think tank said, has been a human and an economic catastrophe for India, with more than 140,000 deaths recorded as of the middle of December.

Reforms, Currency Devaluation Key To Stabilize Iraq's Economy



BAGHDAD (Dispatches) - Fiscal reforms in Iraq combined with the recent devaluation of the exchange rate are "critically important steps to help reduce large external and fiscal imbalances and ensure the country's economic stability", according to a new report by the International Monetary Fund.

"The Covid-19 pandemic and the sharp decline in oil prices and output have aggravated Iraq's economic vulnerabilities," Tokhir Mirzoev, IMF mission chief for Iraq, said. "Severe fiscal financing constraints and challenges with meeting external and domestic payment obligations, including wages and pensions, necessitate a decisive recalibration of economic policies to maintain economic stability."

The Washington-based lender welcomed the Iraq government's plans to significantly increase targeted cash transfers to the poor as well as to enhance health-related spending to mitigate the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on the most vulnerable.

Faced with the twin shocks of dwindling oil revenue and the coronavirus-induced economic slowdown, Iraq devalued its currency by about 23 per cent against the U.S. dollar on December 20, the first time the peg was adjusted since 2015.

The Central Bank of Iraq set the exchange rate at 1,450 dinars per dollar, from a peg of 1,182 dinars, for sales to the finance ministry. The dinar will be sold to the public at 1,470 and to other banks at 1,460.

"The structural distortions in the Iraqi economy are the ones that impoverished the public finances and restricted the ability of reform sought by the government and the Ministry of Finance," the Central Bank of Iraq said. "Fiscal policy lagged behind in performing its roles, and monetary policy was preoccupied with repairing the outputs of confused fiscal policy."

Trade Between ASEAN, Shanghai Remains Strong

SHANGHAI (Dispatches) - Trade between Shanghai and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) remained strong this year despite being affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, data from Shanghai Customs showed.

Shanghai imported goods worth more than 339.3 billion yuan from ASEAN in the first 11 months of this year, an increase of 6.1% from the same period last year, China's Xinhua news agency reported.

Meanwhile, products worth 433.37 billion yuan were exported from Shanghai to ASEAN, down 4.1% year on year, partly due to the impact of the pandemic, according to Shanghai Customs.

Integrated circuits were the largest category of commodities Shanghai imported from ASEAN in the first 11 months, which registered a total import value of 85.64 billion yuan.

The amount represented a 20.5% growth over the same period last year and accounted for 25.2% of the total import value from ASEAN during the period.

Vietnam was Shanghai's largest trade partner in the region from January to November, accounting for 27.4% of Shanghai's total trade with ASEAN.



Iranian Film “Narges Mast” Awarded at Indian Festival

TEHRAN (IRNA) - “Narges Mast”, an Iranian film by Jalaeddin Dorri, received two awards at the 4th edition of Lift India Filmotsav on Sunday.

Majid Derakhshani, composer, who had made the music of the film, was awarded for best music for a long film. The special award of the jury also went to Jalaeddin

Dorri, the director of “Narges Mast”.

Saeed Poursamimi, Mitra Hajjar, Mehdi Pakdel, Hooman Barghnavard, Siamak Safari, Amir-Hossein Modarres, Matin Sotoudeh, Negar Abedi, Behnam Qorbani, Mojgan Akhlaghi, Hasti Farahi, and Mehdi Farajvand are among the cast of the film.



European Businesses Hopeful of China-EU Investment Deal

BEIJING (AFP) - European businesses in China are hopeful of an EU-China investment deal by end of the year, the head of the European Chamber of Commerce in China said on Saturday, although Beijing has declined to commit to a deadline.

The China-EU Comprehensive Agreement on Investment has been in the works for seven years, and is expected to pave the way for European businesses to invest in financial services, telecommunications, electric vehicles and other sectors that are gradually being opened up for foreign investment in China.

But the deal is facing opposition from some European members of parliament and the incoming US administration of President-elect Joe Biden, who say it does not address concerns about the use of forced labour by Chinese manufacturers, especially in the restive northwestern region of Xinjiang.

“The next few days will be interesting. My sense is that there is a serious push to get this past the finishing line,” Joerg Wuttke, head of the European Chamber of Commerce in China, told AFP.

“It’s not a perfect deal, far from it, but it’s a big step forward.”

China’s commerce ministry has refrained from committing to a year-end deadline and appears prepared for an extension of discussions.

“In order to preserve its security and development interests, China will conduct the negotiations at its own pace and strive to reach a comprehensive, balanced and ambitious investment agreement with the EU,” it said in a statement late Thursday.

“The China-EU investment agreement is aimed at providing more investment opportunities and sound institutional guarantees for the two sides, but to reach it requires joint efforts and to meet each other halfway,” it added.

In an interview with Le Monde on Wednesday, France’s junior trade minister Franck Riester said Beijing needed to address the issue of forced labour if Paris was to agree to the deal.

Human rights organisations have raised concerns about labour practices in Xinjiang where Uighurs and members of other Muslim-minority ethnic groups have reportedly been forced to pick cotton under a coercive state-run scheme. Beijing rejects the accusations.



Other critics of the deal say it might undermine Biden’s efforts to mend bridges with European allies, following Donald Trump’s divisive tenure.

“There is nothing in the agreement that would be at the disadvantage of the US,” Wuttke insisted.

But Biden’s camp has been nervous about Brussels moving closer to Beijing.

Jake Sullivan, who has been tipped as National Security Advisor, tweeted on Tuesday that: “The Biden-Harris administration would welcome early consultations with our European partners on our common concerns about China’s economic practices.”

The investment deal aims to create an equal playing field for European businesses in China that have long complained about preferential terms enjoyed by domestic firms.

The treaty will also strengthen intellectual property protections for European companies and ban forced technology transfers.

China Waiting for...

FROM PAGE 1

The CFR went on, “The Biden administration could realize some quick wins by filling in the gaping holes the Trump team has created by abandoning traditional sources of U.S. leverage and influence. Rejoining international institutions and agreements, partnering with European allies, strengthening the United States, and reconstructing the U.S.-China diplomatic framework are likely all on Biden’s agenda. Although the damage inflicted on Hong Kong’s freedoms in 2020—and subsequently on China’s relations with Western liberal democracies, including the United States—appears to be irreversible for the foreseeable future. Beijing’s management in Hong Kong and uprooting the interests of Europe and the U.S. in that region has worsened the U.S.-China relation and even China’s relation with Europe.”



It added, “Destroying the old interests of UK in Hong Kong has left the Westerners high and dry and caused a hidden anger in the West which is not probably comparable with any time in creation of animosity. The succession of Hong Kong-related edicts issued by China’s legislative body, the National People’s Congress, and its Standing Committee, as well as the prompt implementation of that legislation under the guidance of newly installed central government secret police and officials, neutered Hong Kong’s Legislative Council, eliminated prospects for elections with Western intentions, limited the powers of its independent courts, intimidated the pro-West media.”

So all of these led to China’s policy for distancing itself from the West and undoubtedly the Chinese have found their interests for keeping their economic growth in the Persian Gulf, Sea of Oman, and Indian Ocean and this will give the opportunity to the Islamic Republic of Iran to welcome billions of dollars investment.

Previous bonds with China without having any effect on the structure of independence and freedom of the Islamic Republic can become easily hundreds of times much deeper and far-reaching in the region. All attentions of Majlis and the Judiciary should be focused on this issue that lest the 12th government, due to its western approach, vex or offend the Chinese in its last days. The future of our relations with China relies on the maturity of the next government in Iran and I have no doubt that we do have a special and broad look to these relations.

No Trace of...

FROM PAGE 1

Namaki noted in some provinces there were zero deaths, and no one was hospitalized due to the coronavirus infection in some other provinces.

“Fortunately, the daily coronavirus deaths in our country dropped below 120 today,” he said, adding this is a record in months. The minister said the figures keep decreasing to hopefully reach below 100 per day. On Sunday, Iran confirmed 119 new deaths caused by COVID-19 in the past 24 hours, the lowest figure since September 14, and 5,502 new cases of infection with the virus, a record-low since October 24.

Gov’t Seeks...

FROM PAGE 1

About the conditions created in the country after the pandemic and the unjust sanctions, Rouhani said the government has recently taken quite serious steps to meet the people’s fundamental needs and improve the conditions. Commenting on a report presented by Minister of Energy Reza Ardakanian on the Iran-Iraq joint commission, the President said developing friendly ties with the neighboring country and following up the implementation of bilateral cooperation are necessary.

A few days ago, Rouhani said, the U.S. sanctioners who had predicted the collapse of Iran’s economy in a short-term period are now leaving the White House while their dreams did not come true. Although the economic war did create many difficulties, ultimately the Iranian nation won the US war and is now more powerful and resistant than any other time, he said on December 15.

Tokyo Consumer Prices Post Steepest Drop in Decade



TOKYO (Dispatches) - Tokyo consumer prices fell the fastest in more than a decade, while Japan’s jobs market and retail sales remained subdued, data showed on Friday, raising the risks of a return to deflation as the COVID-19 pandemic hammers demand.

The world’s third-biggest economy recovered in the three months to September from its worst postwar contraction, but a third wave of the coronavirus infections threatens the economic revival. The Bank of Japan unveiled a plan last week to examine more effective ways to achieve its elusive 2 percent inflation target.

The core consumer price index (CPI) for Japan’s capital, including oil products but excluding fresh food, fell 0.9 percent in December from a year earlier, the steepest drop since September 2010.

That was deeper than economists’ median estimate for a 0.8 percent fall and deepened from a 0.7 percent decline in November. The December drop was the fastest downturn since September 2010, when core consumer prices slumped 1 percent.

Nationwide data last week for November also showed the steepest price slump since late 2010.

“There is a chance that the nation will return to deflation due to the coronavirus pandemic,” said Takeshi Minami, chief economist at Norinchukin Research Institute. “Private demand is weak as people, especially older people, stay home to keep from getting infected, making it difficult for prices to rise.”

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The Bank of Japan to examine more effective ways to achieve its elusive 2 percent inflation target.

Japan’s seasonally adjusted unemployment rate fell to 2.9 percent, better the median forecast of 3.1 percent, government data showed. In October, the jobless rate stood at 3.1 percent.

There were 1.06 jobs per applicant in November, up from the previous month’s 1.04. Labor Ministry data showed, but still near September’s seven-year low 1.03.

The pandemic remained a drag on consumer spending, with a renewed spike in infections raising fresh risks for a weakened economy.

Strong Rebound Seen for Philippine Economy in 2021, 2022

MANILA (Dispatches) - London-based Capital Economics sees a slight improvement in the Philippine economy during the fourth quarter even as it remained a laggard in the region.

“The Philippines’ economy is only likely to have improved a little this quarter. A fall in new virus cases has enabled the lifting of some restrictions to activity. But as timely data show, mobility remains very depressed and well below elsewhere in the region,” Capital Economics senior Asia economist Gareth Leather, Asia economist Alex Holmes and research assistant Oliver Byrne said in a Dec. 22 report titled “New outbreaks pose downside risks to 2021 forecasts.”

Gross domestic product shrank by an average of 10 percent during the first nine months amid a prolonged COVID-19 quarantine.

“The industrial sector remains in the doldrums, with output down by nearly 15 percent year-on-year. Fiscal support is proving inadequate—government spending fell back in October in levels terms and was down 6.8 percent year-on-year,” Capital Economics noted.

As such, Capital Economics said that even as the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) kept key interest rates steady during its last meeting on the monetary policy stance for 2020 held last week, “the weakness of the recovery means further easing is likely in 2021.”

“We don’t think the recent rise in inflation, from 2.5 percent year-on-year in October to 3.3 percent in

November, will stop the [BSP] from easing further. While higher oil price inflation will push up the headline rate early next year, the weakness of the economy will keep underlying price pressures subdued and inflation should stay within the BSP’s 2 to 4 percent target band,” Capital Economics said.

A string of strong typhoons since late October led to a spike in headline inflation last month mainly as food prices surged, although economic officials had said it was only temporary.

Amid stable inflation yet a slow rebound from the pandemic-induced recession, the BSP slashed the policy rate by a total of 200 basis points (bps) this year to a record low of 2 percent.

Capital Economics expects the BSP to approve a 25-bp cut as early as the first quarter of 2021 to end next year with a policy rate of an even lower 1.5 percent.

Early this month, Capital Economics said that the availability of COVID-19 vaccines would be a game changer for countries that grappled to contain infections such that it upgraded its growth forecast for the Philippines for the next two years.

“The recent good news on vaccine development means that countries in emerging Asia are likely to start inoculating their populations sooner than we had previously envisaged,” Leather said in a Dec. 4 report titled “New forecasts on positive vaccine developments: Faster recovery now likely.” INQ

Kabul, Tashkent to Set Up Joint Economic Zone

MAZAR-I-SHARIF (Dispatches) - Afghan and Uzbekistan have agreed on creating a joint economic zone on their common border to boost bilateral trade.

The proposed economic zone, to be set up in the Sarkhandarya province of Uzbekistan, will facilitate Afghan traders and investors. Balkh and Sarkhandarya governors made statements to the effect at the second conference on strengthening Uzbek-Afghan cooperation in areas of trade and culture in Mazar-i-Sharif.

The Sarkhandarya governor said his country was willing to expand economic and trade ties with Afghanistan.

He added the two sides discussed an agreement on creating an economic zone in Sarkhandarya and initial work of the project had begun.

The visiting official hoped the economic zone, when established, would encourage Afghan traders to invest in Uzbekistan and vice versa. Based on the agreement, Afghan traders will be able to stay in Sarkhandarya for 15 days without visa and they will get necessary facilities.

‘The Afghan-Uzbekistan development committee for cooperation has been established and is doing its job,

For his part, Balkh Governor Mohammad Farhad Azimi told the conference that with the establishment of the economic zone, Afghan products could be easily exported to global markets.

He voiced optimism about the further development of Afghan-Uzbekistan ties in the spheres of trade and culture.

Azimi added Uzbekistan was looking forward to increasing investment by Afghans in that country to expand economic links. The Balkh governor said the working committee had been tasked with facilitating travel between Afghan and Uzbekistan for traders.

Azimi urged Uzbek businessmen to invest in exporting Afghanistan’s agricultural products, fresh and dried fruits, stones and other products.

Meanwhile, Afghan traders expressed optimism about the Afghanistan-Uzbekistan trade and economic cooperation. Amruddin Kakar, a businessman from Balkh, told Pajhwok Afghan News that greater economic cooperation would benefit both sides.

He believed real cooperation from Uzbekistan would enable Afghan traders to easily reach Asian and European markets.

Iran One-Month...

FROM PAGE 1

Meanwhile Iran’s exports to five top European destinations reportedly amounted to €493.7 million during the January-October 2020, indicating a 7% growth compared with the similar period of last year.

Based on the figures released by the Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture, Germany with €223.1 million topped the Europeans importing Iranian goods during the ten-month period.

The Netherlands (€110.3 million), Italy (€84.7 million), Spain (€45.2 million), and Belgium (€30.4 million) were respectively the next top European destinations of Iran’s exports. Iran’s imports from five European countries amounted to €2.37 billion during the same period. The top five exporters to Iran were Germany (€1.23 billion), Italy (€474.7 million), the Netherlands (€298.5 million), France (€206.6 million), and Spain (€165.4 million).

India Bounce Back To Skittle Australia

MELBOURNE (AFP) - A resilient India bounced back from their embarrassing first Test exploits to bundle out Australia for just 195 and take a grip on the second Test in Melbourne after a riveting opening day Saturday.

After their horror show in Adelaide last week, where they lost by eight wickets and were skittled for 36 in their second innings, the tourists were desperate to start well.

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

ISSN 1024-6053

P.O. Box: 15875-8551

Address: No 13, Pajouhesh St., Golestan II St, Golestan St.Marzdaran Blvd., Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Printed by: Honar Sarzmin Sabz

Distributed by:

Cities of Iran Cultural and Artistic Institute

Managing Director: Fereydoon Taherpour Asl

Rodrygo Sidelined With Hamstring Injury

MADRID (Reuters) - Real Madrid forward Rodrygo sustained a hamstring injury in Wednesday's 2-0 win against Granada and is set for a spell on the sidelines, the Spanish champions said.

Real did not provide a time frame for the Brazilian's return but local media reported that the issue might keep him out of action for at least three months. "Following tests carried out on Rodrygo ... he has been diagnosed with a muscular injury affecting the tendon in his right biceps femoris hamstring muscle," Real said in a statement here.

8 IRAN NEWS

SPORTS

MONDAY DECEMBER 28, 2020

Arsenal Beat Chelsea, Man Utd Denied by Leicester

LONDON (Dispatches) - Arsenal eased fears of being dragged into a relegation battle with a stunning 3-1 win over Chelsea on Saturday, as Manchester United's Premier League title challenge stumbled after they conceded a late equaliser to draw at Leicester.

Everton moved into second place, two points behind leaders Liverpool with a 1-0 win at Sheffield United, while Manchester City climbed to fifth place after beating Newcastle 2-0.

Liverpool will go five points clear of Everton if they beat struggling West Brom on Sunday. Mikel Arteta led Arsenal to win the FA Cup the last time they faced Chelsea in August, but less than five months on the Spaniard was under intense pressure after a run of one win in 10 league games.

Arteta had bemoaned his side's fortune in recent weeks, but the Gunners' luck turned on a night when he gave youngsters Gabriel Martinelli and Emile Smith Rowe the chance to shine in the absence of more experienced figures such as David Luiz, Willian and Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang.

Kieran Tierney won a soft penalty for a push by Reece James and Alexandre Lacazette slotted home the spot-kick to open the scoring on 34 minutes.

Granit Khaka then answered his critics after being stupidly sent off in a 1-0 defeat by Burnley earlier this month with a brilliant free-kick to double Arsenal's lead just before half-time.

A third consecutive away loss for Chelsea further damages their chances of competing for the title and there was no way back for Frank Lampard's men once Bukayo Saka chipped in off the inside of the post 11 minutes after the break.

Tammy Abraham did pull a goal back five minutes from time and Chelsea could have set up a grandstand finish in stoppage time, but Jorginho's penalty was saved by Bernd Leno.

Victory lifts Arsenal up to 14th, six points clear of the relegation zone, while Chelsea drop down to sixth on goal difference. Manchester United missed out on equalling a Premier

League record of 11 straight away wins as for once this season they paid for not finishing strongly in a dramatic 2-2 draw.

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's men had come from behind in each of their previous away league games this season, but twice went in front at the King Power Stadium through Marcus Rashford midway through the first half and Bruno Fernandes 11 minutes from time.



Harvey Barnes' blistering strike levelled for Leicester before half-time and United were undone by Jamie Vardy's movement in the box as the veteran striker latched onto Ayoze Perez's cross and saw his shot deflect in off the unfortunate Axel Tuanzebe.

At Bramall Lane, Gylfi Sigurdsson killed off the bottom of the table Blades on 80 minutes with a clinical finish. That sealed Everton's fourth successive league win and set up a significant clash with Manchester City on Monday.

City extended their unbeaten league run to six matches with a comfortable success at the Etihad Stadium. Ilkay Gundogan put Pep Guardiola's side ahead in the 14th minute with a close-range finish from Raheem Sterling's pass.

City doubled their lead in the 55th minute after Newcastle's Miguel Almiron gave the ball away just outside his own area. Despite a desperate attempt to clear by Federico Fernandez, the ball rolled straight to Ferran Torres and the Spanish winger fired home.

Aston Villa are another unlikely challenger for the top four as they eased past Crystal Palace 3-0 despite playing the full second half a man down after Tyrone Mings' red card.

Bertrand Traore gave Villa the perfect start but Mings made his teammates work hard for the win when he was sent off for two clashes with Wilfried Zaha.

Ignoring that setback, Kortney Hause and Anwar El Ghazi wrapped up the points for Villa. Fulham edged to within a point of safety with a 0-0 draw at home with Southampton.

Kamara Shines as

NFL Saints Rip Vikings

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Alvin Kamara ran for 155 yards and an NFL record-tying six touchdowns to lead the New Orleans Saints in routing Minnesota 52-33 in an NFL Christmas contest.

Kamara carried 22 times and caught three passes for 17 yards while scoring on runs of 40, 7, 6, 5, 3 and 1 yards then credited his offensive line blockers for opening holes in the Vikings defensive line.

"It's a good day," Kamara said. "The O-line, kudos to them. They get the game ball for sure. I did a small part. They did the rest."

Kamara matched the all-time NFL record for rushing touchdowns in a game set by Ernie Nevers of the Chicago Cardinals in 1929 in a 40-6 victory over the Chicago Bears. The Saints (11-4) clinched a fourth consecutive NFC South division title, having already secured their place in the NFL playoffs, while the Vikings fell to 6-9 and were eliminated from post-season contention.

"We still have got so much more room to grow," Kamara said. "Every week we're looking to get better. We want to do more. We're tasting greatness. We've still got a long way to go."

Kamara has 21 touchdowns this season, including a team-record 15 rushing touchdowns. He opened the scoring with a 40-yard touchdown run but the Vikings answered on the next possession on Dalvin Cook's 15-yard touchdown run.

Kamara's 1-yard touchdown run capped a 66-yard Saints march and Wil Lutz kicked a 30-yard field goal to give New Orleans a 17-7 edge early in the second quarter.

Minnesota's Mike Boone responded with a 4-yard touchdown run but Kamara scored on a 5-yard run with 38 seconds remaining in the second quarter to lift the Saints ahead 24-14 at halftime.

A deflected Drew Brees pass was intercepted by the Vikings' Hardy Nickerson, giving Minnesota the ball at the Saints' 18-yard line, and that set up a 2-yard touchdown pass from Kirk Cousins to Irv Smith, although a missed conversion kick left the visitors trailing 24-20.



Mbappe Thanks Tuchel After His Dismissal

PARIS (Reuters) - Paris St Germain forward Kylian Mbappe paid tribute to Thomas Tuchel after multiple media reports said the German coach had been sacked by the French Ligue 1 club.

French sports daily L'Equipe and German newspaper Bild said the 47-year-old, who helped PSG reach the Champions League final in August which they lost to Bayern Munich, was dismissed after Wednesday's 4-0 win over Racing Strasbourg.

"It is sadly the law of football. Nobody will forget your time here. You wrote a wonderful part of the club's history and I say to you: 'thank you, coach'," Mbappe said in an Instagram post on Thursday that was accompanied by a picture of him with Tuchel.

PSG are third in Ligue 1 with 35 points from 17 games, one point behind league leaders Olympique Lyonnais and Lille, and are through to the last 16 of the Champions League, where they face Spanish side Barcelona. The club has not confirmed Tuchel's departure. L'Equipe reported that Argentine Mauricio Pochettino, the former manager of English Premier League side Tottenham Hotspur, is set to be named Tuchel's successor.

Tuchel was appointed PSG head coach in 2018 and has won two Ligue 1 titles along with a domestic quadruple in his second season at the club.

Bielsa Launches Broadside at Media For Ridiculing Him

LONDON (Dispatches) - Leeds United coach Marcelo Bielsa hit out at the press who according to the ex-Marseille boss are trying to destabilize his players by suggesting he changes his attacking tactics.

The 65-year-old Argentinian has transformed the fortunes of the once ailing giants restoring their Premier League status after a 16-year hiatus.

His strategy of all-out attack and effectively shoot on sight has drawn plenty of praise but there have been some heavy defeats, most recently last Sunday's 6-2 hammering at Manchester United. Leeds approach the busy festive period beginning with Sunday's home game with Burnley in 14th place, seven points above the relegation zone.

"It's just another way to try to ridicule me," said Bielsa at a press conference referring to the questioning of his strategy.

Bielsa, known as 'El Loco' (The Crazy One), arrived with a dossier and spent more than 40 minutes analysing his team's loss at Old Trafford in answering questions about their style.

"I don't worry too much about what the press think," Bielsa said. "What does worry me is what is written influences the public, they decrease the capacity to understand for the public. Also, they try to destabilize things by suggesting to the players the style needs to be changed."

"Of course, this happens when the results allow. It doesn't matter if in the previous game, the opinion was completely different."

The former Argentina and Chile boss said it is only normal that when someone is down the media put the boot in.

"The best way to win is to play well. So nobody can say I put style over results," said Bielsa.

"Normally, when there is adversity, what the press do is try to weaken the one who is facing adversity or to ridicule the style of play of a team."



Djokovic the Strongest Player At the Moment

LONDON (Dispatches) - Japanese ace Yoshito Nishioka says Novak Djokovic is the best player in the world due to his hitting power.

The world number 56 is known on the ATP Tour for being incredibly solid and capable of upsetting anyone.

However, he says that even he is not sure if he can beat Novak Djokovic, because of a variety of factors that set the Serbian apart from the rest.

"Novak Djokovic is the strongest player at the moment," Nishioka said in a web chat.

"[His] ball control is accurate. People who see the impression that they just stick [to the surface]."

"You may feel it, but I can't attack because the quality of each ball is so high."

The base of the ball he is hitting and the level of the ball I want to hit are too different. I really felt the difference between them."

Djokovic is the reigning Australian Open champion and is almost certain to surpass Roger Federer's record of most weeks at world number one in 2021.

Djokovic joined Rafael Nadal on 35 Masters 1000 titles in August. The Serb took down Milos Raonic 1-6, 6-3, 6-4 in two hours, staying undefeated in 2020 and delivering the 11th triumph over the Canadian in as many encounters!

Winning five matches in New York, Djokovic secured the second Career Golden Masters, lifting the second Cincinnati crown and adding 1000 points to his tally ahead of the US Open. Thanks to that opening set, Milos took one point more than Novak, having an early break in the decider and still finding himself on the losing side in the fourth Masters 1000 final.

