

Spokesman of the Budget Integration Commission of Majlis Said That the Total Amount of the Government's Revenues From Taxes In the Next Year's Budget Would be 225,000b Tomans

# IRAN NEWS

Iran as an Active Exporter in the Middle East Region Could Earn About \$1.4b From Gasoline Export During the Seven Months of the Current Iranian Calendar Year (March 20-October 21)

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## Iran's Finger on Trigger to Start 20% Uranium Enrichment

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's nuclear chief says the country has its finger on the trigger to start the enrichment of uranium at 20-percent purity level as soon as President Hassan Rouhani issues the order.

Ali Akbar Salehi, the head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), said the Islamic Republic is able to start the process very soon. "We are supposed to implement the Parliament's legislation [on increasing the country's uranium enrichment], but the government should communicate to us a bylaw on how to enforce it," he added.

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## No Distinction Between U.S. Bases, Host States in War



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps Aerospace Force warned regional Arab countries that Iran would make no distinction between American military bases and the countries hosting those sites if a war broke out.

In an interview with Al-Manar, Brigadier General Amir Ali Hajizadeh advised the regional countries working with the U.S. and Israel to rectify their policies.

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Rejecting Trump Veto, Republican-Led Senate Backs Defense Bill

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## CBI Net Foreign Assets Rise 4.5%

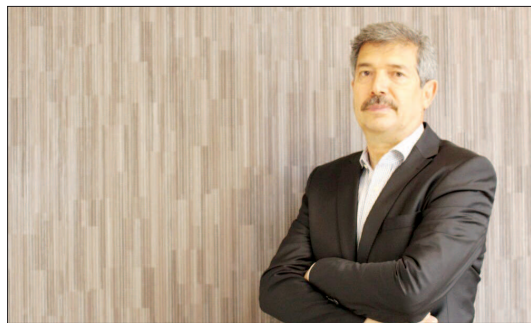
TEHRAN (MNA) - Net foreign assets held by the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) at the end of the current Iranian calendar year's second quarter (September 21, 2020) stood at 3.63 quadrillion rials (about \$86.4 billion), 4.5 percent more than the figure for the end of the previous year (March 19, 2020).

According to the Statistical Center of Iran (SCI) quarterly report, the bank's foreign assets amounted to 3.47 quadrillion rials (about \$82.75 billion) at the end of the previous Iranian calendar year (March 19, 2020), ILNA reported.

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Ali Changi, CEO of the largest manufacturer of car lights

## Lack of Access to Advanced Software by Component Makers



According to surveys, the production of cars and parts has grown by more than 20% in October this year compared to October 2019. Also in September of this year and compared to the same month last year, the production of cars and parts shows a growth of about 19 percent. Although the statistics of car and parts production in November have not been published yet, but considering the upward trend in circulation growth, it seems that the car and parts sector will also face production growth this month. This trend may continue in the last three months of the year, and in the second half of the year as a whole, there will be better days for the auto and parts industry. Among the factors that seem to affect the continuation of the process of improving domestic car production are the acceleration of customs clearance of parts and raw materials, the growth of car factory prices, the plan of the Ministry of Industry, Mines and Trade to liberalize the price of some cars, as well as positive signals. He pointed to the possibility of reviving the Borjam nuclear deal. These statistics are stated while according to Ali Changi, CEO of our country's modern industry research group, it has more capacity than the statistics provided in domestic car production. He believes that in order to achieve the ideal capacity in car production, we are facing two main problems, namely the cumbersome rules and the instability of large industries as suppliers of raw materials. The following is the text of our conversation with Ali Changi, CEO of the Modern Industry Research Group, about the company's success in the last nine months, as well as the problems facing the development of the domestic automotive industry.

Has the performance of the modern industry research group of the country in the last 9 months been favorable?

Given that Irankhodro was able to record last year's production record by the end of December and

increase its production by 25%, we, as a supplier of car lights for Irankhodro products, have also contributed to this growth; But whether our company has more production capacity and capacity requires attention to the production capacity of domestic cars. If a company like Iran Khodro has been able to reach 25% of production despite currency problems, sanctions and stone-throwing, it means that it has the ability to increase this amount of production, and we must see what obstacles have caused this growth to not be higher than the mentioned amount despite high capacity?

What do you think is the reason for this?

In general, in the Iranian economy, the business environment is a dual business environment that can be called the motivational duality of the Iranian economy. If we divide the Iranian economy into two categories of activities, a group of activities, activities that are productive and add value and are employment-generating. Production activities in the field of industry, agriculture, etc. Another category of activities is unproductive activities that do not create employment and do not create added value, which includes brokerage or rental activities. The rules and regulations and business conditions of Iran's economy are such that it always creates obstacles for the productive sector, that is, if the productive sector wants to pursue activities, it faces thousands of problems, obstacles and laws, requires different licenses and faces various restrictions and complications. And he has to pay various taxes, and the business of this sector is closed. The non-productive sector, on the other hand, is free, and the rules and regulations and the tax system do not preclude the non-productive sector, whereas in a developed country the opposite happens and the non-productive sectors face many restrictions and the productive sectors are free. We have closed the generator and provided space for the non-productive sector to operate. So the main problem in the productive part is related to stubborn laws. We must note that in order to achieve a leap in production, the government and the government need to take steps, the most important of which is the elimination of stagnant laws on production, which must be solved once and for all. Labor laws, social security and taxes are detrimental to production. These laws prevent mutations in production. But regarding the second problem, we must say that this problem is due to the instability of work and performance of the parent industries. Unfortunately, these industries do not have a fixed view of small and micro industries. Even this instability can be seen on a monthly basis in the performance of these companies. Problems such as lack of timely delivery of raw materials, daily price increases and lack of a comprehensive plan are the three current problems of small industries that stem from the

unstable behavior of parent industries. Of course, other economic problems in Iran include the banking network and monetary policies in creating unsupported liquidity, and economic problems will not be solved until these problems are rectified, even if sanctions are lifted.

What has been your export in the last 9 months?

We did not have many problems in the export sector and we have been able to maintain our markets despite many problems. In general, one of the most important issues in the export market is maintaining the quality of products and its competitive components, which we have been able to fulfill in the last 9 months. Of course, since the exchange rate has experienced favorable growth since the beginning of this year, the rate of export of goods has been a significant figure for the company.

Are the countries importing auto parts satisfied with the quality of Iranian products?

First of all, we need to know that importing countries have a very open hand in choosing the source of import, and they can easily import goods from any country they want. If these countries choose Iranian goods, there is no reason other than good quality and price. However, Iran needs a significant amount of foreign exchange to carry out its various exchanges and imports, and there is no other way to earn this foreign exchange income than exports. For this reason, in any long-term development strategy, it is necessary to pay attention to the expansion of exports; Exports that can act as a growth and stimulus for the development of the country's industries. Therefore, paying attention to the markets of other countries for the export of Iranian products seems necessary and the authorities should make more efforts to smooth the export.

Have you paid attention to innovation this year as well?

At present, we have localized the production line and designed a new generation of lights inside the company. In some areas of design, we have made good progress, and the design of K132 car headlights was also the responsibility of the Modern Industry Research Group; But given that the car headlight industry is dynamic and still evolving, we must make every effort to progress and develop. The biggest problem we have for producing car headlights is having access to advanced design software. Unfortunately, they do not provide such practical and advanced software to Iran, and even if they do, they charge a very high price for it. Of course, buying those softwares is still valuable to increase the depth of product internalization,

and we are willing to go under the high price they say, but another problem is that they do not provide technical support for the softwares. The reason for this is that in the world, limited resources are produced by these softwares. The force of the sanctions has led to the refusal to sell the main software to Iranian manufacturers. This has led to increased problems that must be addressed in order to continue production; But despite all this, we are still at the forefront of innovation.

If a manufacturing company intends to increase its knowledge and technical capacity to produce lights, what is the first part it should pay attention to? How effective can automakers be in this endeavor?

In answer to the first part of your question, it should be said, increase the engineering power, then use specialized manpower and advanced software. In answer to the second part of your question, it should be said that automakers have a pivotal role in the growth and development of parts manufacturers. Even the automaker determines in which categories the component maker ascends or descends. With the help of modern technology, the automaker can force parts manufacturers to increase their technical and quality capacity.

It has been criticized many times that the quality of cars has been declining in the last two years, is this also true for the production of car headlights?

The answer is definitely no. Automakers strictly control the quality of parts and do nothing to discuss quality. Despite all the problems, including sanctions and manufacturing and industrial challenges, automakers have not fallen short in discussing quality. Parts makers need to maintain their agility and efficiency alongside supply sources so that quality does not decline. It should be noted that this year, the quality assessment of car manufacturers is stricter than ever. Ali Changi: Iran's economic problems include the banking network and monetary policies to create unsupported liquidity, and economic problems will not be solved until these problems are rectified, even if sanctions are lifted. The CEO of the Modern Industry Research Group, problems such as lack of timely delivery of raw materials, daily price increases and lack of a comprehensive plan are the three current problems of small industries that stem from the unstable behavior of parent industries. The main problem in the productive sector is related to stubborn laws. We must note that in order to achieve a leap in production, the government and the government need to take steps, the most important of which is the elimination of stagnant laws on production, which must be solved once and for all. These laws prevent mutations in production.



# President Appoints New Ambassador to UNESCO

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iranian president appointed Ahmad Pakatchi as the new ambassador and permanent representative of the Islamic Republic to UNESCO.

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani appointed Ahmad Pakatchi as the new ambassador and permanent representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on Saturday. Pakatchi is a graduate of Tehran University with a degree in history. He is also an associate professor at the Institute of Humanities and Cultural Studies and majored in studies of religions and historical linguistics from Al-Farabi University in Almaty.

## Any Anti-Iran Action to Be Met With Reciprocal, Decisive Response

**TEHRAN (PressTV) - The chief commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) has warned of a “reciprocal, decisive and strong” response to any action by the enemy against Iran, saying no threats would go unanswered.**

Major General Hossein Salami made the remarks on Saturday during a visit to military units and equipment stationed on Abu Musa Island in the Persian Gulf.

Asked about Iran’s reaction to any encroachment on its security and national interests, especially in the naval field, he replied, “We have demonstrated both in action and expression that we will respond to any action, taken by the enemy against us, with a reciprocal, decisive and strong blow.”

“It has been proven many times that we would not let threats or acts of aggression go unanswered,” he added.

Salami further said that the IRGC Navy has in recent years managed to make amazing achievements and boost its capabilities.

The IRGC Navy, he noted, is in possession of smart mines and has the ability to deal with hostile sub-surface vessels.

The elite force’s manned or unmanned aircraft can destroy hostile targets deep inside the sea by dropping smart bombs on them, the IRGC chief commander said, stressing that the new generation of vertically-launched drones equipped on vessels are capable to operate at different ranges.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Salami said the three Persian Gulf islands of the Greater



Tunb, the Lesser Tunb and Abu Musa are “inseparable components of our national independence, and our defensive front against trans-regional enemies.”

He also described the defense and combat readiness at the trio of islands as reassuring, decisive, strong and unbreakable.

Additionally, Salami hailed the role played by top Iranian anti-terror commander Lieutenant General Soleimani, the commander of the IRGC’s Quds Force, and his Iraqi trenchmate Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the deputy head of the Popular Mobilization Units, were assassinated along with their companions in a US terror drone strike authorized by President Donald Trump near Baghdad International Airport on January 3 last year.

## One Million Iranians Recover from COVID-19

TEHRAN (IFP) - Health Ministry spokeswoman says 1,004,326 COVID-19 patients have recovered from the disease or been discharged from the hospital so far.

In a press briefing on Saturday, Sima-Sadat Lari said the virus has killed 101 patients since Friday noon, the lowest figure reported since June 20, increasing the overall death toll to 55,438. She said 1,237,474 patients have contracted the novel coronavirus so far, including 6,045 new cases identified in the past 24 hours.

Lari said 4,981 patients are also in critical conditions caused by more severe infection.

## FM Censures U.S. for Assassinating Martyr Soleimani

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran Foreign Ministry Affairs has once again censured the United States for committing a “craven act of terror” against top legendary Iranian commander Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, vowing to prosecute the culprits in his assassination.

In a tweet on Friday on the occasion of the first anniversary of general Soleimani’s assassination near the Iraqi capital of Baghdad, the ministry said Washington’s terrorist act was carried out in blatant violation of international law, the United Nations Charter and Iraq’s sovereignty. By committing a craven act of terror against Gen Soleimani, the US violated int’l law & the UN Charter in a blatant violation of Iraqi sovereignty.

Emphasizing that all the US acts of lawlessness are in “full show,” the ministry said, “#Iran won’t rest until bringing those responsible to justice.”

January 3 marks the first anniversary of the US assassination of General Soleimani, the former commander of the Quds Force of Iran’s Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC). He was admired as the Middle East’s most potent counter-terrorism commander, with a unique charisma.

He was Iran’s lead military advisor helping Iraq and Syria defeat foreign-backed Takfiri terrorists, chiefly Daesh.

## Leader Extends Condolences on Demise of Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has offered his condolences on the passing of senior Iranian cleric Ayatollah Mohammad-Taghi Mesbah Yazdi, a member of the Assembly of Experts.

In a message issued on Saturday, Ayatollah Khamenei hailed the late cleric as “a prominent thinker, a competent manager, and an outspoken advocate of the truth with fortitude on the path of righteousness.”

The demise of Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi is “a loss to the Seminary [in the holy of Qom] and Islamic studies schools,” the Leader said.

“His services in generating religious thoughts, writing useful books, and training distinguished students, are effective while his revolutionary presence in all arenas ... is truly and justly unique,” Ayatollah Khamenei emphasized, adding that the clergyman maintained piety throughout his life.

The Leader also described Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi as his “old and dear brother,” offering condolences to his family, students and admirers as well as the Qom Seminary.

The cleric, 85, passed away at a hospital in Tehran on Friday evening due to gastrointestinal disease.

He played a major role in the 1979 Islamic Revolution — led by late founder of the Islamic Republic Imam Khomeini — that overthrew the US-backed Pahlavi regime.

Following the Islamic Revolution, he first founded Baqir-ul-Uloom Institute and then Imam Khomeini Education and Research Institute in Qom, which he headed for the rest of his life.

Also on Saturday, Iran’s Judiciary Chief Ebrahim Raeisi released a message of condolence on the passing of Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi.

He said the late cleric was one of the pillars in the field of explaining and promoting the transcendent Islamic wisdom in the contemporary era.

Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi, Raeisi noted, was a great master in mysticism and practical ethics, who used his knowledge to defend the Islamic Revolution.

## New Coronavirus Strain, Cold Season, Air Pollution 3 Key Concerns

TEHRAN (IFP) - The Iranian president says the new strain of the coronavirus identified in the UK, the cold season and air pollution are three alarming dangers which should be seriously considered.

President Hassan Rouhani said these three are major perils for the coming months.

“I ask our dear people to observe health protocols more during these days, so that we will be able to weather these problems,” said the president.

He hailed Iran’s success in containing the spread of the disease, but called on people not to regard the situation as normal.

Among all countries grappling with the COVID-19 pandemic, he said, the countries where people observe health protocols the most and trust their leaders are the



ones which are more successful in controlling the disease.

“Fortunately, with people’s good cooperation and thanks to the efforts made by all government bodies, we secured good achievements during the different peaks of the disease in the country,” President Rouhani noted.

“During the third peak of the coronavirus outbreak in the country, we managed to contain the virus sooner than others predicted through the cooperation of all government institutions,” he said.

“Today, except for 4 towns which are in a ‘red’ state, the situation has almost improved across the nation,” said President Rouhani.

“This is while Europe and the US are still gripped by this peak and are seeing a growing number of cases,” he added.

## Iran Hopes No Conflict Will Break Out Until Trump Leaves Offices

TEHRAN (IFP) - A senior military advisor to Iran’s Leader says the Iranian Armed Forces are capable of targeting the U.S. aircraft carrier deployed in the region, but hopes nothing will happen until U.S. President Donald Trump leaves office.

Major General Yahya Rahim-Safavi said Iran is keeping a close watch on the United States’ military movements in the region and Iranian troops are prepared to conduct operations if need be.

“Iran’s military has the Americans on its intelligence radar and is closely monitoring all of the United States’ military movements from the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean to the Sea of Oman and the Persian Gulf and the countries around Iran where the U.S. has bases,” said General Safavi, a military aide to Leader of Iran’s Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei.

“We know what the Americans’ weak and strong points are,” he said.

“The Iranian Armed Forces have operational preparedness as well,” the general added.

“The Americans know that we have a powerful Leader who ordered us to strike the Al Asad Airbase [in Iraq],” he said.

“They are worried that we might conduct some operations on the anniversary of the assassination of General Soleimani, and, hence, they are on alert and on the defence mode,” the top general said.

“We hope nothing will happen until wicked Trump leaves, though Iran’s vow to take revenge for the assassination of General Soleimani still holds in the long run,” he said.

## Presence of Aliens in Region Must End ASAP

TEHRAN (MNA) – IRGC Navy Commander Rear Admiral said that the presence of aliens in the region, which is detrimental to security and causes sedition, must end as soon as possible

“With the contribution of the Islamic countries in the region and with unity and brotherhood, we can create security in the Persian Gulf region and the Sea of Oman,” said Ali Reza Tangsiri.

“We have equipment today, all of which are domestically produced and the product of the efforts of young, committed and revolutionary scientists of this nation,” he added, saying, “All military equipment used in the IRGC navy, both surface and subsurface, including UAVs, submarines, missiles and other weapons are domestically produced.”

He also noted, “We also have very good intelligence aristocracy, and we monitor and intercept transnational hostile enemies at all levels.”

“Today, with the formation of a naval Basij in the Caspian Sea, the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman and

the organization of 35,000 people, in addition to 11,000 light vessels and 5,000 heavy vessels at sea and on the coast, lasting security of the people has been established,” Tangsiri added.

### Tehran Reviews Comprehensive Cooperation Document With Afghanistan

MASHHAD (IRNA) - The comprehensive cooperation document of Iran and Afghanistan was reviewed in the presence of Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Abbas Araqchi.

Araqchi expressed hope for solving all issues with regard to implementing the document. He referred to both sides’ good-will, saying Iran and Afghanistan will have clear future in all-out cooperation by respecting constitution and sovereignty. Earlier, Araqchi reiterated that comprehensive strategic document draws prospect of Iran-Afghanistan long-term relations, focuses on principles and plays major role in reinforcing relations.

## U.S. Terrorist Attack Inside Iraq, Total Disregard of Iraqi Sovereignty

BAGHDAD (IRNA)- Iranian Ambassador to Iraq Iraj Masjedi said the US terrorist attack inside Iraq to assassinate Lieutenant General Qasem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the former commander of Iraq’s Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), amounted to aggression on Iraqi sovereignty.

Masjedi made the remarks in an interview with Iraqi media ‘Aletejah TV’. Masjedi said that General Soleimani was the official representative of Iran in charge of the Iran-Iraq coordinated campaign against ISIS terrorism.

He had made several visits to Iraq to orchestrate coordinated military operation to repulse ISIS when the terrorist group poised to capture Baghdad.

He described the terrorist attack to assassinate the Iranian and Iraqi commanders as the US state terrorism, saying that they were commanders of the fight against terrorism.

They played an effective role in the expulsion of Daesh (ISIS) from Iraq and the region, he said. Iran will be happy with Iraq to play a constructive role in the region, he said, adding that the US and Israel do not want friendship and solidarity among the regional countries. Nothing can compensate for the blood of General Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis blood, he said, adding that talking about taking revenge does not mean that Iran tends to kill a person in return.

Trump was number one in this crime and he together with all others who participated in this assassination is not comparable with General Soleimani, he noted.

The ambassador went on to stress that the U.S. forces must be expelled from Iraq and the region and Iran are seeking to do so. “This step, preventing U.S. interference in regional countries’ future and defeating the U.S. polices are considered as taking revenge on the U.S.,” he added.

In response to a question regarding Trump’s adventurism against Iran, he said it is regretted that Trump is president of a big country like the United States but the U.S. people showed their dissatisfaction against his acts.

Iran will give a crushing and firm response to any countermeasure. Iran is not afraid of neither the U.S. nor any sinister power in the world. He noted the regional countries should decide about their own fate.

Iran’s policy is based on wisdom aiming to restore peace and security in the region, the Iranian envoy said.

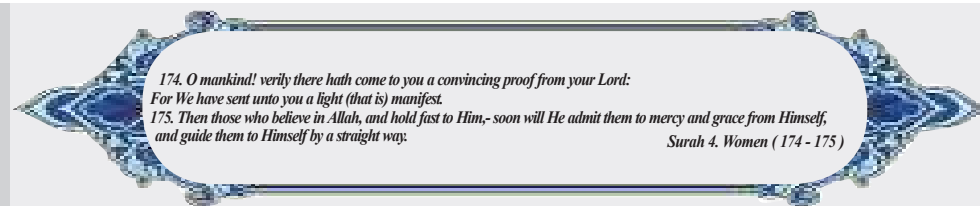
The Ambassador said that the U.S. is raising Iranophobia in the region. They are the root cause of insecurity and got involved in terrorist attacks against the sovereign states, but, the U.S. officials accuse Iran of terrorism.





## PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:09
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:23
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:45
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	07:14



174. O mankind! verily there hath come to you a convincing proof from your Lord:  
For We have sent unto you a light (that is) manifest.  
175. Then those who believe in Allah, and hold fast to Him, - soon will He admit them to mercy and grace from Himself,  
and guide them to Himself by a straight way:  
Surah 4. Women (174 - 175)

## Tehran Calls on Moscow for Exchange of Labor Force

**IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK**

**TEHRAN – Iran's Minister of Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare Mohammad Shariatmadari during a videoconference with Russia's Minister of Labor and Social Protection Anton Kotyakov called for drawing up the draft for an agreement for exchange of labor force.**

According to the reports, in the videoconference, Shariatmadari pointed to Russia's achievement in making COVID-19 vaccine and its beginning of the public vaccination, and expressed hope as the COVID-19 pandemic has been contained in most part of the world especially in Iran and Russia, talks between both states would lead to the health of people in both states.

He also emphasized implementation of the MoU between both countries which has been signed in 2015 and called for forming the joint committee for joint cooperation between both countries. He also emphasized both countries as soon as possible to prepare and approve a two-year plan of action and exchange of laws in the social field between both sides.

Shariatmadari also called for drawing up the draft for an agreement for exchange of labor force between both states.

He also termed the cooperation between Iran and Russia in political and regional fields are in appropriate level, adding that by creating essential infrastructures in the fields related to the labor and social welfare, both sides are trying to pave more grounds for boosting bilateral economic, social and cultural cooperation.

Shariatmadari also referred to the visit of the head of Iran Social Welfare Organization to Russia and presenting the draft of the agreement for cooperation on social welfare field to his Russian counterpart, and expressed hope the document on cooperation between Iran Social Welfare Organization with its Russian counterpart would be finalized.

He also urged his Russian counterpart to draw up the draft for the agreement on exchange of labor forces as soon as possible.



Meanwhile Kotyakov, for his part, expressed his satisfaction over the videoconference and talk with Shariatmadari, and emphasized expansion of ties between Russia and Iran is very important for Moscow and currently there are more co-ordinations and harmony between both states.

He added that there are also good harmony and coordination between both states in the global and international developments.

He also touched upon the MoU which was signed between both ministries in 2015, saying that the MoU is concentrated on social issues, social welfare and labor.

Kotyakov stipulated that issues like exchange of labor force, developing labor relation and migration of labor force have been of the major issues which have been stipulated in the MoU.

He also expressed readiness for holding the joint committee between the two ministries online; adding that a delegation by Russia's labor ministry was to travel to Tehran in 2019 which was postponed to the spring of 2020 and it was finally canceled due to the outbreak of the coronavirus.

He added that there is a bill on migration of labor force in Russia's parliament, adding that it would be better to discuss the exchange of labor force after the fate of the bill is sealed in the parliament. He appreciated Shariatmadari for inviting him to visit Tehran, saying that as soon as the coronavirus related restrictions are removed, he would definitely visit Tehran. He also invited Shariatmadari for paying a visit to Moscow.

## Int'l Cooperation Only Way to Fight COVID-19



TEHRAN (IRNA)- Iranian consul general in Guangzhou referred to mutual aid provided by Iranian and Chinese governments in time of coronavirus, saying international cooperation is the only way to fight COVID-19.

Speaking on the sidelines of the ceremony to receive Chinese company's medical aid to Iran, Hossein Darvishi Motevalli pointed to Chinese company's success in controlling the disease through correct management and taking advantage of technology.

He appreciated the aid rendered by Chinese people and companies like Sichuan Huili International Trade Company and referred to both sides' cooperation in economic, science, technology, industrial and transportation fields.

He also invited Chinese investors to participate in industrial, agricultural and services sectors.

Meanwhile, CEO of Sichuan Huili International Trade Company referred to friendship between Iran and China, saying Chinese people are always ready to support and help Iranians in difficulties.

During the ceremony, Chinese company granted a consignment weighing 12 tons, including one million N95 masks and 100,000 shields.

## Official Rejects COVID19 Vaccine Imports From S. Korea

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iranian Red Crescent Society spokesman reacted to news regarding transfer of the first COVID19 vaccine consignment from South Korea to Iran, saying no shipment has so far made from any country by Red Crescent Society to Iran.

Speaking to IRNA, Mohammad Hassan Ghosian Moghaddam said a foreign media claimed that Fars Air Qeshm cargo plane has transferred first coronavirus vaccine consignment purchased by Red Crescent Society from South Korea to Iran.

The media had claimed that a Boeing 747 wide-body airliner and cargo aircraft of Fars Air Qeshm belonging to Mahan Air left Mehrabad for Incheon International Airport on Thursday to transfer the first COVID19 vaccine consignment purchased by Iranian Red Crescent Society, he added.

Earlier, Head of Iran's Red Crescent Society (IRCS) Karim Hemmati said it is planning to take delivery of a batch of 150,000 coronavirus vaccines produced by Pfizer Inc.

The Pfizer vaccines have been donated by a charity group of Iranian people living abroad, he noted.

He said that the donation has been made in cooperation with the Ministry of Health.

The country needs some 19 to 20 million doses of coronavirus vaccines, one million of which will be imported by the Red Crescent Society, the official said.

"We will make every effort to import the one million coronavirus vaccines from reputable sources," he said, adding that the vaccines will come from one of the East Asian countries, but will definitely be approved by the Food and Drug Administration.

## Steam Unit of Phase 14 of SP Ready for Production

**IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK**

TEHRAN - The operator of the phase 14 development project of South Pars Mr. Mohammad Mehdi Tavasoli-Pour said that the steam unit of the phase 14 is ready for production,

According to the public relations of Pars Oil and Gas Company (POGC), Tavasoli-Pour said that this unit is comprised of six steam production boilers, adding that this utility unit has been completed by MAPNA Company and MAPNA Boiler has been in charge of manufacturing the boilers of this unit.

He pointed to the capacity of producing 160 tons per hour of steam by each one of boilers of the steam unit of Phase 14 Refinery of South Pars, adding that this unit due to completion of its executive activities and pre-launched operation has been handed over to the group which is in charge of launching it and at the time of exploitation, the steam needed by the refinery is provided.

He expressed hope that with completing the process units of Phase 14 refinery of South Pars, this unit will



join the production network and its steam will be used for the production units and for lighting the torch of the refinery. Tavasoli-Pour noted that the construction operation of Phase 14 refinery in two sites of South Pars is underway with 84.6 percent progress and in the first step, the lateral units of this project will join the network by the yearend.

## Webinar on Tehran-China Trade Opportunities to Be Held

**IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK**

TEHRAN – Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mine and Agriculture (ICCIMA) is to hold a webinar on the trade capacities and opportunities between Iran and China on Tuesday, January 5.

According to reports, ICCIMA in collaboration with Iran-China Joint Commerce Chamber is to hold the event and and business activists as well as representatives of provincial chambers of commerce are to attend it.

The webinar is to review the opportunities, challenges and hurdles in way of cooperation between private sectors of Iran with China.

The latest regional developments, condition for co-operations of both states and the outlook of developing relations as well as existing opportunities and easing the arrival of Iranian companies into China's market are of the major issues to be reviewed in the webinar.

## IME Experiences Growth In Its Weekly Trade

**IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK**

TEHRAN - Within the last week trade, the exchange witnessed trades of 996,450 tons of commodities valued at more than \$443m, showing 55 and 39 percent of increase respectively in volume and value of trades.



According to a report by the IME's international affairs and PR the exchange sold 445,660 tons of mineral and industrial goods with a total value of more than \$253m last week, which included 436,370 tons of steel, 1,420 tons of copper, 7,535 tons of aluminum, 120 tons of molybdenum concentrate, 200 tons of cast iron and 10 kg of gold bars.

On both domestic and export pits of its oil and petrochemical trading floor, the IME traded 224,500 tons of vacuum bottom, 193,995 tons of bitumen, 57,564 tons of polymeric products, 17,144 tons of chemicals, 41,500 tons of lube cut, 3,000 tons of slop wax, 3,097 tons of base oil and 8,900 tons of sulfur, which added up to 549,620 tons of commodities altogether worth more than \$190m.

Also, 1,170 tons of various types of goods changed hands on the IME's side market.

## EORC Produces Pentane Solvent With Purity Over 99%

**IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK**

ISFAHAN – Deputy Head of Esfahan Oil Refining Company (EORC) says the company for the first time has produced pentane solvent with purity over 99 percent and its production capacity is 1,000 barrels per day.



Alireza Jafarpour announced the achievement and said with producing this product which is considered a green product, the needs of the country will be met and it can also be exported.

He said the produced pentane by EORC is free of aromaticity, olefin and sulfur compounds and it is a green product for the environmentalists. He also noted that the purity of the produced pentane solvent is over 99 percent and comparing to the normal pentane and isopentane, it is in accordance to the modern international standards, and due to its capabilities during the production process, the ratio of compounds of isopentane and normal pentane is appropriate to all industries and it is adjustable.

Jafarpour reiterated that this new product is free of chlorinated compounds. He said currently the total volume of global pentane production is around \$125,000 tons per year and most of its users are from European, East Asian countries, Japan and India and it is expected the consumption of this product would increase more in Indian and East Asian markets.

He said companies like LG Chemical, CNPC, Phillips, ExxonMobil and Shell are the major producers and actors of this product.

## Iran-Tajikistan Trade Committee Holds Follow-Up Meeting

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran and Tajikistan have held an online trade committee meeting to follow up on the agreements reached during the 13th Joint Economic Committee meeting, an official with Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) said.

According to Behrouz Olfat, TPO director of the Europe and America Department, the meeting was held on December 30, 2020 by TPO in collaboration with the Foreign Affairs Department of the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade of Tajikistan.

During this meeting, the two sides reached various agreements including the formation of an industry, mining and trade working group, holding a virtual meeting

between the standard officials of the two countries, holding webinars by the two countries' Joint Chamber of Commerce, exchanging information of the two sides' private companies and developing cooperation in geology.

The two sides also decided on exchanging trade delegations and holding special exhibitions in near future in accordance with health and safety protocols, according to Olfat.

Accelerating the signing of agreement documents for the electronic exchange of customs data and the memorandum of understanding (MOU) on economic cooperation between the two countries were also among the issues discussed in this meeting.



## Afghan Radio Journalist Shot Dead in Car Ambush

KABUL (Dispatches) - An Afghan radio journalist has been shot dead in a car ambush in the central province of Ghor, making him the fifth media worker to be killed in two months in Afghanistan.

Besnullah Adel Aimaq, editor-in-chief of Voice of Ghor radio, was shot and killed en route to Firoz Koh city, the capital of Ghor province, on Friday, said the governor's spokesman, Aref Aber.

Aimaq's murder follows a similar pattern in recent months, where prominent Afghans have been ambushed by gunmen or killed in bomb attacks.

No group has yet claimed responsibility for the killing.



## U.S. Surpasses 20m COVID Cases on First Day of 2021

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - The United States has surpassed 20 million confirmed cases of COVID-19, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University, another grim milestone as states struggle to distribute vaccines.

The U.S., which for months has recorded the highest number of infections and deaths linked to the novel coronavirus in the world, registered just more than 20 million infections at about midday on Friday.

The tally is nearly double that of India, which at more than 10.2 million cases has the second most infections globally, according to Johns Hopkins University.



## Rejecting Trump Veto, Republican-Led Senate Backs Defense Bill



WASHINGTON (Reuters) -President Donald Trump suffered a stinging rebuke in the U.S. Senate on Friday when fellow Republicans joined Democrats to override a presidential veto for the first time in his tenure, pushing through a defense policy bill he opposed just weeks before he leaves office.

Meeting in a rare New Year's Day session, senators voted 81-13 to secure the two-thirds majority needed to override the veto. Eight previous Trump vetoes had been upheld and until Friday's vote, he had been on track to be the first president since Lyndon Johnson with none overridden.

The Senate also ended for now a push by Democrats to increase COVID-19 financial relief checks from \$600 to \$2,000, a change sought by Trump. The effort was blocked by Republicans.

Republican lawmakers have largely stood by the president during his turbulent White House term.

Since losing his re-election bid in November, however, Trump has lashed out at them for not fully backing his unsupported claims of voter fraud, for rejecting his demand for bigger COVID-19 relief checks, and for moving to override his veto.

In another setback for Trump, a judge rejected a lawsuit filed by a Texas lawmaker and other Republicans against Vice President Mike Pence seeking to overturn Democratic President-elect Joe Biden's win. Pence is set to preside on Wednesday over a joint session of Congress to formalize the results of the election.

The Democratic-controlled House of Representatives on Monday voted to override Trump's defense bill veto. A president has the power to veto a bill passed by Congress, but lawmakers can uphold the bill if two-thirds of both houses vote to override the veto.

The \$740 billion National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) determines everything from how many ships are bought to soldiers' pay and how to address geopolitical threats.

Trump refused to sign it into law because it did not repeal certain legal protections for social media platforms and included a provision stripping the names of Confederate generals from military bases. "We've passed this legislation 59 years in a row. And one way or another, we're going to complete the 60th annual NDAA and pass it into law before this Congress concludes on Sunday," Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell had said ahead of the vote.

Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi accused the president of using his final weeks in office "to sow chaos," saying in a statement that Congress urged him to "end his desperate and dangerous sabotage." The bill also overhauls anti-money laundering rules and banning anonymous shell companies, making it easier to police illicit money flows.

U.S. weak rules on disclosing corporate owners have allowed criminals to use legal entities to shuffle their cash around the world, according to the authorities.

## Portugal Takes Over Presidency of EU Council

LISBON (Dispatches) - On January 1st, 2021, Portugal officially took over the Presidency of the European Council from Germany.

This is the fourth time Portugal presides over the rotating six-month EU Council, since it joined the European Economic Community in 1986.

On Wednesday, Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel handed over her post to Portugal's Prime Minister António Costa in a video message. Addressing Angela Merkel, Prime Minister Costa praised the German Chancellor's Presidency for the "excellent job" at the helm of the European Union. Costa said "It's an honor and a huge responsibility for Portugal to receive this baton from your hands and to continue your work."

"I wish the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union every success. Germany will do everything it can to support Portugal," she reiterated. Costa stated that Portugal will continue the "excellent work"



of the German presidency of the European Union and that the Portuguese EU Council Presidency will have "three main priorities."

The first would be the "economic and social recovery, which will be driven by climate and digital transitions, factors of growth and the creation of more and better jobs; The second, "the development of the European Union's social pillar, creating a solid foundation of confidence that this double transition will be an opportunity for everyone and a guarantee that no one will be left behind; and the third "staying committed to strengthening the strategic autonomy of a European Union open to the world."

"It is now up to us to continue your work, with the motto of the Portuguese Presidency: it is time to act, for a fair, green and digital recovery," he said.

Merkel wished Prime Minister António Costa "much success," stressing that Germany "will do everything within its power" to support Portugal.

## Trump Administration Adds Cuban Bank to U.S. Restricted List

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The United States has added a Cuban bank to its restricted entities list, alleging that the financial institution has ties to the Cuban military and its profits help fund the country's "interference" in Venezuela.

In a statement on Friday, the U.S. State Department said it was adding Banco Financiero Internacional SA (BFI) to the Cuba Restricted List, a list of entities that the US alleges have ties to the Cuban military, intelligence or security services.

Anyone subject to the U.S. jurisdiction is prohibited from engaging in financial transactions with institutions on the list.

"Adding BFI to the Cuba Restricted List furthers the Administration's goal of preventing the Cuban military from controlling and benefiting from financial transactions that should instead benefit the Cuban people," Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in the statement. Cuba's foreign minister, Bruno Rodriguez, rejected the announcement, tweeting on Friday that it was a "punitive measure of #US State Department to tighten blockade against #Cuba".

"The inclusion of Cuban entities in its lists is intended to reinforce an economic siege that has failed to destroy the Cuban Revolution after 62 years," Rodriguez wrote.

The inclusion of Cuban entities in its lists is intended to reinforce an economic siege that has failed to destroy the Cuban Revolution after 62 years.

The move comes after the U.S. media reported that President Donald Trump's outgoing administration is mulling whether to designate Cuba as a state sponsor of terrorism in its final days in office.

The New York Times said the State Department has drawn up a proposal, but it was unclear whether Pompeo would sign off on it.

U.S. Congressman Gregory Meeks, the incoming chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, has warned Pompeo against making the terrorism designation, saying it aims to "tie the hands" of incoming US President-elect Joe Biden.

## Deaths Reported Worldwide During New Year's Eve Celebrations

LONDON (Dispatches) - At least 11 people were killed and several injured during New Year's Eve celebrations across the world on Thursday.

Eight young men and women were reported dead in a cottage in southwest Bosnia and Herzegovina, apparently from carbon monoxide poisoning during a New Year's Eve celebration, police said on Friday.

Police responded to a call about 10am (09:00 GMT) and went to a house in Tribistovo where several people were found dead. Bosnian and Croatian media said the eight were high school and university students.

In Turkey, Galatasaray's Norwegian footballer Omar Elabdellaoui was hospitalised with eye injuries after an accident with fireworks.

Elabdellaoui injured both his eyes, according to Dr Vedat Kaya of Liv Hospital in Ankara.

While the Norwegian has not lost his sight, one eye was much more seriously injured than the other, Kaya said, adding that the player was "better today" but that it was too early to write off potential long-term consequences. Meanwhile, in eastern France, a 25-year-old man was killed when fireworks exploded after he went to inspect them.

In Germany, at least one death was reported early on Friday of a 24-year-old man in the eastern town of

Rietz-Neuendorf, who died when homemade fireworks detonated shortly after midnight.

Another case of improvised fireworks explosion left one man's life in danger and two others injured near the western German city of Osnabrueck. They were working with explosives, trying to create a pyrotechnic, when there was an explosion shortly after midnight.

At least one more injury was reported in the central village of Springstille when a firework detonated prematurely late on Thursday.

After they were barred from setting off fireworks in public spaces, some Berliners instead tried to launch them from their homes on New Year's Eve, leading to dozens of fires across the German capital.

Between midnight (23:00 GMT) and just six minutes later, the Berlin fire service said it was called to 18 fires, with more following deeper into the night. No one was initially reported seriously injured.

Meanwhile, police in the western city of Essen also reported being attacked with professional-grade fireworks by a gang of youths.

In Dortmund, a group of about 50 people caused a further ruckus: several of them emptied fire extinguishers in the street, threw fireworks at passing cars and set a rubbish container on fire.



## China Rebuffs Latest Taiwan Offer of Talks

BEIJING (Reuters) - China has rebuffed the latest offer of talks from Taiwan, saying the government was engaging in a "cheap trick" and provocation by seeking confrontation with China at every turn.

Taiwan is ready to have "meaningful" talks with China as equals as long as they are willing to put aside confrontation, President Tsai Ing-wen said on Friday, offering another olive branch to Beijing in her New Year's speech.

China views the democratic and self-governed island as its own territory, and cut off a formal talks mechanism in 2016 after Tsai was first elected, viewing her as a separatist bent on a formal declaration of independence.

In a statement late on Friday, China's Taiwan Affairs Office said there was no way of changing the reality that the island was part of China, and the refusal of Taiwan's government to accept that was the root cause of present tensions.

Since 2016, Taiwan's ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) "has continued to provoke by seeking independence, confronting the mainland at every turn, deliberately creating confrontation across the Taiwan Strait", it said.

"They again talked about so-called 'dialogue,' but where can that come from?" the office added. "We urge the DPP authorities to stop it with these cheap tricks that dupe people."

Tsai, re-elected by a landslide last year on a pledge to stand up to China and defend Taiwan's democracy and security, has repeatedly said Taiwan is already an independent country called the Republic of China, its formal name.

Tensions have risen in recent months with China ramping up its military activities near the island, including on occasion flying fighter jets across the median line of the narrow Taiwan Strait, which usually serves as an unofficial buffer.

China says it is responding to "collusion" between Washington and Taipei, angered at growing U.S. support for the island. Beijing views this as a precursor to Taiwan declaring formal independence, a red line for China.







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## S. Korea's Export Falls 5.4% in 2020 Over COVID-19

SEOUL (Dispatches) - South Korea's export fell last year due to an economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic, but the slide was limited owing to a partial global demand recovery in the latter half of 2020, a government report showed Friday, Trend reports citing Xinhua.

Export, which takes up about half of the export-driven economy, declined 5.4 percent over the year to 512.85 billion U.S. dollars in 2020, according to the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy.

Import contracted 7.2 percent to 467.23 billion dollars, sending the trade surplus to 45.62 billion dollars. The trade balance stayed in black for 12 straight years.



## China's Economy May Expand by 9% in 2021

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China's economic growth could reach as high as 9 per cent next year, and its rapid rebound from the coronavirus pandemic may help the economy overtake the US to become the world's largest later this decade, analysts said.

But Beijing is likely to roll back some of its stimulus measures used to offset the coronavirus damage amid concerns over its record-high debt level, they added.

Expectations over China's economic outlook have turned bullish in recent weeks, with the world's second-largest economy leading the global recovery from the impact of the coronavirus with its robust export growth, strong government spending and a low infection rate.

Given China's rapid rebound, the Centre for Economics and Business Research, a UK think tank, predicted last week that China will overtake the United States to become the world's biggest economy in 2028, five years earlier than previously estimated.

In contrast, many other countries have been forced to resume lockdown measures to control the spread of the coronavirus.

China's recovery has seen a number of brokers, including Nomura and China International Capital Corporation (CICC), predict its gross domestic product (GDP) growth for 2021 will be 9 per cent.

However, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), a Beijing-based think affiliated with the State Council, cautioned that weak consumption, unemployment and the ongoing struggle among small to medium-sized companies are likely to be major obstacles to growth going forward.

"Even though China's exports remain resilient this year, it could face problems from poor global economic outlook and shrinking international trade," CASS said in its 2021 China economy forecast. "Debt growth and high interest rates are also a risky combination, adding to China's overall debt pressure. The situation of fiscal expenditure not being matched by fiscal revenue is becoming worse, and the proactive fiscal policy is looking tired."

China's economy grew by a recently revised rate of 6.0 per cent in 2019 – the lowest growth rate since political turmoil ravaged the country in 1990 – and then contracted by 6.8 per cent in the first quarter of 2020 after the coronavirus shut down large swathes of the country.

It was, however, the first major economy to show a recovery, with growth rates of 3.2 per cent in the second quarter and 4.9 per cent in the third.

China is now expected to be the only Group of 20 nation to show a positive economic growth rate in 2020, predicted to be 1.9 per cent by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and 2.0 per cent by the World Bank.

Its growth rate is expected to increase sharply in 2021 due to both the continued strong recovery and the low 2020 base for comparison. The IMF then expects China's GDP growth to be 8.2 per cent next year, while the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) places it at 8 per cent. The World Bank and CASS each project a slightly lower growth rate of 7.8 per cent.

In its latest global outlook, Standard Chartered Bank projects China's GDP growth to accelerate to 8 per cent in 2021, adding that year-on-year growth may surge to 18 per cent in the first quarter due largely to the low base following the historic contraction earlier this year, rather than real economic activity.

## Pakistan Hikes Petrol Price by Rs 2.31 Per Liter

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Amid accusations by the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) that the Imran Khan-led government cannot control inflation, Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (OGRA) has increased the prices of petrol by Pakistan Rupees 2.31 per liter.

Petrol will now be available for Rs 106 per liter while diesel will be sold for Rs 110.24 per liter. Meanwhile, the new price of kerosene oil is Rs 73.65 per litre and light diesel oil will be available for Rs 71.81, Geo News reported. On Sunday, while speaking in Larkana on the occasion of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's 13th death anniversary, Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) (PML-N) vice president Maryam Nawaz targeted Imran Khan and said that while people are "killing themselves out of hunger and desperation due to inflation" he said, 'What can I do, I have no magic button'.

Earlier this month, addressing the PDM 'Mehangai March' in Mardan, Maryam Nawaz said: "Before the election, [the prime minister] used to say that he has a team of 200 fantastic individuals. Where is that 200-person team now?" Dawn reported.

"Ministers in his cabinet play musical chairs with each other [...] but that 200 person team is nowhere to be seen in Pakistan," she said.

"He says that he was unaware about the country's power issues, external debt, the current account deficit, and didn't know how to run the government and was not prepared." However, you were prepared for the sugar, wheat and LNG scams through which you stole from the people's pockets, she added.

## Macron Sees Tough Months Ahead Before Spring Recovery

PARIS (Dispatches) - French President Emmanuel Macron said the coronavirus will continue to weigh on the country for a few months until vaccinations are ramped up, pledging that the crisis will not stop the government pursuing economic, security and environmental reforms.

"The first few months of the year will be difficult, and the epidemic will continue to weigh a lot on the life of our country until at least the spring," Macron said in a New Year's Eve address.

Emmanuel Macron speaks virtually during a New Year's Eve address from the Elysee Palace.

France will rise to the challenge and pursue reforms to protect the environment and biodiversity, boost security, reward work, and fight against discrimination, the president said.

Sixteen months ahead of the next presidential election, Macron needs to find the right balance between protecting people against a virus that has already claimed more than 64,000 lives in the country, and revitalizing an economy that has contracted by about a 10th because of lockdowns and other restrictions aimed at stemming the pandemic.

While some European nations such as Germany have closed non-essential shops again, France lifted the country's second lockdown in mid-December and replaced it with a curfew. Restaurants, museums, cinemas, theaters, gyms, and amusement parks remain shut.

Two nationwide lockdowns earlier this year severely dented the economy, with the government predicting an 11% contraction in 2020, and a 6% rebound in 2021.

While daily infections remain significantly above its target, the French government chose a slower start to its vaccination campaign than neighboring countries such as the U.K. and Germany, prioritizing the elderly in nursing homes.

Macron said he won't let anyone play around with the safety and proper conditions in which vaccinations are carried out.

"Nor will I allow the process to slow down without justification for bad reasons: every French person who wants to must be able to be vaccinated," he added.

Facing criticism for the slow start, French Health Minister Olivier Veran said earlier on Thursday that France will accelerate vaccinations for people most in need.

From Monday, medical staff 50 years old or more will be able to be vaccinated in hospitals and centers that are progressively receiving vaccines. Before Feb. 1, elderly people will be able to get shots in towns in vaccination centers, he said.

## U.S. Tech Companies Prove Popular for PGCC Traders in 2020



JEDDAH (Dispatches) – U.S. technology companies attracted the highest trading volumes among investors worldwide in 2020, including the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (PGCC) region, Saxo Bank reported.

The Copenhagen-based investment bank said strict lockdowns and the need for employees to work from home due to the coronavirus pandemic have positively impacted the most actively traded US tech companies, with their indexes up more than 40 percent for 2020.

Boeing, Facebook, Zoom Video Communications, Alibaba and Moderna stocks were the most traded in the PGCC region this year, according to Saxo.

Tesla, Apple, Nio, Microsoft and Amazon were Saxo's most traded stocks in the world in 2020, with over 646 percent of value market growth for Tesla and over 67 percent for Amazon.

"This year was all about the online vs offline world," said Peter Garnry, head of equity strategy at Saxo. "Technology companies were catapulted into the future by the COVID-19 pandemic, while many physical industries such as aviation, travel, leisure, hospitality and automobiles came under significant pressure due to the severe restrictions and lockdowns."

Nio — the Chinese Tesla — had astonishing growth this year with a 1,069 percent surge, meaning that electric-vehicle companies were the best performers in 2020.

Specialized in online trading and investment, Saxo said investors worldwide are turning to financial markets as net buyers following the March global stock market crash.

The pandemic has amplified the participation rate of retail investors in equity markets, a trend that was already underway before COVID-19 and mainly driven by younger people, Saxo said.

The growing trend created a new environment that has made it more difficult for traditional institutional investors to navigate.

Saxo has been focusing on enabling clients in Saudi Arabia and the wider PGCC region to trade using its platform, and has recently launched a dedicated Arabic website as part of its latest drive to encourage more Middle Eastern retailers and investors.

## UK Economy Will Rebound At Fastest Rate Since WW2



LONDON (Dispatches) - Britain's economy will grow at its fastest rate since the Second World War this year as it bounces back from COVID, experts predict.

National income is set to rise by 8 per cent in 2021 – fuelled by billions in savings that Britons are itching to spend.

And the Brexit deal is expected to further boost the economy in the coming months.

The upbeat forecast comes on the day Britain embarks on a new trading relationship with the EU.

The Centre for Economics and Business Research said the economy would benefit from vaccines, the Brexit deal and Donald Trump's departure from the White House.

Deputy chairman Doug McWilliams said Britons' love of spending would also help. "Our tendency to splash out once we are let out of lockdown is greater than in many other countries," he said. "If you give money to Germans or Singaporeans, they will save it, or think about it for a while. Brits will just spend it. The economic recovery will be quicker and stronger than people think."

Signs of optimism have been evident since the Christmas Eve Brexit deal and were bolstered this week by the approval of the Oxford vaccine. The pound ended 2020 on a high, hitting its strongest level of the year against the dollar.

And the FTSE 100 finished the year 23 per cent ahead of its low point in March – although it is still 14 per cent lower than 12 months ago.

The pandemic led to the worst year for blue chip shares since the 2008 financial crisis. But City experts predict 2021 will prove much better for pension savers and small investors.

Michael Hewson, an analyst at CNC Markets, said the FTSE 100 is poised for a 'strong rebound'. Jeffrey Halley at Oanda said UK stock markets 'should put in a strong performance in 2021' propelled by the recovery.

National debt has soared to more than £2trillion due to the pandemic, and a fall in tax revenues. But the CEBR, one of the first to predict the virus's dire impact, expects a strong revival around the world. It said global output is likely to rise by 5.3 per cent this year, the most since 1976.

## Malaysia, Singapore Kill High-Speed Rail Project

KUALA LUMPUR (Dispatches) - A multi-billion-dollar high-speed rail link between Singapore and Malaysia's capital Kuala Lumpur has been terminated.

The two countries were unable to reach an agreement on the project after Malaysia sought changes because of the pandemic's economic impact, according to a joint statement Friday. Malaysia will have to compensate Singapore for costs already incurred, the city-state's transport ministry said in a separate statement.

The announcement came just after a Dec. 31 deadline for the second and final extension of the suspension of the project, which was first mooted a decade ago and given the green light in 2013. In June, the Southeast Asian neighbors had agreed to put the development, which has already incurred multiple suspensions, on hold again amid a discussion around costs.

The on-again, off-again 350 kilometer (218 mile) high-speed rail link would have cut travel time between the centers down to about 90 minutes versus more than four hours by car. Although flying between the two only takes about an hour, that's a lot longer once airport check-in and security is taken into account. The service was due to start in 2026.

"In light of the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on the Malaysian economy, the Government of Malaysia had proposed several changes to the HSR project," according to the joint statement by Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin and Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong. "Both Governments had conducted several discussions with regard to these changes and had not been able to reach an agreement."



Local media in Malaysia reported in November that Malaysia was considering ending the line in its southern city of Johor Bahru rather than in Singapore.

The administration of former Malaysia Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, who resigned in February, sought to cancel the project as the country grappled with debt and liabilities amounting to more than 1 trillion ringgit (\$249 billion), before settling for a deferment and a \$815 million (\$11.4 million) compensation fee to Singapore.

Mahathir had at one stage estimated the project would cost around 110 billion ringgit for Malaysia.

"Both countries will abide by their respective obligations, and will now proceed with the necessary actions, resulting from this termination of the HSR Agreement," said the joint statement.



## Rouhani Unveils Memorial Stamp of “Commander of Hearts”

TEHRAN (IP) - The President of the Islamic Republic of Iran unveiled a stamp commemorating Martyr Qasem Soleimani. On Saturday, on the first anniversary of the martyrdom of Lt. General Qasem Soleimani, the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran Hassan Rouhani unveiled the memorial stamp of “Commander of Hearts “.

Lt. Gen. Qasem Soleimani, the late commander of the IRGC’s Quds Force, and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandisi, deputy Commander of the Iraqi Popular Mobilization (Al-Hashd al-Shabi), along with eight others, were assassinated on January 3, 2020, in an airstrike by U.S. forces near Baghdad airport in Iraq.



# German Gov’t at Odds Over Armed Drones

BERLIN (AFP) - Should the German army be equipped with killer drones? With less than a year to go before a general election, it’s a question that has bitterly divided Chancellor Angela Merkel’s coalition government, testing NATO’s patience.

German armed forces have so far only been allowed to use reconnaissance drones as part of military missions in Mali and Afghanistan, leaving it to other international partners to deploy armed drones.

In 2018, Germany signed a contract to lease five new Heron TP drones from Israeli manufacturer IAI with the initial purpose of using them only for surveillance, although they can be equipped with missiles if desired.

Merkel’s conservatives and their centre-left Social Democratic (SPD) coalition partners agreed at the time that parliament would have the final say on any future arming of the drones.

Any kind of military action remains a sensitive issue in Germany, a nation scarred by its past as the instigator of two world wars.

But calls have also grown louder in recent years for Germany, as a major European country with considerable political and economic clout, to take on more international responsibility in matters of defence and security.

Merkel’s CDU/CSU conservatives have backed arming the remote-control drones, along with some SPD members. The liberal FDP and far-right AfD opposition parties are also in favor.

The opposition Greens and the far-left Die Linke are fiercely opposed.

The debate came to a head in mid-December when SPD co-leader Norbert Walter-Borjans and the chairman of SPD’s parliamentary group, Rolf Muetzenich, unexpectedly spoke out against the arming of the unmanned aerial vehicles.

A vote in the German parliament has now been postponed indefinitely.

“The line between defending the lives and limbs of our soldiers and killing with a joystick is very thin,” Walter-Borjans said.

But the chairman of the prestigious annual Munich Security Conference, Wolfgang Ischinger, disagrees.

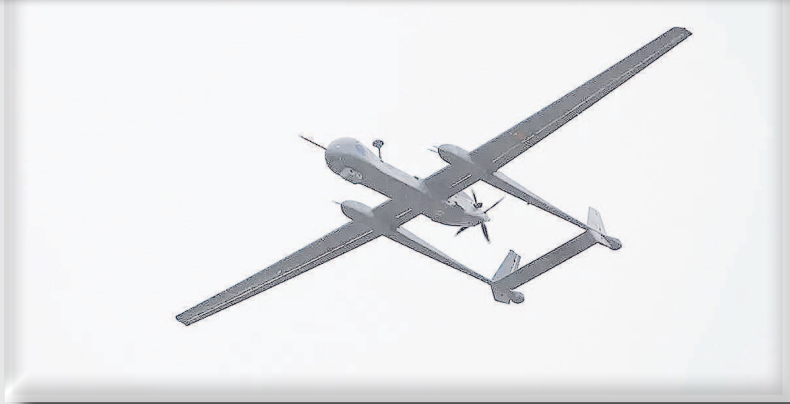
“What does a pilot (of a fighter plane) do, if not kill by joystick, by pressing a button 50 kilometres away, without seeing his target, and firing an air-to-ground missile?”

Muetzenich said he wants a comprehensive ethical debate on “automated killing” by the Bundeswehr armed forces, which he says half of Germans oppose.

It disturbs me that almost only the military -- those responsible for armaments and defence -- have a say, but never doctors or Church representatives,” he said.

Andre Wuestner, the head of Germany’s armed forces union, said there had been several years “of discussions on five, I stress, five armed drones”.

The blockade has been criticised even within the SPD. The party’s defence spokesman, Fritz Felgentreu, resigned in protest at the SPD’s decision.



German Defence Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, a close Merkel ally, has accused the junior coalition partner of “cowardice”.

“We have drawn up operational principles, which stipulate that armed drones can only be used defensively by the Bundeswehr -- to protect its own people,” she said.

Other conservatives, including the CDU’s defence expert Henning Otte, have accused the SPD of trying to score points with left-wing voters in the run-up to the elections.

Secretary-general Jens Stoltenberg of the NATO military alliance has also waded into the spat.

“These drones can support our troops on the ground and, for example, reduce the number of pilots we put at risk,” Stoltenberg told German news agency DPA, pointing to the use of the technology against the jihadist Islamic State group in Syria and Iraq.

NATO members France and Turkey are among those already using armed drones.

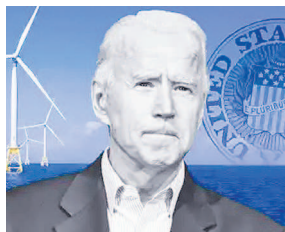
Armed drones, manufactured by Israel or Turkey, were also deployed by Azerbaijan against Armenia in the recent conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Weaponised drones are also a key part of a cross-border project, led by France, Germany and Spain and known as FCAS, to develop a new air-combat system for European forces by 2026.

In Germany, the issue won’t be settled “during this parliamentary term”, Walter-Borjans said, setting the stage for months of heated discussions between the warring parties before Germans head to the polls in September.

## U.S. Oil Industry Awaits New Era Under Biden

LONDON (FT) - In April 2018, with oil prices near a three-year high of \$75 a barrel, OPEC ministers gathering in Jeddah were buoyant. Then U.S. president Donald Trump sent a tweet: “Looks like OPEC is at it again. With record amounts of oil all over the place, including the fully loaded ships at sea, oil prices are artificially very high! No good and will not be accepted!”



That marked the start of an era of unprecedented presidential intervention in oil markets. But things are about to change, with the social-media shy incoming president Joe Biden unlikely to conduct petro-diplomacy by tweet, and more focused on the transition to cleaner fuels.

Mr Trump’s approach was often contradictory and defied convention. But he hit his mark more often than not, say industry experts.

“The president took to Twitter instead of sending the secretary of state to the Middle East or the US ambassador to Saudi Arabia,” said Amy Myers Jaffe, a professor at Tufts University outside Boston, Massachusetts. “And the thing about it is, it was effective.”

What began with Mr Trump proclaiming “American energy dominance” and berating Opec for not producing enough oil, culminated this year when he urged the producer cartel to raise prices to save the U.S. shale patch from disaster.

While Mr Trump’s Twitter feed has talked of oil or OPEC dozens of times since he took office — often as prices neared \$70 a barrel — Mr Biden may take a leaf from the Obama administration’s book. In eight years, the previous president’s White House mentioned the cartel on social media just twice. For the most part, international oil sailed below the radar in policy too.

With urgent tasks on Mr Biden’s plate — from the coronavirus pandemic and distribution of vaccines to stimulating a battered economy — petro-diplomacy will not be an immediate priority, say analysts.

Gone will be the influence of Harold Hamm, the billionaire head of shale producer Continental Resources and Trump confidant who spoke frequently to the president as oil prices crashed this year, according to a recent note from consultancy Rapidan Energy. In will come environment-focused experts such as Gina McCarthy, a former environmental regulator who will now co-ordinate policy as a domestic “climate tsar”.

Some U.S. oil producers fear the change of focus — and Mr Biden’s plans for tighter pollution rules and limits on drilling — will hit the country’s crude output.

## Box Office Bomb: 2020 Was “Year Like No Other” for Film Industry

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Most North American theatres weren’t open for six months straight through the summer season, which typically accounts for 40 percent of the year’s profits.

When the sun sets on the 2020 film box office, it will be difficult to look at the numbers as anything but disastrous.

After five consecutive years of North American revenues exceeding \$11bn, this year they are expected to cap out at an almost 40-year low of about \$2.3bn.

That will be down 80 percent from last year, according to data firm Comscore. Globally, where markets have been able to recover more fully, ticket sales will likely end up somewhere between \$11bn and \$12bn. Last year, that total hit \$42.5bn. But of course, 2020 is a year with a big asterisk.

“It’s a year like no other,” said Jim Orr, president of domestic theatrical distribution for Universal Pictures. “We’ve never seen this little business in this industry.”

Outside of January and February, it’s impossible to judge the year’s box office by pre-pandemic standards. Box office, in aggregate, is fairly predictable in a normal year. But when the theatres shut down on March 20, that “all went out the window”, said Paul Dergarabedian, a senior media analyst with Comscore. “The unpredictability became the constant.”

Most North American theatres were not open for six months straight through the summer season, which typically accounts for approximately 40 percent of the year’s profits.

For the past two years, the summer movie season has netted more than \$4.3bn. This year, it brought in \$176.5m, much of that from drive-in theatres.

“The drive-in became the hero of the summer,” Dergarabedian said.

When indoor theatres did start to reopen in late August and early September, it was at limited capacity and with limited product.

Currently, about 35 percent of theatres are open in the US and some of the biggest markets, including New York and Los Angeles, remain closed.

Although there has been a steady stream of new releases, the blockbuster tentpoles have been few and far between. Some went to streaming services, others became premium digital rentals, but most simply retreated into 2021 and beyond.

Perhaps there is no more telling fact than that 2020 was the first time in more than 10 years without a Marvel movie.



The Walt Disney Co’s superhero factory has for the past two years topped the year-end charts with Avengers: Endgame and Black Panther, and has regularly had two or more films in the top 10.

Unsurprisingly, 2020’s top 10 list is a little chaotic and comprised mostly of films from the first two months of the year. Sony’s Will Smith sequel Bad Boys for Life has stayed in first place in North America since its January release with \$206.3m.

Globally, it is in second place to the Chinese film The Eight Hundred — the first time that the top worldwide film originated outside Hollywood.

The only post-shutdown films to crack the top 10 are Christopher Nolan’s Tenet in eighth place with \$57.2m and the animated family sequel The Croods: A New Age, which was released at Thanksgiving and has earned \$30.8m so far to put it in 10th place. A screening of Trolls World Tour, at the Four Brothers Drive-In Theatre amid the coronavirus pandemic, in Amenia, New York, US [File: John Minchillo/AP Photo]

At least 15 films in the top 100 were retro releases, including Hocus Pocus, The Empire Strikes Back, and The Nightmare Before Christmas.

“The silver lining for movie theatres is even though people had unlimited options at home, people still sought out the movie theatre,” Dergarabedian said. “People have a desire to go outside the home and be entertained. That desire hasn’t changed but the ability to do that was profoundly limited.”

It has even changed the way opening weekends, once a reliable indicator of a film’s long-term prospects, are judged and it might remain that way for a while.

## No Distinction...

FROM PAGE 1

“The U.S. and the Zionist regime have not created security anywhere, and if something happens in here and a war breaks out, we will make no distinction between the U.S. base and its host country. Naturally, the very same Arab countries of the region will bear the brunt,” he warned.

General Hajizadeh reasserted that the IRGC’s missile power would never be subject to negotiations, saying, “No (Iranian) official is allowed to negotiate about the missile power, and this is our red line.”

He also noted that Iran has independently decided to restrict the range of its missiles to 2,000 kilometers, but such limitation on the range of missile is not eternal.

Reaffirming Iran’s support for whoever fighting against the Zionist regime, the commander said Gaza and Lebanon are at the forefront of the battle and all of their missile capabilities have been supported by the Islamic Republic.

“Instead of giving a fish or teaching to catch a fish, we taught our allies and friends how to make a hook,” he said, adding that they are now in possession of advanced missile technologies.

The Israeli regime is currently at a “crossroad of fire” coming from Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, and other Muslim countries, General Hajizadeh said, adding that the friends of Iran are now equipped with missiles with pinpoint accuracy instead of simple rockets.

He said efforts have been made round the clock since years ago after Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei warned the Zionist regime that Haifa and Tel Aviv will be razed to the ground if Israel makes a mistake.

Hajizadeh also pointed to Iran’s retaliatory missile strike on the US base of Ain al-Assad in Iraq after the assassination of Lt. General Qassem Soleimani, saying such attack destroyed the dignity of the US.

On the plans to hit back at the U.S. in January 2020 after the missile strike, the general said, “We were prepared for the American response. Our missile power was fully on alert. If they had given a response, we would have hit all of their bases from Jordan to Iraq and the Persian Gulf, even all of their warships in the Indian Ocean.”

The January 2020 missile attack on Ain al-Assad military base came in retaliation for Washington’s assassination of Lieutenant General Soleimani upon his arrival in the Iraqi capital at the invitation of the Baghdad government.

US forces initially reported no casualties, but it later emerged that at least 110 soldiers sustained traumatic brain injuries (TBIs).

## Iran's Finger...

FROM PAGE 1

“The president should also issue an order for us to begin the process,” Salehi said.

“Our fingers are on the trigger. The commander just needs to issue an order. Then we can start work immediately,” Salehi underlined.

“[With regards to 20-percent uranium enrichment,] we have given a letter to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Vienna to hand it over to the [International Atomic Energy] Agency,” he said.

“The [Agency’s] inspectors should come to Iran and remove the seals [on nuclear facilities],” he added.

“Under the Agency’s supervision, we need to replace the uranium gas capsule,” Salehi said.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) says Iran has notified the UN nuclear watchdog that it plans to enrich uranium to up to 20 percent at Fordow facility, near the Iranian city of Qom.

In a statement released on Friday, the IAEA said the Islamic Republic had sent a letter to the agency on December 31 regarding its decision.

“Iran has informed the Agency that in order to comply with a legal act recently passed by the country’s parliament, the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran intends to produce low-enriched uranium (LEU) up to 20 percent at the Fordow Fuel Enrichment Plant,” the statement read.

“Iran’s letter to the Agency ... did not say when this enrichment activity would take place,” it added.

The agency stressed that it “has inspectors present in Iran on a 24/7 basis and they have regular access to Fordow.”

## CBI...

FROM PAGE 1

Based on the mentioned report, the country’s monetary base stood at 3.72 quadrillion rials (about \$88.58 billion) at the end of the current year’s second quarter, registering a 5.4-percent increase compared to the figure for the end of the previous year.

The total value of Iranian banks’ foreign assets in December 2019, stood at 10.034 quadrillion rials (about \$246.19 billion), 47.8 percent of which belonged to the central bank. The Central Bank of Iran’s foreign assets witnessed a 6.7-percent increase compared to the preceding year (ended on March 20, 2019) in which the figure stood at 14.63 quadrillion rials (about \$110.23 billion).

The previous CBI report, released in September 2019, had put the banking system’s foreign assets by June 21, 2019, at 9.245 quadrillion rials (about \$220.11 billion), 13 percent more than the corresponding period in the previous year. According to the data released by the CBI Department of Economic Research and Policy in June 2020, the country’s monetary base stood at 3.834 quadrillion rials (about \$91.28 billion) at the end of the first quarter of the current calendar year (June 20), 8.8 percent more than the figure for the end of the previous year.



## COVID Sidelines Five Man City Players

LONDON (Dispatches) - Manchester City will be without five players for Sunday's Premier League trip to Chelsea due to positive tests for coronavirus, Pep Guardiola has confirmed as he defended the decision to postpone Monday's clash with Everton. City revealed there had been four positive cases at the club on Christmas Day, including for players Kyle Walker and Gabriel Jesus. A further round of testing found three more cases among the City squad on Monday, leading to the match being called off just four hours before kick-off.

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## Kolasinac Joins Schalke on Loan

LONDON (Dispatches) - Sead Kolasinac has agreed to join Bundesliga side Schalke on loan for the rest of the season, Arsenal announced. The Bosnia defender, 27, will head back to the club where he joined the youth set-up and went on to become a first-team regular before moving to the Premier League in June 2017. Kolasinac's loan move is set to begin on January 4. The full-back has made 113 appearances for Arsenal.

8 IRAN NEWS

SPORTS

SUNDAY JANUARY 3, 2021

# Houston Rockets Prevail In Wall's Debut

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - James Harden shook off a sluggish shooting start and took control late, leading the host Houston Rockets to a 122-119 victory over the Sacramento Kings. Harden finished with 33 points and eight assists, and he had a hand in the final 18 points for the Rockets, who won for the first time this season. John Wall added 22 points and nine assists in his Rockets debut. Wood had 21 points and 12 rebounds, and DeMarcus Cousins, also making his Rockets' debut, scored eight points. Wall and Cousins sat out two games due to COVID-19 contact tracing. Harrison Barnes scored 24 points to pace the Kings, who got 22 points from De'Aaron Fox, 22 points and 13 rebounds from Richaun Holmes and 19 points and from Buddy Hield.

### Philadelphia 76ers 116 - Orlando Magic 92

Joel Embiid scored 21 points and grabbed nine rebounds, Seth Curry also scored 21 points and visiting Philadelphia crushed the previously undefeated Orlando. Curry made five 3-pointers and the Sixers converted 15 of 33 attempts from long range (45.5 percent).

### New Orleans Pelicans 113 - Oklahoma City Thunder 80

Brandon Ingram scored 20 points to lift New Orleans to a win at Oklahoma City. Ingram wasn't around for the last quarter-plus, however, after being ejected in the third quarter for a flagrant foul. The Pelicans dominated the end, though, outsourcing the Thunder 28-7 in the fourth quarter to open up what had been a tight game. Steven Adams, playing in Oklahoma City as a visitor for the first time after spending his first seven NBA seasons with the Thunder, scored eight of his 14 points in the first quarter. He added 10 rebounds.

### Indiana Pacers 119 - Cleveland Cavaliers 99

Domantas Sabonis led six Indiana scorers in double-figures with 25 points and Indiana closed the calendar year with a rout of Cleveland at Indianapolis. One game after they let a 17-point second-half lead slip away in a loss to the Boston Celtics, the Pacers saw a 22-point fourth-quarter lead sliced in half midway through the period thanks to the Cavaliers' backcourt duo of Collin Sexton and Darius Garland. Sexton scored a game-high 28 points, and Garland added 21 in the first of six consecutive road contests for Cleveland.

## Hammon First Woman in History to Direct NBA Team

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Former WNBA player Becky Hammon has become the first woman to direct a team in an NBA contest, describing the experience as "a big deal, it's a substantial moment." Hammon made history Wednesday in the Los Angeles Lakers' 121-107 win over the San Antonio Spurs, taking over the Spurs' bench duties when head coach Gregg Popovich was ejected in the first half. "I've been a part of this organization, I got traded here in 2007, so I've been in San Antonio and part of the Spurs and sports organization with the Stars and everything for 13 years," Hammon said. "So I have a lot of time invested, and they have a lot of time invested in me, in building me and getting me better." Popovich received a technical foul and was thrown out of the game with 3:56 remaining in the second quarter for arguing with a referee as his team trailed the Lakers 52-41. "He officially pointed at me. That was it," Hammon said. "Said, 'You got 'em,' and that was it. Very Pop-like." Vice President-elect Kamala Harris was among those to congratulate Hammon on social media saying she hopes more ex-WNBA players can land coaching jobs in the NBA. "Congrats, @BeckyHammon. You may be the first, but I know you certainly won't be the last." Hammon is in her seventh season on the San Antonio coaching staff. Hammon was a six-time all-star in the WNBA with teams in New York and Texas.

## Cavani Banned Over "Negrito" Social Media Post

LONDON (Dispatches) - Manchester United forward Edinson Cavani has been banned for three matches and fined £100,000 for using a racial term in a social media post, the Football Association announced. The 33-year-old summer signing produced a match-winning display at Southampton on November 29, providing an assist for Bruno Fernandes before netting a two goals in a 3-2 comeback win.



Victor Oladipo knocked down the fourth and final of his 3-pointers with 5:11 remaining to set off a decisive 10-2 run for Indiana down the stretch and turn a 101-90 lead into a 111-92 advantage. Oladipo had 16 points as all five Pacers starters were in double figures. Malcolm Brogdon was next with 17 points.

### Toronto Raptors 100 - New York Knicks 83

Fred VanVleet scored 10 of his 25 points in the fourth quarter and Toronto won for the first time this season, beating New York at Tampa, Fla. Toronto forward Pascal Siakam watched the game in street clothes, and team sources said the move was for disciplinary reasons. Siakam fouled out of the Raptors' loss to the Philadelphia 76ers on Tuesday with 25 seconds to play and marched directly to the locker room instead of to the bench.

### Chicago Bulls 133 - Washington Wizards 130

Otto Porter Jr. had 28 points and 12 rebounds while Zach LaVine added 22 points as Chicago won at Washington to earn a sweep of the teams' back-to-back series. The Wizards lost their fifth consecutive game to open the season despite the fourth triple-double in as many contests from Russell Westbrook, who finished with 22 points, 11 assists and 10 rebounds.

### Phoenix Suns 106 - Utah Jazz 95

Devin Booker hit a couple of clutch shots in the final minutes and scored a game-high 25 points to lead Phoenix past Utah in Salt Lake City. Jae Crowder and Mikal Bridges each added 16 points while Chris Paul contributed 11 points and eight assists as the Suns won their third game in a row.

## Querrey Given Suspended \$20,000 Fine for Quarantine Breach



LONDON (Reuters) - American Sam Querrey was handed a suspended \$20,000 fine by the ATP for breaching COVID-19 protocols at the St Petersburg Open in October, the governing body for men's tennis said. Querrey, 33, was withdrawn from the tournament after he returned a positive COVID-19 test a day before the main draw began but left the country on a private plane despite being placed in isolation by Russian authorities. The ATP called Querrey's conduct "contrary to the integrity of the game" but added that the fine will be lifted if Querrey does not commit further breaches of health and safety protocols related to COVID-19 within a probationary six-month period. The governing body also said it took Querrey's "many years of otherwise good standing with the ATP and other mitigating factors" into consideration when deciding on a suspended fine. World number 53 Querrey, who won the most recent of his 10 ATP titles at the 2017 Los Cabos Open, has five days to appeal the decision. St Petersburg tournament organisers said in October that Querrey, his wife and baby son all tested positive for the novel coronavirus. They said Querrey did not open his hotel door for a doctor's visit the next day and that the family left the hotel without informing the reception.



## Fulham Game Postponement Due to COVID-19 Was Unprofessional

LONDON (Reuters) - The Premier League's handling of the postponement of Fulham's match at Tottenham Hotspur due to a COVID-19 outbreak at the West London club was 'unprofessional' and could have been handled better, Spurs boss Jose Mourinho said on Friday. Fulham were forced to lodge a request with the Premier League to rearrange Wednesday's fixture due to several positive cases and the league called off the game less than three hours before kickoff. Mourinho was not too pleased about being kept in the dark till the last minute and had posted a tongue-in-cheek comment on Instagram labelling the Premier League the "best league in the world" while they waited for a decision. "I don't want to speak too much about it. Just to say I felt (it was) unprofessional, but that

is the way it was," Mourinho told reporters ahead of home match against Leeds United. "We were preparing ourselves for that match and of course we didn't play, and that is disruptive of what is a week of work. "Training sessions before that would be different if we were going to play that game. People say good for me that there was no game, but only good for me if I knew there was no game." Mourinho said Lucas Moura and Carlos Vinicius are expected to be involved against Leeds after both forwards missed the trip to Wolverhampton Wanderers with injury. Mourinho added he does not expect any arrivals during the January transfer window with the club's revenues taking a hit due to the pandemic. "Times are not easy, the club made a big effort in the summer to try and build a good squad," Mourinho said. "If something good happened for us, it would be a big surprise for me... I don't feel the right to ask for something." Spurs were top of the standings last month but one point from three games has dropped them to seventh but Mourinho said he expects his side to improve. "Football is also mental, and you're not in control of every item of the game," he said. "I believe we're going to have a good period, where we win matches and score goals."

## Chelsea Turn a Profit Despite Impact of Coronavirus

LONDON (Dispatches) - Chelsea's form on the pitch may have fallen away of late but the future looks rosy, according to chairman Bruce Buck, as the Premier League side posted a profit of £32.5million (\$44.4 million) for the year ended June 30, 2020. The figures reflect the impact the halt to the Premier League season in March had due to the coronavirus pandemic as overall turnover for the group fell from £446.7 million to £407.4 million. Broadcasting and matchday revenues decreased by £17.6 million and £12.2 million respectively largely due to the suspension of the campaign. However, qualification for the Champions League and surplus made "on a number of player sales" helped them post positive results. Reduced matchday costs because of games being postponed helped partially offset the losses from the pandemic. Chelsea played their final four home Premier League games of the interrupted domestic campaign and also the conclusion of both the FA Cup and Champions League fixtures behind closed doors, the majority of which fell into the 2021 financial year.



## Al-Attiyah Ready To Flex Dakar Muscles in Saudi

JEDDAH (AFP) - Qatari Dakar rally driver Nasser al-Attiyah has prepared for the race's second edition in Saudi Arabia with a strict training regimen to build muscle adapted to coronavirus restrictions. Staged in Africa between 1979 and 2007, the world's most famous rally shifted to the mountainous terrain of South America between 2009 and 2019. Attiyah won the reincarnated race in 2011, 2015 and 2019. The rally's transfer to Saudi Arabia in 2020 returned 50-year-old Attiyah to the Persian Gulf desert environment he knew best, having been born in Doha, the Qatari capital. "I adopted a different physical program which concentrated on building muscle," he told AFP ahead of the competition which gets underway on Saturday and lasts until January 16. Along with his French co-driver Mathieu Baumel, "we trained according to the countries holding Dakar", he said. As a result of lockdown rules in response to the coronavirus pandemic, the champion driver was forced to adapt his preparation. "I have a simulator at home and a sports room which allows me to stay in the rallying atmosphere," Attiyah said.

