

**Health Ministry Spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari Said on Tuesday That Some 132 More Iranians Have Died From the COVID-19 Over the Past 24 Hours Bringing The Total Deaths to 54,946**

# IRAN NEWS

**Deputy of Sistan and Baluchestan Governor in Meeting With Newly-Appointed Consul General of Pakistan in Zahedan Said Iran-Pakistan Cooperation Has Doubled With Reopening of Rimdan Border**

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## No Discrimination in Punishing Culprits of Soleimani's Terror

TEHRAN (MNA) – Judiciary Chief Seyed Ebrahim Raisi says the perpetrators involved in the assassination of Iran's top anti-terror commander, Lt. General Ghasem Soleimani, will be tried according to justice without discrimination.

In a phone conversation with the head of Iraq's Judiciary Faegh Zeidan on Tuesday, Raisi said, "Iran's absolute policy is to bring to justice the accomplices in the January 2020 terror attack and punish them according to justice without any discrimination."

During the phone talk, Raisi thanked the Iraqi judiciary for its continuous follow-up on the terror attack by the US terrorist outside Baghdad International Airport, which led to the martyrdom of General Soleimani, the commander of the Quds Force of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, along with Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, deputy head of Iraq's Hashd al-Sha'abi, and their companions.

He said Iran and Iraq's national security are intertwined and inseparable, adding that "we are witnessing a serious determination by Iran and Iraq to counter those trying to undermine their security and integrity." **See Page 7**

## Energy Minister Visits Iraq Over Unpaid Debts

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Minister of Energy Reza Ardakanian met top Iraqi officials in a visit to Baghdad to discuss plans for closer cooperation with the neighboring state and push it to pay off debts from the purchase of gas and electricity.

Heading an Iranian delegation, Ardakanian arrived in Baghdad on Tuesday morning and held meetings with senior Iraqi officials, including Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi.

The Iranian energy minister has reportedly called on the Iraqi government to settle its unpaid debts to Tehran for the import of natural gas and electricity.

Ardakanian also had a meeting with Iraq's Electricity Minister Majid Mahdi Hantoush to weigh plans to regulate electricity supply to Iraq, IRNA reported.

The Iranian energy minister also held talks with Governor of the Central Bank of Iraq Mustafa Ghalib Makhif about Tehran-Baghdad bilateral relations and financial cooperation. **See Page 7**

# Coviran Vaccine Enters First Stage of Human Trial



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – Iran has begun the first phase in the human trial of the homegrown COVID-19 vaccine after successfully completing the initial steps, including tests on animals, and obtaining necessary approvals.

The vaccine, produced by Iranian experts at the Headquarters for Executing the Order of Imam Khomeini, was administered to three volunteers at a ceremony in Tehran on Tuesday, the first of them being Tayyebeh Mokhber, the daughter of the organization's CEO Mohammad Mokhber.

It is dubbed Coviran Baretak after the pharmaceutical group that developed the vaccine against the coronavirus pandemic.

Speaking on the sidelines of the ceremony to launch the vaccine trial, Health Minister Saeed Namaki said, "Today is one of the most promising days for the Iranian nation." "It is a day when we could fortunately make the first injection on humans following a long period of efforts on the part of the country's leading scientists in the field of technology and biotech, who produced the COVID-19 vaccine after various stages, including animal studies and models," he added.

"We have been producing vaccines in the country for a hundred years. Pasteur Institute of Iran was set up in 1920 and Razi Vaccine and Serum Research Institute was founded in 1924," Namaki said on the sidelines of the unveiling ceremony of the vaccine and the first phase of the clinical trial of Iranian-made COVID-19 vaccine on 56 volunteers.

"We were the first producer of vaccines in Asia and we have sent vaccines to many countries in the world," he added.

"Due to our record in vaccine production, we are trying to offer new vaccines with the help of the Science and Technology Vice-Presidency, knowledge-based companies, the Pasteur Institute of Iran, the Razi Vaccine and Serum Research Institute and the private sector," the minister noted. "We have developed various platforms for coronavirus, including the vaccine, the first human phase of which was performed today," Namaki said, and added, "Another platform is also underway at Razi Institute, and its animal tests are underway and will soon receive a human testing license."

"We hope that we will soon see the start of the second human trial phase of this national vaccine and then the third phase to be followed by its mass production," he continued.

A total of 56 volunteers would receive two shots administered 14 days apart in the first human trial of the Iranian vaccine and the results will be announced 28 days later.

The vaccine is of the inactivated type, which is made of a virus that is weakened or killed by chemicals.

Mokhber said that in addition to the Coviran Baretak vaccine, the Headquarters for Executing the Order of Imam Khomeini is following the vaccine production through six other ways. "From the next two or three weeks, we are ready to produce 1.5 million doses of the coronavirus vaccine in Iran monthly," he said.

"The equipment required for the production of the coronavirus vaccine in Iran has entered the country and we can reach the production level of 12 million in the near future thanks to the support provided by the Health Ministry and the country's zealous scientists," he said. Iranian scientists have been among the frontrunners in the international race to develop safe and effective vaccines aimed at stopping the spread of the highly-infectious respiratory disease.

Tehran said last month that eight of the vaccines it is formulating locally against COVID-19 had made their way onto the World Health Organization (WHO)'s list of 48 promising candidate vaccines.

In parallel with efforts at developing home-made vaccines, Iranian authorities have said the county has plans to pre-purchase foreign brands that pass safety and efficiency tests.

## ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

### Trump, Merkel to Leave The Office Simultaneously

In news reports, I noticed that German Chancellor Angela Merkel after 18 years in office and leading the Christian Democratic Union is stepping down from her post with uttering this sentence "I have not been born Chancellor. I have always dreamed to act honorably in any job that I take its responsibility and leave it honorably."

It seems she leaves a position that in the current condition U.S. President Donald Trump is fighting fiercely for keeping it. I do not believe that Merkel during her years as Chancellor has been beneficial for her country and not for the world. Her policies regarding Iran's nuclear deal, the JCPOA, have caused damages to Iran and fortunately she took the same path that Trump had taken although it did not show to be positive.

The European and American policies have inflicted damages on the people in the West Asia that they may not be recouped in the next 100 years. Although Merkel, by concentrating on more empowering Europe against the U.S., inflicted heavy investment to her country, she kept Germany's stand in the West Asia to some extent. That Europe and the U.S. both see their interests in the Middle East have ended will be of the strategic points in the 2021 to 2030 outlook.

The U.S. and Germany's partners and allies in the Middle East will definitely react to this shift of concentration by Europe to other regions for finding new partners and allies. Some of them will side with the U.S. and Germany's friends and some will join their adversaries. In the near term, at least, these countries through weapon proliferation or armed conflict are likely to engage in riskier behaviors. We've seen signs of all of those things happening already—in Yemen, in Iraq, in Libya, and elsewhere—and they're likely to happen more.

Perhaps this analysis may be correct that none of these issues except weapons proliferation is important for Westerners, including Europe and the U.S., though, who have watched refugee crises shape their politics, and for East Asian allies, who import three-quarters of their oil from the Middle East, rising instability is a major worry.

Jon B. Alterman, the director of the Middle East Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), recently in article published in the website of the center wrote, "Amid a robust discussion about the appropriate U.S. posture in the Middle East (it means the NATO), one element is underemphasized, and sometimes it is entirely missing. Too often, people assume that the United States will fundamentally reorient its strategy toward the Middle East, and other powers (China, Iran and Russia) will essentially roll with the punches." **See Page 7**

### U.S. Increased Military Activities in Region "Out of Fear"

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council says increased military activities by the U.S. Army in the West Asia region stems from Washington's fear of the consequences of its past acts of mischief in this region.

"Increased activities by the U.S. Army in the [West Asia] region is just a defensive show and stems from fear due to past acts of mischief [by the US in this region]," Rear Admiral Ali Shamkhani said in a Monday tweet.

Shamkhani's statements came after the US Navy announced last Monday the arrival of a nuclear-powered submarine in the Persian Gulf amid rising tensions between Tehran and Washington on the eve of the first anniversary of the assassination of Iran's top anti-terror general on direct orders of outgoing U.S. President Donald Trump.

In its statement, the US Navy officials said the USS Georgia entered the Strait of Hormuz accompanied by two American warships, making it the first missile-loaded submarine of its kind to travel to the Persian Gulf in eight years. **See Page 7**

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## Passing FATF Bills to Hamper Sanctions' Circumvention

TEHRAN (MNA) – A member of the Iranian Parliament says the implementation of the remaining bills mandated by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) will make circumventing the U.S. sanctions more difficult.

“At a time that our banking system is under the harshest US sanctions, the implementation of the FATF recommendations will hamper our ways to circumvent the sanctions,” Behrouz Mohebbi Najm-Abadi said. The lawmaker, who is also a member of the Parliament's Planning and Budget Commission, said, “Implementing the FATF bills will bear serious consequences for the country.”

## Rouhani, Qalibaf, Raisi All Stress Tackling U.S. Sanctions



**TEHRAN (IFP) - The heads of the three branches of the Iranian government see eye to eye on the necessity of neutralizing U.S. sanctions on the country.**

At the end of a meeting of the top three officials, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said the Iranian nation has an excellent track record in terms of standing up to the U.S. economic war and anti-human sanctions as well as handling the coronavirus pandemic.

“As the Supreme Leader said, our first job is to neutralize the inhuman sanctions, and we had good discussions on that and on the methods to choose and steps to be taken in that regard,” said Rouhani, the head of the Executive branch, at the end of his meeting with head of the Legislative branch Mohammad-Baqer Qalibaf and chief of the Judicial branch Ebrahim Raisi.

Also on the agenda at the meeting was the national spending package for the Persian New Year starting March, 2021.

“We also exchanged views on next year's budget bill which has been presented to

Parliament and on how Parliament and the [Rouhani] administration can cooperate in that regard and on the possible amendments to the bill,” President Rouhani noted.

He said the issue of the coronavirus vaccine also came up for discussion during the talks.

“Unfortunately, there is a bipolar atmosphere and certain comments with regards to the coronavirus discussion, which are not constructive, proper and useful,” the president complained.

He said Iran is trying different avenues to procure vaccines for the virus.

“The first path is to produce the vaccine in the country. To that end, two major institutes and one knowledge-based company are working, and we hope they will be fully successful,” he said.

President Rouhani noted Iran is also trying to develop a vaccine in cooperation with another country.

Iran is also trying to purchase vaccines from other countries, he said.

## Anniversary of 2009 Pro-Islamic Republic Rallies Marked

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran commemorated the 11th anniversary of mass rallies on December 30, 2009 that put an end to post-election unrest back then and renewed the nation's allegiance to the Islamic establishment.

The occasion is also known as the Dey 9 epic, which refers to the huge demonstrations held in the capital Tehran and other cities on the ninth day of the Persian calendar month of Dey in support of the Islamic Republic.

The million-strong rallies restored tranquility to the country after months of political wrangling and foreign-backed riots, and ended what the Iranian authorities described as sedition ensuing the presidential election in June 2009.

During the riots, a group of demonstrators offended the sanctities of the Iranian people on the day of Ashura, which marks the martyrdom anniversary of Imam Hussein (AS), the third Shia Imam and grandson of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

The unrest was orchestrated by Mehdi Karroubi and Mir Hossein Musavi, two of the candidates who had lost the election, claiming that the results had been rigged. Both remain under house arrest on charges of provoking the public and harming the national security.

Each year, Iranians mark the occasion with rallies, but no such events were scheduled for this year due to the coronavirus outbreak.

Iranians take to the streets across the nation to mark the anniversary of 2009 historic rallies which put an end to months of post-election riots orchestrated by the enemies.

In a message issued on Tuesday, Iran's Intelligence Minister Mahmoud Alavi congratulated Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei and the Iranian people on the occasion.

On the Dey 9 epic, he said, the Iranian nation neutralized the enemies' conspiracies thanks to its “exemplary insight” and dashed the ill-wishers' hopes.

Iran, he said, is commemorating this historic day as the anniversary of the cowardly assassination of Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani and his zealous companions by the blood-thirsty US terrorist regime draws near and weeks after the martyrdom of [senior nuclear scientist] Mohsen Fakhrizadeh by the fake Israeli regime.

Alavi also assured the nation that Iranian intelligence forces will spare no efforts to perform their tasks aimed at preserving and protecting lasting peace in the Islamic Republic.

Additionally, the Iranian Army released a statement on Tuesday, saying the occasion uprooted sedition fueled by internal and external elements and brought disgrace and defeat to the sworn enemies of the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

“The cunning enemy has over the past three decades tested all ways against the great Iranian nation, including coups, imposed wars and cowardly assassinations, etc. In 2009, it wanted to transform the [Islamic] establishment and Revolution under the mask of seeking democracy, protecting the popular vote [by] launching a soft revolution. This is while the Western powers have always supported the most dictatorial countries in the region and have on their hands the blood of innocent people seeking democracy and fighting against tyranny,” the statement read.

The people's huge and spontaneous rallies on the Dey 9 epic can be considered “a vaccine that insured the Islamic Revolution in the face of domestic and foreign seditionist and rioters,” it added.

### Overcoming All Problems, Neutralizing Sanctions “Possible”

TEHRAN (MNA) – Judiciary Chief Ayatollah Seyed Ebrahim Raiesi said that it is possible to overcome all problems and defusing sanctions, so that this strategy should be pursued seriously.

Speaking on the sidelines of a joint meeting held between heads of three branches of government on Monday, he said, “Today, unity, amity and cohesion between legislative executive and judiciary branches is a necessity and a fundamental strategy.”

He pointed to the spread of the novel coronavirus, COVID-19, in the country and added, “Today, noble people of the country is grappling with livelihood problems as well as coronavirus pandemic. Under such circumstances, all responsible organizations should tackle the aforementioned two problems which have affected people's livelihood significantly.”

The country enjoys high capacities and capabilities both materially and spiritually and can overcome all problems, he said and called on responsible officials to follow up the basic strategy of neutralizing sanctions imposed against the country powerfully.

## Militarization of Persian Gulf Not in Anyone's Interest

TEHRAN (IP) - The government spokesman in his weekly presser held virtually on Tuesday said: “We do not think that the militarization of the Persian Gulf will be in the interest of any country in the region and the world, and we hope that the United States will finally give up its adventure in the region by abandoning its interventionist and divisive policies.”

Asked about the possibility of establishing a joint Russian-Chinese, Iran military base in the Persian Gulf or the Sea of Oman, Ali Rabiei said on Tuesday: “Our friendly relations with Russia and China are at the highest level, although we have limitations to deepen these relations in all We have no political or economic aspects.”

The government spokesman said: “As we have stated many times, including in the Hormuz peace initiative, security in the Persian Gulf region must be provided by the countries of the region. This is the only way to achieve security for all countries and to ensure long-term peace and stability.”

Rabiei said that Iran and Russia have good cooperation in various fields, including defense, adding that this cooperation is also underway at the regional level in addition to bilateral cooperation. The two countries' common positions on the fight against terrorism and extremism have provided a common ground for regional cooperation, including in Syria.

Elsewhere, while referring to the joint meeting between the government and the parliament and Monday evening meeting of the heads of the three branches of Iran's government, Rabiei said: “Both in the government and the parliament and the meeting of the heads of the forces, Iran's 2021 budget was discussed.

He said: “There are differences in revenues and expenditures of the budget, and in this regard, the views should be closer to each other.”

The spokesman of the government also referred to U.S. President Donald Trump's leaving the White house said that the world would be the safest place without presence of Martyr Soleimani's murderer.

## Assassination of Soleimani, Abu Muhandis; Impudence of Enemies

TEHRAN (IP) - The head of the Research Center of the Islamic Consultative Assembly of Iran called the assassination of the martyrs Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the shamelessness of enemies of Iranian and Iraqi nations.

Ali Reza Zakani, head of the Research Center of the Islamic Consultative Assembly of Iran, in a meeting with Nasir Abdul Mohsen Abdullah, the Iraqi ambassador to Tehran Monday, on the eve of the anniversary of the martyrdom of Haj Ghasem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, saying: “A cowardly action such as assassination shows the inability and defeat of the enemy. Just as the people of Iran and Iraq united in the fight against ISIS and defeated it, they should try to expel the assassins of the resistance

commanders from the region.”

He stated: “Iran has shown that it always keeps its promises and is very serious about building an independent Iraq, and will not hesitate to help Iraqi people achieve this goal.”

Nasir Abdul Mohsen Abdullah said that the Iraqis are always grateful to the people, authorities, and government of Iran for fighting ISIS, noting: “Iran was the first country to help Iraq in the fight against ISIS, and the Iraqi people will never forget the struggles and sacrifices of General Ghasem Soleimani and the help of the Iranian people.”

The Iraqi ambassador to Iran underscored the punishment of the perpetrators of the assassination of Soleimani and Abu Muhandis.

## Reviewing FATF Bills Indicates Green Light for Diplomacy

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran gave green light for diplomacy by reviewing bills about Financial Action Task Force (FATF), Iranian lawmaker said on Tuesday.

Heshmatollah Falahatpisheh, former chairman of Majlis (Parliament) National Security and Foreign Policy Commission, made the remarks in an interview with IRNA.

If Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei accepted President Hassan Rouhani's demand for a review of FATF bills at the Expediency Council, it does not mean approval of the bills and the related conventions, the parliamentarian said.

Falahatpisheh called on the Expediency Council not to delay Iranian accession to the FATF related conventions if there is possibility to join the international financial body.

Despite hesitation already emerged on joining FATF in the past, the current situation warranted Iran to review the bills and conventions which have already deemed controversial, the lawmaker noted.

In January 2019, Falahatpisheh stated that Expediency Council will issue its final decision on country's accession to Combating the Financing of Terrorism (CFT) and Palermo Convention in maximum 30 days.

If revision had continued at that time, FATF would not blacklist Iran now, Falahatpisheh said.

The CFT bill is one of the four Financial Action Task Force (FATF) bills which seek reform in the money-laundering rule, change in the funding terrorism law, Iran's joining the CFT and the Palermo Convention.

The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, adopted by General Assembly resolution 55/25 of 15 November 2000, is the main international instrument in the fight against transnational organized crime. It opened for signature by Member States at a High-level Political Conference convened for that purpose in Palermo, Italy, on 12-15 December 2000 and entered into force on 29 September 2003.

## Gov't Bodies Officially Instructed to Implement Sanctions Legislation

TEHRAN (IFP) - First Vice President Es'haq Jahangiri has communicated to relevant institutions the executive bylaws on the legislation recently passed by the parliament which obliges government to take action to have sanctions lifted and protect the nation's interests.

The legislation is also aimed at ensuring the full implementation of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

The bylaw had been ratified by the Cabinet on December 20, 2020 at the suggestion of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), the Budget and Planning Organization and the Legal Department of the Presidential Office in line with the implementation of the legislation.

Under the bylaw, the AEOI will prepare a comprehensive report on the status quo as well as on cases in which 20%-enriched uranium is needed, and present the report to the government within two months of the date the legislation became binding in law.

After the necessary funds and technical requirements have been provided, the AEOI will take the necessary measures to enrich uranium for peaceful purposes in such a way that at least 120kg of the material is stockpiled in a year's time. Furthermore, in order to create the capacity to produce 500kg of low-enriched uranium, the AEOI will, after the necessary funds have been appropriated, install and put into service one thousand IR2M and as many IR-6 centrifuges in three months' and one year's time respectively.

Moreover, the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran will complete work to put into service the metal uranium production factory in the central city of Isfahan, so that the facility will be operational at the end of the set period of time.

The AEOI is also duty-bound to present to the government separate reports on the measures already adopted and measures which remain to be taken as well as on items and finances required to put into service and retrofit the Khandab reactor.

The organization is also obliged to present the relevant timetable to the government to be sent to Parliament accordingly. Also, relevant government bodies, including the ministries of oil, foreign affairs, economic affairs and finance, and industry, mines and trade, as well as the AEOI, the Central Bank and the Legal Department of the Presidential Office, with the coordination of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, are obliged to present relevant reports on the fulfilment of commitments by signatories to the JCPOA and measures adopted to remove the relevant obstacles.

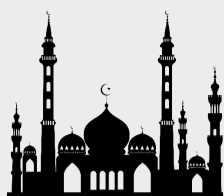
## Iran to Determine Time of Response to Soleimani Assassination

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iran's Secretary of Expediency Council Mohsen Rezaei said that timing of the response to the assassination of Lt. Gen. Soleimani depends on Iran's planning.

In an interview with Al-Manar TV Channel on Monday, Mohsen Rezaei said that in response to the assassination and martyrdom of General Soleimani, Iran dealt a fatal and courageous blow to the US base of Ain al-Asad, although Iran could have punished the United States more.

Referring to the assassination of Iranian nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, he highlighted that a new war has begun between Iran and its enemies and this war continues.

As the end of the Trump administration comes to an end, the United States, in cooperation with the Zionist regime, is carrying out a series of actions against Iran, which in any case is another war, and it is natural to have martyrs in this war, but the war is not over yet, he added.



## PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:09
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:21
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:44
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	07:14

168. Those who reject Faith and do wrong,- Allah will not forgive them nor guide them to any way-  
169. Except the way of Hell, to dwell therein for ever. And this to Allah is easy. Surah 4. Women (168 - 169)

## Iran Needs Its Revenues From Gas Export to Iraq

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN - Spokesman of the Petroleum Products Exporters Union Seyed Hamid Hosseini says Iraq realize that Iran needs gas export revenues to Iraq, as the country is in critical condition and despite having money in the Iraqi bank accounts, it faces problem for paying \$200m for the purchase of medicines.**

Speaking to ILNA and on the possibility of losing the Iraq market due to decreasing gas to this country because of not paying its dues, Hosseini said that according to the agreement, Iran should deliver 50 million cubic meters of daily gas to Iraq, and it has fulfilled its obligation to date but when according to this agreement no money is paid, Iran can stop exporting.

He said by stopping export of gas to Iraq or reducing it, Iran will not lose the Iraq gas market because no country can export gas to this country, and regarding electricity, Iraq by getting gas from Iran produces 6500 megawatts of electricity and Iran itself provides Iraq with exports 1200 megawatts of electricity while Iraq needs 20,000 megawatts of electricity. He noted irregardless of Iran, if any country like Turkey, Kuwait or Saudi Arabia connects to the power network of Iraq, it will not meet the needs of this country. He noted that the capital of Iraq, Baghdad, is connected to the electricity network for just 4 to 5 hours during the day and in the remaining ours of the day, generators provide power for Baghdad citizens, so Iran is not concerned about any rival.



Hosseini said that the total electricity production of Iraq is around 15,000 megawatts and if the country wants to focus on industry and develop it, its needs will rise, therefore, the country will be the purchaser of Iran gas and electricity for years.

He reiterated in case the money is not paid, it is natural to cut the export and it is an ordinary rule in trade, adding that when Iran, in the winter, needs gas and it does not get export revenues, it is natural to take such an action.

Hosseini said that to date, Iran has tolerated it and been ready to get his money in different forms but it has been in vain and now it has been forced to reduce or cut the gas export.

He added that Iraq should understand that Iran needs its money and despite having money in the bank account it cannot spend \$200m for the purchase of medicines and when its money is blocked in Iraq, it will be to the benefit of neither Iraq nor Iran.

Hosseini said that now it seems Iraq has started some moves for paying its dues, expressing hope that during Iranian energy minister's visit to Baghdad this problem would be resolved.

He noted that the main reason behind this problem is the U.S. sanctions and also since Iraq is currently under Chapter VI of the UN Charter is not in charge of its financial resources and all revenues of this country are first deposited in another account and then it is transferred to the account of the government. He noted that Iraq is concerned about the U.S. sanctions and halt in its forex revenues and for this reason it precautions.

## Minister Urges Security for Investment in Private Sector

TEHRAN (IP)- The Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance says "We must seek to create security for investment and the private sector in the implementation of communicative policies and laws of the parliament."

Farhad Dejsand in the open session of Majlis and responding lawmaker's questions said: "Iran's economy is facing a fundamental and structural challenge regarding the bulky structure of the government."

According to him, the size of the government, as it prevents the proper and optimal allocation of resources, will have direct and rapid effects on the efficiency of the economy.

Dejsand continued: "Since the 1980s, the late Imam Khomeini (RH) emphasized on handing over affairs to the people, and since 1984, with the announcement of the policies of Article 44 of the Constitution by the Supreme Leader of the Revolution, these emphases have increased day by day."

He reminded: "The Leader of the Revolution, after five years of this communiqué, re-emphasized it because this is one of the basic priorities of the system."

The Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance emphasized: "Privatization is a serious approach, privatization is not to finance the government but to improve the relationship between the government and the market in the economy and is an inevitable necessity."



## Agro Sector Aims at Providing Food Security



TEHRAN (IP)- The Minister of Agriculture Jihad says Despite all the problems that the coronavirus has created for the Islamic country and the sanctions that have created problems for the supply of currency, we are witnessing the growth of the value added rate of the agricultural sector in the first six months of this year.

Kazem Khavazi in the open session of the Islamic Consultative Assembly today (Tuesday) and in response to the question of the representative of Urmia regarding the lack of necessary support for the agricultural sector in various fields, said: "Today all agricultural activists in line with the Leader's will and they are trying to bring food security to the country."

"Despite all the problems that coronavirus has created for the country and the problems that sanctions have created in providing timely currency for the agricultural sector, we are witnessing the growth of the value added rate of the agricultural sector in the first 6 months of this year and reaching a positive growth of 4.4," added Iran's stop agricultural official.

The Minister of Agriculture Jihad further stated: "In the first nine months of 1398 Solar year (2019-2020), the total agricultural products we exported were 4,986,000 tons, but in the first nine months of this year, we exported 6,100,000 tons of agricultural products, both in terms of weight and it has also grown in value compared to last year."

He continued: "The total garden products that we exported in the first 9 months of 1398 were 645 thousand tons and in the first 9 months of this year we have exported 879 thousand tons of horticultural products. Regarding apples, in the first 9 months of 1398, we have exported 300 thousand tons and this year 403 thousand tons of apples. According to the Eurasia Agreement, Iran's apple exports to Russia have reached."

## Iran's North-South Railway Up for Global Registration

QAZVIN (IRNA) - Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Ali Asghar Mounesan said on Monday that the 1,400-kilometer North-South railway is on the waiting list for world registration.

Talking to reporters on the sidelines of the meeting with cultural heritage, tourism and handicrafts activists late on Monday, he added that with the global registration of this long railway, the length of the route and the cities located on it will have a very good position to attract tourists.

It was very difficult to gather documents related to this heritage project, as it is the largest file submitted to UNESCO, he said.

Uramanat Cultural Landscape located in the provinces of Kurdistan and Kermanshah will soon be registered globally, Mounesan said.

Asked about transfer of Zanjan's saltmen to an exhibition in Germany, he said, "The exchange of historical objects between countries on loan for holding exhibitions is an opportunity to introduce the culture and history of countries, and in recent years we have taken action to hold joint exhibitions, as different countries, especially European countries, are interested in Iran's history and culture."

Noting that giving historical objects on loan is contingent upon the approval of the Cabinet, he added that in case of approval, there is necessary preparation for packing and transporting saltmen to Germany and reciprocally transferring part of German historical objects to Iran for display.

## 2 Wells Rehabilitated in Salman Joint Oilfield

TEHRAN (IP) - Iranian Offshore Oil Company (IOOC) has rehabilitated wells 62 and 63 of the Salman joint oil field, producing oil from both wells in a stable extraction volume by the use of the artificial gas lift.

According to IOOC officials, after the installation of the S1 platform and operation of wells 61 and 64 in the field, the company conducted accurate reviews on drilling operations, rehabilitated wells 62 and 63, and decided to resolve production problems.

"There were risks such as the possible non-productivity of the wells, the increase of water production and the probability of processing problems, as well as the possibility of reduction of oil production in the field, the process of rehabilitation of wells 62 and 63 were initiated under the best circumstances," officials said.

They added the IOOC fully protected the reservoirs and simultaneously drained the

accumulated water from the wells and the surrounding areas; therefore, it succeeded in producing oil from these two wells in a stable flow using the artificial gas lift, IRNA reported.

The Salman oil field as one of the Iranian oil fields is located in Hormozgan province, 144 km south of Lavan Island, enjoying joint reserves with Abu Al Bukhoosh field in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

The oil extracted from the Salman joint oil field is being transported to Lavan Island via a 22-inch pipeline in order to be processed in onshore facilities and stored for export or to be used as feed in Lavan Oil Refining Company.

Salman is an old field in Iran, which still has acceptable reserves. The Salman oil field (Sasan) was discovered in 1965 and became operational in 1968.

Well-timed and knowledge-based implementation of development projects could add to the life and output of the wells in this region.

## Isfahan Abfa Honored for Achievements in A-B-Iran Scheme

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

ISFAHAN - During a videoconference in presence of energy minister, the CEO of Isfahan Province Water and Wastewater Company (known as Isfahan Province Abfa) and some of water activists were honored due to their performance and achievements regarding A-B-Iran Scheme.



In the ceremony and after being honored by the energy minister, the CEO of the company Mr. Hashem Amini pointed to exploitation of seven water and wastewater projects in Isfahan Province in the framework of the weekly A-B-Iran scheme, saying that these projects with the credit around 758b tomans have come on stream.

He said the first phase of reconstruction and repairing Isfahan wastewater network through foreign finance, pumping station and the transfer line of southeast Isfahan, water supply to Baghshad and 8 villages of Lanjan, inaugurating the units of 2 and 3 of Fazelabbaran, Ejich wastewater treatment system, water supply to 19 villages of Flaverjan and Hashemabad wastewater treatment system were the projects which came on stream in the framework of the A-B-Iran.

He added that in the framework of this scheme, the sustainable water supply to tens of villages in Isfahan Province is in the pipeline. With continuation of this campaign and scheme in the year of surge in production, every week some energy projects are inaugurated and launching 250 mega water and power electricity with the credit over 55,000b tomans in 31 provinces are on the agenda.

During this videoconference, governor of Isfahan Province and managers of water and electricity of the province that had played key role in exploitation of mega projects were honored and awarded with plaque of appreciations.

## Iraq Owing Iran \$6b in Unpaid Gas Bills

TEHRAN (Shana) - The National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) said the recent reduction in gas flows to Iraq came after repeated warnings to Baghdad to settle its outstanding gas dues.

NIGC said Iraq owed more than \$6 billion to Iran for importing gas. Iraq has been receiving 5 million cubic meters a day since Iran cut its daily exports from 50 million cubic meters two weeks ago, Ahmed Moussa, a spokesman for Iraq's electricity ministry, said in an interview with the Bloomberg. Following the publication of an interview by Mr. Moussa, who is a spokesman for the Iraqi Ministry of Electricity about the reduction of Iranian gas exports to Iraq, the National Iranian Gas Company emphasized: "The gas exports cuts to Iraq took place after repeated warnings based on the gas export contract between the two countries."

NIGC released a statement about the issue, saying: "The Iraqi Ministry of Electricity

owes more than \$5 billion in gas bills to the National Iranian Gas Company, of which \$3 billion remains blocked and inaccessible in the Iraqi TBI Bank, and more than \$2 billion is overdue debt and remains unpaid by the Iraqi Ministry of Electricity. In addition, the Iraqi side owes more than \$1 billion to the National Iranian Gas Company for contractual offenses under the agreement. "The export of gas by the National Iranian Gas Company to Iraq is an economic and commercial matter, while the Iranian side has not benefited from the contract given that the Iraqi side had more than \$6 billion of gas bill arrears.

"The purpose of the export is generation of revenue, and this money is used for purchasing food and medicine, therefore, the company [NIGC] has slashed the amount of gas flows to Iraq according to the terms of the contract, after repeated warnings, which unfortunately were ignored by the Iraqi side. In any case, the National Iranian Gas Company remains strictly committed to implementing the signed contract."

## Saudi Women's Rights Activist Given Prison Sentence

RIYADH (Dispatches) - A Saudi terrorism court has sentenced prominent women's rights activist Loujain al-Hathloul to five years and eight months in prison, local media reported, despite international criticism of her detention and pressure to release her.

State-linked Saudi news outlet Sabq reported on Monday that al-Hathloul had been found guilty by the court on charges including agitating for change, pursuing a foreign agenda and using the internet to harm public order.

The court suspended two years and 10 months of her sentence. The United Nations human rights office said the conviction was "deeply troubling".



## Maduro Calls Extension of Parliament "Unconstitutional"

CARACAS (Reuters) - Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro on Monday said a move by the opposition-controlled National Assembly to extend its term into next year was "unconstitutional," and called on the South American country's justice system to "do its work."

The National Assembly, overseen by opposition leader Juan Guaido, has declared Dec. 6 parliamentary elections in which allies of Maduro's ruling socialists won a majority as "illegitimate", and over the weekend voted to prolong its mandate.



## Borrell Accuses Russia of Spreading COVID-19 Disinformation to Sell Its Vaccine



BRUSSELS (Reuters) - The European Union's top diplomat said on Monday that Russian public media had spread false information on European and American COVID-19 vaccines in countries where it wants to sell its own shot against the coronavirus.

"Western vaccine developers are openly mocked on multi-lingual Russian state-controlled media, which has in some cases led to absurd claims that vaccines will turn people into monkeys," Josep Borrell said in a blog post.

"Such narratives are apparently directed at countries where Russia wants to sell its own vaccine, Sputnik V," Borrell added, noting that these moves threatened public health amid the COVID-19 pandemic. He gave no specific examples.

Moscow has repeatedly denied these accusations, and alleges that Sputnik V is being targeted by a foreign-backed disinformation campaign. The Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) which is responsible for marketing the vaccine abroad, did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Borrell's statement. The health ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Roskomnadzor, the Russian media and communications watchdog, also did not respond immediately.

When drugmaker AstraZeneca, which worked with Oxford University on its vaccine, paused a clinical trial in September due to the then unexplained illness of a volunteer, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters that Sputnik V was more reliable because it was based on an adenovirus found in humans, whereas the British candidate was a "monkey vaccine".

Trials of the vaccine, which uses a bioengineered version of a harmless common cold virus found in chimpanzees to instruct human cells to make antigens, were resumed in Britain within days after getting the green light from safety watchdogs. Russia last week dispatched its first batch of coronavirus vaccine to Argentina as part of a 10-million-dose deal. It has signed supply deals with a number of other Latin American and Asian countries. The Russian shot costs less than \$20 per person for the necessary two doses.

## Biden Claims Trump Aides Setting Roadblocks for His Transition Team

WILMINGTON (Reuters) - President-elect Joe Biden said on Monday many of America's security agencies had been "hollowed out" under President Donald Trump and the lack of information being provided to his transition team by the outgoing administration was an "irresponsibility."

"We've encountered roadblocks from the political leadership at the Department of Defense and the Office of Management and Budget," Biden said after a meeting with his foreign policy team.

"Right now we just aren't getting all of the information that we need from the outgoing administration in key national security areas. It's nothing short, in my view, of irresponsibility," he added.

## Bangladesh Moves More Rohingya to Controversial Island

DHAKA (Dispatches) - Bangladesh on Monday started moving a second group of Rohingya refugees to a controversial flood-prone island in the Bay of Bengal despite opposition from rights activists.

More than 1,600 of the Muslim minority from Myanmar were taken to Bhashan Char earlier this month, and Foreign Minister A.K. Abdul Momen said just under 1,000 were in the latest batch heading for what he called a "beautiful resort".

Buses took the Rohingya from camps in Cox's Bazar, where nearly one million refugees are packed, to Chittagong port where they will be taken to the barren island.

"They are going voluntarily. They are very eager to go Bhashan Char because they have heard from their relatives, those who have gone to Bhashan Char, that (it) is an excellent place," Momen told AFP.

He claimed the island was "100 times better" than the camps, and that the refugees had "appealed" to be taken there. "Bhashan Char is a beautiful resort. It is an excellent resort. And once anybody goes there, they will love it," the minister added.

Two Rohingya men in the latest group told AFP they were going to the island willingly.

Nur Kamal, a Rohingya from the giant Kutupalang refugee camp, said he was going to be with relatives already at Bhashan Char: "What is the point of staying here (in the camps) without them?"

Serajul Islam said he was going with five family members and was not being forced.

"The way the international community is handling our issue, I don't see any future in the camps," he told AFP from the bus taking him to Chittagong.

"It is better I go and live the rest of my life there in better housing. At least I won't have to think about floods during the rainy season and unbearable heat in the summer." More than 700,000 Rohingya packed the camps in Bangladesh in 2017 after a deadly Myanmar military clampdown that the United Nations has said could be genocide.

After the first transfer on December 4, several Rohingya told AFP that they were beaten and intimidated to agree to move.

The Bangladesh government eventually wants to put 100,000 Rohingya on the 13,000-acre (56 square-kilometre) island, despite criticism from rights groups because Bhashan Char is so isolated.

The UN said it has not been involved in the process.



## Thousands Protest Montenegro Gov't Bid to Change Religion Law

PODGORICA (Dispatches) - Thousands have protested in Montenegro's capital Podgorica against the new government's efforts to change a controversial religion law that has stoked tensions over the country's complex relationship with Serbia.

Chanting "This is not Serbia" and "Treason", the crowd on Monday defied pandemic-related bans on gatherings to rally outside Parliament after the government proposed edits to the legislation that has divided the public for the past year.

The demonstration is the first major protest in the small Balkan country against the new government that came to power after winning a slim majority over a long-ruling pro-Western party at a parliamentary election in August.

Passed in late 2019, the law laid out a process that could see hundreds of monasteries run by the Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC) turned into Montenegrin state property.

But the new government, which is pro-Serb and closely aligned with the Church, is now proposing rewrites to ensure the properties stay in the hands of the SPC, based in Belgrade.



## China Announces Ratification of Extradition Treaty With Turkey

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China has announced the ratification of an extradition treaty with Turkey, a text that Beijing wants to use, among other things, to speed up the return of certain refugees and Muslim Uighurs suspected of "terrorism".

Though the Turkish parliament has not yet ratified the bilateral agreement signed in 2017, it has already raised concerns among the large Uyghur diaspora (estimated at 50,000 people) present in Turkey.

Turkey has linguistic and cultural ties with the Uyghurs and Ankara has long been one of the main defenders of their cause on the international stage, though in recent times Turkey's public show of support has waned.

In its region of Xinjiang (northwest), China has initiated a policy of maximum surveillance of the Uighurs after numerous deadly attacks against civilians. Beijing has laid the blame for the attack on the Uyghur separatist and Islamist movement.

According to foreign experts, the Chinese authorities have interned at least one million people, including Uighurs, in "camps". Beijing has rejected these accusations from the West saying they are "vocational training centers" intended to help retrain the population to find work and thus move away from extremism. Some Uighurs believed to be victims of persecution have since fled to Turkey. "The Standing Committee of the National People's Congress has ratified" the Sino-Turkish "extradition treaty", the Chinese parliament said Saturday evening in a short statement on its website.

However, the treaty provides several grounds for refusal.

In particular, if the state to which the extradition request is submitted considers it related to a "political crime", if the person concerned is one of its citizens, or if the latter enjoys the right of asylum.

"This extradition treaty will cause worry among Uighurs who have fled China and do not yet have Turkish citizenship," Dilxat Raxit, spokesman for the Uighur World Congress, an exile organization based in Germany, told AFP.

## At Least Four Killed in Afghanistan Attacks

KABUL (Dispatches) - At least four people have been killed in separate attacks across Afghanistan, officials said on Monday, raising further concerns about the fate of peace talks that have been suspended until at least next month.

No one claimed responsibility for the attacks, but a local ISIL (ISIS) affiliate opposed to the peace process has continued to regularly target civilians and Afghan security forces.

The Taliban has halted its attacks on the United States and international forces, but continue to target Afghan security forces even as the group held talks this year with the Washington-backed government.

The Taliban attacked a police district headquarters in the western Farah province early on Monday, killing one policeman and wounding three others, according to Mohibullah Mohib, a spokesman for the provincial police chief.

He said the attack began when a suicide bomber was shot by police. His vehicle exploded, however, and then gunmen opened fire. He said at least four attackers were killed and eight others wounded.

In the eastern Ghazni province, two employees of the provincial revenue agency were shot and killed, according to Ahmad Khan Serat, a spokesman for the provincial police chief. In the eastern Khost province, a roadside bomb killed a member of the security forces and wounded two other people, including a provincial council member, according to Kafel Rayan, head of the provincial council.

In two explosions on Monday in the capital Kabul, at least six people were wounded, according to Kabul police.

One targeted employees of the National Statistics Authority, who were in a minibus in the Guzargah neighbourhood. The blast also wounded at least six people, said Ferdaws Faramarz, spokesman for the Kabul police chief. He said the bomb had been placed on a bicycle.

Earlier on Monday, a sticky bomb blew up a vehicle belonging to security forces in the Kolola Pushta area of the city but caused no casualties, said Faramarz, adding that investigations into both the bomb attacks had begun.

Security officials also said Kabul police defused two bombs that were placed near an orphanage and a residential house, as explosions and targeted killings become a new normal in the capital in recent months.



**Shanon**  
(adviser)

**Parsian**

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S/pool, S, J  
L.balcony  
marble fl  
Fully Furn

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

**(\$1800)**  
**Elahieh Apt**  
200sq.m, 3bdrs  
S/p, S, J, & F.F

**Apt (\$2600)**  
**Farmanieh**  
300sq.m, 3bdrs  
S/pool, S, J  
L.balcony  
pkg, yard  
brand new  
F.F

**bldg (\$7000)**  
**Kamranieh**  
4storey, 15bdrs  
yard, pkg lots  
renovated  
parquet fl  
nice yard  
F.F

**Niavaran (\$2200) 200sq.m, 3bdrs, F.F**

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# Tesla to Start Operations in India Next Year

NEW DELHI (Reuters) - Tesla Inc will come to India early next year, country's transport minister Nitin Gadkari told national daily the Indian Express on Monday.

The electric-car maker will start with sales and then might look at assembly and manufacturing based on the response, the minister told here the newspaper.

Tesla and the minister's office could not be reached by Reuters for comment.



## EU States Give Green Light to Post-Brexit Trade Agreement

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - The European Union gave the green light on Monday to its post-Brexit trade deal with the UK, clearing the way for it to come into effect in the New Year.

The British parliament will have to ratify the deal later this week, but Brussels will apply it provisionally, cushioning the economic shock of the divorce.

Customs and regulatory controls on cross-Channel commerce will still come into effect on January 1 after Britain leaves the EU single market. But there will be no immediate return to a regime of tariffs and quotas that could have disrupted trade after Britain's decision to quit the club. Sebastian Fischer, spokesman for the German presidency of the EU, said: "EU Ambassadors have unanimously approved the provisional application of the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement."

Under EU procedure, the decision by ambassadors from the 27 member states to endorse the plan was to take effect at 3pm (14:00 GMT) on Tuesday.

But there is no expectation that any EU members will now slow the adoption of the trade deal, the fruit of a tortuous 10-month negotiation.

Germany holds the rotating EU presidency and Chancellor Angela Merkel's spokeswoman Ulrike Demmer said the coalition government has no objection to the text.

"Germany can accept the negotiated accord," she said.

France backs the draft Brexit trade deal agreed last week but will be vigilant from day one over its proper implementation, President Emmanuel Macron's office said on Monday.

The European Parliament will want to study the deal even after its provisional application and was expected to convene a session in the first half of next year to ratify it.

But on Monday, MEPs were discussing the possibility of pushing that date back further to give themselves more time to study the text and to watch how relations develop.

The member states' provisional approval will last until the end of February, but EU parliamentary leaders asked on Monday for a few more weeks to arrange a vote in March or April.

But if London refuses this delay, they have agreed to hold a special plenary session on or around February 23.

Brussels' chief negotiator Michel Barnier met the president of the European Parliament David Sassoli and the MEPs coordinating EU-UK ties on Monday.

He described the exchanges as "fruitful" and thanked the MEPs "for their trust and support throughout this extraordinary negotiation".

British parliamentarians are to meet on Wednesday to debate the accord. Although the 2016 Brexit referendum that set the divorce in motion proved to be extremely divisive, the vote is expected to go smoothly.

The MPs have not had long to study the 1,200-page text, but Prime Minister Boris Johnson has a comfortable majority of Conservative MPs in the Commons and has hailed the accord as a victory.

## Japan November Factory Output Growth Stalls

TOKYO (Reuters) - Japan's industrial output growth stalled in November after rising for five months, underscoring the fragile nature of the global economic recovery due to a recent resurgence in COVID-19 infections.

The world's third-largest economy recovered sharply in the third quarter from its worst postwar contraction, but lockdown measures in some major economies in response to a new wave of coronavirus infections threatens to hurt demand.

Official data released on Monday showed factory output was flat in November from the previous month, as declining output of cars and plastic products offset strength in production and general machinery output.

The flat reading was much slower than the prior month's final 4.0% gain, and below the median market forecast of a 1.2% rise in a Reuters poll of economists.

"The recovery pace is slowing a little more than expected," said Takumi Tsunoda, senior economist at Shinkin Central Bank Research Institute.

Tsunoda still expected the positive trend in output to continue largely because of underlying strength in Japan's exports, which are heavily focused on Asia.

"Demand for high-tech and IT-related products is currently expanding, so I think that will provide support," he said.

Manufacturers surveyed by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) expected output to decline 1.1% in December and see a sharp 7.1% rebound in January.

The government kept its assessment of industrial production unchanged, saying it was picking up.

Factory output has been recovering from a pandemic-induced downturn earlier this year, helped particularly by solid global demand for cars. Car output in November suffered from falling shipments to the United States and Australia, a government official said.

Some analysts worry that new virus infections around the world, especially in Europe and the United States, may prevent demand for Japan's manufactured goods to grow further as corporate and consumer activity take a hit.

Separate data released on Friday showed Tokyo consumer prices in December fell at their fastest pace since September 2010, while nationwide retail sales slowed in November.



## UK Economy Likely To Be 6% Smaller At Easter

LONDON (Dispatches) - The fresh wave of coronavirus restrictions could lead to the economy being 6% smaller by Easter than official forecasters had predicted just last month, one of the UK's major economic thinktanks has warned.

The Resolution Foundation said the national lockdowns in Scotland and Wales and the tier 4 restrictions imposed in much of England would lead to depressed growth until Easter, and lead to 4.3% growth in 2021 compared with the 5.5% forecast by the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR).

"Efforts to contain the new strain of Covid-19 mean that the first few months of 2021 will if anything require tougher lockdowns," Torsten Bell, the thinktank's chief executive, said. "By Easter that could mean the economy being 6% smaller than what was hoped just a month ago. The government should better target support on the firms most affected, and urgently allow workers required to self-isolate access to the furlough scheme."

"2021 offers light at the end of the tunnel, but it's going to be a bumpy ride getting there." Early 2021 looks a lot weaker than just a few weeks ago, when optimism about the approval of the first coronavirus vaccine boosted public confidence and lifted stock markets. More than half a million people in the UK have received the Pfizer/BioNTech jab so far, mainly people aged over 80 and medical and care home staff.

Since then, a new, more infectious variant of coronavirus has been identified, which led to London, the south-east and east of England being placed into harsher tier 4 restrictions a week ago. Other areas of England moved into tier 4 on Boxing Day, which means 24 million people - 43% of England's population - are now in the strictest tier. New lockdowns are also being introduced in Scotland and Northern Ireland, while in Wales, restrictions that were eased for Christmas Day were reimposed on Saturday.

However, Bell said a hard start to the year could be followed by a "roaring 20s" style social spending boom - similar to America's bounceback after the great influenza of 1918.

"As the vaccine rolls out, death rates will fall swiftly. The gradual lifting of restrictions means a hospitality boom is likely, fuelled in part by the trebling of saving rates led by richer households," he said. "But the return of a 'roaring 20s' feel to hospitality does not mean the whole economy will automatically return to full health. Rising unemployment means household incomes may actually fall even as GDP recovers."

## Chinese Markets New Destination For Pakistani Exports



ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Chinese Ambassador Nong Rong on Monday said that the high-quality development of China's economy will certainly provide important opportunities for the development of the countries along the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), including Pakistan, and other countries all over the world and during the next 5 years. China will steadfastly expand all-around opening up and explore more opportunities for Pakistan to expand its exports to China.

"With a population of 1.4 billion and a middle-income group of more than 400 million, China's domestic retail market is expected to exceed 6 trillion US dollars this year, and its cumulative import volume is expected to exceed 22 trillion US dollars in the next 10 years. After the entry into force of the second phase of CPFTA this year, the proportion of zero-tariff products between the two countries has increased to 75 per cent. This is conducive to Pakistan's expansion of exports to China, promoting economic recovery and resolving the issue of trade imbalance in the course of development," said Ambassador Rong while addressing the participants of the 6th China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) Media Forum.

The forum was jointly organised by the Pakistan-China Institute (PCI) and China Economic Net (CEN) in cooperation with the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Pakistan. The forum is conducted as an annual event in Beijing and Islamabad in alternate years. Due to Covid-19, this year's forum was held virtually and was themed "Post-Epidemic China-Pakistan Media Cooperation".

The forum conducted in-depth exchanges and discussions on topics including the opportunities for digital media, media as an engine for the high-quality development of CPEC, and China-Pakistan media cooperation. Zheng Qingdong, president and editor-in-chief of Economic Daily, and Mustafa Hyder Sayed, executive director of Pakistan-China Institute gave the welcome addresses.

## Bangladesh to Cut Duty on Rice Imports

DHAKA (Reuters) - Bangladesh will slash the duty on rice imports in an effort to bolster reserves and cool record prices of the staple grain in the country, the food minister said.

The import duty on rice will be lowered to 25% from 62.5%, Food Minister Sadhan Chandra Majumdar told reporters. Bangladesh, traditionally the world's third-biggest rice producer, has emerged as a big importer of the grain lately due to depleted stocks and record local prices after repeated flooding ravaged its crop.

The country produces around 35 million tons of rice annually but uses almost all its production to feed its population of more than 160 million. It often requires imports to cope with shortages caused by floods or droughts. "We are allowing the imports in a regulated manner to ensure that consumers and farmers don't suffer from the soaring costs of the rice," Majumdar said.

"Importers will have to seek permission from the Food Ministry by Jan. 10. Then the ministry will decide how much they can import," he said.

The government is rushing to build buffer stocks as it aims to import as much as 500,000 tons of rice in the year to June. It is finalizing the purchase of 150,000 tons of rice from India, officials told Reuters, in what would be the first such bilateral deal in three years.

The government is also issuing a series of tenders to purchase rice in recent weeks.

The rain-fed rice output, or Aman crop, is expected to fall as much as 15% this year, due to repeated floods and excessive rainfall, a senior official at the Agriculture Ministry said.

## Turkey Raises 2021 Minimum Wage by 21.56%

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkey is raising its minimum wage by 21.56% as of Jan. 1, the country's family, labor and social services minister announced Monday.

The monthly net minimum wage will amount to TL 2,826 (\$380), up from TL 2,324, Zehra Zümrüt Selçuk said in the capital Ankara after the fourth and last meeting of the country's Minimum Wage Determination Commission.

The new gross minimum wage, before

deductions such as social security premiums and income taxes, will reach TL 3,578.

"The net minimum wage has increased by TL 500 or by 21.56% compared with 2020," Selçuk said. The minister said the wage increase was 7 percentage points higher than the November inflation rate.

"In November 2020, inflation was 14.03%. By providing an increase of about 7 percentage points above this rate, we have once again kept our promise that we will not let our workers be crushed by inflation," Selçuk said.

Turkey's annual inflation stood at slightly above 14% in November while the 12-month average hike in consumer prices was 12.04%.

Selçuk emphasized that the wage increased from TL 184 in 2002 to TL 2,324 in 2020.

"Thus, as of January 2020, the net minimum wage has increased by about 1.5 times in real terms, namely inflation-free in 18 years," the minister said.

The 15-member commission was headed by Selçuk and consisted of delegates from groups representing workers, employers and the government.

Employers were represented by the Confederation of Employer Associations of Turkey (TISK), while workers were represented by the Confederation of Turkish Trade Unions (Türk-İş), which has the largest number of union members.

About half of all workers in the country of 83 million people earn a monthly salary at or near minimum wage, according to a study by the Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey (DISK).

Selçuk suggested that economic balances and negative impacts by the coronavirus pandemic were taken into consideration while determining the new minimum wage.

"The net minimum wage applies to a single and childless employee. The net minimum wage for a married worker with three children will be TL 3,013," Selçuk said. The government has and will always continue to protect workers, the minister noted.

## U.S. to Be Certainly Expelled From Region

TEHRAN (MNA) – Head of Iranian Parliament Research Center (IPRC) said that the U.S. will certainly be expelled from the region as part of ‘harsh revenge’.

Speaking in his meeting with Iraqi Ambassador to Tehran Nasir Abdul Mohsen Abdullah on Monday, Alireza Zakani said that suitable ground should be paved to expel assassins of former Iran’s IRGC Quds Force Commander Lt. Gen. Qassem Soleimani and Second-in-Command of Iraq’s Popular

Mobilization Forces (PMU) Martyr Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis.

On the occasion of the 1st martyrdom anniversary of martyrs of resistance, the two sides reviewed the latest developments in the region, various levels of bilateral cooperation and emphasized the need for taking hard revenge on perpetrators of the assassination of martyrs Lt. Gen. Qassem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis.



# EU Clears Way for China Investment Pact

BRUSSELS (AFP) - EU member states gave political backing to Brussels’ planned investment pact with China on Monday, clearing the way for a deal between the world’s biggest economic blocs.

At a meeting of ambassadors, the German EU presidency noted no member had “raised a stop sign and the way for a political endorsement was thus cleared”, a diplomat said.

The diplomats noted “recent positive developments” in negotiations, with China reportedly addressing concerns over the alleged use of forced labor on its farms.

This came after the Chinese foreign ministry said last week that “negotiations have entered the final stretch” -- and a second EU diplomat said an agreement could now be formally announced this week.

“We have to be careful, but as long as China is in agreement, there could be an official announcement from Brussels and Beijing by the end of the week,” the senior envoy told AFP.

The deal would be a major boost for both sides and strengthen economic ties between the giants before the arrival of U.S. president-elect Joe Biden in the White House in January.

Outgoing U.S. leader Donald Trump has engaged in a trade war with China but his successor has also expressed concern about the EU outreach, with his team urging Brussels to consult with Washington.

The European Commission, the EU executive, had said before Christmas that the draft of the “political agreement” was “95 percent ready” and just needed the capitals’ green light.

China’s commitment to labor rights had remained a hurdle, but Europe has long sought greater access to the huge Chinese market for its companies.

The head of the EU chamber of commerce in Beijing Joerg Wuttke told AFP this month that negotiators had “apparently made great strides on market access”.

As part of the accord the EU has also been pushing Beijing to reinforce respect for intellectual property, end obligations to transfer technology, reduce subsidies for public enterprises and improve on climate commitments.

While Trump’s administration has engaged in a war of words with Beijing,



Brussels has taken a balanced approach.

The EU states treat China as a “systemic rival” and have expressed concerns over China’s rights record, especially its clampdown in Hong Kong and treatment of the Uighurs.

China’s increasing global assertiveness under President Xi Jinping has given some in Europe pause for thought.

But the bloc’s leading economic power Germany, which holds the rotating EU presidency until the end of the year, had made securing the deal a priority of its time at the helm.

Berlin wanted to get the agreement signed off at a joint EU-China summit in September, but the coronavirus pushed the event online and no deal was signed.

China pushed past the United States in the third quarter of this year to become the EU’s top trade partner, as the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted the U.S. economy while Chinese activity rebounded.

## Trump, Merkel...

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But that’s not true. While the West engagement in the Middle East has grown, the world’s engagement in the region has grown as well. Allies and adversaries alike are tied into the Middle East’s status quo and try to plan strengthening their stand. When it shifts, they will shift, and when allies and adversaries feel effects, the West, including the U.S. and Europe, will feel effects. The United States might feel it is done with the Middle East, but the reverse isn’t true for the NATO and his adversaries.



China, which lacks the domestic oil and gas necessary to drive its economy, seems lashed to the Middle East for years to come. It will almost certainly seek to increase its footprint there, and it is likely to use a more dominant position in the Middle East to exert leverage over East Asian neighbors who are also reliant on the region. As Middle Eastern states view a future in which the United States is receding and China is rising, Germany, as the super power of Europe and the U.S. and as the “reeve” of the world, will be hard pressed to prevent China from embedding itself in the region’s physical and technological infrastructure. China is averse to replicating the U.S. military footprint in the Middle East, or anywhere else, but is keen to advance its security by other means. If it is able to establish pervasive surveillance capabilities, it will do more than be a force multiplier for a limited Chinese military presence. It will also build good relations with Middle Eastern governments, almost all of which are concerned by the prospect of popular discontent and are impressed by the Chinese model of economic development without destabilizing social and political change.

Merkel’s parting with her consent, under the tough coronavirus condition and virus-hit economy and Europe’s pressure in dealing with the Brexit and UK’s double standard, is her savior but costly for Europe. But exerting pressure on Trump for leaving the White House is very beneficial for the U.S. and other countries especially for the West Asia.

## No Discrimination...

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Raisi said the terrorist act aimed at stopping Iran and Iraq on the path of progress and development and stressed the need to fight terrorism.

“Today, we consider the United States a clear example of state terrorism.” The head of the Iranian Judiciary described the US as the common enemy of the Iranian and Iraqi nations, stressing that cooperation between the neighboring countries should increase. He said the withdrawal of the American troops from Iraq, under the Iraqi parliament’s order, will guarantee such security goals.

Fagh Zeidan, for his part, emphasized the implementation of justice without discrimination in the case of the assassination of martyrs Soleimani, Abu Mahdi and their companions. He said, “We are mourning the two martyrs in Iraq and Iran, and we see that the photos of the two martyrs are put together in these ceremonies; this shows the unity and common destiny of the two countries.”

Referring to the U.S. troops’ withdrawal from Iraq, the Iraqi judiciary chief said, “There is no need for the presence of foreign forces to ensure security.”

## Energy Minister...

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Moreover, the visiting Iranian minister held a meeting with Iraqi Minister of Trade Alaa Ahmed al-Jubouri to review the ways to regulate trade ties.

Iranian and Iraqi delegations have also made arrangements for the next meeting of the Joint Economic Commission. Ardakanian and Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi, in a meeting in Baghdad on Tuesday, discussed issues of mutual interests.

The Iranian minister said in Baghdad on Tuesday that after a six-year halt Iran-Iraq Joint Economic Commission is to be reactivated in Tehran in a few weeks. After the meeting and speaking to the reporters, Ardakanian said Iraqi specialized delegations will participate in the Tehran meeting and Iranian private and public sectors will hold constructive consultations for developing bilateral relations.

He added that the trip was made for expanding ties with Iraq in various fields.

Trade Minister of Iraq Alla Ahmed Hassan expressed happiness over the Iranian delegation’s trip to Iraq and added that the trip is aimed at paving the way for holding the Iran-Iraq Joint Economic Commission as successfully as possible. Delegations from the Ministry of Industries, Mining, and Trade; Ministry of Agriculture; Ministry of Petroleum; Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and Central Bank of Iran accompanied Ardakanian to Iraq.

# 2020 Weather Disasters Boosted by Climate Change

LONDON (Dispatches) - The ten costliest weather disasters worldwide this year saw insured damages worth \$150 billion, topping the figure for 2019 and reflecting a long-term impact of global warming, according to a report.

The same disasters claimed at least 3,500 lives and displaced more than 13.5 million people.

From Australia’s out-of-control wildfires in January to a record number of Atlantic hurricanes through November, the true cost of the year’s climate-enhanced calamities was in fact far higher because most losses were uninsured.

Not surprisingly, the burden fell disproportionately on poor nations, according to the annual tally from global NGO Christian Aid, entitled “Count the cost of 2020: a year of climate breakdown”.

Only four percent of economic losses from climate-impacted extreme events in low-income countries were insured, compared with 60 percent in high-income economies, the report said, citing a study last month in The Lancet.

“Whether floods in Asia, locusts in Africa, or storms in Europe and the Americas, climate change has continued to rage in 2020,” said Christian Aid’s climate policy lead, Kat Kramer.

Extreme weather disasters, of course, have plagued humanity long before manmade global warming began to mess with the planet’s climate system.

But more than a century of temperature and precipitation data, along with decades of satellite data on hurricanes and sea level rise, have left no doubt that Earth’s warming surface temperature is amplifying their impact.

Massive tropical storms -- variously known as hurricanes, typhoons and cyclones -- are now more likely, for example, to be stronger, last longer, carry more water and wander beyond their historical range.

2020’s record-breaking 30 named Atlantic hurricanes -- with at least 400 fatalities and



\$41 billion in damages -- suggest the world could see more such storms as well.

The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) had to use Greek symbols after running out of letters in the Latin alphabet.

Intense summer flooding in China and India, where the monsoon season brought abnormal amounts of rainfall for the second year running,

are also consistent with projections on how climate will impact precipitation.

Five of the most costly extreme weather events in 2020 were related to Asia’s unusually rainy monsoon.

“The 2020 flood was one of the worst in the history of Bangladesh, more than a quarter of the country was under water,” said Shahjahan Mondal, director of the Institute of Flood and Water Management at the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology.

Wildfires that scorched record areas in California, Australia and even Russia’s Siberian hinterland, much of it within the Arctic Circle, are also consistent with a warmer world, and a predicted to get worse as temperatures climb.

The planet’s average surface temperature has gone up at least 1.1 degrees Celsius on average compared to the late 19th-century, with much of that warming occurring in the last half-century.

The 2015 Paris Agreement enjoins the world’s nations to collectively cap global warming at “well below” 2C, and even 1.5C if feasible.

A landmark report in 2018 from the UN’s IPCC climate science advisory panel showed that 1.5C is a safer threshold, but the likelihood of staying below it have grown vanishingly small, according to many experts.

“Ultimately, the impacts of climate change will be felt by the extremes, and not average changes,” noted Sarah Perkins-Kilpatrick, a senior lecturer at the University of New South Wales’ Climate Change Research Centre.

## U.S. Increased...

FROM PAGE 1

The US Navy also announced in September that one of its aircraft carriers had sailed through the Strait of Hormuz and entered into the waters of the Persian Gulf in a bid to enforce Washington’s threats about illegal extension of an expiring arms embargo on Iran.

“Such measures only intensify entropy of insecurity and lead to harmful misunderstandings,” Iran’s security chief further said in his Monday tweet.

Shamkhani then emphasized, “Security of the region can be only realized through withdrawal of anti-stability foreign factors.”

## Cyber Crime Has Cost Russia \$49b in 2020



MOSCOW (Reuters) – Cyber-attacks have cost Russian companies and citizens up to 3.6 trillion roubles (\$49 billion) this year, the country’s largest lender Sberbank said.

Russia has encouraged its citizens to switch to bank cards and limit cash use to try to crack down on the shadow economy, but the number of crimes linked to bank cards has shot up by 500% this year, the interior ministry has estimated.

Stanislav Kuznetsov, Sberbank’s deputy chairman, who oversees security and services, told Reuters private business and ordinary Russians were the main targets of cyber-attacks, as the state security services are better protected.

“The private sector is the most vulnerable: everything from the clients’ accounts to financial data and tender documents are targeted: there are 2.3 million darknet accounts operating in Russian and offering the stolen data,” he said.

Russian-speaking cyber criminals operate from Germany, Ukraine and Venezuela, as well as Russia, said the state-controlled Sberbank, which runs its own cybersecurity unit BI.ZONE to provide IT protection and cyber defence for the bank and for others.

While banks, including Sberbank are better protected compared with other parts of the economy, phone fraud - when the client is asked by a person claiming to be a bank employee to provide a card’s data - is becoming more common, Kuznetsov said.

He estimated Russians may lose as much as 10 billion roubles from phone fraud this year alone. He did not provide data for 2019.

The Russian central bank recorded more than half a million unauthorised operations across bank accounts in the country last year, which saw 6.4 billion roubles stolen from private and corporate bank accounts.

## Pfizer Delays Vaccine Deliveries to 8 EU Nations

MADRID (Dispatches)- Pfizer has postponed the delivery of new batches of its coronavirus vaccine to eight European nations including Spain, the Spanish health ministry said Monday, a day after the EU began its immunization campaign.

The Spanish branch of Pfizer informed Madrid on Sunday night of the delay in shipments to the eight nations due to a “problem in the loading and shipment process” at its plant in Belgium, the health ministry said in a statement.

It did not specify which European nations aside from Spain were affected.

Pfizer has informed the ministry that the problem “was already resolved” but the next delivery of vaccines “will be a few hours late” and arrive in Spain on Tuesday, a day later than expected, the statement said.

Asked about the delay during an interview with radio Ser, Health Minister Salvador Illa said it was due to a problem “linked to the control of the temperature” of the shipments which was “apparently fixed”.

The vaccine must be stored at ultra-low temperatures of about -70 degrees Celsius (-112 Fahrenheit) before being shipped to distribution centres in specially designed cool boxes filled with dry ice.

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## Shiffrin Slow on Semmering First run

VIENNA (Dispatches) - World Cup leader Petra Vlhova produced a slick first run in the giant slalom in freezing conditions at Semmering, Austria on Monday as the American star Mikaela Shiffrin came in fourth.  
Vlhova took 1min 01.25sec to negotiate the 43 turns on hard packed snow with Italy's Marta Bassino 0.22sec off the pace and Swiss Michelle Gisin in third at 0.35sec. Shiffrin was 0.59 off Vlhova's pace. Last week the three-time overall World Cup winner Shiffrin won her first race since January after a year marked by the sudden death of her father in February.

## Costa Considering Future at Atletico

MADRID (Reuters) - Atletico Madrid striker Diego Costa missed training on Monday because he is considering his future with the La Liga leaders, a club source said.  
Costa, who helped Atletico win their last La Liga title in 2014, has struggled to make an impact since returning to the club from Chelsea in 2018. The 32-year-old has six months left on his contract.  
The Spain international's second spell with Atletico has been repeatedly disrupted by injuries and he has recently returned from a spell out due to deep-vein thrombosis.

# Chelsea Fail to Lift Pressure on Lampard

LONDON (Dispatches) - Chelsea failed to ease the mounting pressure on manager Frank Lampard as Aston Villa came from behind to earn a 1-1 draw at Stamford Bridge on Monday, as a coronavirus outbreak at Manchester City caused their clash at Everton to be postponed.  
Lampard's men have now won just one of their last five league games to fall six points behind leaders Liverpool in sixth and having played a game more than the champions.  
Chelsea also trail Villa on goal difference, despite Dean Smith's men having two games in hand, and the visitors were well worthy of a point.  
"Now it's a tough moment and you have to fight through it," said Lampard. "Nobody let me down tonight, everyone worked, we just didn't quite get the rub of the green."  
Lampard was able to make six changes from the side beaten at Arsenal 48 hours ago.  
Olivier Giroud was one of those drafted into the side and the French international proved his worth with a precise near post header from Ben Chilwell's cross to open the scoring with his ninth of the season.  
By contrast, Smith made just one enforced change from the team that played for 45 minutes with 10 men in Saturday's 3-0 win over Crystal Palace.  
But Villa showed no signs of fatigue in the second-half and levelled when Anwar El Ghazi turned home his fifth goal in as many games from Matty Cash's cross five minutes into the second-half.



A further round of tests revealed more positives on Monday, reportedly for three players, leading to the Premier League to agree to City's request for the match to be called off.  
"With the security of the bubble compromised, there posed a risk that the virus could spread further amongst the squad, the staff and potentially beyond," City said in a statement. "Based on strong medical advice the Premier League, in consultation with both clubs, have decided to postpone the fixture."  
The club's training ground will now close for an "indefinite period" with further testing on players and staff to take place before it can reopen.  
City are due to face Chelsea away in the Premier League on Sunday and Manchester United in the League Cup semi-finals on January 6. "The Premier League Board received medical advice that the match should be postponed," the Premier League said in a statement.  
"The Premier League continues to have full confidence in its protocols and rules, and the way in which all clubs are implementing them."  
Earlier, a much-changed Leicester moved up to second thanks to Harvey Barnes' late equaliser in a 1-1 draw at Crystal Palace.

With little over 48 hours rest between the Foxes' 2-2 draw with Manchester United on Saturday and the trip to Selhurst Park, Leicester boss Brendan Rodgers made seven changes with Jamie Vardy, James Maddison and Youri Tielemans among those left on the bench. Vardy in particular was missed as Kelechi Iheanacho had a first-half penalty saved by Vicente Guaita.  
Wilfried Zaha's stunning near post volley then put the Eagles in front against the run of play.

## Neymar in New Controversy Over New Year Party Rumors



SAO PAULO (AFP) - Brazil's star footballer Neymar is at the center of a new controversy storm after several Brazilian media reported that he's organizing a huge New Year's Eve party despite the coronavirus pandemic.  
Acelmo Goes, a columnist for the O Globo newspaper, claimed that the Paris Saint-Germain forward is hosting 500 people for a week-long party at his luxury beachside mansion near Rio de Janeiro that started on Saturday and will last until New Year's Day.  
Brazil has suffered the second largest number of Covid-19 related deaths in the world with more than 191,000, while 7.4 million people have contracted the virus.  
Neymar, who is no stranger to controversies over his parties, allegedly even installed soundproofing equipment to try to avoid bothering his neighbors.  
Leo Dias, a columnist for the Metropoles website who is renowned for his scoops on celebrities, even named the artists due to perform at Neymar's party, such as Ludmilla and Wesley Safadão.  
Guests' mobile phones are allegedly due to be confiscated on the door to prevent any evidence finding its way onto social media.

## Mirshekar Warns: Bodybuilding Or Gradual Death?

### IRAN NEWS SPORTS DESK

TEHRAN - A bodybuilding instructor says that most Iranian youth, regardless of the irreparable side effects of dangerous drugs, have become bodybuilders of illicit drug prop clients to achieve fitness and welcome death by losing their health.



Mohammad Mirshekar, a senior physical education expert and bodybuilding instructor, told Iran News about the use of bodybuilding drugs: "Before taking any drug, one should think about the purpose and motivation of the drug or sports supplements to be used." Unfortunately, most of the young people or a large part of the Iranian society take medicine for no particular reason, and this wrong mentality has spread to the field of bodybuilding and some athletes and has become an illegal use of supplements or bodybuilding medicine. He added: "Recently, the use of bodybuilding drugs called "steroids" has become popular among bodybuilders, especially people under the age of 22, while this drug is for athletes who participate in championships, and if others use "steroids", it will definitely be. It will face many problems and complications.

Emphasizing that each drug or sports supplement has its own side effects, Mirshekar said: "I am a bodybuilder and someone who has years of experience in this sport; I do not recommend the use of "steroids" at all for people except the group that is looking for championships. Some people have good physical talent or genetics and can get fit without medication or supplements

Touching upon the youth, he said: What is the purpose of choosing bodybuilding? Don't you choose this field for health, fitness or ultimately beauty? With exercise and diet and without taking bodybuilding drugs, you will first achieve health and then body beauty. Overuse of steroids is dangerous and can lead to premature death. For this reason, the use of "steroids" should be prescribed and controlled by a doctor's instructions or under the supervision of professional trainers, up to date and experienced. Mirshekar also advised young people interested in bodybuilding: to find a good and reliable coach, you should not consider the number of followers of their pages in cyberspace or other social networks and use it as a criterion or value. Consider the importance of choosing the ideal coach.

In response to the question of whether the work of coaches is monitored or not, he said "There is no special body or organization that regularly and constantly wants to closely monitor the work of coaches in bodybuilding clubs."

# Federer out of Australian Open After Knee Surgery



ZURICH (Dispatches) - Twenty-time Grand Slam champion Roger Federer will miss the Australian Open for the first time in his career as he continues his recovery from two rounds of knee surgery, organizers said.

The 39-year-old Swiss has been out of action since February but recently resumed training and was on the entry list for year's opening Grand Slam, which will make a delayed start on February 8.

Federer, a huge favorite with the Melbourne crowds, hasn't missed the Australian Open since his debut in 2000, winning the trophy six times.  
"In the end Roger ran out of time to get himself ready for the rigors of a Grand Slam and he's very disappointed he won't be coming to Melbourne in 2021," said tournament chief Craig Tiley.

"We wish him all the best as he prepares for his comeback later in the year and look forward to seeing him in Melbourne in 2022."

Federer sat out most of the Covid-disrupted 2020 season after losing to Novak Djokovic in the Melbourne semis in January, his last competitive match.

He underwent keyhole surgery on his right knee in February, before needing a follow-up operation and calling off his season to recover.

The Swiss could only watch as Rafael Nadal matched his all-time men's record of 20 Grand Slam singles titles with a 13th victory at the French Open.

Federer will now concentrate on getting himself ready for the rest of the 2021 season, which includes the Tokyo Olympics and the chance of his first singles gold medal.

"He has made strong progress in the last couple of months with his knee and his fitness," his agent Tony Godsick said in a statement.

"I will start discussions this coming week for tournaments that begin in late February and then start to build a schedule for the rest of the year," Godsick added.

## Kohli, Perry Named Cricketers Of the Decade

DUBAI (AFP) - India captain Virat Kohli was named the ICC's male cricketer of the decade on Monday as Australia all-rounder Ellyse Perry swept the top women's awards.

Kohli and Perry were the big winners in the International Cricket Council's Awards of the Decade, while Australian batsman Steve Smith was crowned the best Test player.

Kohli, who was also named ODI player of the decade, lifted the 2011 World Cup and the 2013 Champions Trophy with India, before inspiring their first Test series victory on Australian soil two years ago.

"It's just been an honour for me to be able to go out there and perform for my team, and it's a great honour for me to win this award," Kohli said in a video message.

"My only intention was to make winning contributions for the team and I just strive to do that in every game," he added.

India's all-formats captain was the decade's highest run-scorer with 20,396, hitting the most fifties (66) and having the highest average (56.97) of players with more than 70 innings.

He was also the only player with more than 10,000 one-day international runs, including 39 centuries and 48 fifties at an average of 61.83.

Perry was named female cricketer of the decade as well as the top ODI and T20 player as she cleaned up in the women's awards. Perry, who also played football for Australia at the 2011 World Cup, won four T20 world titles and the 2013 one-day World Cup, scoring 4,349 runs and taking 213 wickets in the decade.

"It has been tremendous to develop the women's T20 game and take it forward," Perry said. "Amazing to see where it's come from when I was introduced to it."



## Messi Stays Tight-Lipped On Future

MADRID (Dispatches) - Lionel Messi remained coy on his future at Barcelona in a long interview broadcast on Sunday in which he called the Catalan giants "my life".

Speaking to Spanish TV channel La Sexta, Messi insisted that he was "excited" to play under coach Ronald Koeman this season despite trying to leave the club where he has played his entire senior career last summer.

He said that at the time he felt like he "needed a change", but his attempted exit was blocked amid a spat with former Barca president Josep Maria Bartomeu.

Messi's contract expires at the end of the season and from next month he will be free to negotiate a move away from Catalonia.

"Barca is my life, I'm in love with the club. And the city, my children were born here," Messi said in an interview conducted earlier this month. "It's true I had a bad time in the summer. It came from everything that happened before the summer, how the season ended, the burofax (how Messi communicated his desire to leave), all of that.

"I carried that into the start of the season a little bit."

Bartomeu stepped down in October and a new Barcelona president will be elected on January 24, after which 33-year-old Messi is expected to begin talks over whether to extend his career-long stay. "I feel good right now, ready to fight for everything. I feel excited," he said.

Messi said he is under no illusions over the position Barca find themselves in, with the financial problems exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic likely to hamper player recruitment. "I know the club is going through a difficult period and that makes everything surrounding Barcelona difficult, but I am motivated," he said.

