

Spokeswoman for Iran's Ministry Of Health and Medical Education Sima Sadat Lari Announced on Sunday That 71 More Iranians Died of Coronavirus (COVID-19) As the Death Toll Hit 56,171

IRAN NEWS

A Majlis Lawmaker Said If Sanctions Are Not Lifted, Gov't Should Expel Inspectors of the International Atomic Energy Agency From the Country And Halt Voluntary Implementation of Additional Protocol

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New Bill Allows GC To Assess Iran Presidential Candidates' Plans

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - A bill ratified Sunday by the Iranian Parliament permits the Guardian Council to evaluate the plans of presidential candidates three months ahead of the elections. The Iranian lawmakers ratified the bill with 191 votes in favor. It allows the Guardian Council to carry out a preliminary evaluation of the presidential candidates and assess their competence for the job.

According to the new measure, the GC can invite the presidential candidates three months before the election day in order to hear their plans.

The bill also requires the Intelligence Ministry, Islamic Revolution Guards Corps Intelligence Department, General Inspection Organization of Iran, Supreme Audit Court of Iran, and other authorized organizations to provide documents and records relating to the candidates to the GC within 15 days after a request from the council.

According to Article 4 of the bill to amend the articles of the Presidential Election Law, the criteria for being 'manager' are:

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Trump Unlikely to Take Nuclear Action

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Iran's ambassador to the United Nations says it is highly unlikely that lame-duck President Donald Trump will use his power to launch a nuclear strike in his last days in office given the international and domestic reactions to the latest US president's decisions.

"The U.S. president has done a lot of weird things over the past years, raising concerns that he may do something unexpected, even in the final days of his presidency," Majid Takht-Ravanchi said in an interview with Iran's think tank the Strategic Council on Foreign Relations.

"But given the current international atmosphere, including [the atmosphere] within the United States, towards Trump's possible decisions and measures in his final days in office, I personally find it highly unlikely that Trump would cause concerns, especially with regard to the issue of nuclear action," Takht-Ravanchi added.

However, he said, since Trump is an unpredictable person, nothing should be ruled out, and "we should be vigilant and ready."

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Majlis Bans American, British, And French Vaccines



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - In a Sunday statement, Iran's Parliament announced that the production of the COVID-19 vaccine by the Iranian young experts is considered an honor to the country, and announced the import of American, British, and French vaccines banned.

The lawmakers stated that in a situation that the country was under the pressure of the sanctions and the European countries refused to issue permission of exporting even face masks to Iran and the people were coping with preparing medical items, the Execution of Imam Khomeini's Order Headquarters played the best role.

The headquarter in the very first days of the coronavirus outbreak started to produce face masks, disinfectants, sanctioned medical drugs, medical equipment, and immediate diagnosis kits, turning the threat into an opportunity, the statement added.

"The statement highlighted the amazing success of the Iranian young expert to achieve the first vaccine for COVID-19 in the of Execution of Imam Khomeini's Order Headquarters, which gained the WHO's license for the human test."

The Iranian parliamentarians attributed the success in the production of the national vaccine to the jihad and revolutionary management as well as belief in domestic power and young human resource.

"Given the foreign companies' lack of documented scientific evidence and production infrastructures and also the impossibility of the examination of the American, British, and French vaccine, on the one hand, and given the existing evidence for the global side-effects and deaths due to the injection of the very vaccines, on the other, Majlis bans the import of the vaccines produced by the American, British, and French companies to prevent risking the compatriots' health and considered the notes made by the Leader of the Islamic Revolution as the final word," the Iranian lawmakers stressed.

Meanwhile speaking in the northern Mazandaran Province, Health Minister Saeed Namaki also provided scientific reasoning for the rejection of the Western vaccines.

He said the Western vaccines had been produced "based on the mRNA method." Inside the US itself, he added, some articles had been published showing how the approach could manipulate the recipients' immune system and afflict them with autoimmune diseases.

"Even in the U.S. and Europe, many people avoid the vaccines because of these speculations," he said.

Namaki also recalled how the same Western countries had been preventing and severely complicating Iran's access to medicine in compliance with the U.S. sanctions.

U.S. Slammed Over Sanctions on PMU Chairman

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) - Iraq's Foreign Ministry has slammed as "unacceptable" Washington's sanctions on Chairman of the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) Falih al-Fayyadh, a day after the US took the hostile measure against the popular anti-terror forces.

On Friday, the U.S. Treasury Department sanctioned 64-year-old Fayyadh, accusing him of serious human rights abuses during anti-government demonstrations in the Arab country in late 2019.

Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin claimed in a statement that Fayyadh was involved in waging a "violent campaign against Iraqi democracy and civil society," and said that the US would "continue to hold accountable human rights abusers in Iraq."

The Iraqi Foreign Ministry expressed surprise in response to the move, describing it as an "unexpected and unacceptable" decision, IRNA reported on Saturday, citing Iraqi media.

The ministry said it will carefully pursue all decisions made by the Treasury against Iraqi figures during both the current and the incoming U.S. administrations and will attempt to address their ramifications.

Fighters of the PMU, better known in Iraq as Hashd al-Sha'abi, have helped the Iraqi Army regain control of Daesh-held territories, which were captured by the terrorist group ever since it launched an offensive in the country in June 2014. The Iraqi Army finally managed to regain control of all the lost territories in 2017, thanks to the PMU fighters and Iran's military advisory assistance.

The PMU has been recognized by Iraq's Parliament as an official force with similar rights as those of the regular army, including the right to receive salaries and pensions.

Meanwhile, the leader of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq also issued a statement, strongly denouncing the new US sanctions as "blatant violation" of his country's sovereignty.

In a statement, the official said the move is in line with the United States' increased acts of aggression against Iraq and the PMU, following the assassination of its commanders as well as bombing and killing of dozens of its fighters, IRNA reported, citing Arabic-language Almaal omah news agency.

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ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

20% Uranium Enrichment Is Our Indisputable Right

With confirmation and repetition by most of international media regarding the Islamic Republic of Iran's decision for resumption of uranium enrichment to 20 percent purity, it is considered the last step of Iran for return to the pre-JCPOA condition. The Westerners are trying to implant this idea that while Donald Trump's presidency in the White House will come to an end in two weeks, on the eve of new round of talks with Joe Biden Administration Iran sits at the negotiation table with having an upper hand and a stronger stand.

But the issue is indeed not at all why the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution in his firm speech on the occasion of the anniversary of the people of Qom's uprising against the oppressive Pahlavi regime (January 7, 1978) broadcast live on IRIB said, "First, they talk about the U.S. returning to the JCPOA. However, we do not insist on this at all and we are in no rush for the U.S. to return to the JCPOA. This is not the issue for us whether the U.S. returns to the JCPOA or not. If the sanctions are not lifted, then the U.S.'s return to the JCPOA might even be to our disadvantage. Not only will it not be to our advantage, it will also be to our disadvantage. Secondly, the decision made by the Islamic Consultative Assembly and the government about withdrawing from part of the JCPOA commitments, is a correct decision, and is a completely reasonable, logical, acceptable decision. When almost all of the other side's commitments in the JCPOA are not honored, it does not make sense for the Islamic Republic to honor all its commitments. That is why since a while ago, they are gradually withdrawing from some of our commitments. And recently too, they have withdrawn from some others. Of course, if they return to their commitments, we will return to ours as well. Since the beginning of the JCPOA I have told that our actions should wait for theirs but it did not happen and now it should be so." See Page 7

Cuba to Collaborate With Iran on Coronavirus Vaccine

IRAN (IP) - Cuba said it had signed an accord with Iran to transfer the technology for its most advanced coronavirus vaccine candidate and carry out last-stage clinical trials of the shot in the Islamic Republic.

The allies are both under fierce U.S. sanctions that exempt medicine yet often put foreign pharmaceutical companies off trading with them and as such they seek to be self-reliant. Both are also strapped for cash.

Iran launched human trials of its first domestic COVID-19 vaccine candidate late last month, while Cuba has four candidates currently in human trials.

Once its most advanced candidate, Soberana (Sovereign) 2, has completed Phase II trials which started on Dec. 22, it will be tested in Phase III trials in around 150,000 people in Havana, officials have said.

Yet the Caribbean country will need to conduct more late-stage trials abroad too, given it does not have a high infection rate due to the successful management of its outbreak, they said. Cuba's Finlay Vaccine Institute said late on Friday it has signed an accord with Iran's Pasteur Institute to collaborate on testing of Soberana 2.

"This synergy will enable both countries to advance more rapidly in the immunization against the SARS-COV-2 virus," it said on its Twitter account. Cuba says several countries have expressed interest in its coronavirus vaccines but this is the first such accord it has reached.

Health Ministry spokesman Kianush Jahanpur was cited by Iranian media as saying 50,000 volunteers would be recruited to carry out the Phase III clinical trials. Technology transfer and joint production were preconditions for allowing human testing in the country, he said. Iran Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said he was "impressed" by the biotech achievements of its ally Cuba in the fight against COVID-19 during a visit to Havana on a Latin American tour last November.

Cuba has not talked of importing vaccines from elsewhere and said it intends to start vaccinating its population against COVID-19 with its own vaccine in the first half of the year.

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Army Ground Force to Stage Military Drill Soon

TEHRAN (MNA) – The Commander of the Iranian Army's Ground Forces announced on Sunday that the body is to stage a military drill in southern parts of Iran in the near future.

As Brigadier General Kioumars Heidari said, this exercise is to be held with the support of other Iranian forces relying on all military equipment.

The drill is to be held in order to gain combat readiness and to upgrade the defense capabilities of the Iranian forces in the southeastern regions of the country and various other parts of the borders of Iran, he explained.

President Urges MPs to Avoid Confusing Businesses In Budgetary Debates

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Iranian President Hassan Rouhani called on the Parliament to refrain from overhauling the national budget bill, warning of disruption to economic activities and development.

In comments at a Sunday session of the Administration's Economic Coordination Headquarters, the president said the cabinet has always embraced the advice of economic experts and activists and views of the lawmakers, but an overhaul of the budget's structure is "definitely unacceptable".

The process of discussing the proposed national budget bill is no good time for changing the basic laws on economic activities, Rouhani said, warning that it could confuse the economic society which is at the forefront of development in the country.

The budgetary decisions should not affect the livelihood of people and vulnerable groups by any means, the president added.

He further voiced the administration's support for the stock exchange market as a major pillar of economic stability in Iran, saying the stock market is a transparent and regulated platform for business with specific mechanisms whose policies must be defined by the



Supreme Council of the Stock Exchange without non-expert interference.

The administration's proposed budget bill for the next Iranian fiscal year has been submitted to the Parliament, whose speaker has described petrodollars as an unreliable source of income and called for a budget reform plan with new sources of revenues.

Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf says what matters to the legislature is that the national budget bill should be ratified without any deficit.

Head of ICCIMA Calls for Paving Ground for Attraction of Investments

MASHHAD (IRNA) – Head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture said here on Saturday that ground must be paved for the attraction of the capitals of natives of Khorasan province who are now residing in other provinces and abroad and even provide bonuses for them.

Gholam-Hossein Shafiee who was speaking with parliament representatives of Khorasan-e Razavi said that the economic potentials of natives of Khorasan who live in other provinces or abroad, but are eager to invest in their own motherland in very high.

"Some of them are very eager to step forth for development of their own city, or province, so this potential needs to be welcomed," he added.

The head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture referred to the challenges faced by the country's manufacturing and economic firms in various sectors, reiterating, "The current economic conditions and the bulk of problem-making laws that have halted the progress of economic and industrial firms need to be eliminated soon."

The parliament representatives, too, after hearing Shafiee's comments expressed their readiness to negotiate with the Iranians and Khorasani living in other provinces and abroad to make investments in Khorasan and promised to try to pass appropriate laws and eliminate the obstacles in the way of achieving that great objective.

New U.S. Administration Must Compensate for Trump's Damages

ISLAMABAD (IRNA) - Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Pakistan says upcoming U.S. administration led by Joe Biden must compensate for the damages caused by Trump's negative decisions against Iran. Syed Mohammad Ali Hosseini expressed his views while giving an interview to Pakistan's top Urdu news channel 'Geo News'.

During the interview he talked about, Tehran-Islamabad bilateral relations, regional developments, JCPOA, assassination of General Soleimani and Dr. Fakhrizadeh and the plot to normalize relations with the Zionist regime.

He said Trump spent four years of his rule in enmity with the Iranian nation and spoiled the international nuclear agreement through unilateral withdrawal; therefore, the new US administration must compensate for such negative actions. Syed Mohammad Ali Hosseini went on to say Iran is neither happy nor worried about Biden's victory, because for us the actions and behavior of the new US administration are more important than change in personalities.

The Ambassador said martyr Lieutenant General Qasem Soleimani was in Iraq on the invitation of the host government but Trump shamelessly assassinated this dear martyr, however, strong revenge awaits the killers of General Soleimani. "Iran's response against the U.S. State terrorism was minimal," the envoy noted.

He added main revenge for the blood of Martyr Soleimani still awaits and Iran is pursuing legal path at the international level with the aim to try and punish all the elements who interfered in the assassination of the senior Iranian commander. Hosseini emphasized Martyr Soleimani was a strong barrier against terrorism, especially the ominous phenomenon of Daesh in the region and the world.

Referring to the terrorist operation related to the martyrdom of Dr. Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, a prominent Iranian nuclear scientist and Head of the Research and Innovation Organization of the Ministry of Defense of Iran, he said Iran is seriously investigating the involvement of the Zionist regime in the attack and they should wait for strong response from the Islamic Republic.

Sanctions Removal Matters, Not U.S. Return to JCPOA



TEHRAN (MNA) – Majlis Speaker says Tehran seeks the removal of the unilateral sanctions and does not care about the US' return to 2015 nuclear, from which Washington unilaterally withdrew in 2018.

"The JCPOA [the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action] is not a sacred agreement; it is merely a deal to remove sanctions under the conditions accepted by the Islamic Republic," Mohammad-Baqer Qalibaf said during the Parliament's open session on Sunday.

"Therefore, the return of the United States to the deal is not important to us.... It is the practical and tangible lifting of sanctions that really matters," he added.

Referring to the recent remarks by the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Qalibaf said Ayatollah Khamenei's advice "derailed the roadmap for all the authorities in fulfilling the demands of the people."

"It became clear to everyone that the main strategy in the face of the enemy is to neutralize sanctions, which is also a prelude to the lifting of sanctions," he said, adding that in order to lift sanctions, the country must increase its power in different sectors, including the nuclear industry.

Qalibaf warned the European countries that have been following the US' hawkish policies against Iran and said, "The Western front should know that it must recognize the rights of the Iranian people; if not, it should be prepared to pay the appropriate price."

The nuclear agreement was signed in 2015 between Iran and six world states – namely the U.S., Germany, France, Britain, Russia and China – and was ratified in the form of Security Council Resolution 2231.

However, U.S. President Donald Trump pulled the US out of the JCPOA in May 2018 and reinstated the anti-Iran sanctions that had been

Iran-Oman Economic Ties "Stable"

SHIRAZ (IRNA) - The head of Iran-Oman Joint Chamber of Commerce said on Saturday that stability in diplomatic and political relations between Tehran and Muscat has resulted in stable economic trades.

Addressing a webinar, Mohsen Zarrabi said that the political relations between the two countries have been at the highest level over the past 40 years.

Zarrabi said, however, the level of economic relations between Iran and Oman are not satisfactory, the most important reasons of which are shortage of infrastructures and reduction of Iranian export to Oman.



He added that as Oman has good ties with other countries and enjoys a stable economy, its infrastructures are appropriate for economic relations and play the role of a base for Iran's traders base for export.

Among opportunities Oman can provide for Iran are export of Iranian goods with zero tariff to 16 big countries and giving access to the markets of some African countries that are not in good terms with Iran. Saying that services, education, industries, and mining are among fields in which Iran and Oman can enhance ties, Zarrabi added with good planning Iran can easily gain a 10% share in Oman's export market.

Transregional Forces Seeking to Disturb PG Security

TEHRAN (MNA) – Stating that the Persian Gulf is in complete security, IRGC Navy Commander said that transregional forces seek to disturb the security of the region.

The Persian Gulf is in complete security and transregional forces seek to disturb the security of the region, said Rear Admiral Ali Reza Tangsiri.

"Today, we have complete control and aristocracy over the entire Persian Gulf," he added.

"We have a complete aristocracy in terms of manpower in the region, in addition to the intelligence monitoring with radars and electronic and electro-optical systems," he said.

Tangsiri highlighted, "The United States must leave the Persian Gulf region and there is no other way but to evacuate the region," adding, "The Persian Gulf belongs to Iran and the countries south of the Persian Gulf."

Tehran to Host IRAN Oil Show on Jan. 22-25

TEHRAN (MNA) – The 25th edition of Iran International Oil, Gas, refining & Petrochemical Exhibition dubbed "IRAN Oil Show" will be held at Tehran Permanent International Fairgrounds on Jan. 22-25, 2021.

This prestigious international exhibition will be held in Tehran given the license issued by the Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade as well as Ministry of Health and Medical Education for organizing specialized exhibitions, the relative improvement of the situation of the novel coronavirus pandemic and also the previous agreement of the Oil Ministry and in cooperation and coordination with the official of Iran International Exhibition Company (IIEC).

The 25th edition of IRAN Oil Show will be held with the motto of "National Oil, Iranian Goods and Services" with the aim of introducing and showcasing latest achievements of oil industry of the country and future plans.

It should be noted that the 25th round of IRAN Oil Show will be held by fully observing anti-coronavirus and social-distancing guidelines.

In addition, Oil Ministry has considered tough health guidelines for participants and visitors.

The 25th Iran International Oil, Gas, refining & Petrochemical Exhibition dubbed "IRAN Oil Show" was postponed for several times due to the spread of the novel coronavirus, COVID-19.

In the beginning, it was scheduled to be held at the venue of Tehran Permanent International Fairgrounds on Oct. 12-15.

Gen. Soleimani's Assassins Must Be Brought to Justice

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's envoy to Japan, addressing a webinar on martyrdom anniversary of the former IRGC commander Lieutenant General Qasem Soleimani, said that the Islamic Republic will not forget the terrorist act of his assassination and will pursue to bring perpetrators of the crime to justice.

In a cultural consultation webinar named "The Introduction of the National Hero of Iran, Martyr Lieutenant General Qasem Soleimani," which was held by the cultural section of the Iranian Embassy in Tokyo on Saturday, Iran's ambassador Morteza Rahmani Movahed described 2020 as the year of important events around the world, in particular in West Asia.

The ambassador underlined that one of the most significant events that took place last year was the brutal assassination of General Soleimani by the U.S. terrorist regime on January 3.

General Soleimani played a key role in defeating Daesh (ISIS) in Iraq and Syria, Movahed noted, adding that the admirable effort was intolerable for terrorist regimes like the US, Israel and Saudi Arabia, and since they have been supporting the

terrorist group, they carried out the assassination.

During his last visit to Iraq, which was at the invitation of Iraqi officials, General Soleimani intended to respond to Saudis' letter via the Iraqi government, the Iranian envoy said, adding that the U.S. got in the way of such peaceful efforts by assassinating the Iranian general, which was in violation of Iraq's sovereignty.

Movahed went on to say that along with the Iranians, the people of the West Asia region are well aware of the sacrifices that General Soleimani and his comrades made in fighting terrorists.

According to the ambassador, the participation of millions of people in the funeral processions of General Soleimani proves that the United States conducted an illegal and terrorist act.

Criticizing countries, which kept silence when it came to the US terrorist act, the envoy warned that such silence will end in encouraging the perpetrators of the heinous assassination to continue terrorism.

The United Nations, as the representative of the international community and certain member states, failed to adopt proper stance in condemning the state terrorism; so, the process led to the assassination of Iranian scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh near Tehran on November 27, 2020, Movahed added.

He called for establishing a working group of legal and media experts to uphold the rights of the oppressed people of the region at international courts.

East Azarbaijan, Nakhchivan Ready to Boost Economic Cooperation

TEHRAN (MNA) – In a meeting between Head of Tabriz Chamber of Commerce and Iranian consul general in Nakhchivan, the sides announced the readiness of Iran's East Azarbaijan's economic activists to increase economic coop. with Nakhchivan.

Iranian consul general in Nakhchivan Ahmad Hosseini and Head of Tabriz Chamber of Commerce Younes Jaeh met at the place of Tabriz chamber.

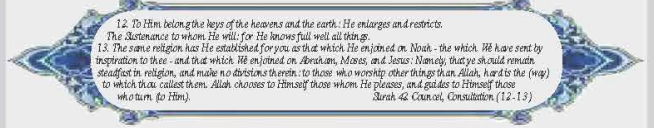
They discussed the strategies to increase trade and economic ties between East Azarbaijan Province and the Republic of Nakhchivan.

"Economic cooperation between the Republic of Nakhchivan and East Azarbaijan Province can be expanded due to the high cultural commonalities in these two regions," Hosseini said underlining the vitality of the Iranian government's support as well as private sector activists in the province.



PRAYER TIME

- Noon (Zohr) 12:12
- Evening (Maghreb) 17:30
- Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr) 05:45
- Tomorrow's Sunrise 07:14



Iran Urged to Boost Trade Relation With Kazakhstan

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Chairman of the Iran-Kazakhstan Joint Chamber of Commerce Mr. Amir Abedi believes Iran and Kazakhstan's good political and cultural relations do not match with their trade relations and both sides should work together to boost their economic relations.

Speaking to ICCIMA news website, Abedi said there are unique opportunities for investment of Iranians in Kazakhstan but so far Iranians have not taken advantage of the good political relations between both states for developing their economic activities.

He also pointed to restoration of a marine route between Iranian ports of Astara and Amirabad with Port of Aktau in Kazakhstan for shipping containers in the form of ro-ro ships, adding that reinforcing the trade and investment relations between Iran and Kazakhstan which is the second economic power in the Eurasia is an important and essential action.

Abedi noted that diplomatic relations of Iran and Kazakhstan have always been good and close and without any doubt such a close relation between the governments can have a positive impact on building economic relations although currently the trade and investment relations of both countries do not match with their political relations.

He also pointed to this fact that Kazakhstan is located on the Silk Road route, saying that due to Kazakhstan's geographical position and being on the Silk Road, currently the link between Iran's Caspian Port with Kazakhstan's Port of Kuryk and their connection to China market is one of the strong points in the issue of trade and relation with Kazakhstan.



Regarding to have road and rail connections with Kazakhstan market Iran should pass Turkmenistan, he said for some time that Turkmenistan had closed its borders to Iranian goods and services, and at that time the joint chamber of Iran and Kazakhstan took an initiative to stop any disorder in the trade relation between Iran and Kazakhstan and it found an alternative route and the first ro-ro ship services began between ports of Astara and Amirabad and Aktau due to the cooperation between Kazakhstan Customs Office and Iran's Port and Maritime Organization.

He also criticized the overnight and sudden regulations as the main factor for lack of success in boosting trade which leads to instability in the national economy and mistrust in the trade partners in other countries.

He then reiterated that launching several direct flights between the both countries is very necessary for developing relations and competitions with other actors in the target countries. He said the flights between Tehran and Almaty should increase, adding that the chamber is after launching direct flight between city of Gorgan in Iran and Aktau which can be crucial in the tourism issue.

Abedi admitted lack of cognizance and proper understanding from culture history, geography, capacities and tourism resources of Iran is one of the problems which has slowed down boosting ties with Eurasian states.

He also noted that problem in banking transactions between both countries is another hurdle in way of boosting bilateral trade, saying that in case sanctions are lifted, the costs and risks for Iranians will reduce and they can increase the trade exchanges between both countries which is currently is around \$400b per year.

First EV Charging Station Opens in Khorasan Razavi

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The first station for charging electric vehicles was inaugurated in Khorasan Razavi Province whose equipment for electrification of the station has been manufactured and provided at the MAPNA Group.



According to the report, in the upcoming spring, the first standard full electric bus will roll out at the Line 1 of Mashhad bus services. To accelerate the move towards electric transportation in Mashhad, a new agreement was signed between MAPNA Group and Mashhad Municipality.

After the agreements between MAPNA Group and Mashhad Municipality in different fields of electrification of transportation system in Mashhad, on Wednesday, the second electric vehicle (EV) charging station of the country and the first one in Khorasan Razavi Province was inaugurated at the bus terminal of Mashhad.

The station has two types of charging of DC and AC which enable all types of the standard vehicles to be charged.

During the inaugural ceremony, the CEO of MAPNA Group Mr. Abbas Ali Abadi pointed to the environmental problems in big cities like Mashhad and said electrification of the transportation is one of the solutions to reduce effects of using fossil fuels and noted that electrification requires appropriate infrastructures in order that electric vehicles can be used.

He added that like 120 years ago that the first power plant started its work and providing light in the country in Mashhad, he hopes the light of using electric vehicle industry would be lit in Mashhad, too.

He then pointed to the environmental issues and said the production unit in the group emphasizes boost in the output and decrease in environment pollution as well as increase of productivity from renewable energies. He reiterated that MAPNA Group has done great and effective jobs in the field of renewable energies.

Ali Abadi further said that one of the properties of this station is that it is indigenized; adding that by inauguration of recharge stations in Tehran and now in Mashhad, the process for acceleration in creating appropriate infrastructures is possible.

Light Vehicle Output Grows 19% in Nine Months

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iranian carmakers produced 625,300 light vehicles during the nine months to Dec. 20, 2020, witnessing an 18.8% jump in comparison with the corresponding period of the last year.

Based on the Industries Ministry data, automotive producers rolled out 60,983 pickups, that is 18.5% more than the year-ago period.

The Agricultural machinery production also grew


during the period with 434 combine machines (up 39.5%) and 15,572 tractors (up 12.6%).

The medium and heavy automotive sector, however, has observed a decline in the past months.

Accordingly, Iranian manufacturers produced 1,362 buses and minibuses during the nine-month period, down 8.7% year-on-year. Last year (ended March 2020), domestic automakers produced 860,000 vehicles.



PERMIT NO : 55/99/24274 DATE : 2021-1-11 FIRST ANNOUNCEMENT



INVITATION TO RENEWAL OF ONE STEP INTERNATIONAL TENDER

AGRICULTURAL SUPPORT SERVICES COMPANY

Agricultural Support Services Company, hereinafter will be referred as ASSC, affiliated to Ministry of Agriculture-Jahad of I.R of Iran, is considering the purchase of the below item of technical, through renewal of one step international tender.

| ITEM | Name | PACKING | Quantity KG |
|------|---|-------------|-------------|
| 1 | Fipronil Tech (18.8-21.2) pct. (premix 20%) | 200 kg drum | 5500 |

All of the qualified and interested companies are invited to receive tender documents from Monday dated 11/01/2021 until Wednesday dated 20/01/2021 (7 working days) from our purchasing committee (located at the 9th floor, no. 1, fourth alley, Gandhi st., Tehran, Iran).

The bidders are requested to submit their letters of introduction, along with remittance bill of I.Rials 1,200,000 to ASSC's account no. 4001039704005791 with SHEBA no. IR25010004001039704005791 at the Central Bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran through p payment order of SATNA or PAYA with the 30 character identification code of 358039782263500650000000000006.


The bidders are requested to submit their sealed and stamped envelopes containing offers latest on Saturday dated 20/02/2021 (during official working hours) to our security office located on the 8th floor. Meanwhile the meeting for the opening of the envelopes will be held on Sunday dated 21/02/2021 at 14:00 PM with the presence of bidder's representatives at our purchasing committee hall (9th floor, no. 1, Fourth Alley, Gandhi st., Tehran, Iran).

We would like to emphasize that the bid bond amount should be in bank guarantee as follows:

- 1- € 16685 for Fipronil Tech(18.8-21.2) pct. (premix 20%) equivalent to Iranian Rials 5273934000
- The bid bond value will be in Euro or in equal value of any other foreign currencies, except US dollars, based on Telegraphic Transfer rate in Sana rate website, www.sanarate.ir. It should be noted that this site lists the currency transactions, executed in Integrated Currency Transactions System [Mina website] on 28/12/2020.

For more information, you may refer to our website www.assc.ir, and <http://iets.mporg.ir> or contact us by phone no. 00982188776325

PR & Intl Affairs Dept of Agricultural Support Services Company(ASSC)



Continuity of Production in MSC "Very Important"

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Representative of Lanjan constituency to Majlis Dr. Hossein Rajaei during his visit to Saba Steel Complex, an affiliate to Mobarakeh Steel Company (MSC), says in the current critical economic condition, continuity of production in Mobarakeh Steel Group is very important.



During the visit, Mr. Rajaei met the CEO of Saba Steel Complex Mr. Mostafa Ataei Pour and said it was an honor for him to meet steelmakers' efforts in-person in a condition that sanctions and restrictions have put the national industries under pressure more than any time but all production lines of this company are working very well.

He added that all should weigh the production of MSC by taking into consideration all existing conditions and woes, adding that continuing the production without any problem in the current condition is a God blessing and also it is indebted to the endeavors of managers and staff of the Mobarakeh Steel Group.

Rajaei termed Mobarakeh Steel Group an active, pioneer and effective group in the national industry and expressed hope that the effects and blessings of the group in the region and province would cover the whole country.

He then pointed to his goal of visiting Saba Steel Complex, saying that he was there to announce readiness of Majlis to help the group in all fields of renovation and development.

He then pointed to the Hot Roll Unit No.2 project of MSC and said all should strive in order that the project would come on stream and new golden leaf is added to the book of honors of the company.

PGSC Opens First Occupational Medicine Clinic

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Head of Medical Services Center of Persian Gulf Star Oil Company (PGSC) announced the implementation of development project and equipping and inaugurating the occupational medicine center of the company.



Hamid Reza Moradi said that by implementing this developmental project and equipping the clinic and inaugurating the occupational medicine clinic of the company, the ground will be paved for serving the staff of the refinery with better quality.

He added that in this project, development and equipping of some parts of the clinic like occupational medicine clinic of the refinery, medical laboratory, radiology, sonography, burns treatment bath, tiage, doctor's office, dentistry, heart counseling, audiometry and spirometry have been included.

Moradi went on to say that medical and molecular laboratories with conducting anti-body, hormone and sinus tests will meet the demands of the staff of the company and after installation of the required equipment, anti-body tests will be conducted by the laboratory. He added that the radiology unit of the clinic is in its last stage of being launched.

He noted that developing and equipping the clinic is a major step in line with observing the social responsibilities by the company and in line with reducing the load of visiting medical centers of the city of Bandar Abbas.

China Tightens COVID-19 Restrictions Near Beijing

BEIJING (Dispatches) - Chinese authorities told residents in two cities south of Beijing to stay home for seven days as they try to stamp out a COVID-19 outbreak in which more than 300 people have tested positive in the past week.

Shijiazhuang, capital of Hebei province which surrounds Beijing, suspended service on the city's subway, then extended the ban to all public transport, including taxis. The province entered a "wartime mode" this week to battle the infections. At a media conference on Saturday, provincial authorities said mass testing for the virus had been conducted on 16 million residents of both Shijiazhuang as well as the neighbouring city of Xingtai.



U.S. Diplomat Visits Western Sahara

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - A top United States envoy has visited contested Western Sahara after Washington recognized Morocco's sovereignty there in exchange for Rabat normalizing ties with Israel.

The U.S. embassy in Rabat called the trip on Saturday by David Schenker, assistant secretary of state for near eastern affairs, and the highest-ranking US diplomat for North Africa and the Middle East, "a historic visit".

Schenker's visit comes before the expected opening of a provisional US consulate in the desert region on Sunday, according to diplomatic sources in Rabat. Western Sahara is a disputed and divided former Spanish colony, mostly under Morocco's control, where tensions with the pro-independence Polisario Front have simmered since the 1970s.



Body Parts, Debris Found at Indonesian Plane Crash Site



JAKARTA (Dispatches) - Indonesian rescuers pulled out body parts, pieces of clothing and scraps of metal from the Java Sea early on Sunday morning, a day after a Boeing 737-500 with 62 people onboard crashed shortly after takeoff from Jakarta, officials said.

Officials were hopeful they were honing in on the wreckage of Sriwijaya Air Flight 182 after sonar equipment detected a signal from the aircraft. Transportation Minister Budi Karya Sumadi told reporters that authorities have launched tremendous search efforts after identifying "the possible location of the crash site".

"These pieces were found by the SAR team between Lembang Island and Laki Island," the head of the National Search and Rescue Agency, Bagus Purihito, in a statement.

Indonesian military chief Air Chief Marshal Hadi Tjahjanto said teams on the Rigel navy ship equipped with a remote-operated vehicle had detected a signal from the aircraft, which fit the coordinates from the last contact made by the pilots before the plane went missing. "We have immediately deployed our divers from navy's elite unit to determine the finding to evacuate the victims," Tjahjanto said.

Indonesian Navy divers hold wreckage from Sriwijaya Air flight SJY182 during a search and rescue operation at sea near Lembang island on January 10, 2021 [Adek Berry/AFP]

More than 12 hours since the plane lost contact, little is known about what caused the crash. The nearly 27-year-old aircraft was much older than Boeing's problem-plagued 737 MAX model, one of which crashed off Jakarta in late 2018, killing all 189 people on board the Lion Air flight.

Older 737 models are widely flown and do not have the system implicated in the MAX safety crisis.

"We are in contact with our airline customer and stand ready to support them during this difficult time," Boeing said in a statement. "Our thoughts are with the crew, passengers, and their families."

Meanwhile, fishermen in the area around Thousand Islands, a chain of islands north of Jakarta's coast, reported hearing an explosion about 2:30pm (07:30 GMT) on Saturday.

"We heard something explode; we thought it was a bomb or a tsunami since after that we saw the big splash from the water," fisherman Solihin, who goes by one name, told The Associated Press by phone.

"It was raining heavily and the weather was so bad. So, it is difficult to see around clearly. But we can see the splash and a big wave after the sounds. We were very shocked and directly saw the plane debris and the fuel around our boat."

Authorities established two crisis centres, one at the airport and one at the port. Families gathered to wait for news of loved ones. The 62 people on board included seven children and three babies.

Pakistan Protesters End Blockade Over Deaths of Miners

QUETTA (AFP) - Thousands of mourners gathered in Pakistan Saturday for the burial of 10 miners who were killed in an attack claimed by the Islamic State group that sparked an outcry over the lack of protection for workers.

A six-day protest by the Shiite Hazara community over the killings in the country's restive southwest was finally called off late Friday after they reached an agreement with the provincial government of Balochistan.

Shiite protesters numbering up to 3,000 had blocked a road on the outskirts of Quetta demanding personal assurances by Prime Minister Imran Khan.

The 10 miners from the minority community were kidnapped by gunmen from a remote colliery on Sunday before being taken to nearby hills where most were shot dead, while some were beheaded.

Ethnic Hazaras make up most of the Shiite population in Quetta, the capital of Balochistan -- the country's largest and poorest region, rife with ethnic, sectarian and separatist insurgencies.

Their Central Asian features make them easy targets for Sunni militants who consider them heretics.

Authorities on Friday promised the arrest of the attackers, payment of compensation to the bereaved families and better security for the Hazaras.

A senior government official told AFP the prime minister is expected to travel to Quetta on Saturday after the Shiite community's decision to call off their protest.

More than 4,000 people attended the last rites of the dead miners whose bodies were laid to rest amid tight security six days after their deaths.

The community's refusal to bury the bodies was a symbolic protest in Muslim-majority Pakistan, where according to Islamic culture people should be buried within 24 hours, before the next sunset.

Mourners chanted slogans of "down with terrorism and arrest the culprits", an AFP photographer at the scene said.



Kazakhs Vote in Parliamentary Election

NUR-SULTAN (AFP) - Voters headed to parliamentary polls in Kazakhstan on Sunday with the ruling party expected to score a big win in this oil-rich country.

President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, 67, had pledged gradual political reform in the Central Asian nation since being eased into his post by Nursultan Nazarbayev, who called time on nearly three decades as head of state in early 2019.

But 80-year-old Nazarbayev retains powerful positions, including the chairmanship of the Nur Otan party that controls the lower house and boasts 800,000 members among a population of 19 million.

The party is expected to win a commanding majority in the lower house polls featuring four other competing parties that are viewed as proxies.

The only party that styles itself as the opposition, the National Social Democratic Party (NSDP), ruled itself out of the contest in November, calling the move a "protest" against the system.

Most residents of the capital Nur-Sultan interviewed by AFP said they planned to skip the vote due either to bitter cold or the lack of real alternatives to Nur Otan.

Sonya Sartayeva, a pensioner, said she would vote "if they brought a ballot box to my house", as temperatures hovered well below freezing throughout the week.

She added that rising coronavirus cases -- which climbed to more than 161,000 on the eve of the vote -- were also a concern.

The most notable candidate on the ballot is Nazarbayev's eldest daughter, 57-year-old Dariga Nazarbayeva, who is representing Nur Otan.

Her return to politics comes just eight months after Tokayev fired her from the position of senate speaker -- a role that places the occupant second in line to the presidency. The dismissal, which was not explained, triggered speculation over a power struggle in Kazakhstan's leadership.

Qatar, Saudi Arabia Reopen Border After Persian Gulf Detente

DOHA (Dispatches) - Qatar and Saudi Arabia reopened their land border Saturday as they restored ties following a landmark deal to end a three and a half year rift.

Saudi shut its side of Qatar's only land border in June 2017 as part of a package of sanctions it said was a response to Doha's backing radical Islamist groups and closeness to Iran. AFP correspondents saw cars making the crossing on Saturday. A Qatari source said traffic at the Abu Samrah crossing, 120 kilometres (75 miles) south of Doha, had resumed around 0700 GMT.

Saudi Arabia, along with the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt, all of which also imposed embargoes on travel and trade, had agreed to lift the restrictions at a Persian Gulf Cooperation Council summit in the kingdom on Tuesday.

The day before the summit, Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Ahmad Nasser Al-Sabah had announced on state television that a deal had been reached to "open the airspace and land and sea borders between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the State of Qatar".

Qatar Airways and Saudi Airlines announced Saturday on Twitter that they would begin resuming flights between their countries from Monday.

Only a trickle of cars arrived at the palm tree-lined, whitewashed land border post to make the short crossing into Saudi Arabia after news broke that the frontier had reopened.

A smaller number made the journey from the kingdom into Qatar, where strict measures to fight the spread of the novel coronavirus have been imposed.

"I'm very happy the border is open again," said Qatari Jaber al-Marri, as he approached a checkpoint in his Land Cruiser SUV, adding that he had loved ones in the neighbouring kingdom.

"A lot of Qataris have relatives in Saudi Arabia," he said, holding a negative coronavirus test report. "The coming days will be better."

Qatar has announced strict coronavirus control measures for those arriving from Saudi Arabia.

Doha will require travellers to present a negative coronavirus test, undergo another test at the frontier and quarantine in a government-approved hotel for one week.

A helicopter belonging to the Qatari health service shuttled supplies between Doha and the border, an AFP correspondent reported. As it was the weekend, cargo haulage did not appear to have resumed.

Qatari Hamad al-Marri, who also drove a Land Cruiser, said he was excited to go hunting with falcons in Saudi Arabia, a popular Persian Gulf pastime.

"I'll take a fortnight holiday there," he said. "I will go hunting and visit my friends, whom we have not seen for more than three and a half years."

"I'll be reunited with my family," he added. "Everybody is happy that we can go to Mecca and Medina."



India Detains Chinese Soldier At Flashpoint Border

NEW DELHI (AFP) - Indian forces have detained a Chinese soldier on the disputed Himalayan frontier where the world's two most populous countries fought a deadly battle last year, the military said Saturday.

It is the second detention on the high altitude border since the pitched battles in June in which 20 Indian soldiers and an unknown number of Chinese troops were killed.

Both sides have since poured tens of thousands of troops and heavy weaponry into the tension zone in the Ladakh region, currently in the grip of freezing winter temperatures.

The Indian army said in a statement that the People's Liberation Army soldier was "apprehended" on the Indian side of the Line of Actual Control, as the border is known, in the early hours of Friday and taken into custody.

"The PLA soldier is being dealt with as per laid down procedures, and circumstances under which he had crossed the LAC are being investigated," the statement added.

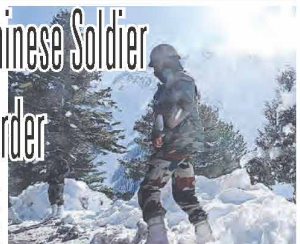
Another Chinese soldier was briefly held by Indian forces in the same region in October.

India and China have disputed their frontier for seven decades and fought a brief war in 1962. The two sides blame each other for the current standoff.

The neighbors have held several rounds of disengagement talks but failed to ease the military buildup.

India's foreign ministry said Friday that the two sides have agreed to a new round of talks between senior commanders.

"In the meantime, both sides have maintained communication at the ground level to avoid any misunderstandings and misjudgements," it said in a statement.



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Shanon (adviser)

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Fully Furn

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Total to Keep Renewables Energy Investments in 2021

PARIS (Reuters) - Total will be as active in adding renewable energy assets in 2021 as it was last year, Chief Executive Patrick Pouyanne told an Oddo BHF conference. Total is trying to reduce its dependence on oil and shift towards electricity and renewable energy. It aims to have 35 gigawatts (GW) of gross renewable energy generation capacity by 2025 from around 9 GW now. Pouyanne said the investment budget for electricity and renewables would surpass \$2 billion in 2021.021, says CEO



OPEC Crude Output Cuts Should Help U.S. Shale Profits in 2021

HOUSTON (Reuters) - A decision by OPEC and allied countries to cut crude production through March delivered a late Christmas present for U.S. shale firms that have slashed costs, but any rise in prices spurred by the unexpected move may be just a modest stocking stuffer. U.S. crude oil production has fallen 2 million barrels per day in the last year as low prices and demand forced shale producers to cut their losses. Investors had already been pressuring the industry to curb spending and boost returns before the pandemic hit. Shale output was quickly cut, but might return quickly if prices keep rising. On Tuesday, Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest oil exporter, said it would voluntarily reduce its production by 1 million barrels per day (bpd) in February and March, after Russia pushed to increase output, worried about U.S. shale capitalizing on the group's cuts.

Russia and Kazakhstan will increase their output, reluctant to cede market share to the United States. Overall, OPEC+ had been due to restore 500,000 bpd in each of the two months. Saudi officials were concerned new increases would outpace demand during new coronavirus lockdowns. Prices for West Texas Intermediate on Friday topped \$52 per barrel, and the 12-month futures' price, which producers use to plan spending on new wells, hit \$51.37 a barrel, up from \$44.63 at the start of December. Higher crude prices will fall directly to U.S. producers' bottom lines given recent cost cuts and commitments to keeping output flat. Companies pledged to keep production flat and use any price increases to boost investor returns or pay down debt.

Rising prices in recent years have "tended to be a bit of a mirage," said Thomas Jordan, chief executive of Cimarex Energy. "We're going to be highly disciplined in setting a budget," he added at a Goldman Sachs conference on Thursday.

In top two U.S. shale fields, oil and gas companies are profitable in the \$30 per barrel to low \$40s per barrel range, according to data firm Rystad Energy. This year's higher prices could push the shale group's cash from operations up by 32%, Rystad said.

Another factor that will benefit producers is low oilfield service costs. Excess capacity at the companies that provide fracking sand and services cut fees and have not been able to raise them.

"Margins are terrible," said Chris Wright, chief executive of Liberty Oilfield Services, the second-biggest fracking company in North America. "They're slightly better now they were six months ago, but they're still terrible."

Liberty has kept existing customers through the pandemic, but pricing remains so low it has not made sense to go after new clients. Demand for fracking services is improving but falls short of levels that would boost U.S. shale production, he said. Shale producers historically lifted production budgets with rising oil prices, said Linda Htein, senior research manager at consultancy Wood Mackenzie. But "this time is maybe a little bit different" because global demand remains uncertain, she said.

Airbus Keeps Top Spot Despite 34% Drop in 2020 Jet Deliveries

PARIS (Reuters) - Airbus delivered 566 aircraft in 2020, maintaining its crown as the world's largest planemaker for a second year as U.S. rival Boeing remained mired for most of that period in the grounding of its 737 MAX, company data showed. Deliveries from the European planemaker fell 34% from a record 863 in 2019 as the coronavirus crisis hit air travel demand. The announcement confirms a Reuters report on Tuesday that Airbus had delivered more than 560 aircraft in 2020, beating an internal target.

Airbus sold a net total of 268 aircraft after adjusting for cancellations, down from 768 in 2019.



Boeing delivered 118 jets between January and November and had a negative total of 454 net orders before accounting adjustments, giving Airbus an unassailable lead for the year. MAX deliveries resumed in December.

Cancellations for Airbus jets included 10 A350 wide-body jets on order from troubled Malaysian carrier AirAsia X.

In total Airbus lost orders for 26 wide-body jets, reflecting a continued severe slowdown in intercontinental travel - expected to be the slowest travel industry segment to recover from the pandemic.

Airbus is planning a summit meeting with major suppliers in the coming days, amid mounting speculation that it may have to delay planned jet output increases as Europe faces a resurgent coronavirus crisis, industry sources said.

Azerbaijan Keen to Promote Bilateral Trade With Pakistan

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Ambassador of Azerbaijan Ali Alizada said on Saturday that his country was keen to further promote bilateral trade with Pakistan as both countries have tremendous scope to enhance trade and economic cooperation in many fields.

He said that Azerbaijan and Pakistan enjoyed excellent relations at political level, but trade and economic relations were not matching with them, therefore, there was a great need to focus on promoting trade relations that would yield highly beneficial results for the economies of both countries.

He was addressing the business community during his visit to Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI).

Ali Alizada said that the people of Azerbaijan have great love for Pakistan and feel comfortable in doing business with it, therefore, Pakistan should seriously consider to expand trade cooperation with it. He said that Azerbaijan has signed free trade agreements with 10 countries of the region including Russia, therefore, by investing in Azerbaijan and increasing trade cooperation with it, Pakistani investors could promote exports to all these regional countries.

He said that Covid-19 pandemic has caused some slowdown in trade activity between the two countries, but after the coronavirus was over, bilateral trade was expected to get a boost.

He said that Azerbaijan was interested in developing railways links and direct flights with Pakistan soon after the end of Covid-19.

He identified agriculture, industry, tourism, mining, hospitality and defense as potential areas of bilateral cooperation between Azerbaijan and Pakistan. The envoy said that Pakistani pharma companies have huge potential in his country and they should set up manufacturing plants in Azerbaijan.

He said that Azerbaijan was establishing a free economic zone next to the port of Baku and Pakistani investors should explore JVs and investment in this facility.

He said that an online business forum between the two countries was planned in March and said that Pakistani business community should attend it to explore business collaboration with the counterparts of Azerbaijan.

He said that ICCI should take a delegation to Azerbaijan to explore its market and he would cooperate in connecting them with right partners in his country.

Speaking at the occasion, Sardar Yasir Ilyas Khan, President ICCI said that the bilateral trade of around US\$ 16-17 million between Pakistan and Azerbaijan was quite nominal given the actual potential of both countries and more serious efforts were needed from both sides to improve it.

Top Investment Banks Upgrade Economic Outlook for S. Korea

SEOUL (Dispatches) - Top global investment banks (IB) forecast the South Korean economy to grow 3.4 percent this year, up by 0.1 percentage point from their previous estimate.

Credit Suisse upgraded its estimate by 0.7 percentage point to 3.6 percent and HSBC by 0.5 percentage point to 2.7 percent.

Others surveyed in late December, Barclays, BoA-Merrill Lynch, JP Morgan, Citi, Goldman Sachs, Nomura Securities, and UBS, have retained their previous projections ranging from 3 percent to 4.1 percent.

UBS gave the rosiest outlook of 4.1 percent.

South Korea's Ministry of Economy and Finance recently forecasted a 3.2 percent growth, while the Bank of Korea gave a 3 percent outlook.

The average 2021 outlook for the global economy stood at 5.7 percent.

The forecast for China was an 8.4 percent growth, while the U.S. was given a 4.4 percent growth outlook. Japan is expected to grow 3 percent.



German Economic Data Belie Virus Gloom

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Figures released by Germany's Federal Statistics Office revealed that the country's economy performed better than expected in November, raising hopes that Europe's largest economy may be showing signs of having come through the storm of the novel coronavirus in better shape than forecast.

The country was still in partial lockdown at the time and retail sales had been expected to

fall, but largely driven by online shopping and people investing in home improvements, they in fact went up by 1.9 percent. The year's overall retail growth now is expected to be around 4 percent, an improvement on 2019's total of 3.2 percent.

Germany's retail performance is in contrast with the overall eurozone retail sales, which dropped 6.1 percent in the same month, the steepest fall since April when the first wave of lockdowns was fully underway.

The country's delivery and online retail enjoyed a highly successful month, with year-on-year revenue up by almost one-third, and people spending more time at home resulted in a 15.4 percent increase in expenditure on building materials, household appliances and decorative products.

"The apparent resilience of the German economy in late 2020 bodes well for the new year," Berenberg chief economist Holger Schmieding told the Bloomberg news agency. "Despite a likely setback early this year, we look for a strong rebound starting no later than April."

More encouragement came from unemployment figures, with the Federal Labor Agency reporting a fall of 37,000 year-on-year for December, at a time when numbers were expected to rise.

Economic performance was also helped by a seventh consecutive month of increased industrial orders, which ING economist Carsten Brzeski said was supported by demand from Asia's recovering economies. End-of-year stockpiling ahead of the Brexit deadline was also a possible contributory factor.

Lebanon Central Bank Says No Currency Float Before IMF Agreement



BEIRUT (Reuters) - Lebanon's central bank governor Riad Salameh told Reuters the country's currency would not be floated unless an agreement with the International Monetary Fund was reached.

Asked whether the currency price would be determined by the market - after remarks made in an interview with France24 where he said the era of the dollar peg was finished - Salameh said the matter was dependent on negotiations with the IMF.

"It is all contingent to the IMF," he said. The admission of the currency peg's demise was a first from the central bank governor, who had spent years upholding the rate that crashed in 2019 by 80% on the parallel market.

But Salameh said floating the currency would have to be accompanied by many other reforms.

"The departure from the peg to a floating system should come within a general program enhancing confidence and under the agreement with the IMF," he said.

Reforms including budget deficit reduction and negotiations with creditors after the country's default to reassure markets with confidence and fresh liquidity were necessary, he added.

Lebanon is grappling with a deep economic and financial crisis that has hammered the currency, spread poverty and prompted a sovereign debt default.

An insolvent banking system, which had lent more than two-thirds of its assets to the central bank and state, has shut out all depositors from their dollar accounts.

Talks with the IMF stalled last year when Lebanese government officials, bankers and political parties could not agree over how big the losses were in the financial system and who should bear them.

The IMF said in December it was committed to helping Lebanon, but that the country was in need of a coherent fiscal framework and a credible strategy to rehabilitate its banking sector.

Iranian Animation Awarded At Film Festival of Jordan

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iranian "Haboob" directed by Mahsa Samani received the award for the best short animation at the 11th Karame Human Rights Film Festival in Amman, Jordan.

The cinematic work narrates the story of a man and his daughter, who are accustomed to living in harmony and peace with nature, the synopsis of the animation said.

All of sudden some incidents take place and make the characters fade away, it further added.

The 9-minute artwork competed at the event held online.



EU Hits Turkey With Steel Sanctions Amid Dumping Probe

ANKARA (Dispatches) - The EU has announced that it will impose tariffs on hot-rolled iron and steel products from Turkey starting on Jan. 8 following an anti-dumping investigation.

Turkey was once the top provider of finished steel products into Europe until the EU introduced safeguards in 2018 to protect manufacturers.

A complaint that was lodged by the European steel association EUROFER on March 31 last year over the low pricing of Turkish hot-rolled coil imports into the EU resulted in a probe that was launched in May.

The complaint contained sufficient evidence of dumping and the resulting economic damage.

A separate anti-subsidy investigation against Turkish iron and steel products is also ongoing.

The new tariffs that were announced by the EU on Turkish products vary between 4.8 percent and 7.6 percent. They will target companies including Erdemir, Isdemir, Colakoglu Metalurji and Borcelik Habas, and will be applied for six months until the investigation concludes.

Istanbul-based Erdemir Group is Turkey's largest integrated steel producer.

But the higher duties are expected to lower the profit margins of Turkish companies and discourage them from competition in Europe.

According to the complaint, Turkish exporters increased their market share from 2.8 percent to 8.1 percent in 2019 by undercutting established market prices.

Last year, Turkey exported about \$3 billion of hot-rolled steel to the EU, according to data from Turkey's Steel Exporters' Association.

Aydin Sezer, an expert on customs policy, says the European move 'is not politically motivated and only aims to compensate for Turkish product dumping last year.'

According to Aydin Sezer, an expert on customs policy, the European move is "not politically motivated" and only aims to compensate for Turkish product dumping last year.

"It has technical and judicial basis. It will not prevent foreign trade with European countries, but it will make it more costly and could limit Turkish mill exports to a certain extent," he told Arab News.

Sezer said that the decision will allow Brussels to discipline Turkish players and protect against potential dumping attempts.



Last May, Turkey informed the World Trade Organization that it could inflict customs duties on steel imports from the EU in retaliation.

Trade authorities in Ankara have yet to release a statement on how Turkey will respond to the EU decision.

In 2018, the US raised tariffs by up to 50 percent on steel imports from Turkey, citing national security reasons, causing major losses for Turkish steel exporters and pushing Ankara to retaliate by applying equal tariffs on some imported products from the US.

Last year, the coronavirus pandemic hit several industrial sectors in Turkey, including the steel sector, which halted production in April, resulting in a sharp drop in the country's crude steel output. Turkey's construction sector, normally the largest steel-using industry in the country, is expected to contract further.

Rising EU protectionist measures in Turkey's main export market have also worsened the domestic steel market outlook.

Turkey's steel sector, vulnerable to exchange rate fluctuations and variations in global trade patterns, is mainly dependent on steel product exports and normally exports 50 percent of its total output each year.

20% Uranium...

FROM PAGE 1

Almost all of the world know that Iran and P5+1 after several rounds of talks finally reached an agreement in July 2014 and signed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) for settling the nuclear issue between Iran and the world community. The JCPOA caused Iran hurriedly to fulfill all of its obligations stipulated in the agreement out of its illogical trust to the West and especially to the P5+1 and it weakened the country's national pride and authority by filling the Arak Heavy Water Facility with cement, and sat with hand under the chin waiting for the West's actions; but the West performed a fraudulent scenario which had been planned in camera between Europe and the U.S.



The U.S. presidential election in 2016 announced Donald Trump as the winner and new U.S. President and he in the short time left the JCPOA on the pretext that the JCPOA did not meet his demands and Europeans continued his path of not observing the obligations stipulated in the JCPOA through running with the hare and hunt with the hounds. Although the JCPOA was considered one document and all parties were obliged to carry out it and fulfill the stipulated obligations according to the international laws, it seemed that the outlook of both sides of the agreement had totally changed after the change in the White House from Barack Obama to Trump.

The Islamic Republic and especially those fronts in the country who had pinned hopes on the JCPOA from pro-West relation reformists to Kargozaran (Executives of Construction) Party accused of being Anglo-Saxonism and known as moderates in power, looked at the JCPOA as a key for return of a "flourishing Iran" and moderation of the religious thoughts in the country, as the West likes, and its materialization, and they essentially did not believe in the Islamic Republic of Iran which was advancing resistance strategy in the Middle East.

The second government of President Hassan Rouhani after two years of talks had reached the nuclear deal and signed the JCPOA. In his and his pro-West team's views, the nuclear deal was presented as a "key" to resolving all extensive economic woes of the country. The market and the public in the Islamic Republic of Iran, after two years and with suffering unbearable cost and watching the results of the talks and the promises that the government had given to the public based on its childish optimism, were waiting that by return of foreign investments to the country and undoing the banking and trade locks the country would come out of recession and move towards boom but all calculations went wrong and the JCPOA was considered as a deceit that with cooperation of state elements and exposure of some spies in collaboration with the West became useless and costly.

That Iran gradually and wisely is coming out of its JCPOA obligations and returns to the pre-JCPOA condition, indeed, it turns into a wrong tool for propaganda. For example, Spokeswoman for Russian Foreign Ministry Maria Zakharova on Tuesday, January 5, said, "Iran's resumption of uranium enrichment to 20% is a departure from the Comprehensive Joint Plan of Action for the Iranian nuclear program."

Of course it is not a wrong analysis. In fact, she as an official in the Russian Foreign Ministry in her interview with Russian news agency TASS clarifies her views and says, "This question has nothing to do with Iran's compliance with its obligations under the Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement or the Nuclear Weapons Non-Proliferation Treaty. From this standpoint there are no claims to make against the Iranian side. All material enriched to 20% remains under the IAEA control. The Agency has not exposed any attempts to use it for undeclared purposes that might contradict the NPT."

But this Iran's official stand on resumption of uranium enrichment to 20% purity has turned into a tool in the hands of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (PGCC) and it has issued statement in opposition to this Iran's move and has stirred the Iranophobia. Of course, Iran's Foreign Ministry Spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh on Thursday had an appropriate reaction deservng the (P) GCC and in response to some of the leaders of the PGCC, who had called Iran's nuclear program a serious threat to the peace in the region and the world, he accused them of old project of "Iranophobia" that they still continue.

As I have earlier quoted, the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution said, "If they return to their commitments, we will return to ours, as well." Leaving the JCPOA commitments by the Islamic Revolution of Iran and return to uranium enrichment to 20% purity does not mean absolute departure from the JCPOA and as long as the West does not fulfill its commitments, uranium enrichment to 20% purity is our indisputable right."

U.S. Natural Gas Prices Hit Lowest In Decades in 2020

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Milder weather and decreased demand resulted in U.S. natural gas spot prices averaging in 2020 the lowest in decades, since at least 1997, data from the Energy Information Administration (EIA) showed.

Early in 2020, demand for heating was lower than usual due to milder winter weather, while declining demand with lower economic activity during the pandemic dragged down consumption, production, and spot prices of natural gas for the remainder of the year. The average spot price of natural gas at the Henry Hub, the U.S. benchmark was \$2.05 per million British thermal units (MMBtu) in 2020.

The spot price hit record lows in the first half of 2020 due to mild winter early in the year and depressed demand later on with the pandemic. The average monthly Henry Hub spot price in the first six months of 2020 was \$1.81/MMBtu. Monthly prices reached as low as \$1.63 per MMBtu in June, the lowest monthly inflation-adjusted price since at least 1989, according to EIA estimates. The monthly average Henry Hub price was less than \$2/MMBtu in each month from February through June. Before 2020, the Henry Hub price had averaged less than \$2/MMBtu in just one month—March 2016, the EIA said last summer.

At the start of 2021, natural gas prices jumped by 3.5 percent on Monday due to expectations of colder weather and projected higher demand for heating. Gas demand for the week January 6 through 12 is expected to be low, according to NatGasWeather, with demand seen rising over the weekend, but lighter again around the middle of next week as much of the U.S. wams back above normal.

U.S. Slammed...

FROM PAGE 1

Hashd al-Sha'abi works under the command of the Iraqi Armed Forces, and Fayyadh is a government figure and a national fighter, Hamoudi said.

He also asked the Iraqi government to take a decisive stance against the U.S. move.

Separately, Iraqi National Security Adviser Qasim al-Araji also took to Twitter to advise the U.S. Treasury to correct its mistake, because Fayyadh "should not be on the sanctions lists."

The Lebanese Hezbollah resistance movement, in a statement, condemned the US sanctions against the PMU leader. It said the new sanctions should be added to a series of continued US crimes against the Iraqi government and people.

The political office of Yemen's Ansarullah movement also denounced the US measure, saying it was yet another "hostile act" against Iraq and its people, which will be added to America's record of animosity toward the Arab nation. The Ansarullah movement voiced confidence that the sanctions would not affect the Iraqi people's will to free their homeland and drive the occupying forces out of their country.

Oman Begins Implementing Value-Added Tax in April

MUSCAT (Dispatches) - The Tax Authority today issued three executive decisions pertaining to the implementation of the Value Added Tax (VAT), which will enter enforcement stage by April 16, 2021, according to the Oman News Agency, which has revealed that 94 mostly food items have been exempted from tax.

Oman's Ministry of Finance stressed that the implementation of this tax is estimated to generate over \$780m, thus helping fill the budget deficit.

The first decision specified that registration to the Tax Authority becomes compulsory if the taxpayer's annual supplies stand at \$100,000 or more or are expected to reach this ceiling.

The decision set the ceiling of voluntary registration to the Tax Authority at \$50,000 and states that, accordingly, the taxpayer may apply for voluntary registration if the applicant's annual supplies stand at, or cross or expected to go beyond the value of \$50,000.

Determining ceilings for compulsory and optional registration comes within the context of the provisions

of the GCC Unified VAT Agreement, which the Sultanate signed in November 2016.

The second decision states that taxpayers whose value of annual supplies crosses or is expected to cross \$2,600 have to register to the Tax Authority during the period from Feb.1 2021 to March 15, 2021. Accordingly, the VAT for this segment becomes applicable from April 16, 2021.

As for taxpayers whose value of supplies crosses or is expected to cross \$1,300, their registration begins from April and the deadline of registration will be July 1, 2021. The deadlines of lower segments follow a similar slope (per volume of supplies) till the minimum level of \$100,000 worth supplies.

The decision grants taxpayers a right to register voluntarily to the Tax Authority with effect from Feb. 1, 2021 in case the value of their supplies crosses or is expected to cross \$50,000. In order to ensure that the small and medium-sized business sectors that wish to register the VAT system are not affected, and can take advantage of the generated benefits, such as the refund of the tax right bore on their proceeds.

New Bill...

FROM PAGE 1

A candidate is known as a 'manager' who has the necessary competencies and skills in the field of senior management of the country and with sufficient knowledge of the human and material resources of the country and able to use the capacity to achieve the goals of the Islamic Revolution and benefit from successful experience and records in the field of macro-management.

The note of this paragraph also states:

Having records related to the fight against poverty, corruption, and discrimination, merit selection, having jihadi-style and group work spirit, sensitivity to the treasury, dealing with violations and deviations, and the spirit of accepting criticisms and responding to the Guardian Council are among the characteristics of being a 'manager' at the Islamic Republic of Iran's level.

The criteria for being 'resourceful' are:

A candidate is known as a 'resourceful' person who can identify the issues and needs of the country and adopt appropriate solutions and make major decisions by anticipating the threats and opportunities of the country.

In December, the Parliament dismissed a proposal that high-ranking military commanders should not be allowed to run for presidential election.

Trump...

FROM PAGE 1

On the recent movements by the US military in the Persian Gulf, Takht-Ravanchi dismissed the moves as "mischievous" and said Iran should be ready to counter possible threats, but anticipated no new act of adventurism.

In recent months, Washington has taken provocative measures that exacerbated the already tense situation with Tehran. It has flown B-52 bombers over the Persian Gulf, dispatched a nuclear-powered submarine to the region, and extended the stay of an aircraft carrier as a warning to the Islamic Republic.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the Iranian ambassador argued that there is not much difference between the Democrats and Republicans when it comes to their foreign policy.

"For instance, the use of sanctions against Iran has continued under both Democratic and Republican administrations in the US," he said. "Hence, to say that the new administration will abandon the use of sanctions may not reflect reality." Takht-Ravanchi pointed to Trump's humiliating actions towards European leaders and his harsh policies toward China, saying while the administration of President-elect Joe Biden may be more subtle in its conduct, it will not completely change course.

"We will see a series of policies that may be different on the surface, but they are, deep down, a continuation of the same policies and there will be no U-turn in this regard," the envoy predicted.

Tommy Ford Suffers Heavy Fall

ZURICH (Dispatches) - American skier Tommy Ford was the victim of a heavy crash during the World Cup giant slalom at Adelboden on Saturday.

The 31-year-old hit a gate in the steep final part of the course, landing on his head and coming to rest tens of metres down the slope.

Medical officers were quickly on the scene with the skier from Oregon helicoptered off the slope 20 minutes later.

LICENCE HOLDER: SOKHAN GOSTAR INSTITUTE

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

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Avalanche Kills Three at Russian Arctic Ski Resort

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Three people were killed after an avalanche swept through a ski resort outside the Arctic city of Norilsk overnight, Russian investigators said Saturday.

The Investigative Committee, which probes major crimes, said it was notified at 00:30 local time (1730 GMT) that an avalanche had buried four buildings under snow at the Otdelnaya Gora ski complex in the town of Talnakh, 25 kilometres (16 miles) north of Norilsk.

Man Utd Get Past Watford and Into FA Cup Fourth Round

LONDON (Dispatches) - Scott McTominay celebrated captaining Manchester United for the first time by scoring the only goal in a 1-0 FA Cup third-round victory against Watford on Saturday.

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer made nine changes to his team, who could go top of the Premier League on Tuesday, when they take on Burnley.

The home side started strongly at an empty Old Trafford, with Daniel James impressive on the left side of the attack, and were rewarded when McTominay gave them the lead in the fifth minute.

The Scotland international, who recently scored two early goals against Leeds, headed downwards from an Alex Telles corner and the ball went in off the post.

United were largely in control and Juan Mata saw an effort saved following a fluent team move and sumptuous flick by Donny van de Beek.

But McTominay's header proved the only goal of a first half in which Watford threatened intermittently. Adam Masina's effort was blocked by a mixture of United goalkeeper Dean Henderson and Axel Tuanzebe.

The opening period ended with United defender Eric Bailly being replaced by Harry Maguire after he was clattered by team-mate Henderson.

The second half at Old Trafford was dull and uneventful, with Watford failing to create clear-cut chances to threaten.

Solskjaer threw on Marcus Rashford and Anthony Martial with just over 20 minutes to go but United were unable to extend their lead.

"The most important thing in the cup is that you go through, so that will make everyone happy, but the first 15-20 minutes I think were the highlights of our game, Solskjaer told the BBC.

"I think we played some very good stuff, created chances and then we let them back into the game but we are through." He said the multiple changes allowed his fringe players to make a case for themselves and achieve match fitness.

"We will need all of them over the season and that was part of the reason we made changes," he added.

Meanwhile Emile Smith-Rowe and Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang scored in extra time as Mikel Arteta's side began their FA Cup defence with a hard-fought 2-0 victory over Newcastle United in the third round at Emirates Stadium on Saturday.



After arriving as a second-half substitute, Smith-Rowe had a red card rescinded for a tackle on Sean Longstaff in stoppage time following a VAR review.

The 20-year-old midfielder went on the score the opener as he latched on to a ball from Alexandre Lacazette inside the box before slipping it past Newcastle goalkeeper Martin Dubravka.

Aubameyang also found the net from close range in the final minutes of extra time to extend Arsenal's winning run to four games in all competitions.

"I was really happy, a bit of a relief for me with the incident before," Smith-Rowe told the BBC. "It definitely wasn't intentional - happy to get the goal and get through to the next round.

"We knew how tough it was going to be, they're a tough opponent. It was about breaking them down. It shows how together we are, we have been working off the pitch to get closer as a group and it shows."

Arsenal, who have lifted the FA Cup a record 14 times, have failed to progress to the fourth round just once in the last quarter of a century.

Arsenal created the majority of the chances through forwards Aubameyang and Nicolas Pepe but the hosts were denied an opening in 90 minutes at the Emirates Stadium.

Striker Andy Carroll missed the target for the visitors from inside the six-yard box in the 56th minute before his efforts on goal in stoppage time were brilliantly blocked by Arsenal goalkeeper Bernd Leno.

Gasanova Stuns Ex-Number One Pliskova In Abu Dhabi

ABU DHABI (Dispatches) - Russian qualifier and world number 292 Anastasia Gasanova sent former top-ranked Karolina Pliskova crashing out of the season-opening Abu Dhabi WTA event on Saturday in a straight sets triumph.

The 21-year-old Gasanova won 6-2, 6-4 to reach the round of 16 and record her first ever victory over a player in the top 100.

Gasanova, making her main draw debut, needed just 73 minutes to see off the third seed.

"I'm really surprised, but when I woke up today, I thought, 'Why not? Why can't I win this match?'," said Gasanova.

"Actually, I had thought I would lose in qualities or something like that, but I just kept pushing myself, like, I need to win and I want to win."

Gasanova goes on to face Spain's Sara Sorribes Tormo for a place in the quarter-finals.

Ukrainian second seed Elina Svitolina eased past Russian veteran and two-time Grand Slam runner-up Vera Zvonareva 6-4, 6-1.

Greece's Maria Sakkari, seeded nine, defeated US teenager Coco Gauff 7-5, 6-2.

Messi Revival Continues as Barca Thrash Granada

MADRID (Dispatches) - Lionel Messi is back in form and Barcelona are finding their feet after a 4-0 demolition of Granada on Saturday put them within four points of the top of La Liga.

Messi scored twice to make it four goals in three matches since the turn of the year and his resurgence has coincided with an upturn for the team too, this victory Barca's third on the bounce. It puts them in sight of league leaders Atletico Madrid, even if Diego Simeone's side now have three games in hand.

Atletico's match against Athletic Bilbao earlier on Saturday was postponed due to the snowstorm that has engulfed Spain this weekend.

Messi's double, the second a sweetly-struck free-kick, came between two strikes from Antoine Griezmann, who is also enjoying a revival after a disappointing 18 months at Camp Nou.

Pinturault Cruises to Second Giant Slalom at Adelboden



He replicated his dominance on Friday at the Swiss resort to register his 33rd win on the circuit, finishing a gaping 1.26sec clear of Croatia Filip Zubcic who took the runner-up position for the second day running.

In third came local hope Loic Meillard at 1.65sec.

Pinturault, the two-time Olympic bronze medalist in the discipline, extended his lead in the overall standings to 115 points from the reigning champion Aleksander Aamodt Kilde, fifth.

ZURICH (Dispatches) - France's Alexis Pinturault brushed aside his rivals to claim his second World Cup giant slalom in the space of 24 hours at Adelboden on Saturday.

The first run was marked by a heavy crash sustained by US skier Tommy Ford. The 31-year-old hit a gate in the steep final part of the course, landing on his head and coming to rest tens of metres down the slope.

Medical officers were quickly on the scene with the skier from Oregon helicoptered off the slope 20 minutes later.

When the first run resumed half an hour later Meillard set the fastest time ahead of eventual winner Pinturault.

It was the third giant slalom victory for Pinturault in Adelboden, his first coming four years ago.

It was also his third giant slalom win in a row after he picked up right where he left off before the holiday break after also dominating in Alta Badia.

Milan Bounce Back to Extend Serie A Lead

MILAN (Dispatches) - Zlatan Ibrahimovic returned from injury, coming off the bench for a late cameo appearance, as AC Milan defeated Torino 2-0 on Saturday to extend their lead at the top of Serie A.

Last weekend, champions Juventus ended Milan's 27-match unbeaten run in the league dating back to March.

But Rafael Leao's goal and a Franck Kessie penalty in the first half ensured AC Milan moved four points ahead of Inter Milan who travel to third-placed Roma on Sunday.

Ibrahimovic started on the bench, having been out of action since scoring a double against Napoli on November 22, with a thigh injury and then a calf problem.

"We had a clear programme, if Ibrahimovic passed the last test yesterday he could have a small role as he did," said Milan coach Stefano Pioli.

The 39-year-old Swede, who scored 10 goals in six league games before injury, replaced Leao with five minutes to go in a game the hosts dominated against lowly Torino.

"The important thing is that the muscular problem is behind him, now we'll have to help him find his way back because he was out a long time," continued Pioli.

"He's such a strong player, a great stimulus for the whole team."

Leao opened the scoring on 25 minutes after Theo Hernandez combined with Brahim Diaz to send the Portuguese forward clear to beat Torino goalkeeper Salvatore Sirigu.

Kessie calmly slotted in the second from the penalty spot in the 36th minute after a VAR review judged Torino captain Andrea Belotti to have tripped Diaz.

Ricardo Rodriguez missed a chance to score for Torino against his former club, rattling the crossbar before the break, with Sirigu denying Kessie from close range.



Djokovic, Nadal, Serena To Quarantine in Adelaide, Not Melbourne

SYDNEY (Dispatches) - Tennis' top stars will quarantine in Adelaide rather than Melbourne and play an exhibition there ahead of the Australian Open, with the city also hosting a WTA event after the years' first Grand Slam, organizers said Saturday.

Some 1,270 players and support staff are due to arrive in Melbourne on charter flights late next week, where they will have to spend a mandatory 14 days in quarantine.

But with hotel rooms in the city scarce, Australian Open chief Craig Tiley said he had approached the South Australian government about taking some of them.

Matters were further complicated when a hotel in Melbourne that was due to accommodate players pulled out on Tuesday, reportedly because of concerns from residents.

With little benefit to Adelaide from putting its community at risk of coronavirus by housing players, an exhibition featuring the top names in the game was suggested as an enticement.

"It would be a benefit if they played an exhibition tournament just before they came to Melbourne, so the premier (Steven Marshall) has agreed to host 50 people in a quarantine bubble and then have those players play an exhibition," Tiley told Tennis Channel.

An official statement announcing the January 29 exhibition said it would feature the world's top three men -- Novak Djokovic, Rafael Nadal and Dominic Thiem -- and two of the top three women in Simona Halep and Naomi Osaka.

World number one Ashleigh Barty was not included, but 23-time Grand Slam winner Serena Williams was, with two more players to be added to the field.

"The conditions of the quarantine will be the same (as Melbourne)," said Tiley, with players only allowed out of their rooms for five hours to practise and train in a bio-secure bubble.

Goggia Wins St Anton Downhill



ST ANTON (AFP) - Italy's Sofia Goggia won the women's World Cup downhill at St Anton in Austria on Saturday, her sixth victory in the discipline and her second this season.

The 28-year-old, who won the Olympic downhill in Pyeongchang in 2018, edged Austria's Tamara Tippler by 0.96secs with the American Breezy Johnson a further 0.08secs back in third.

Goggia, who also three career victories in Super G to her credit, now leads the discipline standings and is up to third in the overall standings, still 235 points behind leader Petra Vlhova.

Timed at 130 kilometres per hour, Goggia looks increasingly like the new queen of speed on the women's circuit, taking over the mantle from the American Lindsey Vonn, who retired two years ago.

Her compatriot Laura Pirovano, 23, scored the best result of her young career, as she finished fifth.

With her second place, Tippler clambered on to the downhill podium for the first time in her career, after five runners-up spots in Super-G.

Johnson finished third for the third time this season in downhill after two podium finishes at Val-d'Isere in December.

The Slovakian Vlhova kept up the pace at the top of the general classification with 12th place in one of her weaker events.

