

**Health Ministry Spokeswoman  
Sima Sadat Lari Said on Friday  
That Some 114 More Iranians Have  
Died From the Coronavirus Disease  
Over the Past 24 Hours Bringing  
The Total Deaths to 55,337**

# IRAN NEWS

**Commander of IRGC Major General  
Hossein Salami Said Iran Is Ready  
For Every Scenario, Noting That the  
Enemies' Movements in the Region  
Is the Outcome of Their Mistake in  
Assassinating Martyr Soleimani**

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## Iran Warns UNSC About U.S. Adventurism In Persian Gulf

TEHRAN (IFP) - Iran's Permanent Mission to the United Nations (UN) in New York has warned against the United States' "military adventurism" and recent provocative moves in the Persian Gulf region, at a time that the administration of lame duck US President Donald Trump nears its final days.

The Iranian mission issued a stern warning in a letter to the UN Security Council on Thursday and said the U.S. has ramped up its military presence and activities in Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman in recent weeks.

"In addition to sending advanced and highly sophisticated weapons to the region over the past few weeks, the United States has also carried out some provocative military actions, including the deployment of a number of its long-range strategic bombers in the Persian Gulf in recent days," the mission said in the letter.

"Such belligerent moves, if left unchecked, could escalate tensions to alarming levels, and it is clear that the United States will be fully responsible for the entire consequences," it added.

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## Iran Marks First Anniversary of Martyr Soleimani Assassination



**IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK**

TEHRAN - A ceremony was held on Friday to mark the first anniversary of the martyrdom of Iranian commander, Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, who was martyred in a U.S. drone strike in January 2020.

The ceremony was attended by IRGC Quds Force Commander Brigadier General Esmail Qa'ani and Judiciary Chief Ebrahim Raisi.

Addressing the ceremony, Hojjatoleslam Raisi said that the enemies wanted ISIS to rule in the region and disarm the resistance and introduce American Islam to the people instead of pure Islam and set the region on fire with sedition and conspiracy, adding that ISIS wanted to divert real Islam but they could not because Martyr Soleimani and the companions of the Quds Force, which created a huge capacity in the region, did not allow this.

"This is the awakening of the region from the pure blood of the martyrs. The martyrs who defended the shrine, whose blood was shed on the ground everywhere," the senior cleric noted.

He added: "The enemy may place some puppets in power in the region, but the awakening cannot be eliminated. They may make sedition in one region, but eliminating ignorance cannot be ignored. Martyr Soleimani considers the Islamic Republic a sanctuary and believes that if this sanctuary remains, other sanctuaries will not be damaged, but if the sanctuary of the Islamic Republic is damaged, all sanctuaries will be damaged, so he for 40 years is defending the sanctuary that has been established with the name of the implementation of religion and religious teachings."

The head of the judiciary stated that the ideology of resistance has disrupted the current of domination and arrogance. The resistance has done something that has made the enemy desperate. The assassination of Hajj Qassem is a sign of the desperation of the enemy, not a sign of its superior hand and the resistance has destroyed the think tank of infidelity and atheism.

Ayatollah Raisi stated that Gen. Soleimani generated power in the region and that the power that was created in the region should never be vanished, noting that he was looking for solitude to talk to Imam Reza and ask him for help. One of the characteristics and behavior of Gen. Soleimani was supplication, prayer, and divine conduct.

He added: "The creators of ISIS and al-Qaeda thought that the axis of resistance would weaken with the assassination of the hero of the fight against terrorism in the region and the world, but he received the message that the creators of ISIL could not undermine the resistance by assassinating our commanders and Martyr Soleimani. Today, more than ever, there is an insistence on the enemies in the people of the region, and the spirit of Gen. Soleimani has more than ever fueled and awakened the spirit of resistance in the people of the region."

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## Top 22 Qaris in Int'l Section of 15th Festival of Majlisi Tilawat Announced

After reviewing works and selecting the top 23 contender qaris (Holy Quran reciters) in the international competition section, Secretary of the 15th Festival of Majlisi Tilawat (recitation of Holy Quran) Davood Jafari in a statement announced that the international section of the festival would be ceased at this stage and in the near future more details on will be published.

In his statement he expressed his condolences on the occasion of martyrdom anniversary of Hazrat Fatimah (A) and announced that the international section of the festival would be ceased at this stage. He said essentially the launch of this section in the 15th festival was an experiment in the international field to assess the feedback and to evaluate reactions from Muslim and non-Muslim states and among Muslim nations and Holy Quran enthusiasts, and the result of this valuable experience is very very ponderable that God willing in an appropriate opportunity its details would be published.

In his statement Jaafari said they had planned three different and very interesting stages for the international section that they decided to stop it at this stage and after the first phase and selecting the best entries, and due to some reasons that he would explain, the organizers decided to cease it for now.

He added that the first stage ended by selecting top 22 Holy Quran qaris (reciters) and the voting aspect and global reaction was accompanied with technical officiating. He noted that in the second stage, they were supposed to form regional groups and round-robin competition of groups in the team formats to choose the top two teams technically. Jafari further said finally in the third stage, the single competition had been planned for the qaris in the two top chosen groups, and the best were to be chosen through the public and international voting along with technical voting for the single and team performance of the qaris by the popular votes in the international field.

Jafari went on to say that the reason to stop the competition after the first stage would, God Willing, be explained in the near future. He noted as everyone knows, the organizers of the festival have had correspondence with the officials in the field of holding Quranic competitions in the country and this field due to the cultural and legal sensitivities and ultimately for the sake of the name of the Islamic Republic of Iran and observing all diplomatic protocols has its own principles and rules, therefore the organizers tried to stop the competition at this stage in order to abide by the normal process until getting the favorable and exploitable results accompanied with discipline and bilateral and multilateral cooperation with the Supreme Headquarters of the Competitions of the country, and now they are waiting for getting the necessary authorization for this holding international section.

In the statement, Jafari said promotion of the holy Quran in the world and specially in the digital space and above all in a universal level cannot definitely wait and delay for bureaucratic process and such correspondences and it also cannot limit itself to the views of individuals and organizations, and undoubtedly, the promotion and propagation current of the Holy Quran will continue, by far, faster and with high speed in the world community which is facing fast developments accompanied by changes.

He expressed hope the esteemed officials with understanding the social capabilities and offering necessary supports would try to accompany and have better cooperation for boosting the popular vigor.



## ViewPoint By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

### Saudi Rulers Deserve Punishment

Coronavirus is killing people in Yemen more than any other place in the world and the world should be warned that mercy, equity, generosity and human rights have all closed down and been disregarded. All are witnessing this horrible massacre but nobody takes any action.

The World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean Dr. Ahmed Al-Mandhari in an interview with Russian news agency Sputnik which has been quoted in the Al-Ahed news website has emphasized that Yemen suffers from multiple challenges in facing the "Covid-19" pandemic due to the critical security situation in the country. Saudi Arabia and the UAE after failure in achieving their goals in Yemen are taking revenge from Yemeni people and are obstructing the arrival of humanitarian items for the needy children and women in Yemen.

As health and nutrition exports report, it is predicted in case this cruel besiege of Yemen continues, millions of Yemenis will strive of hunger and famine. Al-Mandhari in this interview has officially warned that the ongoing conflict impeding many support activities and has exhausted the health sector and blocked supplies for some areas. The Omani official of WHO added that the conditions of displacement and asylum have made difficulties and challenges access to health services to those who need.

According to the official published, it can definitely be said that these figures are not even ten percent of the genuine statistics of the infected patients and death tolls. The number of COVID-19 infected Yemenis has been reported 2,177 cases and its death toll until last Wednesday has been 620 that health observers and experts believe this figure cannot be real because of the weak health system and lack of capability in testing in Yemen, and the reported figure cannot be even ten percent of the real figure of the infected or death toll and the number of reported cases of the infected Yemeni is not authentic.

Meanwhile on Tuesday, December 29, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) announced that due to the Saudi-led coalition's aggressive war in Yemen and some other factors, so far about 223,000 people have lost their lives in this country. The UN office has repeatedly in different messages and statements officially emphasized that Yemen needs ceasefire.

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### Iran Eyes Joint Cooperation With Cuba in Producing COVID-19 Vaccine

TEHRAN (PressTV) - An Iranian Health Ministry official says the production of coronavirus vaccine in cooperation with Cuba is one of Tehran's priorities after such other alternatives as purchasing from a foreign country and participation in the World Health Organization's COVAX program.

Kianoush Jahanpour, spokesman of the Iran Food and Drug Administration (IFDA), made the comment on Friday as he explained the country's various measures for the provision of the Corona vaccine.

"Probably, the first corona vaccines to arrive in Iran are through direct purchases from a foreign country, followed by Iran's quota from the COVAX basket, then the joint production of the Pasteur Institute of Iran with a Cuban company, and then the Iranian vaccine," Jahanpour said in an interview with the official IRNA news agency.

The Iranian official highlighted joint cooperation between Tehran and Havana in the production of the COVID-19 vaccine and said its test and trial is under way in three phases.

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## Trump Administration Suffers Another Defeat at End of 2020

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iranian Ambassador to UK Hamid Baeedinejad said that the Trump administration sustained another setback at the end of the year 2020.

In a tweet, Baeedinejad wrote, “At the end of 2020, Trump administration suffered another defeat and once again showed isolation of its policy regarding Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).”

The U.S. proposal to return international sanctions against Iran, which had previously been opposed by the UN Security Council, was rejected by members of the United Nations.

Three European countries as JCPOA members, members of European Union, China and Russia as well as Western allies of the United States, along with non-aligned countries all voted against the US proposals, the envoy added.

## President Urges Restrictions on Borders For Arrival of New Virus

**TEHRAN (IRNA) - President Hassan Rouhani on Thursday urged restrictions on borders at sea, on land and in the air not to let arrival of new virus to the country.**

President Rouhani made the remarks in a meeting with heads of national anti-coronavirus committees.

At the meeting, separate reports on preemptive measure against the deadly virus were presented.

Further, the President stressed the need to fully implement the anti-coronavirus plans in order to reach a stable situation across the country.

The second lockdown served to contain COVID-19 pandemic with dramatic fall in death toll compared to last month.

Iranian Government ushered in successful campaign against spread of COVID-19 by imposing the second lockdown.

Meanwhile on Thursday Rouhani said that he was pleased with the efforts made by the Government to revive the Urmia Lake, terming it a great historical job.

He made the remarks at a virtual inauguration ceremony of 26 power and drinking water projects in four provinces.

President Rouhani expressed hope that Iran would celebrated revival of Urmia Lake by the early days of the Iranian New year, 1400, to start on March 21, 2021. The provincial environment officials hoped that the lake would reach its ecological level by 2025.

Life of people in northwest of the country depends on Urmia Lake, the President said, highlighting the efforts made for its revival.



Kani Sib Dam in West Azarbaijan Province is among the projects the President opened this morning.

The project aims to pipe water to Urmia Lake to help its survival.

In a coordinated effort to save the lake in 2013, Iran started a joint project with the UN Development Program (UNDP) funded jointly by the Iranian and the Japanese governments. The revival efforts therefore focused on redirecting rivers to irrigate farmland, thus avoiding use of water from the lake, and the promotion of more sustainable farming methods.

Urmia Lake began shrinking in the mid-2000s due to decades of longstanding drought spells and elevated hot summer temperatures. According to international statistics, the lake lost about 80% of its waterbed by 2015.

## Iran’s Anti-COVID-19 Smart Plan, Successful

*IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK*

TEHRAN (IP) - Interior Minister stressed that the infection, hospitalization, and death toll rate decline indicates the coronavirus combatting smart plan has been implemented successfully across the country.

: On the sidelines of the counseling committee of combatting the coronavirus headquarters held on Thursday, Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli attributed the successful implementation of combatting the coronavirus due to the people’s cooperation with the health ministry and observing the health protocols.

“The Health Ministry has worked hard and nonstop to detect the virus, meet people’s needs, and prove anti-coronavirus products,” he stressed.

Rahmani Fazli noted that: “since the very beginning of the coronavirus outbreak, the Health Ministry has gained significant achievements including producing masks, disinfectants, ventilators, oxygen-producer machines which Iran was in dire need of them, but right now these products are provided and fully Iran could meet its needs.”

He said weekly meetings are held to discuss and consulting how to combat the virus.

The minister also stressed that the virus has caused innumerable social challenges and people are on tight budgeting, but to reach the required health and calmness, cooperation is a must.

Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli expressed hope that the combatting COVID-19 process continues with all organizations’ contributions and the Health Ministry’s cooperation.

Highlighting how the Health Ministry daily observes the virus’s status and its mutation online, Saeed Namki, Iran’s Health Minister as the next keynote speaker added that the Health Ministry Health monitoring section is trying to be equipped and updated in order to predict and preempt any incidents.

## Iran Congratulates Havana on Anniversary of Cuban Revolution

TEHRAN (IFP) - Pesident Hassan Rouhani has congratulated his Cuban counterpart Miguel Díaz-Canel on the anniversary of the victory of the Cuban Revolution.

In a message on Thursday, President Rouhani expressed hope that Tehran and Havana will work together closely to enhance mutual ties.

“I congratulate Your Excellency and the people of your country on the anniversary of the glorious Cuban Revolution,” read the message.

“I hope through mutual cooperation and by tapping into existing potential, we will see further promotion of relations in all areas of mutual interest,” the message read.

The Cuban Revolution was an armed revolt conducted by Fidel Castro’s revolutionary 26th of July Movement and its allies against the military dictatorship of Cuban President Fulgencio Batista.

The revolution began in July 1953, and continued sporadically until the rebels finally ousted Batista on 31 December 1958, replacing his government.

## Araqchi Discusses Regional Issues With Qatari Officials

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran’s Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi met with Qatar’s Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani and Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defense Affairs Khalid bin Mohammad Al Attiyah in Doha.

Araqchi has made a trip to Doha, heading a delegation.

The officials exchanged ideas on the most recent developments in the Persian Gulf region and the existing threats.

They also discussed the ways to expand and enhance bilateral relations. Earlier on Tuesday evening, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and his Qatari counterpart Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani in a telephone call stressed the need for regional states to work together to ensure comprehensive stability and security.

## Europeans Indebted to Haj Qassem Soleimani

TEHRAN (IP) - The Special Assistant to the Speaker of Iran’s parliament for International Affairs has said that European governments and nations are indebted to Martyr Haj Qassem Soleimani.

“In my meetings with Western officials, I told them that you should give a medal to General Soleimani, because if it were not for his bravery, the cities and capitals of Europe, even the United States would have been targeted by ISIS,” Hossein Amir Abdullahian told IRIB Wednesday night.

Regarding the prosecution of the perpetrators and perpetrators of the assassination of the IRGC top commander Lieutenant-General Soleimani, he said: “All judicial capacities were provided and technical and

legal committees were formed, and all the documents were detailed and a serious, deterrent and remorseful indictment for the perpetrators and accomplices of this terrorist operation will be issued soon.”

Elsewhere in the interview, Amir Abdullahian pointed to the amazing foresight of Martyr Soleimani and said: “In 2018, in a meeting with Haj Qassem Soleimani, he predicted that in less than two years, the real face of the relations between the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf and the Zionist regime will be revealed.”

“I believe that the activities and bravery of General Soleimani will continue to be determinative in the region for at least the next 5 decades,” Amir Abdullahian concluded.

## U.S. Responsible for Consequences of Any Possible Adventurism



TEHRAN (MNA) – Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said that the United States would be held responsible for consequences of any possible adventurism in the region.

Speaking in a telephone conversation with his Kuwaiti counterpart Sheikh Ahmed Nasser Al-Mohammed Al-Sabah, Zarif reiterated that Washington would be held accountable for any consequences of possible adventurism.

The two sides exchanged their views on the latest developments in the region and bilateral relations.

In addition to clarifying Islamic Republic’s view in ensuring comprehensive stability and security away from foreign interference, Iranian foreign minister pointed to some suspicious and mischievous moves of the United States in the region and stated that Washington is responsible for consequences of any possible adventurism in the region.

## All U.S. Bases in Region Within Range of Iran Missiles

TEHRAN (IFP) - A senior military advisor to Iran’s Islamic Revolution Leader has warned U.S. President Donald Trump about any act of aggression against Iran, saying all American bases in the region are within range of Iranian missiles.

“I saw it in the news that the Americans are on standby for the fear of (Iran’s) revenge, and have flown two B-52 bombers over the Persian Gulf for show,” Brigadier General Hossein Dehqan tweeted Thursday.

“All their military bases in the region are within the range of our missiles,” he said.

He also advised “those fired from the White House” not to “turn New Year into a tragedy for Americans.”

His comments came after the United States flew strategic bombers over the Persian Gulf on December 30, 2020 for the second time this month, fueling tensions in an already volatile region.

## Majlis Hails Indonesia, Pakistan, Algeria For Anti-Zionist, Pro-Palestinian Stances

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iranian Parliament’s Foreign Policy and National Security Commission supported the stances of Indonesian, Pakistani, and Algerian parliaments in opposing compromise with the Zionist regime.

Saying that the stances of the three Muslim countries is a real symbol of resistance and opposition against various plots of the Zionist regime, the Iranian lawmakers in a statement commemorated the anniversary of Gaza Strip’s 22-day war with the Zionist regime (27 December 2008) in which 1,500 innocent Palestinians lost their lives and hundreds of more were maimed by Israel’s prohibited weaponry.

The Iranian parliament supported Algerian Parliament’s criminalization of any kind of normalization of relations with the Zionist regime and praised honorable stances of Pakistan’s and Indonesia’s parliaments against pressures to normalize ties with the occupiers of the Holy Quds.

The statement also hoped that the other Muslim countries would follow these countries and support the oppressed people of Palestine.

The Iranian Parliament’s Foreign Policy and National Security Commission reminded that compromise with the Zionist regime would have no effect, except for notoriety and contempt for those who compromise.

Palestine belongs to Palestinians and it is their rights to decide for their own government and fate, the statement said, adding that the only way out of the present crisis caused by the Israeli occupation, terrorism, and violations is Iran’s proposition for holding a plebiscite on the issue, which was planned in the framework of Islamic Revolution Supreme Leader Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei’s opinion and was registered in the United Nations.

## U.S. Resorting to Cheap Propaganda to Hold Countries Hostage to Its Bullying

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Foreign Ministry Spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh has lashed out at the U.S. for resorting to “cheap propaganda” to whitewash the Donald Trump administration’s failure in its so-called maximum pressure campaign against Tehran.

In a post on his Twitter page, Khatibzadeh reacted to a recent tweet by outgoing US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo who claimed victory against Iran and bragged about Washington “initiating a campaign of maximum pressure” by re-imposing sanctions on Tehran.

Pompeo also accused Iran of instigating instability and terror and threatening the US and its allies.

In response, Khatibzadeh described the Trump administration’s policy on Iran as “maximum failure,” welcomed its departure and said the world has “refused to be held hostage to your bullying.”

After 4 years of “Maximum Failure”, @SecPompeo is desperately turning to cheap propaganda to dress up the disaster he has promoted and instigated as a success.

In its last days at the White House before the inauguration of the new government in the US, the Trump administration has been ratcheting up its pressure on Iran, threatening the country to bow to its bullying, all to no avail.

The Trump administration initiated tension with Iran by pulling out of a landmark nuclear agreement between Tehran and major world powers in 2018 and reinstating sanctions against the Islamic Republic.

## Zarif Invites World Leaders to Make Peaceful, Healthy New Year

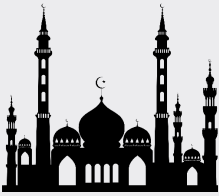
TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister of Iran Mohammad Javad Zarif in a message on Thursday invited the world leaders to make peaceful and healthy New Year, hoping for the new Christian year to end the insane era of contempt for law and multilateralism.

“As we end a year of anguish, let us hope for new beginnings in the coming year, ending the insane era of contempt for law and multilateralism—a four-year one that caused so much bloodshed, terror & cruelty,” Zarif wrote in his Twitter account on Thursday.

“Let’s join together to make 2021 a peaceful, healthy & Happy New Year,” he added.

The last year of Donald Trump’s presidency in the United States experienced the increase of disagreements between Washington and its European allies over a host of issues such as NATO, trade war, disputes at the UN Security Council as well as the US withdrawal from international agreements. The Trump administration started with imposing maximum pressure on the North American countries and then on the Middle East, Iran and China.





PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)

■ Evening (Maghreb)

■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)

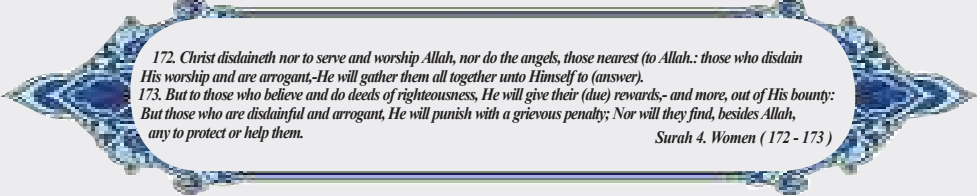
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise

12:08

17:22

05:45

07:14



Iran-Eurasia Trade Hits \$1.4b in 8 Months

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN – According to the statistics released by Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mine and Agriculture (TCCIMA), Iran’s trade with Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) countries stood at around \$1.4b in the first 8 months in the current Iranian calendar year.**

According to the report, the value of Iran’s trade of goods with EAEU states, excluding the crude oil trade, has been around \$1.4b in the first eight months of the current Iranian calendar year which accounts for 2.8 percent of the total value of Iran’s trading goods and the figure shows 11 percent decline comparing to the same period last year.

The report shows that in the first eight months, Iran has exported 1.8m tons of non-oil goods worth \$639m to the EAEU member states that shows 20 percent decline in terms of weight and 6 percent in terms of value comparing to the same period last year. TCCIMA report also indicates that Iran’s exports to Russia and Belarus have increased considerably in terms of weight and value while its exports to three countries of Armenia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have slumped both in terms of weight and value.

EAEU states’ share of Iran’s total goods exports in the first eight months has not witnessed a meaningful change both in terms of weight and value comparing to the same period last year and with only 0.2 percent rise has reached 2.4 percent.

Among Iran’s trade partner in the EAEU, Iran’s exports to Russia in the first eight months have stood at \$285m while the figure has been \$233m for Armenia and in return Iran has had most of its imports from Russia which is valued at \$727m.

Agro and foodstuff items have accounted for major part from Iran’s total exports to five EAEU member states in the eight months which has been around 425m tons of



goods worth \$330m. The major destinations for Iran’s food and agro exports to the EAEU states have been Russia, Kazakhstan and Armenia. The figure for exports to Russia is some \$246m, to Kazakhstan \$44m and to Armenia \$23.6m.

Meanwhile the report claims that Iran’s trade balance with EAEU members in the current Iranian calendar year has been negative but the condition has become better in favor of Iran as the negative trade balance has been cut by \$90m. The reason for this cut in the negative trade balance is the rise in exports from and decline of imports from Russia and Belarus, and also because of decline in imports from Kazakhstan.

The report also indicates that the trade balance with Russia in the first eight months is still negative with \$442m in favor of Russia.

Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) as an economic union which has started its work since 2015 with five major countries of Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan and Armenia and it is in charge of policy-making for macro economy, migration of workforce in direction of free trade and trade agreements.

Iran signed a trade agreement with EAEU in November 2019 and according to the agreement, 860 items of goods are traded between Iran and five EAEU members and Iran is currently negotiating for signing free trade agreement with the union.

Russia to Ban Tomato Imports From Iran Over Virus Fears



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Russian Federal Service for Veterinary and Phytosanitary Surveillance (Rosselkhozadzor) announced yesterday that it will impose a temporary ban on importing tomatoes from Iran over the discovery of Tobacco mosaic virus in the fruits.

In a statement, Rosselkhozadzor said it had discussed the matter during negotiations with representatives of the Iranian Ministry of Agriculture, adding that an official notification will soon be delivered to Tehran regarding violations of international and Russian phytosanitary requirements.

“Rosselkhozadzor reserves the right to impose temporary restrictions on importing these products from Iran,” it added.

According to the food watchdog, the main exporting countries of tomatoes to Russia during the first nine months of 2020 have been Azerbaijan (38 per cent), Turkey (14 per cent), Morocco (ten per cent), China (nine per cent) and Belarus (seven per cent).

Iran Among 10 Coronavirus Producing Countries

TEHRAN (IRNA) - A member of Majlis presiding board on Wednesday hailed Iranian youth efforts in producing coronavirus vaccines, saying that by producing the vaccine, Iran was placed among the ten vaccine producing countries in the world.

Seyyed Mohsen Dehnavi added in a televised speech that this is a great honor that despite the cruel sanctions, Iran’s healthcare system has managed to produce vaccine along with the developed countries in the world.

“We do not have any supervision over the production of foreign vaccines and we buy them according to the certificates issued for them, while the Iranian vaccine is produced with all necessary supervision,” he said.

Making vaccine has a history of 100 years in Iran and World Health Organization has acknowledged Iran and Egypt among the countries producing vaccines, he said. Noting that many countries in the world tried to produce coronavirus vaccine, but they did not succeed, Dehnavi said that Iran succeeded in producing this vaccine with the help of knowledge-based companies.

Iran, Iraq Owe Booming Trade to Martyr Soleimani

TEHRAN (PressTV) - A major Iranian businessman says Lieutenant General Ghassem Soleimani was key to growing trade relations between Iran and Iraq, saying if it was not for the strategic thinking of the slain general the two neighboring countries would have never been able to expand economic ties to the current level.

“General Soleimani had a major role in raising the number of trade crossings as well as in Iran’s energy exports to Iraq,” said Hamid Hosseini, a former chairman of Iran-Iraq Joint Chamber of Commerce, on Thursday.

Hosseini’s comments come as Iran prepares to mark the first anniversary of Soleimani’s assassination by US forces in Iraq. Soleimani was a popular figure in Iraq mainly because of his role in the successful expulsion of terrorist elements from the Arab country.

Hosseini said Soleimani’s strategic view was that booming trade between Iran and Iraq would cement political ties between the two nations.

The first anniversary of the U.S. assassination of top anti-terror Iranian general Qassem Soleimani is just around the corner. Iran currently has 10 border crossings with Iraq, far ahead of other neighboring countries like Turkey and Saudi Arabia whose trade with Iraq is processed through single crossings.

Hosseini said Soleimani was also instrumental in an initiative to set up markets in 18 locations on the border with Iraq, a move which caused a major boom in the volume and value of trade exchanges between the two countries.

The businessman said that the slain general had ordered the creation of a special headquarters to further expand economic relations between Iran and Iraq, especially in areas of energy exports, religious tourism and renovation schemes for holy shrines in the Arab country.

Pistachio Exports Double Y/Y in 3 Months to December

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iranian pistachio exports have doubled year on year in the three months to late December as exporters expect even better earnings next year with better crops and surging international demand for the nut.

Head of Iran Pistachio Association (IPA) said that pistachio exports from the country had amounted to 90,000 metric tons in the third calendar quarter ending December 20.

Mohammad Salehi said that the shipments had doubled in volume terms compared to the similar quarter last year, adding that exports had earned the country over \$540 million in hard currency revenues.

Salehi said earnings could further surge in the coming months with an expected rise in the price of the Iranian pistachio in the international markets.

“Given the good interest of the foreign customers, the price for the Iranian pistachio will soon increase and we



could witness revenues of \$10,000 to \$15,000 from exports of each ton of pistachio,” Salehi was quoted as saying by the ILNA news agency.

Iran is the largest producer and exporter of pistachio in the world as it normally earns around \$1 billion annually from the exports of the nut.

However, better crops and more government support for non-oil exports in recent years have led to a surge in shipments with experts believing the \$2-billion target is well in reach this calendar year ending March despite restrictions imposed on trade because of the global spread of the coronavirus pandemic.

Salehi insisted the price of Iranian pistachio in the international markets would rise from the current \$6 per kilogram, saying the hike would be a huge boost of morale to pistachio farmers in the country after years of low yields due to drought.

Wealth of Iranian Expatriates Estimated Around \$2,000b

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - A member of presiding board of Majlis says some six million Iranians live abroad whose wealth is estimated around \$2,000b.

Speaking to ICANA, Alireza Salimi explained the details of the meeting the members of the Iranian expatriate fraction of Majlis with deputy foreign minister on consular, legal and Iranian affairs abroad. He said in the meeting, the condition of Iranian expatriates was reviewed.

Salimi who is representative of Mahallat and Delijan constituency to Majlis said that some six million Iranians live abroad whose wealth is estimated around \$2,000b and one of the topics discussed in the meeting was how the country can plan for investment of Iranian expatriate in a was major part of this huge wealth is taken into the country.

He said during the current government, investment of Iranian oversees has declined considerably and the country should move towards this huge capacity.

Salimi added that in the meeting the issue of Iranian students abroad was discussed as the number of students is around 70 and most of them are facing serious problems and their problems should be resolved.

He added that in the meeting also the issue of Iranian schools abroad was discussed, adding that some of students have forgotten their mother tongue and it should be reinforced and these schools should also be reinforced.

Salimi said the country should pave the ground for reverse migration of Iranian elites into the country and the country should use its diplomacy capacity for resolving such problems.

Mobarakeh Steel Group Shines in National Festival of PR Publications

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

ISFAHAN – The 15th National Festival of Public Relations Publications wrapped up with brilliant performance of public relations of Mobarakeh Steel Group.

In the closing ceremony of the festival which was held at the conference hall of Industrial Management Institute in Tehran and in presence of deputy Islamic Culture and Guidance minister on the media affairs and some of the experts and veterans of the mass communications science, Mobarakeh Steel Group won several accolades in different categories in the festival.

In the closing ceremony, Mobarakeh Steel Company (MSC) bagged seven top awards and Hormuzgan Steel Company, affiliate company of MSC, also won four top awards to celebrate another honor in the performance record of Mobarakeh Steel Group.

MSC ranked first in the caricature and poster categories in the national level, ranked second in the infographic and documentary films categories in the national level as well as ranking second in the clip, trailer and creativity categories. By the way, the public relations of Hormuzgan Steel Company (HSC) was among the successful public relations in the closing ceremony by winning four top awards as well as receiving plaque of appreciation and statue of the festival for its performance.

The public relations of HSC ranked first in promoting, first in publishing book and ranked second in publishing article in national level and ranked second in designing and publishing special issues in the provincial level.

At the end of the ceremony, association of public relations experts as the organizers of this national festival presented the public relations of MSC with plaque of appreciation and special statue to honor its performance in presentation of printed and online culture.



1st Cargo of MEG Exported to Istanbul by Train

TEHRAN (MNA) – The first export consignment of mono ethylene glycol (MEG) produced by Shazand Petrochemical Co. was exported from Iran’s Arak to Istanbul by train on Wednesday.

It was a 100-ton-consignment, produced in Shazand Petrochemical Company, one of the largest petrochemical complexes, exported through Arak railway to Turkey.

Methanol and MEG (mono ethylene glycol) are the major products exported from Iran and accounted for 77 percent and 11 percent respectively of the total volume exported in 2019. Ethylene glycol (IUPAC name: ethane-1,2-diol) is an organic compound with the formula (CH2OH)2.

It is mainly used for two purposes, as a raw material in the manufacture of polyester fibers and for antifreeze formulations. It is an odorless, colorless, sweet-tasting, viscous liquid.

Petrochemical products are among the main sources of foreign revenues for Iran, accordingly, the country is reportedly planning to launch eight petrochemical projects by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2021).

As reported, 30 percent of the country’s petrochemical output is consumed domestically, adding the number of operational 70 percent of the products are exported to international markets.



## Russia to Supply Algeria, Bolivia With Sputnik V Vaccine

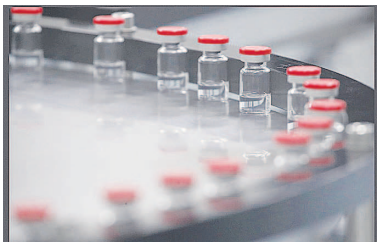
MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia has signed contracts to supply Bolivia and Algeria with its Sputnik V COVID-19 vaccine, the country's sovereign wealth fund has announced.

The Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) said on Wednesday the agreement would make it possible for more than 20 percent of Bolivia's population to access the vaccine, which is administered in two doses.

Supply would be facilitated by the Russian fund's international partners in India, China, South Korea and other countries.

Bolivia's population is 11.35 million and 20 percent would be 2.27 million people.

The development marks the South American nation's first major vaccine deal.



## Belarus to Hold Referendum On Constitutional Changes

MINSK (Dispatches) - Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko said on Thursday the country will hold a referendum on his suggested constitutional reforms, the Belta state news agency reported.

Lukashenko, who has faced weekly protests since claiming victory in an August 9 election his opponents say was rigged, did not say when such a referendum would be held.

The 66-year-old's comments came as he addressed members of staff at Belarus's National Applied Research Center for Pediatric Oncology, Hematology and Immunology, Belta reported.



## U.S. Rejects UN Budget Over Israel, Iran



UNITED NATIONS (AFP) - President Donald Trump's outgoing administration on Thursday fired a late salvo against the United Nations by voting against its budget, citing disagreements on Israel and Iran, but it found virtually no international support.

Only Israel voted with the United States, with 167 nations in favor, as the General Assembly closed the year by approving the \$3.231 billion UN budget for 2021. Kelly Craft, the US ambassador to the United Nations, voiced objections that the budget would fund a 20th anniversary event for the 2001 UN conference on racism in Durban, South Africa, where the United States walked out in solidarity with Israel over what it said was a fixation by Muslim-majority countries against the Jewish state.

The United States, the biggest funder of the UN, "called for this vote to make clear that we stand by our principles, stand up for what is right and never accept consensus for consensus's sake," Craft said on the General Assembly floor.

"Twenty years on, there remains nothing about the Durban Declaration to celebrate or to endorse. It is poisoned by anti-Semitism and anti-Israel bias," she said. Israel's ambassador to the UN, Gilad Erdan, said that the Durban conference "will become another meeting demonizing the Jewish state -- it will be used once again to slander us and to launch false accusations of racism against Jewish self-determination."

The General Assembly separately approved a resolution backing follow-up efforts on the Durban conference.

That resolution passed 106-14 with 44 abstentions. The United States and Israel were joined in voting no by Western powers including Britain, France and Germany.

Craft also complained about how the United States received almost no support in the world body in September when it declared that UN sanctions against Iran had come back into force.

The Trump administration said it was triggering UN sanctions due to alleged Iranian violations of a nuclear deal negotiated by former president Barack Obama, but even US allies scoffed at the argument that Washington remained a participant in an accord that Trump had loudly rejected.

"The U.S. doesn't need a cheering section to validate its moral compass," Craft said. "We don't find comfort based on the number of nations voting with us, particularly when the majority have found themselves in an uncomfortable position of underwriting terrorism, chaos and conflict."

Craft said that the U.S. vote would not change its UN contribution, including 25 percent of peacekeeping expenditures and some \$9 billion a year in UN-channeled humanitarian relief.

President-elect Joe Biden is expected to seek a more cooperative relationship with the UN including stopping a U.S. exit from the World Health Organization, which Trump blamed for not doing more to stop Covid-19.

## Spain Reaches Deal With UK on Gibraltar

MADRID (Dispatches) - An 11th-hour breakthrough in protracted negotiations will keep open Gibraltar's crucial border with Spain following the United Kingdom's full departure from the European Union, Spanish Foreign Minister Arancha González Laya announced Thursday.

Just hours before the UK was to complete its break from the 27-nation bloc, Madrid and London clinched "an agreement in principle" that means people in the speck of British territory on Spain's southern tip "can breathe a sigh of relief," González Laya said.

The key to the deal is that The Rock, whose sovereignty is disputed by Spain and Britain, will remain subject to rules in use in Europe's Schengen area, she said.

That area consists of about two dozen nations that have agreed to eliminate general travel checks among them. Britain is not in the Schengen group. UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said in a statement the negotiating teams



## Dozens Killed in Ambush on Bus in Deir Az Zor

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) - At least 25 people are believed to have been killed in an attack on a bus along a main highway in Syria's eastern Deir Az Zor province that borders Iraq, Syrian state media said, an incident that residents and defectors say was likely an ambush aimed at pro-Assad forces.

The attack, which wounded 13 others, was in an area where mostly Syrian army and Iranian-backed militias are based, near the ancient city of Palmyra.

A senior military defector in the area said the vehicle carried soldiers and pro-government fighters who had finished their leave and were on their way back to their base in the desolate, sparsely populated area.

Another source said at least 30 soldiers were killed, mostly from the Syrian army's elite Fourth Brigade, which has a strong presence in the rich oil-producing province since the ISIL, also known as ISIS group fighters were pushed out at the end of 2017. Rami Abdel Rahman, the head of a UK-based war monitor - the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights - told the AFP news agency that the ambush "was one of the deadliest attacks" since the fall of ISIL (ISIS), which at its peak in 2015, controlled large swaths of land across Syria and Iraq. He said the assailants detonated bombs before opening fire at the bus, which was ambushed near the village of Shula. Two other buses which were part of the convoy managed to escape, the war monitor said.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attack.

Syria's state-run Sana news agency said that pockets of ISIL (ISIS) fighters are still in the area. They remain a threat by continuing to place mines and improvised explosive devices or IEDs in the province and near the border with Iraq.

Deir Az Zor residents and intelligence sources say there has been a rise in recent months of ambushes and hit-and-run attacks by remnants of ISIL (ISIS) group fighters who hid in caves in the mainly desert region. They also say in the last few months, Arab tribes who inhabit the area have been angered by executions by Iranian militias operating in the area of dozens of nomads suspected of affiliation to armed groups.

## Yemen Gov't Vows to Bring Stability After Deadly Attack

ADEN (AFP) - Yemen's new power-sharing government vowed on Thursday to bring stability to the war-torn country, a day after deadly blasts rocked Aden airport in an attack targeting cabinet members.

At least 26 people, including three members of the International Committee of the Red Cross and a journalist, were killed and scores wounded in the explosions as ministers disembarked from an aircraft in the southern city.

All cabinet members were reported to be unharmed in what some ministers charged was an attack by the north Yemen-based rebels.

AFP video footage shows what appears to be a missile strike followed by a ball of intense flames, in part of the airport which moments before had been packed with crowds.

But it is still not fully clear what caused the explosions.

Foreign Minister Ahmed bin Mubarak told AFP on Thursday that the new unity government was up to tackling the challenges facing a country that has long been the Arab Peninsula's most impoverished nation.

"The government is determined to fulfil its duty and work to restore stability in Yemen," he said.

"This terrorist attack will not deter it from that."

Tens of thousands of people, mostly civilians, have been killed and millions displaced in Yemen's grinding five-year war, which has triggered what the United Nations calls the world's worst humanitarian disaster.

The cabinet ministers had arrived in Aden days after being sworn in by Yemeni President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi in Saudi Arabia, which leads a military coalition.

The new government includes ministers loyal to Hadi and supporters of the secessionist Southern Transitional Council, as well as other parties.

While all oppose the rebels, they are deeply divided, and secessionists and forces loyal to the central government have sporadically clashed in and around Aden.

Some ministers, including Mubarak, blamed the Huthi insurgents for the attack -- but other government officials remained more circumspect.

Maged Al-Madhaji of the Sanaa Centre for Strategic Studies said Wednesday's incident was the most significant in the Yemen war.

"The explosions could have destroyed everything. They could have wiped out the entire legitimate government completely," he told AFP.



## Fireworks Explode Over Empty Streets as 2020 Slinks Away Into History



SYDNEY (Reuters) - Blue and gold fireworks soared into the sky above the Sydney Opera House as they do every year, but the harbor below was a ghost town, a fittingly creepy send-off for a year that will not be missed.

No light show will illuminate Beijing from the top of the TV tower. The lions of London's Trafalgar Square will be barricaded off, as will Red Square in Moscow. In Rome, crowds will not assemble in St Peter's Square, the Pope will lead no Mass, and revelers will not make their yearly dive into the Tiber.

The New Year's Eve ball will drop on Broadway. But in place of hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers packed shoulder-to-shoulder into Times Square, the audience will be a small pre-selected group of nurses, doctors and other key workers, their families kept six feet apart in socially distanced pens.

Good riddance, 2020. Hello, 2021.

With more than 1.7 million people dead and 82 million infected around the globe since last New Year's Eve - yet hope that new vaccines can help tame the pandemic - this year's end is like none other in memory. Angela Merkel, in her 16th New Year's Eve address as German chancellor, said as much.

"I think I am not exaggerating when I say: never in the last 15 years have we found the old year so heavy. And never have we, despite all the worries and some scepticism, looked forward to the new one with so much hope."

"I can only imagine how bitter it must feel for those mourning loved ones lost to corona or who are having to fight against the repercussions of an illness when the virus is disputed and denied by some hopeless individuals," said Merkel, 66, who said she would get vaccinated as soon as practicable.

Germany has banned the sale of fireworks to discourage crowds. Authorities in Berlin said police would "punish violators consistently".

In the Chinese city of Wuhan, where the pandemic originated a year ago, thousands were expected to gather at popular landmarks across the city center for the countdown to 2021. Some said they were being cautious, but weren't particularly worried.



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## China's Services Activity Growth Slows in December

BEIJING (Reuters) - Activity in China's services sector expanded at a slower but still strong pace in December, official data showed on Thursday, supported by pent-up demand as the recovery from the coronavirus gathered pace.

The official non-manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) fell to 55.7 in December from 56.4 in November, data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) showed. The 50-point mark separates growth from contraction on a monthly basis.

Though slower than manufacturing, China's services sector, which includes many smaller and private companies, has posted solid growth thanks to strong domestic demand.



## Oil Outlook for 2021 Hit By New COVID-19 Strain

LONDON (Reuters) - Oil prices are unlikely to mount much of a recovery in 2021 as a new coronavirus variant and related travel restrictions threaten already weakened fuel demand, a Reuters poll showed on Thursday.

The poll of 39 economists and analysts conducted in the second half of December forecast Brent crude prices would average \$50.67 per barrel next year.

That is up from a poll last month that forecast a 2021 average price of \$49.35 per barrel but little changed from Brent trading at around \$51 on Thursday. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) U.S. crude futures are expected to average \$47.45 per barrel in 2021, the poll showed.

That too is up from a November consensus of \$46.40 per barrel but little changed from Thursday WTI trading near \$48.

A new variant of the coronavirus detected in Britain this month raises the risk of renewed restrictions and stay-at-home orders, which along with a phased rollout of vaccines might restrict further price gains.

Oil demand recovery will depend on the pace of deployment of the vaccines being developed to combat the virus, analysts said, with some expecting no return to pre-pandemic levels before late 2022 or 2023.

"New virus strains might complicate the outlook and lead to harsher lockdowns that will cripple the crude demand outlook for the first quarter," Edward Moya, senior market analyst at OANDA, said.

"Additional lockdown measures and the careful OPEC+ dance of raising output will be the focal point for the first half of the year."

OPEC producers and allies including Russia, the so-called OPEC+, have agreed to loosen their output cuts by 500,000 barrels per day from January.

OPEC+ is scheduled to meet on Jan. 4 to discuss policy, including a possible additional loosening of 500,000 bpd in February.

"If OPEC+ loosens the production cuts too quickly, there is a threat of a price setback. But if it is too cautious (and prices rise significantly), a rift could arise and U.S. shale oil production could rise again," Commerzbank analyst Carsten Fritsch said.

Brent and WTI futures are down more than 20% this year though Brent has more than tripled since April, when it hit a more than 20-year low of \$15.98 per barrel.

## Pakistan Economy Continues to Move Forward Amid COVID-19

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - As economies around the globe have remained under intense pressure owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Pakistani economy is showing encouraging signs of a promising recovery with improved economic indicators.

The country's economic experts believed that despite the testing times, the national economy is heading towards the right direction as the government's extensive measures have helped it move progressively on the adjustment path in a stabilization process.

According to a recently released Asian Development Bank (ADB) report on development outlook, Pakistan's economy has been getting better despite the persistent challenge of COVID-19. "Pakistan's economy is recovering, particularly in the manufacturing and construction sectors, supported by the government emergency relief," said the report, a regular supplement to the Asian Development Outlook (ADO) 2020.

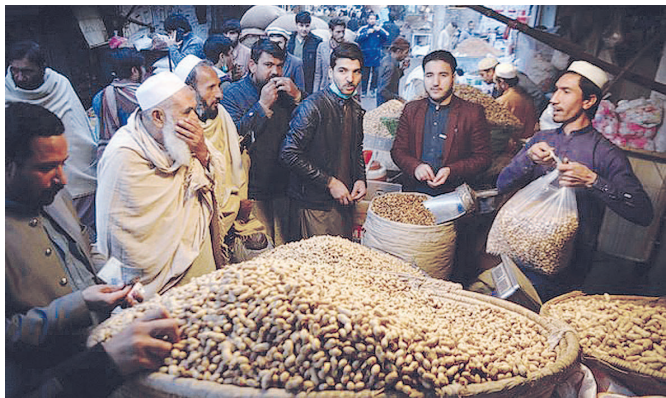
Quoting data released by the country's central bank, Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan said that the improved economic indicators herald new pace in the economic development of Pakistan despite enormous challenges brought by the pandemic. "...despite COVID-19, great news on economy — remarkable turnaround," Khan said in a tweet last week, adding that Pakistan's total current account surplus during the first five months of the current fiscal year from July to November rose to 1.6 billion U.S. dollars against a deficit of 1.7 billion U.S. dollars during the same period last year.

The current account balance turned surplus as the government had made prudent and timely policies to maintain a healthy balance between imports and exports, and sustainability in remittances by overseas Pakistanis, Talat Anwar, a renowned economist and former advisor on macroeconomic policy at the Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, told Xinhua.

"Resultantly, the Pakistani rupee strengthened against the dollar due to less demand from importers and considerable inflows of the

greenback into the country," Anwar said, adding that rupee is expected to remain strong in the coming period.

Workers' remittances maintained a strong momentum, remaining above two billion U.S. dollars for a record sixth consecutive month in November. The remittances grew to 2.34 billion U.S. dollars, up 2.4 percent over the previous month and 28.4 percent over November 2019, according to the recently released statistics of the State Bank of Pakistan. Pakistan also witnessed a growth of over six percent in large scale manufacturing in October 2020 as compared to the same month a year earlier, and the exports have increased to 9.732 billion U.S. dollars in the first five months of the current fiscal year as compared to 9.545 billion U.S. dollars a year earlier, according to the official statistics.



## Iraq Faces 71 Trillion Dinar Budget Deficit in 2021

ERBIL (Dispatches) - A member of Iraqi parliament's finance committee has told state media that the country's budget deficit for 2021 stands at 71 trillion dinars (approximately \$49 billion), according to a bill set to be read by parliament next month.

Muhammad Saheb Al-Daraji told state media on Wednesday that the budget, approved by Iraq's Council of Ministers on December 21, stands at 164 trillion dinars (approx. \$113 billion), and the price of oil is set at \$42 per barrel, according to the bill.

"The deficit in the budget reaches 71 trillion dinars," Al-Daraji added, saying Iraq will also be steeped in 16 trillion dinars, or \$11 billion, worth of debt from previous loans.

Deputy parliament speaker Basheer Haddad said that the parliament will conduct their first reading of the bill at the "beginning of January," state media reported on Tuesday.

Iraq has plunged deeper into an economic crisis amid low oil prices, the main source of revenue for Baghdad. Economic woes were a key factor pushing people to the streets in widespread protests that began in October 2019, with youth calling for better services and an end to mass unemployment, but the economy has continued to weaken amid the COVID-19 pandemic. In October, the World Food Programme warned that 10 percent of Iraqis are going hungry.

Iraq's central bank announced on December 19 that it would be devaluing the country's currency in an effort to combat a national liquidity crisis and bring in much-needed cash to the government's coffers. The devaluation of the Iraqi dinar is a step taken towards reform and creating a "financial balance" and will revive the economy, said Iraq's Minister of Finance.

"There are attempts at removing the Iraqi dinar from the market and adding huge amounts of [older] dollars into the market," Daraji added. "These huge amounts come from the Kurdistan Region."

According to the committee member, 53.8 trillion dinars (around \$37 billion dollars) of the budget has been set aside for civil servant salaries — a thorny issue between Baghdad and Erbil this year.

The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Erbil, reliant on Baghdad to pay its civil servants, has not paid its employees for most of this year amid budget disputes with Baghdad. The federal government has had to take out loans from its central bank to pay the salaries of its civil servants for the last three months of 2020.

Tensions rose between the two governments after Kurdish MPs in Baghdad walked out over a parliamentary session on the fiscal deficit coverage bill, angered over a clause obliging Erbil to hand over an unspecified amount of oil in exchange for funds — a clause they say was not in the original bill.

Frustrated civil servants took to the streets across the provinces of Sulaimani, Halabja and the Garmiyar administration to protest their unpaid salaries earlier this month. 11 people were killed.

## Xi Hails China's Economic Growth

BEIJING (AP) — China has made major progress in developing its economy and eradicating rural poverty over the past year despite the coronavirus pandemic, Chinese President Xi Jinping said in a New Year address Thursday.

China was the first major economy to register positive economic growth in 2020, with its gross domestic product expected to exceed 100 trillion yuan (almost \$14 trillion) for the year, Xi said on nationwide television, speaking from behind his desk in his wood-paneled office.

The International Monetary Fund forecast in October that China, the world's second-largest economy, would grow 1.9% in 2020, a sharp slowdown from its 6.1% gain in 2019, and then expand 8.2% in 2021.

That compares with an IMF forecast for a global economic contraction of 4.4% for 2020, the worst plunge since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

China has largely ended domestic transmission of the coronavirus, but Xi's speech came as the government is ordering additional measures to prevent a resurgence over coming months.

China is encouraging tens of millions of migrant workers not to travel home during February's Lunar New Year holiday to prevent further spread of the coronavirus, disrupting the most important family gathering of the year. Schools nationwide are also scheduled to begin the Lunar New Year vacation a week early and tourists have been told not to visit the capital Beijing during the holiday.

Xi called for increased international cooperation in fighting the virus, which is believed to have emerged from the central Chinese city of Wuhan in late 2019.

## Turkish Economy Still Cool Since 2018

ISTANBUL(Reuters) - Turkey's foreign trade deficit has surged beyond \$45 billion this year, data showed on Thursday, as fallout from the coronavirus pandemic extended the worst economic slump in President Tayyip Erdogan's nearly two decades in power. The sharp trade imbalance, including a jump of \$5 billion in November alone, approached the \$55 billion deficit logged in 2018, when a currency crisis marked the end of years of hot economic growth fuelled by cheap foreign credit.

Since mid-2018, year-on-year growth has averaged roughly 0.5% due to a roller-coaster of recession, strong recovery and another deep contraction in the second quarter of 2020, when the economy was mostly shuttered to curb COVID-19.

Before that, steady annual growth of around 5% propelled Erdogan to five straight election wins, the last in 2018. But since then, the lira has halved in value and it was down 0.5% on Thursday.

This year alone, it has lost 20% against the dollar, the second worst performance among emerging market currencies — despite rallying in the last two months since Erdogan overhauled his economic leadership and pledged a new, market-friendly era.

Economists expect the \$760-billion economy to narrowly avoid a contraction in 2020.

Measures to curb COVID-19, which has killed nearly 21,000 people in Turkey, have slashed key tourism revenues in a country already heavily reliant on imports.

A dollarisation trend, including a record \$235 billion in local hard-currency deposits last week, exacerbated the chronic trade deficit.

The deficit in the first 11 months of the year jumped some 83%, the Turkish Statistical Institute said. Exports fell 8.3% while imports rose 3.5%.

Erdogan appointed Naci Agbal as central bank governor in early November, and he has since hiked rates by 6.75 percentage points to cool double-digit inflation. The bank's policy minutes showed on Thursday price pressures could rise.

"With a tight monetary policy stance (and) potentially falling current account deficit, we believe the nominal strengthening in the lira ... may remain relatively stable in 2021," Gedik Investment Research said in a note.

Erdogan also named a successor to Berat Albayrak, his son-in-law, who abruptly resigned as finance minister in early November. Since then, foreign investor inflows totalled some \$15 billion after years in the other direction.

Istanbul's main stock index has also rallied sharply since early November and is set to end the year almost 30% higher.

## OPEC + Oil Output Cut Compliance At 101% in November



LONDON (Reuters) -The OPEC+ group of oil producers fully complied with supply cuts in November, two sources from the alliance told Reuters ahead of the group's Jan. 4 meeting to discuss whether to boost production further from February.

One of the sources said compliance from members in the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) reached 104% while compliance was at 95% for their allies, including Russia, with overall compliance at 101%.

Russia last week said it was keen for OPEC+ to raise output by 500,000 barrels per day (bpd) from February despite concerns among some members that the move would be premature in the face of the latest surge in coronavirus infections.

"Is the oil demand forecast for the first quarter of 2021 better than that forecast in early December? I don't believe so, given the lockdown in many countries in Europe until the end of January," one of the OPEC+ sources said.

Several European countries including Britain, Germany and France have enforced movement restrictions to contain new infection waves.

In early December OPEC+ agreed to ease its record cuts from 7.7 million bpd to 7.2 million bpd after backing down from earlier plans for a 2 million bpd output boost.

Under the deal, further monthly adjustments will not exceed 500,000 bpd.

"At the end of the day there is not much of a difference in the balance between increasing by 500,000 bpd in February or not. The big issue was not to increase by 2 million bpd in January," the second source said.



## Iran Gasoline Exports Hit \$1.4b in 7 Months

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran as an active exporter in the Middle East region could earn about 1.4 billion dollars from gasoline export during the seven months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-October 21).

Iran was an importer of gasoline until two years ago, which imported up to 4.5 million liters per day, but it is now one of the exporters of the strategic product in the region and the world. In 2006, Iran had to import

over 27 million liters of gasoline per day, leading to the outflow of foreign currency and the dependence on energy security.

Such a dependence turned gasoline embargo as the top item of sanctions imposed on Iran; so, the country was even forced to change the process of some petrochemical companies to substitute reformat instead of gasoline in order to avoid any fuel shortages.



## China, EU Reach Investment Deal, But Risk Friction With U.S.

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - China and the European Union struck a sweeping agreement Wednesday on an investment pact that will deepen ties between the world's second- and third-largest economies, despite a warning from the incoming U.S. administration over rushing into a deal.

The two sides wrapped up talks on the broad outlines of the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment in a video meeting attended by Chinese President Xi Jinping, European Council President Charles Michel, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron.

The investment deal, which Brussels and Beijing began negotiating in 2014, is expected to give a boost to European companies seeking to enter the Chinese market and revive European economies hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic. For China, the agreement -- coming close on the heels of the recently signed Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership -- further enhances its international influence.

"This agreement will rebalance our economic relationship with China," von der Leyen said.

Xi said the treaty will "greatly boost world economic recovery in the post-pandemic era" and "enhance the international community's confidence in economic globalization and free trade," according to the official Xinhua News Agency.

The two sides clinched the deal before U.S. President-elect Joe Biden takes office next month, and questions remain as to how the incoming administration will respond. Biden's team had warned Brussels this month against an overly hasty deal, citing "common concerns about China's economic practices."

Some analysts warned that the China-EU agreement risks splintering a united front against some of Beijing's more problematic economic measures.

"This need for the EU to publicly promote and defend the CAI would likely run counter to those of a U.S.-led collective effort to rein in Chinese unfair and state-led practices," Wendy Cutler and James Green said in a report for the Asia Society published Wednesday.

Cutler served three decades in the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, including serving as acting deputy U.S. trade representative. Green served as minister counselor for trade affairs at the U.S. Embassy in Beijing as well as in the USTR.

"Beijing will use these encounters to convey European endorsement of China's trade and investment regime -- contrary to U.S. assertions about the disruptive and unfair nature of the Chinese system -- and mute critics of recent Chinese strong-arm trade tactics towards Australia," they said.

"Clearly, one of Beijing's key objectives in making last-minute concessions to Europe is to drive a wedge between the U.S. and EU approaches towards China on the eve of a new administration in Washington."

The deal will lower barriers faced by European companies seeking to enter the Chinese market, according to a document released by the EU.

Beijing will phase out joint venture requirements in the automotive sector and ensure market access for "new-energy" vehicles such as electrics. Joint venture requirements will be lifted for private hospitals, letting EU businesses open facilities in major cities, and European investors will be allowed to own stakes of up to 50% in companies offering cloud services.

The deal includes measures to improve transparency surrounding Chinese government subsidies to state-owned enterprises, and to ban forced technology transfers. It also establishes a mechanism for dispute settlement if one side fails to abide by the agreement.



The two sides clashed until the last minute on protections for workers in China, but Beijing ultimately agreed to work toward ratifying International Labor Organization rules on forced labor.

"For the first time, China has ... agreed to ambitious provisions on sustainable development, including commitments on forced labor," the EU said in a news release, praising this concession by Beijing.

In contrast to free trade agreements, deals like this focus narrowly on conditions for promoting investment without touching on tariffs. The Chinese side had hoped for a trade pact, but Brussels stuck to investment, arguing that a full-fledged trade agreement would take too much time.

The deal, like RCEP, furthers Beijing's efforts to take a leading role in international trade and investment. With the power competition between the U.S. and China expected to drag on for some time, Beijing is rushing to strike major deals that shut out Washington while expanding its own sphere of influence. The concessions made in this agreement suggest that such geopolitical considerations were at play.

The conclusion of the investment pact is expected to bring substantial economic benefits as well. China's direct investment in the 27 EU member countries doubled in three years to \$280 billion in 2019, according to the International Monetary Fund.

The boost is driven largely by Xi's Belt and Road infrastructure-building initiative. Chinese investment into key EU members like Germany and France have increased as well.

Direct investment would play a greater role in lifting China's economy once the new deal lowers hurdles for European players to take a stake in Chinese companies or build Chinese factories. Attracting European investment will be key for China's "dual circulation" strategy, through which it aims to bolster industries at home with the help of foreign input.

The EU has suffered an economic blow from the coronavirus pandemic, and many members including Germany strongly supported the deal with China. But the agreement still needs to be ratified by the European Parliament, which could pose a challenge given the body's concerns over China's treatment of its Uighur Muslim minority and crackdown in Hong Kong.

## Post-Brexit Borders to Divide EU, UK Citizens

BRUSSELS (AFP) - From January 1 British and EU citizens will be confronted with the reality of Brexit as the transition period ends and borders that were done away with decades ago return.

Although a deal has been struck to permit tariff-free trade across the Channel, from that date, Britons will be treated by the EU as "third country" nationals.

They will no longer enjoy freedom of movement to work, study or retire across the European Union and Britain in turn will process EU nationals at its borders as it does other non-UK passport holders. EU citizens proving residence in Britain, or Britons already living in a European Union country, will theoretically retain their rights under a Withdrawal Agreement struck in late 2019.

Tourists will see some immediate changes -- apart from the fluctuating coronavirus restrictions already crimping travel -- but both sides have agreed that travel will be visa-free, as long as the other side keeps it that way.

The EU will however stop British passports being used in its automated e-gates, potentially meaning longer queues at manned passport booths.

Britons must hold passports still valid for at least six months and will be limited to EU stays of 90 days in a rolling 180-day period.

They will also need to show travel insurance coverage, sufficient funds and a return ticket on request.

Europeans entering Britain can use a national ID card until October, after which only passports will be accepted, for stays of up to six months.

EU passport holders will be able to continue using British e-gates under current guidance.

Those with criminal records may be banned and non-European family members of a European may need a visa, depending on nationality.

### Saudi Rulers...

FROM PAGE 1

It is noteworthy to remind that last week UN Special Envoy for Yemen, Martin Griffiths, had warned, "Human condition in Yemen is deteriorating day by day. However we can hinder famine in this country. We need truce and to open the doors of Yemen to the humanitarian aids." He emphasized, "Despite coronavirus pandemic, we have offered necessary equipment and materials for helping the health sector for fight with COVID-19 and reinforcing laboratory and supervision capability for boosting medical checkup and getting COVID-19 tests. But health sector is still facing with problem in monitoring the COVID-19 infected and conducting necessary tests. So we believe that handling some cases have not been completed or monitored."

Yemen Foreign Minister in a press conference which was published on Al-Ahed news website for the umpteen time emphasized, "Saudi Arabia is not after stopping the war but we welcome talks for ending the war or even ceasefire."

That Yemen is today subjected to a huge cruelty then where should we take this fact that the Hebrew-Arab-Western arrogance sees its interests in the continuity of turmoil in any part of the Persian Gulf and Gulf of Aden? Who is to respond to this fact that all of these injustices, due to the international bodies' defiance, have been showered against Yemeni people whose demand is just the independence of their country for getting out of the Saudis' yoke?

Indeed, in this belligerence rooted by the hatred of Arab versus Arab, should not we consider Saudis deserving punishment? Undoubtedly and without the smallest hesitation today after years of ruthless massacre of poor Yemeni people, Saudi rulers should stand trial as the war criminal. The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Organization and Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) should convene without any delay and as soon as possible, they should take some action to stop war and then to form a fact-finding committee for finding the aggressor and filing a petition for its trial.

### Iran Marks...

FROM PAGE 1

The head of the judiciary said: "There are signs of tough revenge, but the enemy must wait for tough revenge. They will see tough revenge, and what they have seen so far has been a manifestation of revenge. The Islamic Ummah itself will determine the time and place of revenge, but the enemy knows that life will be more difficult for him from now on, and the punishment of the masterminds and perpetrators of this crime will be manifestations of tough revenge."

Hojjatolislam Raisi noted: "The expulsion of the United States from the region will be the revenge of Hajj Qassem. Nobody assumes that someone in the guise of the U.S. president as a murderer has safety. All those who took part in this assassination will not be safe anywhere on this planet."

Meanwhile Qa'ani warned that people inside the United States may retaliate the assassination of his predecessor General Soleimani.

Addressing the ceremony to mark the first anniversary of General Soleimani's assassination, General Qa'ani said "it is possible that some people inside your home (the US) would respond to your crime."

He said after what the U.S. did, they may find people all around the world who would be ready to take vengeance.

In his Friday remarks, General Qa'ani stressed that the U.S. mischievous acts in the region will not change the Resistance Front's path.

### Iran Warns UNSC...

FROM PAGE 1

The letter underlined Iran's determination to protect its people and to defend its security, sovereignty and territorial integrity and noted that the Islamic Republic's resolve to respond decisively to any threat or use of force against the country should not be underestimated.

The mission's letter to the Security Council echoed earlier remarks by Iran Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif who said Iran does not seek war but will "openly and directly" defend its people and security as well as its vital interests.

On Wednesday, two nuclear-capable American B-52 bombers flew over the Persian Gulf after nonstop flights to the region from their US-based hangars. It was the third time in six weeks that American bombers were conducting long-range flights off the Iranian coast.

The latest deployments came after the US Navy announced the arrival of a nuclear-powered submarine in the Persian Gulf last week. The USS Georgia passed the Strait of Hormuz accompanied by two American warships, making it the first missile-loaded submarine of its kind to enter the Persian Gulf in eight years.

The region has witnessed escalating tensions since Trump accused Iran of playing a role in the attacks on the U.S. embassy in Iraq late last month, threatening retaliation.

Moreover, the outgoing U.S. president, as political analysts maintain, would barely choose not to welcome the eruption of a limited conflict with Iran as a final recourse to maintain its grip on power at a time that political and electoral procedure has denied him a second term in office after a crushing defeat to his Democratic rival, Joe Biden, in the November 3 election.

### Iran Eyes...

FROM PAGE 1

"Phase one of the human clinical trial of the corona vaccine has been successfully performed in Cuba, the second phase of the human clinical trial is currently being conducted under the supervision of the Pasteur Institute of Iran in Cuba, and providing the success of the second phase, phase three of the human-based study -- as announced by the head of the Pasteur Institute of Iran -- will be done in Iran in the final months of the year," Jahanpour noted.

The IFDA's spokesman said the technology of production of a joint vaccine between Iran and Cuba is Subunit and this technology is to be transferred to Iran during the joint cooperation.

Subunit vaccines are composed of protein or glycoprotein components of a pathogen that are capable of inducing a protective immune response and may be produced by conventional biochemical or recombinant DNA technologies. On Tuesday, Iran begun the first phase in the human trial of the homegrown COVID-19 vaccine after successfully completing the initial steps, including tests on animals, and obtaining necessary approvals.

The vaccine, dubbed Coviran Barekat and produced by Iranian experts at the Headquarters for Executing the Order of Imam Khomeini, was administered to three volunteers at a ceremony in Tehran.

Iran reported the first cases of the coronavirus in mid-February 2020, soon becoming a hub where the deadly virus rapidly spread, making the country one of the hardest-hit in the region.

Iran is under illegal, inhumane sanctions imposed by the United States, which have hampered its access to medical equipment and pharmaceuticals, and complicated the process of importing vaccines from other countries.



## Wolves Boss Nuno Charged Over Ref Comments

LONDON (Dispatches) - Wolves manager Nuno Espirito Santo has been charged with improper conduct by the Football Association over comments he made about referee Lee Mason.

The Portuguese was highly critical of the official after his side's Premier League match against Burnley on December 21.

The FA said in a statement: "Nuno Espirito Santo has been charged with a breach of FA Rule E3 in relation to their Premier League match against Burnley FC on Monday December 21, 2020.

LICENCE HOLDER: SOKHAN GOSTAR INSTITUTE

**Switchboard:**  
(+98) (21) 44253448  
**Public Relations Tel:**  
(+98)(21) 44253450  
Editorial Board: 44253449  
**Public Relations Fax:**  
(+98)(21) 44253395  
**Advertising Department:**  
Tel/Fax:(+98) (21) 44253335-9/44253234  
**Website:**  
http://www.irannewsdaily.com

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## Belgian Midfielder Rejoins Cagliari on Loan

MILAN (Dispatches) - Belgian midfielder Radja Nainggolan has rejoined Cagliari, where he played between 2010-14, on a second loan from Inter Milan, the Sardinian club announced Thursday.

Nainggolan, who spent last season at Cagliari on loan, this time is on loan until the end of the season.

Cagliari said that the club and player shared "a very strong bond". "So strong that when on a hot afternoon at the end of August, the Belgian, Sardinian by adoption, emptied his locker in Asseminello, everyone hoped that it would not be a farewell."

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SPORTS

SATURDAY JANUARY 2, 2021

## James Celebrates Birthday With Milestone in Lakers Win

LOS ANGELES (AFP) - Los Angeles superstar LeBron James celebrated his 36th birthday with another NBA milestone, scoring double-digit points for the 1,000th straight game in the Lakers' 121-107 victory over the Spurs in San Antonio.

James finished with 26 points to extend his already record streak of double-digit games in the regular season.

He sealed the milestone midway through the second quarter with a turnaround jump hook that gave the Lakers a 46-37 lead.

"I just try to live in the moment and just try to continue to get better with my game, try to get better with my teammates and try to just maximize when I'm on the floor," said James, who is in his 18th NBA campaign after leading the Lakers to the 2020 title in the league's quarantine bubble in Orlando.

"I've been blessed to play the game that I love for 18 years and hopefully I can continue to play at a high level," he said.

James' double-digit scoring streak began on January 6, 2007, when he was playing for the Cleveland Cavaliers.

"It's a tribute to his tenacity level ... his commitment to excellence," Spurs coach Gregg Popovich said before the game. "He deserves a lot of credit for being the consummate professional. His mental state along with his physical state really makes him really special."

Shortly after James reached the milestone, Popovich was ejected from the contest for arguing with officials.

Assistant Becky Hammon took over on the Spurs bench, becoming the first woman to direct a team in an NBA game.

Anthony Davis scored 20 points and pulled down nine rebounds for the Lakers, newcomer Dennis Schroder added 21 points and four assists.

## Williamson Overtakes Smith, Kohli as Top Test Batsman

LONDON (Dispatches) - New Zealand skipper Kane Williamson has overtaken Australia's Steve Smith and India captain Virat Kohli to be the number one Test batsman in the world in the latest ICC rankings released Thursday.

Williamson leaped from third to first after his player-of-the-match effort leading the Black Caps to a 101-run victory over Pakistan this week, scoring 129 in the first innings and a rapid 21 in the second when New Zealand were building a lead before declaring.

The New Zealand skipper described it as "humbling" to overtake Smith, who held the top spot for 313 days this year, and Kohli, who was number one for 51 days.

Smith slipped to third in the rankings behind Kohli following scores of nought and eight in Australia's second Test against India while Kohli was on paternity leave.

"They are incredible players of our generation," Williamson said as he arrived in Christchurch ahead of the second Pakistan Test which starts on Sunday.

"Those two players are the best so far me to sneak up perhaps in some way, is very surprising and humbling." All three players were this week named in the International Cricket Council's team of the decade with Smith also named as the individual Test player of the decade. Kohli took the award for the best one-day player.

## F1 Champion Hamilton Gets His Knighthood

LONDON (Reuters) - Seven-times Formula One world champion Lewis Hamilton was awarded a knighthood in the UK New Year's honours list published on Wednesday.

The 35-year-old this year became the most successful F1 driver of all time after equalling Ferrari great Michael Schumacher's record seven titles and beating the German's 91 race wins.

The sport's only Black driver, who grew up in social housing as the grandson of immigrants from the Caribbean, Hamilton has also used his profile to campaign for diversity and speak out against racial injustice.



Miami with 26 points, Bam Adebayo added 22 points, eight rebounds and 10 assists and Tyler Herro scored 21 points with a career-best 15 rebounds as the Heat rallied to stave off another home defeat.

The Bucks had dominated on Tuesday with an NBA-record 29 three-pointers in their 144-97 triumph.

The Bucks, fueled by a triple-double of 26 points 13 rebounds and 10 assists from two-time NBA Most Valuable Player Giannis Antetokounmpo, looked like making it two wins in a row when they led by 14 in the third quarter.

Donte DiVincenzo scored 15 points and Jrue Holiday added 13 for the Bucks, but the Heat rallied despite missing Jimmy Butler for the second straight game.

"You want to constantly develop some grit and toughness during the course of a long season, and our guys responded in an appropriate fashion," said Heat coach Erik Spoelstra, who acknowledged before the game that there was "a lot of anger and frustration" after the blowout loss on Tuesday.

"As well there should have been," he said.

In Brooklyn, Kyrie Irving scored 17 of his 25 points in the fourth quarter and Kevin Durant added 33 points, 11 rebounds and eight assists as the Nets dealt the Atlanta Hawks their first defeat of the young season, 145-141.

Irving's late burst helped the Celtics withstand 30-point performances from Atlanta's Trae Young and John Collins.

Boston, powered by Jaylen Brown's career-high 42 points defeated the Memphis Grizzlies 116-111.

The Celtics led by 12 points after the opening quarter and took full control with a 17-0 scoring run in the second period.

Brown's put-back basket with 4:39 left in the first half gave Boston a 57-30 lead and they cruised from there, Brown notching his career-high in scoring despite sitting out all of the fourth quarter.

## Murray Pulls Out of Delray Beach Open

LONDON (Dispatches) - Andy Murray has pulled out of what was due to be his first tournament of the season in Florida next week because of coronavirus concerns.

The former world number one accepted a wild card into the Delray Beach Open and had been due to play his first match next Friday but has decided the trip is too risky.

"After much deliberation with my team I've decided not to travel to play in Delray Beach," said Murray

"Given the increase in Covid rates and the transatlantic flights involved, I want to minimise the risks ahead of the Australian Open.

"I'm really thankful for the understanding of the tournament and I look forward to playing there soon."

The 33-year-old has been given a wild card for the Australian Open and will travel Down Under in mid-January before a period of quarantine prior to the start of the first Grand Slam of 2021 on February 8.

Australia has strict protocols regarding entry to the country and travelling to the United States first, where coronavirus cases remain high, could potentially jeopardise his plans.

Murray, a three-time Grand Slam champion, has slipped to 122nd in the world after an injury-ravaged three years.

British number one Dan Evans has also pulled out of Delray Beach and the pair will continue to prepare in London ahead of the new season.



## Honda "So Sorry" for Lackluster Botafogo Spell

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Former Japan midfielder Keisuke Honda apologized for a disappointing spell at Brazil's Botafogo as he bowed out ahead of a reported move to Europe.

Honda, 34, said he accepted fans' criticism after scoring only three goals in 27 matches during a coronavirus-disrupted year.

"Criticism is natural and I am not making excuses, I am disappointed as well, I am so sorry,"

he tweeted in Portuguese.

Reports in Portugal have said that Honda, a former AC Milan and CSKA Moscow player and a one-time mainstay of Japan's national team, will join Portuguese outfit Portimonense in January.

Honda was welcomed by thousands of fans when he arrived in Brazil on February 7. But Botafogo have struggled this season and they are currently second from bottom in the Serie A table.

Honda is among the most successful Japanese footballers. He scored 37 goals, including four at World Cups, in 98 appearances for the national team.

## Liverpool Miss Chance to Stretch Lead

LONDON (Dispatches) - Liverpool squandered the chance to open up a five-point lead at the top of the Premier League in the final English top-flight match of 2020 after being held to a goalless draw by Newcastle.

The 0-0 stalemate at St James' Park means the champions go into the New Year with a three-point lead over Manchester United, having played a game more.

But they will rue their missed chances in a match in which they enjoyed nearly three-quarters of possession.

Mohamed Salah -- top of the Premier League goalscoring charts with 13 goals -- missed the target either side of half-time with just goalkeeper Karl Darlow to beat and strike-partner Roberto Firmino saw two headers superbly saved.

Three days after lowly West Brom snatched a point at Anfield, Jurgen Klopp's men, who have now won only two of their eight league away games this season, were frustrated once again, although it took a late goal-line clearance from Fabian Schar and Darlow's brilliance to keep them at bay.

Klopp rued his side's profligacy in front of goal.

"You might not think I have to tip my hat to my team but I like the performance," he told the BBC. "It was really good. Can we play better football? Yes, but in this game we did more than enough to win it. "I think we had four 100 percent chances. We have won against Newcastle before with fewer chances. Tonight we didn't but we accept that. I am happy with the things I saw tonight and I can really work with that.



## Atletico Extend La Liga Lead After Real Slip

MADRID (Dispatches) - Atletico Madrid extended their lead at the top of La Liga on Wednesday after Luis Suarez fired them to a 1-0 win over Getafe while Real Madrid could only draw 1-1 at Elche.

Suarez struck in the 20th minute with a superb header from Yannick Carrasco's cross to move Diego Simeone's Atletico up to 35 points, two ahead of local rivals Madrid after they were pegged back by a Fidel Chaves penalty following Luka Modric's early opener.

Real Sociedad, Sevilla and Villarreal are all a further seven points back, with Barcelona 10 behind Atletico in sixth after their 1-1 draw with Eibar on Tuesday.

Atletico have also played two fewer matches than reigning champions Madrid after a scrappy win emblematic of Simeone's reign on his 500th match as club coach.

"When I got on the plane to come here I thought that when I left the club (as a player) that I always wanted to come back," said Simeone, who is in his 10th year as Atletico coach.

"I found men (Koke, Saul Niguez) who wanted to get the club out of the bad patch it was in, and I have a relationship with them that goes beyond football."

Uruguay forward Suarez's eighth goal of the season was a good as it got for Atletico, who despite fielding a strong line-up did not impress in a match of little incident at the Wanda Metropolitano.

However Atletico's third straight win keeps them top of the pile after a fraught last few days in which Diego Costa was allowed to leave and Kieran Trippier was banned until the end of February for betting breaches.

