

**IRAN NEWS Felicitates Its
Christian Readers on the
Occasion of New Year and Wishes
A Prosperous 2021 to Its Readers**

IRAN NEWS




VOL. XXVI, No. 7131 TEHRAN Price 40,000 Rials

www.irannewsdaily.com

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Iran to Resume Gas Flows to Iraq

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) - Iran resumed normal gas flows to Iraq on Wednesday after reaching an agreement with Iraq on Tuesday over unpaid bills, a spokesman for Iraq's electricity ministry said.

Iran's state gas company said on Monday it had cut supplies to neighboring Iraq over arrears of more than \$6 billion. The Iraqi electricity ministry said the cuts placed Baghdad and other cities at risk of serious power shortages.

An agreement was reached during a meeting between Iranian Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian, who is visiting Baghdad, and Iraqi counterpart Majid Mahdi to resume normal gas flow rates as of Wednesday evening, spokesman Ahmed Moussa told Reuters.

Iran's energy minister also met with Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi and conveyed the Iranian government's pledge to "urgently resume gas pumping which had been slashed recently after technical problems," a statement from the prime minister's office cited Iran's minister as saying without giving details.

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2nd Iran-Made COVID Vaccine Going Through Trial

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The second home-made coronavirus vaccine, developed by Pasteur Institute of Iran, is going through trial phases, says head of the Institute.

Speaking to a radio station on Wednesday, Alireza Biglari said that the Pasteur Institute of Iran is developing a COVID vaccine with the cooperation of a foreign country.

He said that the animal phase of the vaccine and its first human phase have been successfully completed and the second human phase has already started. "The third human phase, which is the least dangerous one, will be carried out on nearly 50,000 individuals in the course of the next two months," Biglari predicted.

Pointing to the 100-year history of the Institute in the fight against different diseases, Biglari named the body as the oldest vaccine manufacturer in West Asia.

His comments come as the first human phase of a COVID vaccine developed by companies under Execution of Imam Khomeini Order (EIKO) kicked off on Tuesday.

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Sokhan Gostar Institute

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U.S. Forces Soon To Leave Region



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Commander of the Quds Force of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps Brigadier General Esmayeel Qaani lauded the role of Martyr Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani in strengthening the Axis of Resistance, and vowed that the U.S. troops will soon leave the region.

Qaani praised the role of General Soleimani in resolving regional crises and strengthening the Resistance Front, stressing that according to the agenda of the Resistance Axis, the end of the US military presence in the region is imminent.

He made the remarks in a closed session of the Iranian Parliament on Wednesday, where he briefed the lawmakers on the details of the last year terror attack on his former boss, Martyr General Soleimani.

He emphasized the necessity of revenge for the blood of Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani.

Hailing the role of General Soleimani in resolving regional crises and strengthening the Axis of Resistance, Qaani said that the bones of the enemy are being crushed due to such strengthened resistance. Referring to the remarks of IRGC Quds Force Commander Brigadier General Qaani in the closed session of Iran's Parliament on Wednesday, parliament member Ebrahim Rezaee said, "In the first place General Qaani stressed that the U.S. must leave Iraq and the region."

Qaani, who served as Martyr Soleimani's deputy for more than a decade, replaced him after his assassination.

He did not go into details of his meeting with lawmakers but it was expected the meeting to be on the latest developments in Iraq and in the region.

In relevant remarks on Sunday, Iranian Parliament Speaker's Special Aide for International Affairs Hossein Amir Abdollahian underlined once again that the country will certainly take a harsh revenge from the masterminds and perpetrators of the terror attack on the former IRGC Quds Force Commander, Lieutenant General Soleimani.

Trump Administration Approves Arms Sales to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Egypt

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - In its final days in office, the administration of US President Donald Trump has approved arms sales to three Arab countries, including the Saudi regime and Egypt, despite criticism of their bleak human rights records.

The U.S. State Department authorized selling the Riyadh regime 3,000 Boeing-made GBU-39 Small Diameter Bomb I (SDB I) munitions and related equipment worth \$290 million, according to a notice to Congress released on Tuesday.

It is separate from a license the Trump administration recently moved forward with approving, which would allow Raytheon Technologies Corp. to directly sell Saudi Arabia 7,500 of its Paveway air-to-ground "smart" bombs at an estimated value of \$478 million. In its Tuesday's notice, the State Department claimed that the sale would "support US foreign policy and national security objectives by helping to improve the security of a friendly country that continues to be an important force for political stability and economic growth in the Middle East."

"The proposed sale will improve Saudi Arabia's capability to meet current and future threats by increasing its stocks of long-range, precision air-to-ground munitions. The size and accuracy of the SDB I allows for an effective munition with less collateral damage," it added. The notice kicks off a 30-day clock during which American lawmakers can block the deal if they choose to. It puts the deadline at the beginning of the administration of Trump's successor, Joe Biden, which could also halt the sale if it wants.

The Democrat has vowed to review the US relationship with Saudi Arabia, end support for the Yemen war, penalize human rights violations and treat the kingdom like "the pariah that they are." In addition to Saudi Arabia, the Trump administration announced approvals on Tuesday for \$4.2 billion and \$170 million in arms sales to Kuwait and Egypt, respectively.

The State Department approved selling Kuwait eight AH-64E Apache helicopters worth \$4 billion and \$200 million in spare parts to upgrade its Patriot missile systems.

Kuwait's government had asked to buy eight AH-64E Apache Longbow Attack Helicopters and the upgrade of 16 of its current AH-64D Apache Longbow Attack Helicopters to the AH-64E configuration, the Pentagon said in a statement, citing Boeing Co, Lockheed Martin Corp, General Electric and Raytheon as the weapons makers associated with the sale.

Separately, the State Department said Egypt was approved to purchase a missile countermeasures system for its presidential aircraft worth \$104 million and 20 targeting pods for military aircraft worth \$65.6 million.

The arms deals have sparked concerns among human rights groups. Sarah Leah Whitson, executive director of Democracy for the Arab World Now (DAWN) non-profit organization, said "The Trump administration is rushing through with parting arms gifts to Saudi Arabia despite its deplorable human rights record."

"President Trump's lame duck Middle East arms bonanza continues," William Hartung, the director of the arms and security program at the Centre of International Policy think tank, said. "Selling more bombs to Saudi Arabia given its history of indiscriminate airstrikes that have killed thousands of civilians in Yemen should be a non-starter. If Congress can't block it, the Biden administration should do so when it takes office."

Iran to Pay \$150,000 For Victims of Downed Ukrainian Plane

TEHRAN (MNA) - The Legal Department of the President's Office on Wednesday passed a bill to pay \$150,000 to each of the bereaved families of the victims of the Ukrainian plane which was downed in an accident earlier this year.

"The Ministry of Transport and Urban Development has been instructed to arrange for the payment of \$ 150,000 or its equivalent in euros to the families of each of the victims as soon as possible and to pay the amounts to the beneficiaries based on the relevant documents," the Legal Department announced, according to IRNA.

It said the damages resulting from the deaths of the victims should be paid without any discrimination based on nationality, citizenship and gender and according to the laws of the victims' countries.

On January 8, an Iranian air defense unit mistakenly shot down Flight 752 of the Ukrainian International Airlines shortly after take-off from Tehran en route to Kiev.

167 passengers and 9 crew members were killed in the downing. The victims included 82 Iranians, 63 Iranian-Canadians, 11 Ukrainians, 10 Swedes, four Afghans, three Germans, and three British nationals.

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Tehran, Moscow Defense Cooperation Based on Int'l Law

TEHRAN (MNA) - Russian Foreign Minister said that Moscow's defense cooperation with Iran is in accordance with international law.

Russia is conducting military cooperation with Iran in strong accordance with its international commitments and for the sake of maintaining stability and security in the region, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov told Sputnik in an interview. "In its military cooperation with Iran, which, undoubtedly, has the right to secure its defense, Russia strictly observes its international commitments and prioritizes the regional stability and security," Lavrov said when asked whether Moscow and Tehran were planning to boost cooperation past the expiry of a UN arms embargo on Iran.

Lavrov said there were no longer any legal constraints, including those posed by the UN Security Council, for Russia and Iran to carry out military cooperation.

According to the foreign minister, all of Russia's military cooperation policies are conducted in accordance with its laws on export and oversight, which are among the world's strictest.

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Syrian Air Defenses Thwart Israeli Aggression On Damascus

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) - Syria says the country's air defenses have thwarted an Israeli aggression on the capital Damascus amid an upsurge in Israeli attacks on the Arab country.

Syria's official SANA news agency said the country's missile defense systems had confronted the Israeli attack on the capital Damascus' western countryside in the early hours of Wednesday.

The state-run media, however, added that the Israeli assault, which was carried out on the southwestern town of al-Zabadani in the Rif Dimashq Governorate, claimed the life of a Syrian soldier and left there others injured.

"Our air defense confronted some of the missiles, which caused one martyr and led to the wounding of three soldiers as well as material damage," SANA quoted a military source as saying.

The incident comes days after Syria's air defense forces repelled an Israeli airstrike on the western Hama province.

Israel frequently targets military positions inside Syria, especially those of the resistance movement Hezbollah which has played a key role in helping the Syrian army in its fight against foreign-backed terrorists.

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Iran Hopes to Join Global Market of Digital Economy

TEHRAN (IP) – President Hassan Rouhani hopes for Iran entering the digital economy and knowledge-based companies.

President Rouhani said in a meeting of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution on Tuesday evening: “Iran today has made honourable progress not only in science production and articles in nanotechnology but also in industries and products.”

The head of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution stated: “Sanctions are annoying not only in imports but also in exports, especially new technologies.”

Iran Not to Calm Down Until It Avenges Martyr Soleimani's Assassination

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – President Hassan Rouhani says Iran will definitely take vengeance upon those responsible for the assassination of top Iranian commander Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani.

President Hassan Rouhani said on Wednesday, “Our nation reserves the right to avenge the killing of their loved one (martyr general Soleimani), and won't calm down until they do so.”

He said his American counterpart Donald Trump and the U.S. secretary of state are among the key elements behind the assassination.

“The assassination of General Soleimani was revenge on the Islamic Republic of Iran, on the independence of regional countries and on the great nations which stood up to, and thwarted the US and Zionist plots,” he said

President Rouhani described the ISIS terrorist group as a bunch of mercenaries of Zionists and Americans in the region.

“They didn't want the ISIS issue to end like this. They wanted ISIS to rule the region,” he noted.

The president reiterated the only ones that benefit from chaos, war and insecurity in the region are Zionists and the Americans.

He said the U.S. assassinated General Soleimani because the late commander prudently stood up to their schemes.

He also described martyr Soleimani as a national hero for Iranians as well as a hero for regional countries and Muslims.

Rouhani said that insecurity in Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Afghanistan would serve the interest of no one except for the Zionist regime.

The president, addressing the perpetrators of the assassination, said, “You cut off the arms of our commander, we will cut off your leg from the region.”



He said the end of Trump's era is one of the effects of this shameful and stupid act, adding, “In a few days, the ruling time of this savage and crazy murderer will end and the whole history and his regime will go to the dustbin of history.”

Rouhani who was addressing the cabinet meeting on Wednesday, noted: “Tomorrow is the last day of the year, and Friday is the first day of 2021. We hope that all those who will have the beginning of their year in these days and those who are related to Jesus Christ, including us Muslims who believe in the mission and prophesy of their great prophet, will all be able to benefit from his noble way.”

He added, “2020 has been a difficult year for all countries in the world, noting that from the beginning of this year and even the end of 2019, the world's countries were grappling with a coronavirus that was unique in the last century.”

“Culture, education, economic relations of the society, etc., were in trouble. All countries of the world have great problems in terms of economy, education, culture, and public health,” Rouhani said.

The President stated that although 10 months have passed since the outbreak of Coronavirus and we have entered the 11th month, underscored: “We should try to distance ourselves from this problem. It is not clear under what circumstances the corona problem is over. At the same time, we are happy that the medical staff and the people and all the forces, the Basij and the IRGC, etc., entered the scene with all their might and facilities.”

Iran Prepares Draft of Ukrainian Plane Crash Final Report

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Civil Aviation Organization of Iran announced on Wednesday that the draft version of the Ukrainian plane crash final report has been prepared for those countries participating in investigations.

Those who receive the report will have two months to present their views to CAO and then the final report will be released.

The meeting to address Ukrainian plane crash was held through video conference on December 21.

U.S. as manufacturer of the plane, Ukraine as its user, France a country which had provided technical support and experts from Canada, Sweden, UK and Germany attended the event.

The report is aimed at preventing similar accidents and promoting safety level in the world.

“The second round of talks between Iran and Ukraine on plane crash was constructive, Iranian Ambassador to Ukraine Manouchahr Moradi wrote in his Twitter account.

The first round of talks was held on July 30-31, 2020, under the supervision of deputy Foreign Minister for Legal and International Affairs Mohsen Baharvand, in Kiev, Ukraine.

Iranian and Ukrainian officials started the second round of talks on the passenger plane crash on October 19 expected to continue until October 21.

On Jan 8, 2020, a Boeing 737 belonging to Ukraine International Airlines crashed in Tehran shortly after taking off from Iran's Imam Khomeini International Airport (IKIA) with at least 170 passengers and crew, mostly Iranians, onboard.

Deputy Foreign Minister for Legal and International Affairs Mohsen Baharvand has emphasized that the Islamic Republic of Iran never seeks to hide the details of the air disaster and violate the rights of the families of the victims.

Baharvand assured the families of the victims that the country's diplomatic apparatus, in coordination and cooperation with all relevant parties, will use all its capacities and efforts to remedy the rights of the victims.

Gas Condensate Storage of South Pars Phase 14 Operational

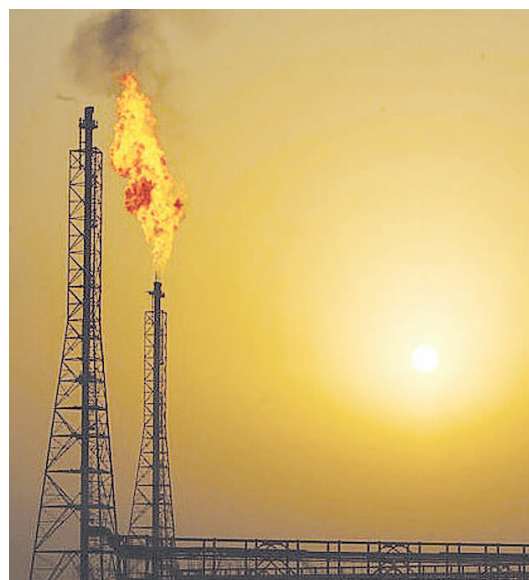
TEHRAN (IRNA) - Managing director of Pars Oil and Gas Company Mohammad Meshkinfam said on Wednesday that gas condensate storage of South Pars Phase 14 were put into operation.

According to the Pars Oil and Gas Company, Meshkinfam said that completion of the new storage will boost reservoir capacity of South Pars gas condensates.

He said that the company will also build the second storage for gas condensates, adding that the preparatory works for construction of the third storage are also underway and designing the project will be worked out by the end of January 2021.

South Pars Phase 14 development is aimed at producing 56.6 million cubic meters per day of rich gas, 75,000 barrels/day of gas condensate and 400 tons/day of sulfur, and one million tons/year of liquefied gas and one million tons/year of ethane to be fed to petrochemical plants.

South Pars gas field is divided into 24 standard phases of development in the first stage. Most of the



phases are fully operational at the moment.

The huge offshore field covers an area of 9,700 square kilometers, 3,700 square kilometers of which are in Iran's territorial waters in the Persian Gulf. The remaining 6,000 square kilometers, called North Dome, are situated in Qatar's territorial waters.

The field is estimated to contain a significant amount of natural gas, accounting for about eight percent of the world's reserves, and approximately 18 billion barrels of gas condensate.

The operator of the South Pars Phase 14 development project said the project's onshore refinery is scheduled to be fully operational by the first half of the next Iranian year (September 2021).

“Based on the schedules, by the end of the current Iranian year (March 2021), utility units (including water, electricity, and steam), gas condensate storage unit, independent water intake unit and torches will be completed and commissioned, Mohammad Mehdi Tavassolipour said.

Preparations for 20% Uranium Enrichment Underway

TEHRAN (IP) - The Chief of the Presidential Staff Mahmoud Vaezi said that after the law of nullifying sanctions was passed in the parliament, the president immediately ordered the formation of a committee, and the report of this committee was presented to the government.

In response to an Iran Press question, Mahmoud Vaezi stated that it is natural that the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran should prepare the ground for this law and that it is being implemented, and that all clauses of the parliamentary law have been sent to the relevant agencies for implementation.

The official stated that the Atomic Energy Organization is making preparations for 20% uranium enrichment and 120 kg of uranium enrichment must be done in a year. He added that 20% uranium enrichment has a technical sensitivity and that preparations are underway by the Atomic Energy Organization.

Iranian lawmakers in the 1st December's open session of the parliament adopted the outline of the 9-article strategic plan action to nullify sanctions with 251 votes in favor and stressed the need for its immediate implementation.



Money Stolen by Russian Official Didn't Belong to Iran

TEHRAN (IFP) - The government spokesman has rejected Russian media reports that the one-million-dollar cash allegedly stolen by a Russian Foreign Ministry official belongs to Iran.

Ali Rabiei made the comment after some Russian media outlets claimed around \$1 million cash money sent in two suitcases to Russia by Iran had been stolen.

Rabiei said the issue is about an embezzlement case related to one of the employees of the Russian foreign ministry. “The money belonging to one of the staff members of the Russian foreign ministry is not related to Iran. This money came from the Russian government's earnings in Iran, and everything happened inside Russia,” he said.

“As far as I know, one of the staff members of the Russian foreign ministry did this, and legal proceedings to review the case have been going on in Russian courts since last year,” the spokesman noted.

“This issue completely falls within Russian laws and has nothing to do with Iran and relations between the two countries,” he noted. “So, issues pertaining to the case are not related to Iran. The only relation to Iran, as I said, is that the money comes from the consular revenues of the Russian embassy in Tehran. Neither does the money belong to Iran, nor is the accused person Iranian,” Rabiei said.

Region United Against U.S.

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said the January assassination of top Iranian commander Lt. General Qassem Soleimani united the region against the U.S. arrogance and presence.

“Last year, across the region, from Iran and Iraq to India and Pakistan, people showed disgust for murderers of General Soleimani,” the Iranian Foreign Ministry said in a post on its Twitter account on Wednesday.

“His blood united our region in opposing US arrogance and presence. A real response to recklessness,” it noted.

“The anger and unity still stand,” the post added.

On January 3, a U.S. drone strike near Baghdad International Airport assassinated General Soleimani, former commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps. The attack — that also killed Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the second-in-command of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) anti-terror group, along with several others— came while General Soleimani was on an official visit to the Iraqi capital.

Saudi Compromise With Israelis To Only Make It “Insecure”

TEHRAN (MNA) – Majlis Speaker's Special Aide for International Affairs said that tie normalization between Saudi Arabia and Zionist regime will have not any achievement for Riyadh except insecurity.

Speaking in an interview with Al-Mayadeen News Network on Tue., Hossein Amir-Abdollahian reiterated that the compromise of the Saudi Arabian government with the Zionist regime will only make Riyadh ‘insecure’.

He pointed to Saudi war waged against Yemen and added, “War against Yemen is an American-Zionist plot and Saudi Arabian government is a pawn and puppet in their hands.”

“We regret that some countries are rushing to normalize their relations with the Zionist regime, a compromise that makes Muslim countries to be among enemies.”

He said that former IRGC Quds Force Commander Martyr Lt. Gen. Qassem Soleimani was equipping and training resistance forces and this “Strategic Action” would continue.

He then pointed to the salient characteristics of Martyr Gen. Soleimani and added, “Martyr Soleimani, in addition to his military characteristics, had a unique diplomatic knowledge. He was a brave commander who never got tired and was very serious in what he did.”

Iran's former IRGC Quds Force Commander Martyr Lt. Gen. Qassem Soleimani and Iraqi PMU Commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis were assassinated at Baghdad International Airport on Jan. 3 by the US terrorist forces at the behest of US President Trump.

Half of Iranians Unhappy With Gov't President

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is the Iranian people's top pick for the role of the country's president, a new poll by the Iran Wire news site has found.

At 37%, over one-third of respondents aged 18 and over said they wanted to see Ahmadinejad return to the presidency, compared to the 10% who named conservative politician Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf as their first choice for the job.

The poll's findings reflect the Iranian public's disillusion with the reformist movement, whose supporters have largely given up hope they will be able to reform through elections.

Around 48% of the 1,000 people surveyed said they were unhappy with current Iranian President Hassan Rouhani's performance, and 16% said they were very unhappy. Considered something of a compromise pick by the reformist camp, Rouhani has been criticized by both camps for his handling of the country's economic situation.

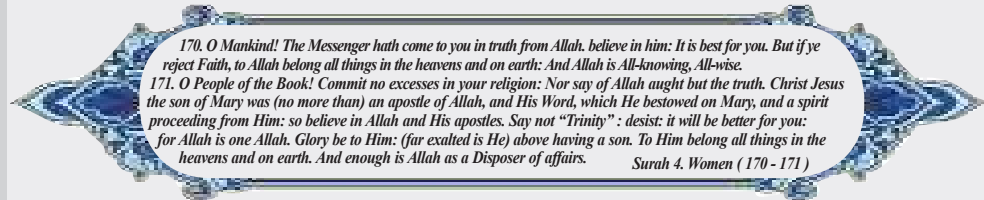
Elected in 2009, Ahmadinejad is considered the country's most radical president to date. Known for his frequent threats against Israel and anti-Semitic rhetoric, the former president managed to anger progressive U.S.

Nevertheless, Ahmadinejad is seen as a humble politician who supports the lower classes in Iranian society and fights corruption.



PRAYER TIME

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



China 25-Year Cooperation Plan Nothing to Do With Any Gov't in Iran

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Chairman of Iran-China Joint Chamber of Commerce Majid Reza Hariri says anybody who talks about the future of China's 25-year cooperation program with Iran just expresses his own opinion and it can be invalid and the only source whose opinion and news on this cooperation is valid and authentic is the center which has been launched in Iran and former Majlis Speaker Mr. Ali Larijani is in charge of it.

Speaking to ILNA, Hariri reacted to the remarks of one of Majlis lawmakers who claimed the China government delays implementing its 25-year cooperation program with Iran as the Chinese are waiting for the next government in Iran. He added when one government is in its last days and a new government is to take office, it usually affects on the international interactions but the comprehensive Sino-Iran 25-year cooperation program has been drawn up in a way that it is not dependent on the governments and for this reason a long-term plan has been drawn up, and it means the relation between the Islamic Republic establishment and China.

He added therefore regarding these relations it makes no difference whether Mr Rouhani's government to be in charge or the next government because it is not supposed the tastes of governments to be involved in this regard.

Hariri added that it has been tried this program to be above the government or political fraction approaches, and since the day one it has been decided the program to advance



between the Islamic Republic establishment and China. He noted so for shaping this relation, in 2018 Mr. Larijani went to China as Iran's representative, it means no government official has been chosen for this task and Mr. Larijani accompanied by seven government ministers conveyed Supreme Leader's message to China.

He stipulated that it means this program has nothing to do with governments and after that visit, the government officially announced that Mr. Larijani is in charge of managing negotiations between Iran and China for drawing up the comprehensive plan. He noted Mr. Larijani has no parliamentary or government job and he has been appointed in charge of this program as the representative of the establishment and currently he is managing it and he is busy with his job in an office which has been allocated for it.

Hariri reiterated that some specialized workgroups are working on this program and it has nothing to do with the change of governments. He emphasized the necessity of univocal in negotiations, and avoiding any distractive remarks. He reiterated that the only legitimate place whose news on this relation is authentic and is allowed to talk on is this center.

He added that anybody except this center who talks about this program is just expressing his personal opinion and it may be wrong.

Hariri noted that any remark on this cooperation program is just for domestic consumption and inter-political front disputes and can have negative impact on the negotiations. He said all of us are to have one voice and the voice is that both Supreme Leader has ordered and the government has approved it, so other voices and remarks may disrupt the trend of these talks.

Pakistan Urged to Move for Boosting Asian Cooperations



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – Chairman of Iran's parliamentary Group in the Asian Parliamentary Assembly (APA) Ms. Masumeh Pashae during her meeting with Pakistan Ambassador to Tehran Rahim Hayat Qureshi said members of APA committees of Iran and Pakistan should take advantage of the opportunities ahead for strengthening Asian cooperations.

In the meeting, Majlis lawmaker Ms. Pashae pointed to the deep bonds between Iran and Pakistan, saying that commonalities between the two neighboring and friendly countries are opportunities for the nation, government and parliament in order to take step in line for strengthening and developing relations more than ever.

She called Iran and Pakistan as two important and influential countries in the Muslim world and stipulated that developing bilateral relations as well as boosting consultations and contacts with other Muslim countries is a solution for unity and solving crises of Muslim world especially innocent Palestinian people's woes.

She then pointed to the important stand of APA in boosting parliamentary diplomacy and distinguished role of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan as two influential and important members of the assembly, and added that continuation of cooperation and parliamentary talks between both countries for strengthening and advancing the goals of the APA is of great importance. She reiterated that the members of committees of APA teams of both countries should take advantage of the opportunities ahead of them for more bolstering Asian cooperation.

Pakistan Ambassador, Mr. Qureshi, for his part, expressed his satisfaction over the meeting and underscored bolstering parliamentary relations between Iran and Pakistan in the regional and international meetings, adding that nothing should hinder boosting cooperation between Tehran and Islamabad in different fields either bilateral or multilateral co-operations.

He also said inauguration of Rimdan-Gabd cross-border gateway is a step towards boosting bilateral relations between Iran and Pakistan in the new era, adding that this move is an effective action for creation of job for the local people and preventing them from turning to smuggling of goods.

Ankara Calls for More Economic Cooperation With Tehran

TABRIZ (IRNA) - The governor-general of Erzurum Province of Turkey stressed increasing trade and economic relations with Iran's East Azarbaijan Province.

In a video-conference with Governor-General of East Azerbaijan Mohammad-Reza Pourmohammadi, Okay Memiş said on Tuesday that he is seeking to launch a direct flight line between Tabriz and Erzurum.

Memiş said that the necessary facilities are prepared for Iranians to invest in Erzurum and the investors of Erzurum Province are ready to invest in Iran, adding that some 500 Iranian students are studying at Ataturk University in Erzurum.

Referring to the historical, religious, linguistic, and ethnic commonalities between Iran and Turkey, Memiş called for the strengthening of relations between the two neighboring countries.

Poumohammadi said in the online meeting that launching the flight can prosper trade and tourism in northwestern Iran and eastern Turkey.

Pourmohammadi said that the two countries have been by each other during the difficult times, and it is necessary that they keep their cooperation more vigorously.

He added that with regard to the 30-billion-dollar vision for trade between Iran and Turkey, the border provinces can play an important role and that the economies on the two sides of the border can be complementary to each other.

Senior Cleric Doubtful Iran Would Ratify FATF Conventions

TEHRAN (PressTV) - A senior Iranian cleric sitting on the Expediency Council, the body in charge of settling legislative disputes in the country, says he is doubtful the body would eventually endorse requirements of the FATF money-laundering watchdog over fears that they may undermine the country's financial independence.

Ayatollah Mohsen Mojtahed Shabestari said on Tuesday that a renewed debate in the Expediency Council on the Financial Action Task Force's Palermo and terrorist financing conventions would not necessarily mean there would be a change in the Council's position on the issue.

"I have already expressed my opinion and I have insisted that my position would not change and I don't think the opinion of other members has changed on the issue," Shabestari told the semi-official Mher News agency.

The comments came a week after officials in the

administrative government of President Hassan Rouhani said the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei had agreed to recommend a renewed debate in the Expediency Council to examine the FATF conventions.

Rouhani's government insists that Iran's continued inclusion in an FATF blacklist would hurt the country's trade and economic relations with neighboring countries as well as with major allies like China and Russia.

Ayatollah Shabestari, a former representative of the Leader in northwestern Iran, said that accepting FATF conventions would do more harm than good to Iran, saying, however, that bills meant to ratify the conventions may finally pass through the Expediency Council with a slim majority of votes.

"It is difficult to foresee what would be the final outcome on FATF bills ... I am not able to predict their fate," said the cleric.

Printing, Packing Expo to Open on Jan. 2

TEHRAN (MNA) - The 27th International Exhibition of Printing, Packing, and Related Machinery is going to be held during January 2-5 at the Tehran Permanent International Fairground.

More than 190 domestic companies are going to showcase their latest products and services during the four-day event, Head of Iran's Association of Manufacturers of Engraving Plates, Lithographs, Stamps, Plaques and Screen Printing, Ahmad Abolhassani told IRIB.

The exhibition covers a variety of areas including printing machines, packaging machines, encoders and devices, export products sealing machines, and etc.

According to the official, this year's exhibition is going to be open only for businessmen, experts, and scholars due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"The exhibition will be held in complete compliance with health and safety protocols," Abolhassani stressed.

He further noted that the necessary licenses and approvals have been obtained from the National Headquarters for Coronavirus Control as well as the Trade Promotion Organization (TPO).

Mentioning the country's potentials and capacities in this industry, the official said: "Iran's printing and packaging industry can play the leading role in the region, but due to the lack of support from the government and executive organizations, unfortunately, Turkey is currently holding the major market for this sector in the region, while our capabilities in this sector are not less than this country."

The exhibition aims to provide a platform to showcase the latest services and products to support domestic production and transfer knowledge and technology.

Ten Innovation Center Inaugurated At Shahid Beheshti University

TEHRAN (IP) - Ten innovation centers, one accelerator center and several technological projects related to laser were inaugurated in Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran.

In the unveiling ceremony held in the presence of vice president Sorena Sattari and Shahid Beheshti university's president Saadollah Nasiri, many knowledge-based companies exhibited their latest achievements.

The products included the latest technologies in laser, fighting with coronavirus and many other fields.

Vice president for science and technology said that these days the universities' approach had changed completely, and they are focusing on production and creativity rather than just getting degrees.

Sattari stressed the need to use scientific committees in new sectors such as biotechnology and describe Shahid Beheshti University as the main laser science center.

He also said that each graduate student must be supported to establish a knowledge-based company and said that researching without having customers is meaningless.

Vice president for science and technology also encouraged universities to focus on new fields rather than basic sciences.

There is a platform in the vice presidency for science and technology which encourages graduates from top universities to work in Iranian universities as scientific committees, Sattari concluded.

Rail Transit From Sarakhs up by 35%

MASHHAD (IRNA) - Managing director of Khorasan railways said rail transit through Sarakhs has experienced 35 percent growth in a seven-month period compared to last year's corresponding period.

Mostafa Nasiri said 200,000 tons of goods have been transited through the Sarakhs border and from Turkmenistan to Iran.

He added that the exported goods were transferred to Bandar Abbas and Mirjaveh.

Nasiri referred to suitable infrastructures and taking advantage of Iranian wagons' capacities for loading as the reason behind increasing transit.

He went on to say that sulfur weighing 150,000 tons (75% of total amount) and fertilizer have been transited through Sarakhs.

Iranian, German Universities To Exchange Students



SHAHR REY (Dispatches) - Islamic Azad University of Shahr Rey and Technical University of Cologne, Germany, signed agreement to exchange students, Chancellor of Islamic Azad University of Shahr Rey, Saeed Ghazi Maghrebi, said on Wednesday.

Ghazi Maghrebi said that applicants will receive two certificates from the Iranian and German universities.

He added that the course will be held in three models of "only in Iran", "partly in Iran and Germany" and "only in Germany".

Ghazi Maghrebi noted that Persian language is necessary for Iranian versions and for studying in Germany, the applicants should learn German language at least at B2 level.

He said that visa together with invitation will be issued from the German university and the student should pay for the ticket.

Tuition fees in Iran will be provided by the student or the sponsoring company, which may be Iranian or a representative of a German company in Iran.

Philippines Bans Arrivals From 20 Countries

MANILA (Dispatches) - The Philippines will shut its borders to foreigners arriving from 20 countries and territories in a bid to prevent a new strain of coronavirus entering the nation, officials said Tuesday.

The ban on travellers from places including Australia, France, Japan and Hong Kong comes as the archipelago braces for a post-Christmas surge in the virus that has infected nearly half a million people.

Dozens of countries closed their borders to the Britain in recent weeks over rising cases of a variant that is believed to spread faster.



Gaza Forces Fire Rockets to Mark Israel Conflict Anniversary

GAZA CITY (AFP) - Palestinian armed groups staged military exercises in Gaza on Tuesday, including firing rockets into the sea, to mark the anniversary of the start of the 2008 conflict with Israel.

The demonstrations were scheduled to last several hours and involve about 10 groups in the Israeli-blockaded Palestinian enclave, said a spokesman for the Al-Quds Brigade forces, the armed wing of Islamic Jihad.

The goal of the exercise, the first of its kind, is to “strengthen the skills of combatants” and demonstrate the “unity” of armed groups in Gaza, added the spokesman, whose face was almost entirely covered by a traditional headscarf.



UK, Turkey Reach Post-Brexit Free Trade Agreement



ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkey and the United Kingdom signed a free-trade agreement Tuesday as the UK prepares to leave the European Union's economic orbit at the start of the new year.

The deal, which will come into effect on January 1, aims to support trade between the two countries which was worth more than \$25 billion in 2019.

It is one of many post-Brexit trade deals the British government is pursuing with nations around the world and came days after it finalised a trade agreement with the EU.

The UK left the EU on January 31 of this year but remained subject to the bloc's business regulations and within its customs union during a transition period that ends on December 31.

Turkish Trade Minister Ruhsar Pekcan and Dominick Chilcott, the British ambassador to Turkey, signed the British-Turkish agreement.

Pekcan hailed the deal as the most significant trade pact for Turkey since the signing of a customs union agreement with the EU in 1995.

“The free trade agreement is a new and special milestone in the relationship between Turkey and United Kingdom,” Pekcan said during the ceremony. Britain is Turkey's second-largest export market.

A British government statement said the deal will secure existing preferential tariffs for some 7,600 British businesses that exported goods to Turkey in 2019, ensuring the continued tariff-free flow of goods.

Both countries have said the deal will lead to a more comprehensive agreement in the future.

Bazoum Leads Early Presidential Results in Niger

NIAMEY (Reuters) - The ruling party's presidential candidate in Niger, Mohamed Bazoum, held a large lead in the first partial results from Sunday's election, although his early score was short of the 50% he would need to avoid a second round.

Based on results published late on Monday by the electoral commission from 23 of 266 voting districts, Bazoum received nearly 40% of the vote, ahead of his nearest challenger, former president Mahamane Ousmane, who had about 16%.

Bazoum, a former interior minister, is considered a strong favourite to succeed President Mahamadou Issoufou, who is stepping down after two five-year terms leading the country of 23 million.

A smooth handover would mark the first transfer of power between two democratically elected presidents. Niger has experienced four coups since independence from France in 1960.

Swiss Get 24/7 Fighter Jet Protection

GENEVA (AFP) - Switzerland will get round-the-clock airspace protection starting this week, the military said Tuesday, nearly seven years after the country was unable to scramble fighter jets to respond to an hijacking outside of business hours.

Starting on December 31, two F-18 fighter jets will be operational 24/7 to protect the airspace over the small, landlocked country, the armed forces said in a statement.

“From now on, the air police service will be on call 24 hours a day to guarantee the security and the sovereignty over Swiss airspace,” the statement said. The plan to increase Swiss airspace surveillance was proposed to parliament in 2009, but it was boosted by an incident five years later that cast a spotlight on the lack of round-the-clock protection.

In February 2014, an Ethiopian Airlines co-pilot, Hailemedehin Abera Tagegn, hijacked his own plane, carrying 202 passengers and crew from Addis Ababa to Rome, and forced it to land in Geneva.

When Tagegn locked himself in the cockpit while the pilot went to the bathroom, Italian and French fighter jets were scrambled to escort the plane through their respective airspaces.



Strong Quake Central Croatia, Damaging Buildings

SISAK (Reuters) -An earthquake of magnitude 6.4 struck central Croatia on Tuesday, killing a child and injuring many people in the town of Petrinja, and also shook several neighbouring countries, officials and residents said.

Rescuers pulled people from the rubble of collapsed buildings in Petrinja and army troops were sent to the area to help.

Tremors were also felt in Croatia's capital Zagreb and as far away as Austria's capital Vienna. Slovenia shut its only nuclear power plant as a precaution.

The GFZ German Research Centre for Geosciences said the quake hit at a depth of 10 km (6 miles), with the epicentre in Petrinja, 50 km south of Zagreb.

Tomislav Fabijanic, head of emergency medical services in nearby Sisak, said many people had been injured in Petrinja and in Sisak.

“There are fractures, there are concussions and some had to be operated on,” he said. Prime Minister Adrej Plenkovic, who rushed to Petrinja, said: “We have information that one girl was killed. We have no other information on casualties.”

“The army is here to help. We will have to move some people from Petrinja because it is unsafe to be here,” Plenkovic said.

N1 news channel quoted a Petrinja town official as saying that a 12-year old child had been killed. It showed footage of rescuers in Petrinja pulling a man and a child from the debris. Both were alive.

Other footage showed a house with its roof caved in. The reporter said she did not know if anyone was inside.

N1 also said a kindergarten was destroyed in the quake but there had been no children in it. The situation was “difficult” in retirement homes in the Petrinja area, it added.

Piles of stone, bricks and tiles littered Petrinja's streets in the aftermath of the quake, and cars parked in the road were also smashed by falling debris. Patients were evacuated from the Sisak hospital because buildings were damaged.

Thousands March Against Nepal PM's Dissolution of Parliament

KATHMANDU (Reuters) - Thousands of opponents of Nepal's Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli marched through the streets of Kathmandu on Tuesday urging him to reverse his decision to dissolve parliament and call for early elections.

The protesters, who say his decision on Dec. 20 was unconstitutional, rallied outside his office despite coronavirus curbs on gatherings.

Oli says internal squabbling and a lack of cooperation from his party have paralysed decision-making, forcing him to seek a new popular mandate.

Police officials overseeing security said at least 10,000 people were on the streets to participate in the march, one of the most intense protests the country has witnessed since Oli dissolved parliament.

“We have tactfully managed the rally of about 10,000 protesters,” said Basanta Bahadur Kunwar, a police spokesman.

The country's top court will in January continue hearing dozens of petitions filed against Oli's political move and his plans to press ahead with parliamentary elections next year on April 30 and May 10, less than two years before the scheduled date.

“The prime minister has no authority to dissolve the parliament under the constitution. Therefore, he should reverse his decision immediately,” said 19-year-old student Rajesh Thapa, waving a flag with a red hammer and sickle printed on it, a symbol of the ruling Communist party.



EU Criticizes China for Jailing Journalist Who Reported on COVID-19



BRUSSELS (Reuters) - The European Union on Tuesday criticized the jailing of a citizen-journalist in China who reported on the early outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic from Wuhan.

A Chinese court handed down a four-year jail term on Monday to Zhang Zhan, who reported at the peak of the crisis in the city where the coronavirus first emerged. Her lawyer said Zhang was jailed on the grounds of “picking quarrels and provoking trouble”.

The EU called for Zhang's immediate release, as well as for freedom for jailed human rights lawyer Yu Wensheng, and several other detained and convicted human rights defenders and individuals who engaged in reporting in the public interest.

“According to credible sources, Ms Zhang has been subject to torture and ill-treatment during her detention and her health condition has seriously deteriorated,” an external affairs spokesman for the 27-nation EU said in a statement.

Separately, the EU called on China to “guarantee procedural fairness and due process of law” for 10 Hong Kong activists on trial in China after being caught at sea and accused of trying to flee to Taiwan.

In a statement it called for the immediate release of the group and their swift return to Hong Kong from Shenzhen, where they went on trial on Dec. 28 in a closed court and without appointed lawyers of their choice.

The EU criticism over the cases comes a day before EU and Chinese leaders are expected to clinch a deal to give European companies better access to the Chinese market.

Citizen-journalist Zhang was among a handful of people whose firsthand accounts from crowded hospitals and empty streets painted a more dire picture of the pandemic epicentre than the official narrative.

Critics say that China deliberately arranged for Zhang's trial to take place during the holiday season in the West, to minimize scrutiny.

“The restrictions on freedom of expression, on access to information, and intimidation and surveillance of journalists, as well as detentions, trials and sentencing of human rights defenders, lawyers, and intellectuals in China, are growing and continue to be a source of great concern,” the EU spokesman said.

Kamranieh (\$2800)
220sq.m
3bdrs, pkg
S/p, Sauna
J, balcony
marble fl
Fully Furn

Shanon (adviser)

Elahieh bldg (\$12000)
4storey bldg
10bdrs, yard
enough pkgs
renovated
Semi Furn

Parsian

Sa'adat abad (\$1600)
2bdrs, 150sq.m, & yard

Velenjak (\$1400)
130sq.m, 2bdrs
S/p, S, J, gym
balcony, & F.F

Jordan (\$2000)
250sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, F.F

Tajrish Villa
1300sq.m, 5bdrs
S/p, S, J, yard
pkg lots, & F.F

Elahieh Apts
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(\$2200) 3bdrs, 220sq.m, S/p, F.F

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India Lifts Ban on Onion Exports as Prices Plunge

MUMBAI (Reuters) - India decided on Monday to lift a ban on onion exports from Jan. 1, as prices have fallen sharply in the last few weeks on expectations of a big crop.

Exports of all varieties of onion will be allowed, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry said in a notification. India banned exports of onions in September to preserve domestic supplies after flooding in several states worsened seasonal shortages, leading to a spike in local prices.

India is the world's biggest exporter of onions, a staple of South Asian cooking. Countries such as Bangladesh, Nepal, Malaysia and Sri Lanka rely on Indian shipments.



Trump Administration Bolsters Order Barring U.S. Investment in Chinese Firms

WASHINGTON (Reuters) -The Trump administration on Monday strengthened an executive order barring U.S. investors from buying securities of alleged Chinese military-controlled companies, following disagreement among U.S. agencies about how tough to make the directive.

The Treasury Department published guidance clarifying that the executive order, released in November, would apply to investors in exchange-traded funds and index funds as well as subsidiaries of Chinese companies designated as owned or controlled by the Chinese military.

The "frequently asked questions" release, posted on the Treasury website on Monday, came after Reuters and other news outlets reported that a debate was raging within the Trump administration over the guidance. The State Department and the Department of Defense had pushed back against a bid by Treasury Department to water down the executive order, a source said.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said Monday that the announcement "ensures U.S. capital does not contribute to the development and modernization of the People's Republic of China's (PRC) military, intelligence, and security services."

"This should allay concerns that U.S. investors might unknowingly support (Chinese military-controlled companies) via direct, indirect, or other passive investments," he added.

The Chinese foreign ministry said on Tuesday that China is firmly opposed to the "smearing of China's military-civilian integration strategy."

"Politicizing economy and trade, abusing the power of the state, stretching the concept of national security, such actions go against the principles of market competition and international trade that the United States has always prided itself with," the foreign ministry's spokesperson's office told Reuters.

Specifically, some media outlets reported that Treasury was seeking to exclude Chinese companies' subsidiaries from the scope of the White House directive, which bars new purchases of securities of 35 Chinese companies that Washington alleges are backed by the Chinese military, starting in November 2021.

The guidance released on Monday specifies that the prohibitions apply to "any subsidiary of a Communist Chinese military company, after such subsidiary is publicly listed by Treasury." It added that the agency "intends to list" publicly traded entities that are 50% or more owned by a Chinese military company or controlled by one.

"Treasury's published FAQ represents a clear victory for the U.S. security community in its determined effort to preserve strong capital markets sanctions associated with [the executive order] — the first of their kind," said Roger Robinson, a former White House official who supports curbing Chinese access to U.S. investors. The November executive order sought to give teeth to a 1999 law that mandated that the Department of Defense compile a list of Chinese military companies. The Pentagon, which only complied with the mandate this year, has so far designated 35 companies, including oil company CNOOC Ltd and China's top chipmaker, Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corp. Since the November order, index providers have already begun shedding some of the designated companies from their indexes.

Saudi Aramco Discovers Four New Oil and Gas Fields

RIYADH (Dispatches) - Saudi Aramco has discovered four new oil and gas fields across the kingdom, according to the country's Minister of Energy.

In a report carried by the state-run Saudi Press Agency, Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman bin Abdulaziz revealed that non-conventional oil has been discovered in al-Reesh oil field, north-west of Dhahran.

It said that the Al-Reesh Well No. 2 has 4,452 barrels per day of Arab extra light crude oil, along with 3.2 million standard cubic feet of natural gas.

To determine the field's size, Aramco has drilled al-Reesh Well No. 3 and Well No. 4. Well No. 3's initial production has reached 2,745 barrels per day of the same oil type, along with three million standard cubic feet of gas per day. Well No. 4's daily flow of Arab Extra Light crude oil amounts to 3,654 barrels per day, along with a daily 1.6 million standard cubic feet of natural gas.

Oil has also been discovered in al-Ajramiyah Well No. 1, which lies to the north-west of the city of Rafhaa in the Northern Borders Province. The well test shows a rate of 3,850 barrels of oil per day.

Non-conventional gas has also been discovered in al-Sarrah reservoir at al-Minahhaz well, south-west of the Ghawar oil field, and at al-Sahbaa well, south of Ghawar. Gas from al-Minahhaz well amounts to 18 million standard cubic feet daily, along with a daily 98 barrels of condensate, and out of al-Sahbaa well a daily rate of 32 million standard cubic feet.

According to the OPEC website, Saudi Arabia possesses around 17 percent of the world's proven petroleum reserves. The oil and gas sector accounts for about 50 percent of gross domestic product, and about 70 percent of export earnings.



China's Factory Activity Likely Sustained Strong Expansion in December

BEIJING (Reuters) - China's factory activity likely maintained a solid pace of expansion in December, a Reuters poll showed on Tuesday, as the world's second-largest economy steadily recovers from the coronavirus crisis.

The official manufacturing Purchasing Manager's Index (PMI) is expected to edge

down to 52.0 in December from November's 52.1, according to the median forecast of 27 economists polled by Reuters. A reading above 50 indicates an expansion in activity on a monthly basis.

China is on track to become the first to completely shake off the drag from widespread industry shutdowns. November's PMI reading was the highest in more than three years.

Profits at China's industrial firms grew robustly in November for a seventh month of gains, supported by strong industrial production and sales.

The Chinese economy is expected to expand around 2% for the full year - the weakest in over three decades but still much stronger than other major economies still struggling to contain virus infections.

Around two-thirds of executives in China said the country's recovery to pre-COVID conditions is still more than three months away, according to a survey by China Beige Book released Monday.

"China Beige Book data continue to show a less robust recovery than official statistics," said Leland Miller, the CEO of the U.S.-based consultancy, in a statement released alongside the survey results.

The official PMI, which largely focuses on big and state-owned firms, and its sister survey on the services sector, will both be released on Dec. 31.

The private sector Caixin manufacturing PMI will be published on Jan. 4, and the Caixin services PMI survey will be out on Jan. 6.

German Exports Down More Than 12% This Year Due to Pandemic

BERLIN (Reuters) - German exports shrank by at least 12% this year as demand from the United States and Britain collapsed due to the coronavirus pandemic while Asia remained the only bright spot for Europe's largest economy, the BGA trade association said on Tuesday.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has pushed us back five years when it comes to trade - and at the same time it has catapulted us five years into the future in terms of digitalization," BGA President Anton Boerner said.

German exports to the United States, its largest foreign sales market outside the European Union, fell by 16% and exports to Britain tumbled by 18.5%.

"The only bright spots are China and Asia, their importance continued to increase during the pandemic," Boerner said.

But it remained to be seen how a China-backed agreement among fifteen Asia-Pacific economies to form one of the world's largest free trade blocs would change demand for European goods in coming years, Boerner cautioned.

China is likely to overtake France and the United States this year to become number one destination for German exports by value for the first time as German companies double down on the resurgent Asian giant.

European officials said on Monday that China and the EU are likely to clinch a deal this week that would give EU firms better access to the Chinese market, improve competition conditions and protect EU investment in China.



South Korea Exports Growth Seen Accelerating in December



SEOUL (Reuters) - South Korea's export recovery likely accelerated in December thanks to strong chip demand, though the coronavirus pandemic continued to add pressure on domestic consumption, a Reuters poll showed on Tuesday.

Outbound shipments in the final month of 2020 were seen increasing 5.6% from a year earlier, according to a median estimate of 12 economists, the fastest growth in three months and better than a 4.1% rise in November.

"The semiconductor-led exports recovery is seen continuing. The upward trend in exports will continue through to second-quarter in 2021, as the global economy and trade volume return to normalcy in the help of vaccine supplies," said Chun Kyu-yeon, economist at Hana Financial Investment.

Preliminary data showed overseas sales of chips, the country's largest export item, surged 26.4% during Dec. 1-20.

Imports were expected to have shrunk 2.6% in December, extending the decline to a third month as a third wave of coronavirus infections, the country's worst, sapped domestic demand.

Economists, however, see the exports recovery remaining resilient despite worries over the local coronavirus situation.

"Though the global resurgence in COVID-19 and related lockdown measures will partially have negative impact on exports, U.S. stimulus and China's efforts to boost its domestic consumption will support the exports recovery," said Park Sang-hyun, chief economist at Hi Investment & Securities.

Trade data for December and the whole of 2020 will be out on Jan. 1 at 9 a.m. (0000 GMT Jan. 1).

Meanwhile, 11 economists predicted industrial output in November would expand by a seasonally adjusted 0.8% month-on-month, after shrinking 1.2% in October.

Twelve economists also estimated consumer prices in December would rise a median 0.6% year-on-year, steady from the previous month.

Dubai Cuts 2021 Budget as COVID Hits Economy

DUBAI (Dispatches) - Dubai said yesterday it expects to cut its budget to \$15.5 billion in 2021 after its economy was impacted by a plunge in tourism and other sectors amid the novel coronavirus pandemic. The emirate, one of the seven that make up the United Arab Emirates, had posted a record \$18.1 billion budget for 2020. "The newly-announced budget takes into account the exceptional economic conditions of the fiscal year 2020 and the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic on the global economy," said a statement by the Dubai Media Office.

Dubai foresees a deficit for the fifth year in a row, of \$1.3 billion in 2021. In 2019, it had forecast a \$700 million deficit for this year. The emirate, which depends heavily on tourism and retail services, closed its border for several months due to the pandemic, resulting in a 10.8 percent GDP plunge in the first half of the year.

According to government estimates published earlier this week, the economy will likely contract 6.2 percent this year but is expected to see four percent growth in 2021. The new budget "confirms Dubai's ability to deal with the crisis, restore the pace of economic growth, strengthen social benefits and essential services," the media office said.



The government was counting on the six-month Dubai Expo 2020 global trade fair - which was scheduled for October but postponed by one year - to attract millions of visitors. Tourism has long been an economic mainstay of Dubai, which welcomed more than 16 million visitors last year. Before the pandemic, the aim was to reach 20 million this year. Dubai is renowned for its skyscrapers, including the world's tallest building, Burj Khalifa, but its key property sector has been hit since 2014 by lower oil prices.

Bazargan Customs' Exports Up by 31%

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Managing Director of Bazaran Customs Mojtaba Bazgir said on Tuesday that since the reactivation of customs (mid-June this year), the rial value of goods exported from this border has grown by 31 percent.

Since the reopening of the border in mid-June this year, 79,639 tons of goods have been exported through this border, he underlined. Major exports across the border include petrochemicals, plant and agricultural products, stones, ceramics, and glassware, as well as textiles, he further noted.



India's Economy Could Prove to Be Most Resilient in Sub-Region Over Long Term

UNITED NATIONS (Dispatches) - India's economy could prove to be the "most resilient" in the sub-region of South and South-West Asia over the long term, according to a report by the UN, which says a positive but lower economic growth post COVID-19 pandemic and the country's large market will continue to attract investments.

The report titled 'Foreign Direct Investment Trends And Outlook In Asia And The Pacific 2020/2021', and compiled by United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), stated that inward FDI flows to South and South-West Asia slightly decreased by 2 per cent in 2019, from USD 67 billion in 2018 to USD 66 billion in 2019.

The growth, however, was mainly driven by India, which accounted for 77 per cent of the total inflows to the sub-region and received USD 51 billion in 2019, up 20 per cent from the previous year.

The report, released last week, said the majority of these flows were destined for the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and the construction of sub-sector.

Regarding the ICT sector, the report said the investment to India has evolved from information technology services for Multinational enterprises (MNEs) to the thriving local digital ecosystem where many domestic players, especially in e-commerce, have attracted considerable international investment.

"Facebook and Google's investment in Jio in 2020 worth \$5.7 billion and \$4.5 billion respectively were testaments to this trend."

The report added that Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) outflows from South and South-West Asia increased for the fourth consecutive year, modestly growing from USD 14.8 billion in 2018 to USD 15.1 billion in 2019.

The geographical spread of FDI outflows from the subregion remained uneven, with just two countries (India and Turkey) accounting for the vast majority of outflows in 2019, it said.

"As such, the slight increase in outward FDI was predominantly due to an increase in outflows from India, which accounted for 80 per cent of total outward investment from the subregion," the report said, adding that in 2019, India invested USD 12.1 billion abroad, a 10 per cent increase compared with the previous year.

The report noted that in the short term, both inflows and outflows from and to the subregion are expected to decline.

In the first three quarters of 2020, the value of greenfield FDI inflows declined by 43 per cent compared to the same period last year, signaling a reversal of the growth trend in the subregion.

Most of the greenfield flows (87 per cent) were destined for India, although the overall greenfield inflows to the country declined by 29 per cent. Equally, FDI from India is projected to decline in 2020, with the largest MNEs revising their earnings down by 25 per cent in early 2020 due to the impacts of the pandemic.

"However, India's economy could prove the most resilient in the subregion over the long term. FDI inflows have been steadily increasing and positive, albeit lower, economic growth after the pandemic and India's large market will continue to attract market-seeking investment," the report said.

India's fast-growing telecom and digital space, in particular, could see a faster rebound as global venture capital firms and technology companies continue to show interest in the country's market through acquisitions, it said.

It noted that Facebook and Google's investment in Jio Platforms in 2020 worth USD 5.7 billion and USD 4.5 billion respectively were testaments to this trend.



"Estimates suggest that by 2025, core digital sectors such as IT and business process management, digital communication services, and electronics manufacturing could double in size. "In addition, the pandemic has only further increased the tendency of many sectors such as agriculture, education, energy, financial services, logistics to digitalise, as COVID-19 has pushed many individual and companies to adopt digital solutions and processes," the report said.

India has implemented a number of noteworthy investment policies and measures since 2019. Some of them include the relaxation of limits to FDI in the insurance sector, liberalisation of FDI rules which ended equity caps in several sectors including coal and lignite mining, contract manufacturing and single brand retail trading and increase in ceiling for FDI into the defense sector to 74 per cent via automatic approval route, it said.

In addition to these measures, and in direct response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the government also introduced intensified FDI screening procedures from neighbouring countries, including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, China and Nepal, it said.

The report said that as in previous years, inflows of greenfield investments have been unevenly distributed across the Asia-Pacific region. In 2019, Vietnam received the second largest share of inward greenfield investment (11 per cent), followed by India (10 per cent), and Sri Lanka (8 per cent).

Looking ahead, in the short-term investment in pharmaceutical manufacturing is forecast to decrease as many European and United States pharmaceutical companies may switch partly to more localised sourcing owing to supply-chain disruptions in the pharmaceuticals sector during COVID-19 pandemic.

"This will be important for pharmaceutical manufacturing hubs in the region, particularly in India," the report said.

The report said that Asia-Pacific's share in global FDI inflows dropped from 45 per cent in 2018 to 35 per cent in 2019, and its share in global FDI outflows decelerated from 52 per cent to 41 per cent.

Turkey Economic Confidence Dips a Second Straight Month



ANKARA (Reuters) -Turkey's economic confidence index dropped for a second straight month to 86.4 points in December, reflecting a surge in coronavirus cases that brought curfews, weekend lockdowns and restaurant closures, according to official data on Tuesday.

The index declined 3.5% month-on-month, the Turkish Statistical Institute said. It hit a record low when the pandemic struck earlier this year, recovered for six straight months as measures were eased, and then dipped again in November.

The index, which points to an optimistic outlook when above 100 and pessimistic when below, last stood above 100 points in March 2018.

Turkey's economy is skidding again due to the new restrictions and higher interest rates meant to rein in double-digit inflation that is expected to edge higher in early 2021. The roller-coaster year saw the economy shrink nearly 10% in the second quarter and expand 6.7% in the third.

The central bank raised its policy rate in the last two months under new Governor Naci Agbal in the face of a record low lira and record high dollarisation. Consumer prices (CPI) rose 14% in November and could get another boost by a more than 21% rise in minimum wage for 2021. Three bankers, citing the central bank's previous research, calculate a 10% rise in the wage above CPI could push inflation 120-150 basis points higher next year.

According to estimates from 2016 government data, more than 40% of registered employees earn the minimum wage, which will be 2,825.9 lira (\$378.51) next year.

The impact of the rise above inflation will lift both consumer- and producer-price indexes due to higher demand and labour costs, respectively, said Oyak Securities.

FAA to Reform New Airplane Safety Approvals

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) said Monday it would reform how it certifies new airplanes in line with legislation passed by Congress after two fatal Boeing 737 MAX crashes that killed 346 people.

Lawmakers approved sweeping reforms in legislation signed into law Sunday by U.S. President Donald Trump that boosts FAA oversight of aircraft manufacturers, requires disclosure of critical safety information and provide new whistleblower protections.

The FAA said in a statement it "will work to implement the changes as directed by Congress. The FAA is committed to continuous advancement of

aviation safety and improving our organization, processes, and culture."

Senator Roger Wicker, a Republican who chairs the Commerce Committee, said in an opinion piece Monday the law "will take steps to protect against manufacturers placing undue pressure on employees during the certification process."

Wicker added the law "should help restore the safety culture in the FAA."

An FAA survey released in August found some safety employees reported facing "strong" external pressure from industry and raised alarms the agency does not always prioritize air safety.

Iran to Buy COVID-19 Vaccine From Reliable Foreign Companies

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Minister of Health, Treatment and Medical Education Saeed Namaki said that Iran will purchase COVID-19 vaccines from reliable foreign companies in parallel with manufacturing domestic vaccines.

Namaki congratulated the first phase of human trial of manufacturing COVID-19 vaccines in Iran, saying that Iran will produce the domestic vaccines in the form of joint venture with a foreign company, and at the same time will purchase vaccines from foreign countries.

The first injection of the 1st phase of COVID19 vaccine human trial produced by Imam Khomeini's Order Executive Office was done on Tuesday.

The ceremony was held in the presence of Vice-President for Science and Technology Affairs Sorena Sattari and Health Minister Saeed Namaki. The vaccine named COV Iran Barkat was injected to first volunteer without any side effect like shock or fever. Namaki added that the new mutation corona virus rapidly spreading in United Kingdom has not been detected in Iran and that passengers from the UK are being quarantined for two weeks.

He said the UK announced the new mutation corona virus with a two-month delay, adding that upon receiving the information, Iran halted flights to and from the UK.



Tehran, Moscow...

FROM PAGE 1

The years-long Iranian arms embargo expired in October, in line with the 2015 nuclear deal that aimed to prevent Tehran from developing nuclear weapons in return for sanctions relief.

The United States, which unilaterally left the accord in 2018 and reinstated restrictions on Iran, tried to campaign for the embargo extension, citing Tehran's non-compliance with the deal, but to no avail. Lavrov also declared that, there is no restriction in the UN Security Council on the technical-military collaboration with Iran and that Russia has every right to look for such collaboration with Iran. He further said that, "At present, there are no restrictions in the UN Security Council on technical-military cooperation with Iran. Our government has a full right to interact in this direction." On Tuesday, the Russian foreign minister made the remarks in an interview with the Russian Sputnik news agency published. He stressed, "Russia's military technology cooperation policy is fully compliant with international law and fully complies with Russian export control laws, which are one of the strictest in the world."

Iran to Resume Gas...

FROM PAGE 1

Energy Minister Ardakanian told state news agency IRNA that "good agreements were reached with the Iraqi officials to withdraw Iranian funds from Iraq to pay for the purchase of the coronavirus vaccine from Europe using Iran's existing financial resources in Iraq."

Tehran said last week it had received approval from US authorities to transfer \$244 million to buy coronavirus vaccines from the World Health Organization-led COVAX alliance.

Ardakanian said Iraqi authorities had paid back an "appreciable portion" of their debt to Iran's state gas and electricity companies, IRNA reported. He did not give any amounts.

"With these new arrangements, we hope to use our existing financial resources in Iraq more quickly to purchase basic goods and other needed items in the near future," Ardakanian added.

Iraq said on Dec. 21 it was ready to export 700,000 tons of barley to Iran at a price of \$125 per ton as part of payments owed by the Iraqi government to Iran.

An Iraqi trade ministry official said on Tuesday the barley export shipments to Iran, in addition to other goods, will be used to pay back part of the delayed gas debts.

Iran has been unable to access billions of dollars in assets in several countries due to US sanctions.

The United States has insisted that oil-rich Iraq, OPEC's second-largest producer, moves toward self-sufficiency as a condition for its exemption to import Iranian energy, yet Baghdad has struggled to do so, in part due to low oil prices.

Iraq's electricity ministry said on Tuesday that it will resume taking delivery of normal Iranian gas supplies as of Wednesday after an agreement was reached over unpaid bills between electricity minister Majid Mahdi and Iran's Ardakanian.

Ardakanian's Tuesday trip to Baghdad, his second in 2020, saw him meeting senior Iraqi officials including Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi.

The minister said that he had also reached agreements with the Iraqi side on the increased presence of the Iranian engineering and constructions companies in the Arab country's electricity sector.

2nd Iran-Made...

FROM PAGE 1

Meanwhile, Vice-President for Science and Technology Sorena Sattari said on Tuesday that six knowledge-based companies are working on producing coronavirus vaccines.

Meanwhile some 149 more Iranians have died from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) over the past 24 hours bringing the total deaths to 55,095, Iran's Health Ministry spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari said on Wednesday.

Sima Sadat Lari said that with the 149 new victims, the country's total COVID-19 deaths mounted to 55,095.

Some 6,272 new cases of infection with the COVID-19 were found over the past 24 hours, some 807 of whom have been hospitalized, she added.

Iran to Pay \$150,000...

FROM PAGE 1

The operator had mistaken the Boeing 737-800 with a cruise missile at a time when the air defense systems were at the highest level of alert following the United States' earlier assassination of prominent Iranian commander Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani.

On January 3, U.S. President Donald Trump ordered drone strikes that martyred Major General Soleimani, chief of the IRGC Quds Force, and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the deputy commander of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU).

In the early hours of January 8, the IRGC attacked Ain al-Assad airbase in western Iraq, where U.S. forces were stationed, as part of its promised "tough revenge" for the U.S. terror attack.

Syrian Air...

FROM PAGE 1

The Arab country has been gripped by foreign-backed militancy since March 2011. The Syrian government says the Israeli regime and its Western and regional allies are aiding Takfiri terrorist groups that are wreaking havoc in the country.

Israel mostly keeps quiet about the attacks on Syrian territories which many view as knee-jerk reaction to Syrian government's increasing success in confronting terrorism in country.

The Tel Aviv regime has been a main supporter of terrorist groups that have opposed the government of President Bashar al-Assad since militancy erupted in Syria nine years ago. Syrian government forces have taken back many areas once controlled by the terrorist groups.

Sheff Wed Sack Pulis After 45 Days

LONDON (AFP) - Tony Pulis has been sacked by Championship strugglers Sheffield Wednesday after just 45 days and 10 games in charge.

Wednesday chairman Dejphon Chansiri said issues on and off the pitch were behind the decision with the club second bottom of the table. Pulis's dismissal came on Monday night with first-team coach Neil Thompson set to take charge of the team until a permanent replacement was found, starting with Tuesday's game against Middlesbrough.

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ISSN 1024-6053
P.O. Box: 15875-8551
Address: No 13, Pajouhesh St.,
Golestan II St, Golestan St. Marzadaran
Blvd., Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran
Printed by: Honar Sarzmin Sabz
Distributed by:
Cities of Iran Cultural and
Artistic Institute
Managing Director: Fereydoon Taherpour Asl

Indian Wells Postponed Due To COVID-19 Concerns

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) -The BNP Paribas Open tennis tournament in Indian Wells that was scheduled to be held in California in March has been postponed due to COVID-19 concerns, tennis governing body ATP said on Tuesday.

It marks the second consecutive year the tournament, which is considered the most prestigious event outside the four Grand Slams, has been impacted by the virus as the 2019 edition was cancelled.

8 IRAN NEWS

SPORTS

THURSDAY DECEMBER 31, 2020

Man Utd Move Up to Second

LONDON (Dispatches) - Marcus Rashford's 93rd minute strike beat Wolves 1-0 to move Manchester United into second in the Premier League as fears over the continuation of the season due to rising coronavirus infection rates grew on Tuesday.

A record 18 positive tests for Covid-19 among players and staff were detected in the weekly round of testing.

After Manchester City's trip to Everton on Monday was postponed due to a Covid outbreak in Pep Guardiola's squad, all five matches scheduled for Tuesday went ahead despite disruption for Sheffield United and Southampton.

Bottom-of-the-table United revealed they had suffered a number of positive cases but were still able to field a squad of 18 for their 1-0 defeat at Burnley.

Southampton manager Ralph Hasenhuttl coached his side from his home for a 0-0 draw against West Ham after a member of his household tested positive.

The Telegraph reported the Premier League will discuss plans for a two-week circuit breaker with infection rates soaring across England.

However, Manchester United boss Ole Gunnar Solskjaer called for the competition to continue.

On the field, United were fortunate to escape with all three points against a youthful Wolves side, who were in action just 48 hours ago against Tottenham.

In keeping with several meetings between the sides in recent years, chances were few and far between.

But United answered Solskjaer's call to win more games late on in the style he did as a player during Alex Ferguson's time at Old Trafford as Rashford's shot took a wicked deflection off Romain Saiss deep into stoppage time.

"This is a big step forward that you don't perform, but you still win," added Solskjaer.

Arsenal eased fears they could be dragged into a relegation battle with a 3-1 win over Chelsea on Saturday and can now look up the table with hope thanks to Alexandre Lacazette's winner in a 1-0 victory at Brighton.

Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang returned from injury in the place of Lacazette in the only change made by Arteta.



But the French striker came off the bench to make an instant impact with a fine near-post finish from Bukayo Saka's pass just 21 seconds after coming on.

Victory moves the Gunners up to 13th, within six points of the top six.

West Brom are next up for Arsenal at the weekend and the Baggies confidence after a shock 1-1 draw at Liverpool on Sunday quickly evaporated in a 5-0 hammering by Leeds.

A miserable night for West Brom started with a self-inflicted wound as Romain Sawyers scored a remarkable own goal as his backpass sailed past Sam Johnstone.

Ezgjani Alioski, Jack Harrison and Rodrigo made it 4-0 before half-time and Raphinha's powerful strike into the top corner inflicted Sam Allardyce's heaviest ever home defeat as a Premier League manager.

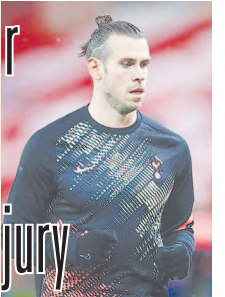
Allardyce said new recruits in the January transfer window were now a "necessity" with West Brom five points from safety.

Sheffield United are the only side below West Brom in the table and their chances of survival are diminishing rapidly with just two points from their opening 16 games.

Ben Mee scored the only goal at Turf Moor as Burnley moved five points clear of the relegation zone and above Brighton into 16th.

Southampton missed the chance to move into the top four as they failed to score for the third consecutive game in a 0-0 draw with West Ham.

Bale Out for Few Weeks With Calf Injury



LONDON (Reuters) - Tottenham Hotspur forward Gareth Bale will miss the next "few weeks" after he sustained a calf injury in their League Cup quarter-final win at Stoke City last week, manager Jose Mourinho has said.

Bale, who is on loan from Spanish side Real Madrid, started and scored in the 3-1 win but was withdrawn at halftime.

Mourinho is short of backup options in attack with the Portuguese manager saying Lucas Moura and Carlos Vinicius were also doubts for Wednesday's match against Fulham.

"No, I don't expect him (Bale) to be fit and also I have my doubts that Lucas and Vinicius can be fit for Fulham," Mourinho told reporters when asked about Bale's status. "I wouldn't say it's serious (for Bale) but I'd say a few weeks."

Bale, who was named Player of the Year in his final season at Spurs before a then-world record move to Real Madrid in 2013, has yet to live up to those standards, scoring only three times for the north London side this season. Mourinho was also happy with Tanguy Ndombele's improvement in recent games, especially after he scored in Sunday's 1-1 draw at Wolverhampton Wanderers, but said he is not yet fit to play the full 90 minutes.

Resilient India Thump Australia in Second Test

MELBOURNE (Dispatches) - Stand-in captain Ajinkya Rahane led India to a dominant eight-wicket win over Australia in the second Test Tuesday, levelling the series 1-1 and capping an extraordinary turnaround after their record collapse in the opening game.

Rahane, deputising during Virat Kohli's paternity leave, hit an unbeaten 27 in Melbourne -- after a century in the first innings -- as India reached the meagre target of 70 for the loss of two wickets.

It capped a remarkable comeback for an Indian side desperate to make amends after losing in Adelaide by eight wickets, when they posted their lowest ever score of 36 and were widely criticised at home.

And they bounced back without superstar and batting mainstay Kohli, who has returned home for the birth of his first child. "Really proud of all the players," said Rahane.

"I want to give credit to the debutants (Mohammed Siraj and (Shubman) Gill, the character they showed after the Adelaide loss was great to see. Character was important for us."

Kohli, watching at home in India, tweeted his congratulations.

"What a win this is, absolutely amazing effort by the whole team," he said. "Couldn't be happier for the boys and specially Jinks (Rahane) who led the team to victory amazingly."

Under the mild-mannered Rahane, India battled hard to dismiss Australia for 195 in the first innings and then posted 326 in reply.

Australia resumed their second innings on day four on 133 for six with a two-run lead, and their hopes resting on 21-year-old rookie all-rounder Cameron Green.

He made 45 as they battled to 200 before tail-ender Josh Hazlewood was the last man to fall before lunch.

Siraj took 3-37 with Jasprit Bumrah, Ravindra Jadeja and Ravi Ashwin grabbing two each. Rahane and Gill (35) then saw India home, but not before some nervous moments. Mitchell Starc got a nick from the out-of-form Mayank Agarwal (5), which Tim Paine caught, then Pat Cummins snared Cheteshwar Pujara for three, edged to Green at gully.

Cochran-Siegle Celebrates Maiden World Cup Win



ROME (Dispatches) - In-form American Ryan Cochran-Siegle recorded his maiden World Cup victory, at the age of 28, by sweeping to a convincing win in the super-G at the Italian resort of Bormio on Tuesday.

Cochran-Siegle's sole previous podium finish was second in the downhill in neighbouring Val Gardena earlier this month.

It was also the first time an American skier won a World Cup super-G since Bode Miller's victory in Hinderstoder in 2006.

Cochran-Siegle finished 0.79sec ahead of Austrian Vincent Kriechmayr, with Norwegian Adrien Smiseth Sjersted (+0.94sec) rounding out the podium.

Another Norwegian, reigning World Cup overall champion Aleksander Aamodt Kilde, came in fourth in a race held back from Monday because of poor weather.

Kilde currently sits second in the general classification behind France's Alexis Pinturault, who finished 12th in Bormio.

Barca End Gloomy Year With Home Draw With Eibar

BARCA (Dispatches) - Barcelona ended a difficult year with another disappointing result as they were held 1-1 at home by struggling Eibar on Tuesday.

The result left Barcelona in sixth place in La Liga, seven points behind Atletico Madrid who have played two fewer matches.

"We have to be realistic," said Barcelona manager Ronald Koeman. "The league is very complicated. In life nothing is impossible, but you have to recognize the points gap to a team like Atletico, which seems to give very little away."

The six-time Ballon d'Or winner Lionel Messi is nursing an ankle injury and watched from the stands.

In his absence Martin Braithwaite took an eighth minute penalty kick, and missed. The Dane did put the ball in the net in the 25th minute but the strike was disallowed.

Although Barcelona dominated possession and took far more shots, Eibar took the lead after 57 minutes. Their captain Kike Garcia pounced after a defensive mistake from Ronald Araujo.

"I take responsibility," said Araujo. "I didn't notice that the forward was so close."

"It's a pity, we wanted to win and we played well"

Ousmane Dembele levelled 10 minutes later with a right foot shot but Barcelona could not find the winning goal.

"We were missing Leo, of course," said Koeman, before asking: "How is it possible that we didn't win this match?"

"We created chances, we missed a penalty, and we gave away a goal, the only shot on target they had?"

Barcelona have struggled with injuries this season and lost Philippe Coutinho who limped off in added time.

"He said he was feeling pain in his left knee," said Koeman. "We need to do more tests to find out exactly what's wrong with him."

In the other early game, Lucas Ocampos converted an early penalty and Youssef En-Neyri added a second after the break as Sevilla beat visiting Villarreal 2-0. Sevilla moved onto a tie for third with Real Sociedad and Villarreal.



PSG Sack Tuchel, Pochettino Favorite To Take Over

PARIS (AFP) - Paris Saint-Germain on Tuesday confirmed the sacking of coach Thomas Tuchel, who had been at the club since July 2018, but did not name his successor.

"After an in-depth analysis of its sporting situation, Paris Saint-Germain decided to terminate Thomas Tuchel's contract," the French giants announced in a statement.

Argentinian Mauricio Pochettino, the ex-Tottenham coach and a former PSG player, is widely reported to be the favourite to take over.

Tuchel, whose axing was widely reported but unconfirmed last week, managed PSG 127 times in all competitions, with 95 wins, 12 draws and 20 defeats.

His trophy haul featured two Ligue 1 titles (2019, 2020) as well as the French Cup and French League Cup in 2020.

The 47-year-old German also led the Parisian club to their first ever Champions League final last August, which they lost 1-0 to Bayern Munich.

Despite appearing to be adept at man-managing PSG's squad of superstar players such as Neymar and Kylian Mbappe, Tuchel reportedly upset the Qatari-backed club after complaining about an apparent lack of recognition at leading PSG to the Champions League final.

"I would like to thank Thomas Tuchel and his staff for all they have contributed to the club," said PSG chairman Nasser al-Khelaifi.

"Thomas has put a lot of energy and passion into the job, and we will of course remember the good moments we shared together. I wish him all the best for the future."

Less than three months on from the final defeat to Bayern Munich in Lisbon, Tuchel has become the first PSG coach to leave mid-season since Antoine Kombouare was replaced by Carlo Ancelotti in December 2011.

Tuchel departs the Parc des Princes having secured a last 16 Champions League clash with Barcelona and PSG sitting third in Ligue 1 -- a point shy of leaders Lyon -- despite being plagued by injuries, suspensions and coronavirus infections. Should Pochettino take over, his opening match in charge will be January 6's trip to Saint-Etienne on Ligue 1's resumption after the winter break.

Then, on February 16, the Argentinian could face his first massive test against his compatriot Lionel Messi's Barcelona, with the return leg on March 6.

