

Spokeswoman for Iran's Ministry Of Health and Medical Education Sima Sadat Lari Announced Monday That 91 More Iranians Died of COVID-19 as the Death Toll Mounted to 56,262

IRAN NEWS

Spokesman of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) Said The Organization Will in a Technical Move Implement the Law of Strategic Measure Passed By Majlis to Remove the Sanctions

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Seoul Urged to Adopt Independent Attitude Towards Tehran

TEHRAN (MNA) - Stating that South Korea should have an independent attitude towards Iran, Iran's Governor of the Central Bank said that Iran will continue to pursue its rights and use of its assets in South Korea.

During the meeting with South Korean Deputy Foreign Minister Choi Jong-Kun, Abdolnaser Hemmati expressed hope for the results of these talks, saying, "The banks of South Korea have blocked our assets in this country for many years and do not assign the issue."

Stating that freezing our assets in South Korea is Iran's main challenge with this country, he said, "We had assets in other countries, and we used and had access to them despite U.S. sanctions. But we have not yet been able to access our assets in South Korea, which has been one of Iran's main trading partners."

He pointed to his visit to South Korea, saying, "A year and a half ago, I had talks with South Korean officials, including the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economy, about this issue, and they promised to help and cooperate, but unfortunately, it has not worked out yet."

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Iran Has Upper Hand in New Talks With Foreign Oil Companies



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN Oil Minister Bijan Zanganeh says Iran has progressed well during the sanctions era and gained self-sufficiency in the oil and gas fields and now it has upper hand for new talks with foreign oil and gas companies for cooperation.

Speaking in the signing ceremony of contracts for retaining and increasing oil output, Zanganeh said that if foreign oil and gas companies come to Iran, "We are ready to cooperate with them within the framework of stipulated terms and conditions."

Zanganeh reiterated that Iran is ready to cooperate and collaborate with foreign oil companies if they come back to the Islamic Republic of Iran.

"But we do not give up what we have achieved. We will clinch agreements with foreign oil and gas companies on a new basis within the framework of rules and regulations at a much more solid and higher level," he added.

Zanganeh emphasized that the capacities created in the sanctions period would be used optimally.

"The Oil Ministry will use its upper hand in conclusion of contracts with foreign companies under new terms and conditions," he said.

He went on to say that many capacities have been created in oil sector and Iran's progress in oil exports amid sanctions is not comparable with two years ago.

Zanganeh said that one percent increase in crude oil production co-efficiency which is 7 billion toman will bring about 300 billion-dollar revenue for the country.

Regarding the increase in the recycling co-efficiency, he said that \$1.2 billion worth of investment will be made for the current stage, 100,000 bpd will be added to the output and will bring about \$1.5 billion extra revenue a year. He noted that all the contracts have been signed with Iranian contractors and 72% equipment are domestically made.

Efforts have been made for creating jobs amid sanctions during which 14.5% of Oil Ministry shares have been destroyed. Earlier, he said that 11 billion dollars of revenues earned in the first boom of the petrochemical industry seven years ago, and in the second jump, the income is expected to reach 25 billion dollars at the end of the next Iranian year (March 20, 2021-March 20, 2022).

Iran had earned two billion dollars of the petrochemical industry in 1997 and the income reached 11 billion dollars in 2013, Zanganeh said. The revenue of petrochemical projects would increase to 25 billion dollars by March 20, 2022, he noted, adding that 37 billion dollars of income is expected by 2025.

Meanwhile the CEO of the National Iranian Oil Company said NIOC was planning to issue Rls 20,000b worth of bonds to finance projects aimed at production enhancement and maintenance of oil fields in Iran.

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Iran to Import COVID-19 Vaccines From India, China, Russia

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran plans to import some two million doses of AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccines from India, China, and Russia by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20).

"The Iranian-made vaccine is more reliable than many foreign-made vaccines, but it takes a long time to be approved. So, the health ministry plans to import some two million doses of vaccines from India, China, and Russia by the end of the year," IRNA quoted Mohammad-Reza Zafarghandi, head of the Iranian Medical Council, as saying on Monday.

Pfizer and Moderna vaccines were never on the agenda to be purchased by Iran due to their high prices, transportation problems, and the need to be kept extremely cold, Zafarghandi added.

"But, the AstraZeneca vaccine, which is produced by Sweden and only its scientific studies have been done in Britain's Oxford, can be purchased. Moreover, it is possible to be kept in Iran," he explained.

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Iran to Return to JCPOA Commitments the Day the West Returns

TEHRAN (IP) - Foreign Ministry Spokesman says that the day Europe and the United States return to fulfilling their commitments in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Iran will return to its commitments too.

Regarding the crash of the Ukrainian crashed plane and the remarks of the Secretary of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine and other countries, including Pompeo, Foreign Ministry Spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh offered his condolences, saying: "The word is absolutely incapable of expressing sympathy with their families."

Khatibzadeh stated: "Iran has jurisdiction on to prosecute the accused. Judicial proceedings are underway. According to the regulations, this issue is being seriously pursued. We had good talks in two rounds with Ukraine, where technical issues were discussed."

He added: "The third round was scheduled to take place in Ukraine in November 2020, but the Ukrainian side has not yet specified the exact date. Iran has been following this issue since the first day. According to Annex 13 of the Chicago Convention, we were required to submit our technical report one year after the incident. With seriousness in the Civil Aviation Organization, they did this and sent it both in the form of video conference and in a written format, and all the relevant countries confirmed their receipt."

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Exports to Iraq Rise Seven Percent

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Director-General of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) for the Arab and African Countries Farzad Piltan said on Monday that Iranian exports to Iraq rose seven percent from March to December stood at \$5.9 billion.

According to Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO), Piltan said on Monday that 23.6 percent of the import market in Iraq is held by Iran.

Highlighting efforts to increase Iran's share in the Iraqi market, he added that Trade Promotion Organization of Iran has for the first time dispatched a commercial attaché to the Iraqi city of Basra.

"Iran has the potential to experience a big rise in exports to Iraq," he added, citing the difficulty caused by U.S. sanctions for the Iranian trade relations.

Iran and Iraq Presidents have agreed to augment trade to \$20 billion a year and regarding the economic ties between Iran and the Iraqi Kurdistan Region in the time of Pandemic COVID-19, trade exchanges have continued with all the health protocols on the borders.

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Pakistan Says Iran Capable of Turning Into Regional Economic Power

PAKISTAN (Dispatches) - Pakistan's prime minister has expressed hope that the sanctions against Tehran will be lifted, saying the Islamic Republic of Iran has the capacity to turn into an economic power in the region.

At a recent meeting with top Pakistani media figures and researchers, Imran Khan lamented the impact of the U.S. sanctions on Iran, which were imposed after President Donald Trump withdrew from the historic Iran nuclear agreement in May 2018.

He said the bans have hampered the development of trade ties between Pakistan and Iran, IRNA reported on Monday.

"The Pakistani prime minister has on several occasions called for the lifting of US sanctions on Iran.

In March 2020, he urged Trump to lift the unilateral bans, in the midst of Iran's fight against the spread of the coronavirus, until the pandemic is over.

"I want to appeal to President Trump on humanitarian grounds to lift the sanctions against Iran till the COVID-19 pandemic is over," Khan said.

He added that at a time when "the people of Iran are facing untold suffering" the brutal US sanctions on the Islamic Republic "are crippling Iran's efforts to fight COVID-19."

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Houthi Say Reserve Right to Respond to U.S. Terrorist Designation

SANAA (Dispatches) - Yemen's Houthi Ansarullah movement has said the group is entitled to respond to any US move to designate them as a terrorist organization, hitting back at the U.S. administration of Donald Trump as "terrorist".

"America is the source of terrorism," Mohammed Ali al-Houthi, a member of Yemen's Supreme Political Council tweeted on Monday. "The Trump administration's policy and actions are terrorist. We reserve the right to respond to any designation issued by the Trump administration or any administration."

It came a day after U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced plans to designate the Houthi movement as a foreign terrorist group. "The Department of State will notify Congress of my intent to designate Ansarullah, sometimes referred to as the Houthis as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO)," Pompeo said in a statement on Sunday.

He added that he also intended to designate three Ansarullah leaders, namely Abdul Malik al-Houthi, Abd al-Khalik Badr al-Din al-Houthi, and Abdullah Yahya al-Hakim, as "Specially Designated Global Terrorists."

The United States plans to designate Yemen's Houthi Ansarullah movement as a foreign "terrorist" group on Monday, three sources have told Reuters. Speaking with Press TV, Political commentator Tim Anderson said the U.S. decision to designate the Ansarullah movement, which has been effectively the government of Yemen for the last five years, is aimed at justifying any form of aggression against Yemen.

"To call it terrorist is really to turn the meaning of the world upside down," said Anderson, who is the director of the Center for Counter Hegemonic Studies (CCHS) in Australia. "I think we're getting used to that, with the way the US views the world."

In another tweet on Monday, al-Houthi posted pictures of Yemeni children who were killed and starved as a result of the US-backed Saudi coalition's war against Yemen, criticizing the United States' "unbridled terrorism."

Houthi says the U.S. is massacring Yemeni people in order to keep productions at its major weapons manufacturing companies running and advance Israel's regional plots. Saudi Arabia has been leading a war on Yemen since March 2015, in hopes of reinstating former president Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi and destroying the Houthi movement.

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192 Iranian Cities Turn Blue Covid-19 Condition

TEHRAN (MNA) – According to the latest figures released by the Iranian Health Ministry, the declining trend of COVID-19 infections and deaths is continuing and by Mon. 192 cities have turned into Covid-19 blue condition.

The Ministry's spokesperson Sima Lari made the announcement on Monday, saying that 6,208 new cases were identified over the past 24 hours, bringing the country's total number of identified cases to 1,292,614.

Lari noted that 4,568 coronavirus patients are in critical condition, adding that 8.2 million tests have been conducted across the country to detect the infections so far.

National COVID Vaccine, Great Honor of Iranian People

TEHRAN (IP) – Judiciary Chief said that the national COVID vaccine was a great honor for the Iranian people, benefiting all nations after mass production.

At a meeting of the Judiciary High Council officials on Monday, Hojjatoleslam Seyyed Ebrahim Raisi stated that Iran was not a laboratory for American and British vaccines. He noted that the Leader of the Islamic Revolution's plan to boycott the American and British vaccines was to protect the people's lives against those who pursued their own interests regardless of human lives.

The first phase of human injection clinical studies of the first COVID vaccine developed by Iranian researchers called "COVO-Iran Barakat" began on December 29, 2020, on volunteers. The vaccine is to be injected into 56 volunteers in phase one within two months.

About the latest situation in the Ukrainian plane crash case, Raisi also pointed out



that there was no red line in pursuing the case.

Regarding all the hypotheses and claims, in this case, he noted that detailed expert, field, scene reconstruction, etc. investigations had been carried out.

On January 8, 2020, a passenger plane belonging to Ukrainian Airlines crashed near Tehran, killing 167 passengers and nine crew members.

Most of the passengers were Iranian nationals, and the 32 others had passports from five countries: Canada, Afghanistan, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, and Sweden.

Iran's judiciary chief also referred to the recent events in the United States and stated that these events manifest the oppressive structure of this country and their arrogant views of the people.

Assets Frozen Due to South Korea's Lack of Political Will



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's deputy foreign minister for political affairs has taken to task the government of South Korea for illegally freezing the Islamic Republic's assets over fear of the U.S. sanctions, warning that Seoul should not submit to the extortionist policies of the White House.

Abbas Araqchi made the remarks in a Sunday meeting with South Korea's visiting First Vice Foreign Minister Choi Jong-kun, who arrived in the Iranian capital, Tehran, earlier the same day.

"For about two and a half years, South Korean banks have illegally frozen Iran's foreign exchange assets over what they describe as fear of US sanctions. This measure, which is only due to submission to U.S. extortionist policies, is not acceptable," Iran's deputy foreign minister said.

Araqchi added that further expansion of relations between Tehran and Seoul would be only possible in the event that this problem is solved.

He pointed to various rounds of unfruitful negotiations held recently between representatives from Tehran, particularly the Central Bank of Iran, and Seoul, saying, "We believe that Iran's foreign exchange resources have been frozen in [South] Korea more due to lack of political will on the part of the South Korean government rather than the cruel sanctions by Washington."

He urged the South Korean diplomat to help find necessary solutions to the issue and make it a main priority in relations between the two countries.

Iranian authorities have said on several occasions that they expect South Korea to do more on the release of nearly \$8.5 billion blocked illegally in two South Korean banks under the pretext of US sanctions against the Islamic Republic.

Araqchi also pointed to the South Korean diplomat's demand for the release of a South Korean-flagged tanker impounded by the naval force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) and said the ship has been seized just because of technical reasons and polluting the Persian Gulf waters.

He added that Iran's Judiciary has launched investigations into the case, but recommended that South Korean officials to avoid politicizing the issue and allow a peaceful legal procedure to be carried out away from futile propaganda efforts.

Rabiei Condemns Assassination of Afghan Gov't Spokesman

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iranian Government Spokesman Ali Rabiei condemned a terrorist attack in Kabul that led to the death of three people, including an Afghan Government Spokesman Zia Wadan.

In a message on Monday, Rabiei wrote, "The assassination of the spokesman of the Afghan government and his entourage was a shocking news for the Iranian government and people."

"While extending our condolences to the Afghan nation, government, and the families of the victims of the attack, we strongly condemn this terrorist move," he added. He deplored the act of assassination as "a disgusting and unacceptable means to achieve political goals that will have no effect other than reinforcing the vicious circle of insecurity and violence, adding, "We assure our brothers and sisters in Afghanistan that we will stand by them in the fight against terrorism, violence and occupation as long as necessary."

Zia Wadan, a spokesman for the Afghan Public Protection Force, was on his way to work during the morning rush hour on Sunday when a sticky bomb attached to his car went off, killing Wadan and two others.

There has been no immediate claim of responsibility for the attack.

Pfizer Vaccine Is Not Reliable

TEHRAN (IP) - The chairman of the Parliament Healthcare and Treatment Commission said that what the Leader has said about the U.S. and British corona vaccines is scientific, and there is no trust in the vaccines produced by these countries.

Hossein Shahriari stressed the importance of the Leader's emphasis on banning vaccines from the United States and Britain, adding that deaths may occur in some countries due to Pfizer's use of vaccines.

"If Pfizer vaccine works, Americans should try it on their own people first, not send it to others," he said.

"It is possible that the Americans and Western countries have made genetic changes in the corona vaccine sent to Iran," Shahriari said, noting that Western countries are not supplying drugs to Iran and how they want to send vaccines."

He said Iran would have good access to indigenous vaccines and that any vaccine needed would be produced in Iran.

Iranian Exemplary Exporters Honored

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran's 24th National Export's Day ceremony was held on Monday at the place of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) during which the country's top exporters were introduced and honored.

The ceremony was attended by senior officials including First Vice President Es'hag Jahangiri, Industry, Mining, and Trade Minister Alireza Razm Hosseni, ICCIMA board members, some MPs, and representatives of the private sector. This is the first time that the ICCIMA is directly in charge of selecting and introducing the country's top exporters.

According to ICCIMA Vice Chairman Ali Mollaei, one of the measures taken by the ICCIMA to select this year's top exporters was correspondence with private sector export organizations, chambers of commerce across the country, as well as joint chambers of commerce.

A working group comprised of the representatives from the Trade Promotion Organization (TPO), Industry Ministry, Agriculture Ministry, Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA), the Central Bank of Iran (CBI), Program and Budget Organization (PBO), Institute of Standards and Industrial Research of Iran, Iran Chamber of Cooperatives (ICC), and related organizations was also formed in this regard, the official explained.

After obtaining and determining the necessary criteria by the mentioned working group, public call for nominees were announced and applicants were registered. In the admission process, a total of 822 applicants applied for the title, of which 568 companies active in a variety of fields including industry, mining, agriculture, food, and services were finally registered, Mollaei added.

TPO was previously the main body in charge of evaluating and selecting the country's top exporters and ICCIMA only collaborated with the mentioned organization.

Tehran Province Unemployment Slashes to 6.7%

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Unemployment in Tehran Province has slashed to 6.8% in autumn, according to Tehran Province Governor-General Anoushiravan Mohseni-Bandpei.

Speaking to reporters on Monday, he said that the figure shows a 2.6% decline compared to the preceding period.

Given the continued reduction of unemployment rate in Tehran Province over the past three quarters of the year, the year-on-year unemployment rate of the province is expected to have a significant reduction at the end of the year, he said.

He said that an increase in providing the applicants with the necessary banking loans and a growth in issuance of construction licenses for creating production units have contributed to the reduction of unemployment.

Mohseni-Bandpei said that the province's unemployment rate in summer and spring has declined by 4.6% and 1.4% respectively compared to the preceding period.

Tehran, Kabul Agree to Develop Int'l Railway Link

TEHRAN (MNA) – Spokesperson for Iranian Parliament Civil Commission announced the approval of a draft agreement between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Afghanistan on international railway connection.

Seyyed Alborz Hosseini pointed to the agreement made between Iran and Afghanistan regarding the development of international railway link and said, "With the coordination made in this regard, details of a single article of the agreement was approved in 12 articles in the presence of a representative of the Iranian government and members of the Commission."

Upon approval of this agreement, the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Afghanistan reached an agreement due to the existence of friendly relations and good neighborliness in terms of international communication on lines to use capacities of two countries of Iran and Afghanistan in the field of exchanging goods and passenger, he added.

Iranians Rank First in Buying Real Estate in Turkey

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Official statistics released by Turkey show that Iranians have set a record in buying real estate in Turkey as they rank first in purchasing 6,425 real estates in this country in the first 11 months of 2020 which indicates 38 percent growth comparing to the same period in 2019.

Reports coming from Turkey show that purchase of real estate by foreigners in this country has declined by 9 percent but the official statistics show that Iranians have set record in buying real estate in this country.

Being granted with residence and citizenship with purchasing real estate are of the major incentives for attracting Iranian investors into Turkey's housing market. According to Turkey's law, foreign nationals by purchasing real estate worth \$250,000 or more can get residence and Turkish nationality. Since the approval of this law, purchase of real estate by foreign nations has experienced considerable boom.

Statistics show that in 2019, some 40,616 real estates have been purchased by foreign nationals but the figure has declined by 9 percent in 2020. Iraqis who ranked first in 2019 in buying real estate in Turkey lost their interests in 2020 and their purchase fell by 11 percent and lost the top place in rankings to Iranians whose purchases grew by 38 percent.

Ankara, Antalya and Bursa have been the top destinations for Iranians for purchasing the real estate in Turkey. They have bought 6,425 items of real estate in 11 months of 2020 according to the official statistics.

Tech Firm Supplies First Eye Surgery Simulator to Chinese Customer

TEHRAN (IFP) - A medical technology company in Iran has started marketing a patented device in other countries as a customer in China takes delivery of a first batch of its simulators that are used in ophthalmic surgeries.

Without naming the company, the IRIB News said that the Iranian-made simulator had already found its way into the market in China with the Iranian company being a first to export such high-tech medical devices to other countries.

Other reports suggested the device, marketed under the trade mark of OpSim, is an educational simulator used in eye surgeries, especially for operations involving cataract and glaucoma.

The device has been developed by SiMedix, a tech startup which operates as a branch of a larger government-backed science and technology company based in the Iranian capital Tehran.

The Iran University of Medical Sciences had approved the use of OpSim in one of its hospitals in Tehran in March 2018.

The IRIB News said the simulator has also been marketed in countries like India, Singapore, Turkey and Russia and exports would be possible if administrative hurdles are cleared.

Iranian High-Tech Firms Due in Armenia To Discuss Further Cooperation

TEHRAN (IFP) - As many as 20 Iranian knowledge-based companies are to travel to Yerevan next month to enhance trade and technological relations with their Armenian counterparts.

Supported by the Science and Technology Department of the Iranian President's Office, the visit will be made on February 9-12, 2021.

Delegates from the Iranian companies are slated to discuss trade and technological cooperation with Armenian firms in Yerevan.

Part of the itinerary includes visits to a permanent exhibition of products made by knowledge-based companies as well as sci-tech parks of Armenia.

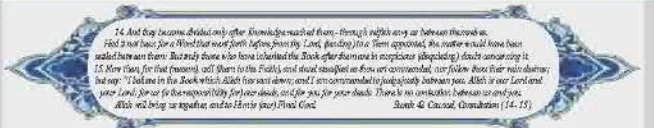
Eurasia is a major market for Iranian products, especially knowledge-based and technological products.

Political, economic and cultural relations between Iran and Armenia in the post-war era (the conflict between Armenia and the Azerbaijan Republic) are an opportunity to enhance exports to Armenia as a gateway to the Eurasian market.



PRAYER TIME

- Noon (Zohr) 12:13
- Evening (Maghreb) 17:31
- Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr) 05:45
- Tomorrow's Sunrise 07:14



Talks on Free Trade With Pakistan Underway

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Head of Iran Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) says exports to neighboring countries as well as to India and China is the priority of Iran, and other Asian, African and Latin American states are the second priority.

Speaking in the National Export Day ceremony, Hamid Reza Zadboum said that the policy of the ministry of industry, mine and trade is focused on two axes of abundance of goods and easing forex commitments of exporters, adding that by new approval which will be announced next week, more details will be released on removing the forex commitments of exporters.

He went on to say that the first priority of exports of the country is the neighboring states as well as India and China and the second priority is the other Asian, African and some of Latin American states.

Zadboum reiterated that in terms of exporting goods, any commodity with higher value added will be the priority in order to reduce the raw material sales, admitting that it is impossible to have immediate halt to raw material sales and it should happen gradually.

He added that the other policy of the organization is to sign agreements with the domestic bodies and also free trade agreements with other countries, and talks on free trade with Pakistan are underway.

Zadboum also on Sunday night and in a TV program said that Iran can gain more share of imports of the neighboring states, adding that the value of



imports of those countries is around \$1200b and Iran can export \$100b of goods to those states. He admitted that if Iran wants to increase its share of those countries' imports, it requires to reinforce its export production.

He said the total volume of Iran's exports is around \$41b that \$24b of it is to the neighboring states and in order to boost the figure, export production should be increased.

He added that according to the TPO studies, Pakistan has good capacity for Iran's exports and Iran can export \$16b of goods out of its 100-billion-dollar export target set for the next year. Zadboum admitted that programs for foreign trade are based on the international agreements but Iran's condition is different from other countries.

He also said the organization is to dispatch a trade delegation to Idlib of Syria.

First Branch of "Melli Plus" Inaugurated

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – In a ceremony which was held on Sunday both online and in-person, the first branch of "Melli Plus" was inaugurated.

The CEO of Bank Melli Iran (BMI) Dr. Mohammad Reza Hosseinzadeh, who had attended the ceremony virtually addressing the ceremony said that the world and Iran's banking industry is moving fast towards being digitalized. He added that BMI is pioneer in this field in the country and it has presented tens of products and services for its customers.

He further said BMI has reduced 500 branches so far and this trend of reducing branches will continue, interesting that undoubtedly BMI cannot close down all of its branches but it needs to have a balance in the number of its offices, and the approach of interaction of the branch with customers should change and "Melli Plus" is the first step in this direction.

Hosseinzadeh added that "Melli Plus" is the first branch with modern approach in the national banking system and said offering special services to customers, economic activists, students and start-ups in this branch will change the banking procedures. In this branch, cash is not exchanged and all processes will be based on the digital banking, he added. He emphasized that some new branches of "Melli Plus" will be inaugurated in Tehran, adding it has been planned that at least one branch of "Melli Plus" is launched in every province.

In the ceremony, he also presented the services of those who were involved in launching the first branch of "Melli Plus" and emphasized that banking system should move on course to creating novel services and projects proportional to the demands of the society. The first branch of "Melli Plus" was inaugurated in Tehran and opposite of University of Tehran. Melli Plus is the full electronic branch of the bank where all banking services are conducted digitally and Alfa Robot, VTM, One Time Password, ATM and other e-banking services are available for the clients.

Javad Goli, a consultant in the field of social responsibility of the Persian Gulf Holding, emphasized:

Social Responsibility is Pursued as an Important Mission in the Persian Gulf Holding



Social responsibility is one of the main missions, concerns and strategies of Persian Gulf Holding, so to achieve this important, the holding took a step towards designing and approving the social responsibility document.

The concept of social responsibility encompasses a broader set of goals that include socio-economic aspects. This concept goes beyond merely gaining economic benefits, it also includes and advocates for the betterment of society. In fact, it can be said that companies not only meet the needs of their owners, but also meet the needs of a set of social actors who are interested in the company and its field of activity. The company's willingness to accept responsibility is greater than the normal responsibility for the actions and effects of its business. In fact, corporate social responsibility is a greater responsibility that the company has for its effects on society and the natural environment. In order to fulfill its social responsibility, Persian Gulf Holding has put 5 service-oriented projects with a credit of about 300 billion Rials on the agenda for 2020. These projects include empowering talented students with academic wealth in Mahshahr port. Families and entrepreneurial projects are also supported to empower small industries. Medical services are provided to families with special diseases and sports services for adolescents and young people in deprived areas of Mahshahr. Studies and executive procedures of the empowerment program of this part of small businesses have also been done. The needs of petrochemical companies, general and semi-industrial items and empowerment of economic actors to meet their needs have been studied. Regarding the holding strategies of the Persian Gulf in the field of social responsibility, "Javad Goli", the director of public relations and international affairs and the social responsibility consultant of this holding, spoke. He described the actions of the Persian Gulf Holding in the field of "social responsibility". Director of Public Relations and International Affairs of Persian Gulf Holding, emphasizing that with the implementation of social responsibility strategies of this holding, we will see the improvement of Mahshahr residents, said: Social responsibility is one of the main missions, concerns and strategies of Persian Gulf Holding. Holding has taken a step towards designing and approving a social responsibility document. In addition to explaining the policies, policies and priorities of executive actions in the Persian Gulf Holding and its subsidiaries, this document can be a way to promote and improve other petrochemical, oil and gas companies. He stated: The CEO of the holding is present in all social responsibility meetings. Mr. Robeie is involved in the smallest issues in the field of social responsibility. This is not to say that the project was approved and we signed it. For example, this year we will spend 30 billion Tomans in the field of social responsibility and we will not pursue it

anymore. Rather, he believes that research should be done on the social responsibility projects that we have approved. After reading, we check the projects one by one. Engineer Goli said: "Supporting talented students is one of the central programs of social responsibility in the Persian Gulf Holding." In this project, it is important to support students based on the interview and the environment to which they belong. Education plays an important role in this project, but it should not be the case that students enter the Persian Gulf Holding Social Responsibility project on a custom basis. Our goal is to support students who have academic wealth but no financial wealth. If these people are supported by the holding, we will see a transformation of their students, families and empowerment. The Public Relations Manager of Persian Gulf Holding said about the special strategy of the company in social responsibility, considering that Mahshahr industrial town is not in proper production conditions and many investors prefer to withdraw their capital from this town. Persian Gulf Holding seeks to activate this town in the form of a program to support entrepreneurship projects and empower small industries. It is necessary for 50% of the workforce in these workshops to be provided by prisoners with financial crimes. By implementing this project, companies and entrepreneurs empower these prisoners and bring them into the work and production cycle. In addition, the quality of the products will be such that they will persuade customers to supply their goods from them and not from other parts of the country, even if their products are more expensive. Of course, it should be noted that financial costs are not equal to social contributions, and the social achievements of the holding are more important and valuable than its financial costs. Goli said: "Suppose we come to help start up these companies and the holding companies are encouraged to supply the goods they need from those workshops, including work clothes, product bags, pallets, safety and firefighting equipment, and so on." Also pre-purchase their products. The combination of these measures will enable such businesses to be strengthened and sustained in addition to training the workforce. Currently, a unit in the Mahshahr Petrochemical Special Zone has purchased land and is bringing equipment. We have notified holding companies in the Special Zone to pre-purchase the unit's products to help launch and employ 80 people. The Public Relations Manager of the Persian Gulf Holding said: "Empowering the people, youth and women of the neighboring areas has not been a priority of the petrochemical industry so far." Many CEOs cannot claim that this strategy works in their area of social responsibility. Today, the CEO of Persian Gulf Holding outlines and controls the main and partial strategies of actions in the field of social responsibility, so that even how to attract, interview and select students is no exception. Holding social responsibility projects are in fact sustainable, studied and with a long-term perspective. In these projects, attention should be paid to the development of a strategic document, project control and empowerment. Not just to say we did something and leave. I hope we get to the point where these projects are not shut down and are sustainable. In the next period, everyone who came to work should continue this path. He reminded: "Recently, we had a ceremony in Mahshahr where we donated a thousand sports clothes, sports bags and shoes to the local sports teams of Mahshahr who play on clay courts." At Shahid Tongdogvin Petrochemical, we built a bridge over the water canal where the children played and sometimes fell into it. These are practical services and have good long-term effects. The director of public relations of the Persian Gulf Holding said about another notable project that is being implemented in the form of free social responsibility projects of this company: some schools in Mahshahr and Bandar Imam lack basic sports equipment and facilities such as ball games. By allocating a significant amount, we will equip these schools with sports equipment. We have also allocated 5 billion Tomans for the scholarship project for students and 6 billion Tomans for the family project and 10 billion Tomans for the empowerment project. Regarding the holding support of families against social harms, Goli said: "We have not defined any projects directly related to addiction, but the effect of the projects that have been developed and are being implemented is to prevent and reduce social problems and harms such as divorce, addiction, etc." "One of the things we did, and few people expected the holding to do, was to standardize the consulting centers in Asshlyeh and Mahshahr and appoint a technical director for them," said the

consultant in charge of the Persian Gulf Holding. We basically defined counseling centers based on guidelines for standardizing and improving counseling centers and psychological services. Today, our counseling centers are not at all comparable to the past, and they operate like highly professional provincial counseling centers. All clients have a personal file and all the required criteria are observed. In addition to providing people with high-quality, professional counselors, we also use leading national counselors to train other counselors. He added: "We also designed an instruction of the nursing system with the aim of nursing the child at home." The children of women who work for our companies and whose husbands also work were at home or in kindergarten. Kindergarten children are left alone at home and parents have to hire non-professional nurses for their children. This could cause serious problems and harm for both children and parents. By designing a curriculum in the nursing system, laws were enacted to prevent these problems from occurring. According to the curriculum, people who are indigenous and have a level of education and want to become nurses for these children must have their own terms and conditions and receive the necessary training. They are supervised so as not to endanger the child. It is unprecedented to issue such instructions for the nursing system in the oil and petrochemical industry. Goli said about the Persian Gulf Holding social responsibility projects: "Before, the information process was such that each company produced and published content. Today, this information is systematic and integrated. According to the project information guidelines, 2% of each social responsibility project should be spent on informing the same project. We set priorities for this 2% Forms and formats for reporting the success and failure of social responsibility projects have been compiled into a 160-page book on celebrations and ceremonies. First, the public relations committee studied and then went to the public relations of the special zone. The Public Relations Committee approved the book of cultural calendar with a budget of 15 billion Tomans in Mahshahr. In the next stage, the cultural calendar has been approved by the Strategic Council and the CEO. Subsequently, the book was signed by members of the Strategic Council and the CEO went to the non-industrial sector of Mahshahr. The company is responsible for implementing this book. Today, all ceremonies are performed according to a specific schedule and dedication. We no longer see programs running without a specific schedule and calendar. For example, it is clear that the Labor Day program should be implemented for a few nights, with whom and with what budget and standards. We hope that these things will come to fruition. The book will be available for editions in later years. Regarding the social responsibility of the Persian Gulf Holding in Corona, Goli said: "According to the holding policies and, of course, the emphasis of the honorable Minister of Oil, social responsibility is being pursued today as an important mission in the Persian Gulf Holding." In the case of Corona, petrochemical companies spent more than 90 billion Tomans through the Strategic Council. The javelin needed by various provinces of the country to disinfect public places was provided in the early days of the Corona epidemic. Today, it helps to equip medical centers in neighboring areas. It also helps people in the petrochemical industry. Previously, the policy was to allocate funds from petrochemicals to the responsible body for that issue and that body would spend that budget on that issue. It was not clear whether the budget would be spent on the same issue. The quality of its implementation was also always discussed. We made a change in this issue. For example, in the Family Strengthening Center project, instead of giving our money to a department to carry out the project with its own opinion, we acted differently. We did not say zero to one hundred, we do all the work ourselves or we leave everything to ourselves, but we made detailed plans for these centers, consultants and how to implement them. We established working relationships with departments that have the ability to work together. We train consultants. We announce the standards and programs and provide funding for it. At the same time, we are closely monitoring the implementation of this project by consultants. In fact, we have brought an experienced consultant with a scientific team who can run the program. The result will be an increase in information and awareness of the public of Mahshahr city with a population of 300 thousand people. The desired program was developed. Now this program will be implemented by a specialized:

Six Park Rangers Killed in DR Congo

VIRUNGA (Dispatches) - Armed men on Sunday killed at least six rangers and wounded several others in an ambush in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo's Virunga National Park, the world's most important sanctuary for endangered mountain gorillas.

The identity of the assailants was not immediately clear, said Olivier Mukisya, a Virunga spokesman. Previous attacks against the rangers have been blamed on various militias who fight to control land and natural resources in eastern DR Congo. "We confirm this sad news. A group of armed men attacked our positions in the region of Nyamitwitwi in the middle of Virunga National Park," Mukisya told Reuters.



Guterres Seeks to Stay On for Second Term

NEW YORK (Reuters) - United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told the five permanent members of the Security Council that he would like to stay on for a second term, Bloomberg News reported on Sunday citing two diplomats familiar with the matter.

Guterres is likely to officially inform the president of the UN General Assembly soon, the diplomats said, speaking on condition of anonymity as the decision has not been made public yet, the report added.



Democrats Forge Ahead To Impeach Trump, Again



WASHINGTON (AFP) - U.S. Democrats said Sunday they would push to remove President Donald Trump from office during the final days of his administration after his supporters' violent attack on the Capitol, with some Republicans supporting the move.

Trump could face a historic second impeachment before the January 20 inauguration of Democrat Joe Biden, at a time when the United States is hit by a surging pandemic, a flagging economy and searing division.

House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi, the top Democrat in Congress, said there would be a resolution on Monday calling for the cabinet to remove Trump as unfit for office under the Constitution's 25th amendment.

If Vice President Mike Pence does not agree to invoke the amendment, "we will proceed with bringing impeachment legislation" in the House, Pelosi said.

"As the days go by, the honor of the ongoing assault on our democracy perpetrated by this President is intensified and so is the immediate need for action," she added. Trump was already impeached once by the Democratic-controlled House in December 2019 for pressuring the Ukrainian president to dig up political dirt on Biden. He was acquitted by the Republican-majority Senate.

Though time is running short, Democrats likely have the votes in the House to impeach Trump again and could draw increased Republican support for the move.

But they are unlikely to muster the two-thirds majority needed to convict Trump in the 100-member Senate and remove him from office.

Authorities are seeking to arrest more Trump supporters who violently stormed the Capitol on Wednesday after the president held a rally outside the White House repeating false claims that he had lost the election to Biden due to fraud.

Trump's immediate resignation "is the best path forward," Republican Senator Pat Toomey told CNN on Sunday, adding, "That would be a very good outcome."

Toomey said that since losing the November 3 vote, Trump had "descended into a level of madness and engaged in activity that was absolutely unlikable, and unforgivable."

Lisa Murkowski of Alaska was the first Republican senator to demand Trump's resignation, saying, "I want him out." House Republicans, including Adam Kinzinger on Sunday, have echoed that call.

The article of impeachment is set to charge Trump with inciting Wednesday's violence, which left five people dead.

Hundreds of off-duty police on Sunday lined Constitution Avenue in Washington and saluted as a hearse rolled slowly by carrying the body of Brian Sicknick, the police officer who died in the attack on the Capitol.

Indonesia Pinpoints Location of Crashed Plane's Black Boxes

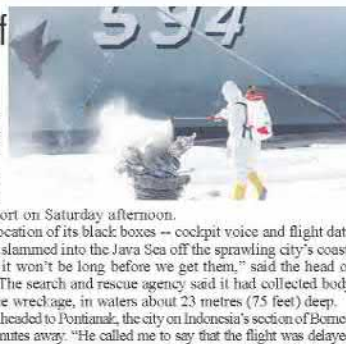
JAKARTA (Dispatches) - Body parts, twisted wreckage and clothing were plucked from waters off the Indonesian capital Sunday after a passenger jet with 62 people aboard crashed shortly after take-off a day earlier.

Authorities have yet to say why the Sriwijaya Air Boeing 737-500 went into a steep dive about four minutes after it left Soekarno-Hatta international airport on Saturday afternoon.

But, on Sunday, they said that they had pinpointed the location of its black boxes -- cockpit voice and flight data recorders -- that could be key to explaining why the plane slammed into the Java Sea off the sprawling city's coast.

"Divers will start looking for them now and hopefully it won't be long before we get them," said the head of Indonesia's transport safety agency, Soerjanto Tjajiono. The search and rescue agency said it had collected body bags filled with human remains, as well as debris from the wreck age, in waters about 23 metres (75 feet) deep.

Passengers Ihsan Adhlan Hakim and his new bride Putri were headed to Pontianak, the city on Indonesia's section of Borneo island which had been flight SJ182's destination, about 90 minutes away. "He called me to say that the flight was delayed



due to bad weather." Hakim's brother Arwin said from Pontianak, where a wedding celebration had been planned.

"That was the last time I had contact with him," Beben Sofian, 59, and her husband Dan Razamah, 58, were also on the doomed flight. "They took a selfie and sent it to their kids before taking off," the couple's nephew, Hendra, told AFP.

DNA from relatives will be compared with discovered remains for identification.

All 62 passengers and crew aboard the half-full flight were Indonesian. The count included 10 children. Dismayed relatives waited nervously for news at Pontianak airport.

"I have four family members on the flight -- my wife and three children," said a sobbing Yaman Zai.

"(My wife) sent me a picture of the baby... How could my heart not be torn into pieces?"

Data from FlightRadar24 indicated that the airliner reached an altitude of nearly 11,000 feet (3,350 metres) before dropping suddenly to 250 feet. It then lost contact with air traffic control.

Iraqi Policeman Shot, Dozens Wounded in Protests

NASIRIYAH (AFP) - A policeman was killed Sunday in Iraq, the army said, as security forces fired to disperse a third consecutive day of protests in the city of Nasiriyah, according to medics.

The policeman was "killed by a bullet to the head", a medic in the city 300 kilometres (190 miles) south of the capital Baghdad said.

The army confirmed the death. "Thirty-three other policemen were wounded in the events of the day," the military added, without elaborating.

Medical sources said several protesters were wounded. Witnesses said security forces opened fire to disperse demonstrators -- including some throwing stones -- from a city square that served as an epicentre of a widespread protest movement that began in October 2019.

A sprawl of tents in Habbubi Square had remained in place until November 2020, when eight people were killed in clashes between anti-government protesters and followers of the Shiite leader Moqtada Sadr.

Anti-government protesters reoccupied the square on Friday, demanding the release of peers who have been arrested in recent weeks.

Security forces repeatedly fired in the air and launched smoke grenades towards the protesters, whose movement for the first time penetrated other parts of the city. A spokesman for the protesters told AFP that 13 demonstrators who had been arrested were released, adding that authorities had promised other detainees would be released the next day.

Iraq's protests fizzled out last year due to the Covid-19 pandemic and a crackdown that left nearly 600 dead and 30,000 wounded.

But kidnappings, targeted killings and arrests of protest leaders have continued. Alongside demanding an end to political corruption, protesters want jobs and improved public services.

But the state's ability to finance these demands is hamstrung by an economic crisis, including a yawning fiscal deficit.

Kazakh Ruling Party Set to Sweep Parliamentary Polls

NUR SULTAN (Dispatches) - Kazakhstan's governing party is set to sweep the oil-rich country's parliamentary election, as it has done for decades, with no major opposition groups running in the vote.

An exit poll by Kazakhstan's Public Opinion Research Institute said the Nur Otan party had won almost 72 percent of Sunday's vote. As with the current legislature, two other parties cleared the 7 percent threshold to win some seats. Nursultan Nazarbayev, the 80-year-old former president who stepped down in 2019, remains hugely influential as chairman of the national security council and leader of Nur Otan, which controls 84 of 107 seats in the outgoing lower house.

Although four parties ran in the election apart from Nur Otan, none has openly criticised Nazarbayev or his handpicked successor President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev. Instead, they have targeted lower-level officials and their policies, an arrangement that government critics said is meant to create an illusion of pluralism.

The Nationwide Social Democratic Party, the main opposition party in the Central Asian nation, boycotted the vote, calling the move a "protest" against a rigged

system. Another opposition movement, the Democratic Party, failed to secure official registration.

Dozens of opposition supporters rallied at the main squares of Kazakhstan's biggest city of Almaty on Sunday, shouting "Boyott!" and "Nazarbayev go away!"

At a polling station in the capital, Nur Sultan, a 50-year-old man named Nurzhan told the AFP news agency that many Kazakhs "have stopped believing in progress."

"But I still hope [things] can be better," he said, explaining his decision to head to the polls despite freezing conditions.

In an attempt to modernise the system without relinquishing his party's tight grip on power, Tokayev has overseen the introduction of quotas for women and under-29s in political parties' candidate lists.

"[Further] reforms are being prepared," Tokayev told reporters after casting his ballot in Nur Sultan. "Reforms must not stop."

The World Bank has estimated Kazakhstan's economy slunk 2.5 percent in 2020 as it grappled with the effects of the coronavirus pandemic -- a first year-on-year recession in some 20 years.



U.S. Capitol Siege A "Wake-Up Call" For Democracies

BRUSSELS (Reuters) - The European Union's top diplomat said on Sunday that last week's siege of the U.S. Capitol exposed the dangers of allowing the degradation of democratic values to go unchecked and disinformation to spread on social media.

"What we saw on Wednesday was only the climax of very worrying developments happening globally in recent years. It must be a wake-up call for all democracy advocates," EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said in a blog post.

"Everybody needs to understand that if we accept setbacks after setbacks, even if they seem minor, democracy and its values and institutions can eventually and irreversibly perish," said Borrell, who speaks on behalf of the 27 EU member states.

President Donald Trump is facing a renewed drive by Democrats to remove him from office after he incited supporters to storm the U.S. Capitol, based on the unsubstantiated claim that he lost the Nov. 3 election due to widespread voter fraud.

The resulting assault by rioters left five people dead.

"In case anyone had any doubts, the events in Washington also show that disinformation constitutes a real threat for democracies," Borrell said. "If some people believe that an election was fraudulent, because their leader has been once and again telling them, they will behave accordingly."

Borrell called for better regulation on social networks, and said this could not be carried out by the companies themselves.

Twitter permanently cut off Trump's personal account and access to his nearly 90 million followers late on Friday, citing the risk of further incitement of violence. Trump has repeatedly used Twitter and other platforms to claim the election result was fraudulent and to share other conspiracy theories.

The EU's executive Commission last month proposed rules to clamp down on fake news on social media. These would force large online platforms to tackle illegal content and intentional manipulation of platforms to influence elections and public health, or face fines up to 6% of global turnover.



Shanon
(adviser)

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J, balcony
marblefl
L.balcony
Fully Furn

Niavaran Villa (\$6000)
1000sq.m
5bdrs, S/p
S, J, & pkg
green yard
Fully Furn

Parsian

Kamranieh (\$3000) 300sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, S, J, & F.F
Zaferanieh (\$2400) 240sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, S, J, & F.F
Gheitarieh (\$2000) 200sq.m, 2bdrs, S/p, S, J, & F.F

Farmanieh (\$2000)
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Baku, Kiev Consider Creating Business Council

BAKU (Dispatches) – Republic of Azerbaijan and Ukraine can create a working group on economic cooperation and an Azerbaijani-Ukrainian business council within the framework of the intergovernmental commission, Head of Azerbaijan's Ministry Economy Mikayil Jabbarov said. Jabbarov made the remark at a meeting with the Ambassador of Ukraine to Azerbaijan Vladislav Kanevsky, Trend reports referring to the ministry. According to him, Azerbaijan supports the creation of new mechanisms that could stimulate economic ties between the two countries.



China Recovering Fast Ahead Of Most Big Economies

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China is recovering fast ahead of most large economies, but the recovery is still unbalanced and facing significant downside risks, the IMF has said, projecting an eight per cent growth rate for the world's second largest economy in 2021.

However, the main concern around the Chinese recovery that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has is the lack of balance, said Ilge Berger, Mission Chief for China and Assistant Director, Asia and Pacific Department of the IMF.

The recovery is still relying mostly on public support. Private investment has strengthened recently, but consumption is lagging. Growth rates and consumption recently have been higher, but the level of consumption compared to its pre-crisis trend is still rather low, he told reporters during a conference call on Saturday on the publication of the 2020 China Article IV Staff Report.

China is recovering fast ahead of most large economies, but the recovery is still unbalanced and facing significant downside risks. We are seeing growth at around 2 per cent in 2020 and around 8 per cent in 2021. December numbers have been surprising on the upside, so there are some upside risks to that forecast, said Berger.

On the other hand, he said that there are significant downside risks. Domestically, there is a pandemic risk that is still around. Also, the external environment has generally become a little bit more difficult for China and its economic relations with other countries.

"This is a large reason for the fact that we think that there's still an output gap this year of 1.8 per cent. That's the difference between what the economy potentially can have in terms of GDP and what we are actually expecting in terms of demand. So that's where this lack of balance comes in, and this has important implications for the way macro policies should be conducted, Berger said.

In the short term, he said, the IMF does not withdraw macroeconomic policy support prematurely in China. And this is the advice that other countries are getting from the IMF, so this is a bit of a global concern, but it applies to China as well.

The second implication of our analysis of the outlook and the risks around it is that we need to make sure that we adjust the composition of macroeconomic support away from investment towards household support. This will directly help consumption. This has implications, of course, for our policies to strengthen the social safety net, Berger said.

Noting that structural reforms have been progressing despite the pandemic which is quite an achievement in China, Berger said that this reform effort has been predominantly in the area of opening financial services to the outside world, and less so in the real sector. Real sector reforms, however, are important, he said.

While productivity has increased in the past, the levels for the productivity in China are still relatively low compared to the global frontier, he said. Average productivity across all sectors is around 30 per cent of the global frontier.

UAE, South Korea Enjoy Robust Economic Relations

DUBAI (Dispatches) - Kim Young-ju, Chairman of the Korea International Trade Association (KITA), stated that the UAE and South Korea have had solid bilateral relations since the start of their diplomatic ties in the early 1980s, adding that the two friendly countries established a strategic partnership in 2018 during the official visit of Moon Jae-in, President of South Korea, to the UAE.

In an interview with the Emirates News Agency (WAM), Young-ju said that the two countries share multiple characteristics related to growth and development, noting that South Korea has become an economic and industrial powerhouse, and the UAE has become a distinguished modern country with its skyscrapers and the largest GDP per capita in the world.

Young-ju added that the UAE is a key economic partner of South Korea, and the value of their trade exchange exceeded \$12.5 billion in 2019, and over 200 Korean companies are currently operating in the UAE.

Speaking about the cooperation between the Abu Dhabi Chamber of Commerce and Industry and KITA, he pointed out that before the signing of the strategic partnership agreement between the two countries, the chamber established an office in Seoul in 2015 to strengthen their economic bilateral ties and reach out to the largest number of Korean investors.

KITA and the chamber have jointly organised several investment seminars in South Korea attended by government authorities from Abu Dhabi and business leaders, to promote the emirate and the UAE, in general, as a business hub in the Middle East and North Africa, which received many Korean delegations that expressed their interest in investing in the emirate's markets, Young-ju further added. The KITA Chairman then noted that in 2018, KITA signed a memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the chamber to drive advancement and establish the foundations of sustainable development in



the two countries, through promoting cooperation and globalisation between promising companies. KITA has also provided promising opportunities to the business communities from both countries, as well as facilitated the exchange of expertise and created communication opportunities between governments, private sector establishments and business leaders.

He pointed out that South Korea had organised a virtual Korean-UAE business meeting in June 2020, in partnership with the chamber, which gathered companies from both countries operating in the medical, cosmetics, consumer goods and industrial sectors. Both sides also worked together to organise the Abu Dhabi-Korea Healthcare Week in October 2020.

Bangladesh Exports May Face New Challenges

DHAKA (Dispatches) - Maintaining trade benefits would be one of the major challenges for Bangladesh after completing graduation from the least developed country in 2027, according to foreign secretary Masud Bin Momen.

The UN Committee for Development Policy would hold a meeting of experts with Bangladesh tomorrow for reviewing Bangladesh's progress on its graduation process.

LDC graduation would have the greatest impact on the country's exports, estimated at a 14-per cent decline, according to a World Trade Organization document for 2020.

Around 70 per cent of Bangladesh's export is conducted under preferences given by some developed and developing nations under the LDC criteria.

"We expect that Bangladesh would meet all three criteria for graduation in the second triennial review this year for graduating from the status of LDC," the foreign secretary told New Age on Sunday, adding that, this graduation may bring new challenges for the country in getting trade benefits in major export destinations.

Bangladesh met all three graduation criteria – per capita income, economic vulnerability index and human development index – in the last triennial review in 2018.

There is a three-year transition period before the actual graduation.

The UN is expected to make an announcement on February 24, 2021 declaring Bangladesh eligible for graduation from the LDC. Bangladesh maintains progress in attaining the thresholds in all three graduation criteria set by the UN with current per capita income \$1,827 while the threshold is \$1,272, 27 out of 32 or below in economic vulnerability index and 75.4

in the human development index while the threshold is 66, officials said. European Union officials in Dhaka said that there is a three-year transition period from the graduation eligibility to the actual graduation.

In addition, special extensions are allowed depending on the individual circumstances of graduating LDCs, offering the respective countries to prepare strategies and engage with development partners to ensure smooth integration into the global economy following graduation.

Bangladesh enjoys preferential treatment including duty-free and quota-free access in the EU under the "everything but arms" initiative, and, in Canada, Japan and the U.S., under their respective GSP schemes.

Bangladesh also enjoys preferential market access in such other industrialized countries as Australia and in some developing countries, including China, India and the Republic of Korea, under RTAs and bilateral initiatives.

Italy Gov't to Seek Parliament Approval for Larger Deficit

ROME (Dispatches) - Italy's government will ask parliament to approve another increase in the deficit later this month to pay for vaccines, healthcare, and support for companies and workers, according to Finance Minister Roberto Gualtieri.

The request will be for 24 billion euros (\$29 billion), Gualtieri said in an interview with the Corriere della Sera newspaper published Sunday. That's equivalent to 1.5% of Italy's gross domestic product and the government hopes that this "will be the last time" they need to ask for more money, he said.

This will be the fifth request for a larger deficit the government has made since the first national lock down in March last year. The extra spending is on top of the current projection of a deficit equal to 7% of GDP in 2021.

The government will soon revise its economic and debt forecasts for this year, but "there is no reason to foresee a deficit-to-GDP ratio in double digits this year," Gualtieri said in the interview.

The ruling cabinet is likely to meet Tuesday to discuss how to spend money from a European Union recovery package, according to local media. The governing coalition has been fighting over how much of the money to use, with former prime minister Matteo Renzi criticizing current leader Giuseppe Conte over his plans for the money.

Renzi threatened to withdraw his party's support from the coalition, which could trigger a confidence vote in Conte's government in the parliament.

Swiss Economy Could Grow by 4% in 2021 and 2022

ZURICH (Reuters) - The Swiss economy could grow at more than double its usual rate in 2021 and 2022, with GDP increasing by around 4% in both years as output recovers from the coronavirus epidemic, the government's chief economist told newspaper NZZ am Sonntag.

In its "positive scenario", the government expects the global economy to recover from the middle of 2021, Eric Scheidegger

said, a situation which should help Switzerland's export-orientated economy.

The State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) in its December forecast said it expected GDP growth at 3% in 2021 and 3.1% in 2022 after output fell 3.3% in 2020, the worst downturn since 1975.

The economy typically grows at a rate of around 1.7% per year.

"In our positive scenario, we expect a strong recovery in the global economy from the summer onwards," said Scheidegger, the head of the Economic Policy Directorate at SECO, told the newspaper.

"In this case, Switzerland could achieve growth of around 4% in both 2021 and 2022."

The downturn in 2020, as companies saw their order books empty and much of the service sector closed down for long periods, generated an estimated loss of 72 billion Swiss francs (\$81.32 billion) for the Swiss economy, he told the newspaper.

Government aid, which was equivalent to 5% of the GDP, prevented the downturn being worse and was far more than the support measures during the financial crisis, he said.

GDP should return to pre-crisis levels by the end of 2021, he added, with investments by companies supporting the recovery.

"Alongside consumption, investment is the second key driver: companies typically hold back in this respect during crises. But as soon as they have planning certainty again, many companies will focus on the upswing," Scheidegger told the newspaper.

Switzerland is one of the wealthiest countries in the world with an economy led by financial services and pharmaceuticals. Although outside of the European Union it has access to the bloc's single market through a series of treaties.

Indian Economy Heading Towards V-Shaped Recovery in 2021



NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India's economy is showing decisive signs of a "V-shaped" recovery in 2021 with the return of consumer confidence, robust financial markets, an uptick in manufacturing and exporters braving it out in the global market with never-say-die spirit, ASSOCHAM said on Sunday.

The industry chamber said it expects immense accruals of economic benefits from the COVID-19 vaccination program about to be rolled out.

"The high-frequency data is a strong pointer to a V-shaped recovery in 2021 with the seeds bursting into green shoots over the last two months of 2020 itself," ASSOCHAM Secretary General Deepak Sood said. India's GDP is estimated to contract by a record 7.7 per cent during 2020-21 as the COVID-19 pandemic severely hit the key manufacturing and services segments, as per government projections released on Thursday.

"With India about to roll out its vaccination programme with approvals of the two vaccines, the accruals of the economic benefits would be significant, especially to sectors such as hospitality, transportation, entertainment, which were hit hard during the pandemic," Mr Sood said. According to ASSOCHAM, the most definitive of the data is the record collection of Rs 1.15 lakh crore in the Goods and Services Tax (GST) during December.

"The State-wise collection showed the fightback spirit in consumer confidence. Illustratively, the largest consumption State of Maharashtra, which was amongst the severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, has posted a healthy growth of seven per cent in GST collection, even as the total GST mop-up was up 12 per cent year-on-year," Mr Sood said.

He said the Budget for 2021-22 would be a major catalyst. "Great focus on healthcare, agriculture and revival of demand would be imperatives in Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's Budget".

Neighboring States Iran's Most Important Export Targets

TEHRAN (IRNA) - First Vice-President Eshaq Jahangiri said that the government will not hesitate to provide all-out support to improve trade conditions, especially exports.

Addressing the 24th ceremony of celebrating the top exporters on Monday, Jahangiri said that the government and the private sector must work together to pass through the difficult conditions

and solve the problems.

Referring to the trend of changes in exports of goods over past three years, Jahangiri noted that the currency transfers created many obstacles so that this action has also had a great impact on Iran's trade relations with friend countries. He reiterated that "we must not allow the situation to become difficult for the people".



Despite Economic Recovery, Poverty Across U.S. on the Rise

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Even as average personal incomes rose during the pandemic largely because of government aid, millions of people who didn't receive such help have fallen into poverty, struggling to pay for food and other basic expenses.

That group, trying to get by with the help of local charities, may have been excluded from the federal payments because of immigration status, lack of time in the labor force needed to claim unemployment benefits, or just red tape in states that have been slow to pay jobless claims.

The situation in the Houston area is particularly desperate, with almost half of residents struggling to pay basic expenses in the week ending Dec. 7, according to a Census Bureau survey. That share has grown 10 points since October to 48.4%, the highest of the 15 metro areas included. In Miami and Riverside, Calif., more than 45% of people said they had trouble paying for routine expenses such as food, rent and car payments.

Statewide, Nevada had the highest rate, at 44.7%. Experts say the hardest-hit areas have large numbers of immigrant workers who aren't entitled to pandemic relief, or, like Nevada, have an unemployment system that has broken down under the strain of unemployment applications in the pandemic. Nevada also lacks a state income tax, which can help verify unemployment claims.

In New York, 14% of adults reported their household not having enough to eat, according to data collected between Nov. 25 and Dec. 21 by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities from Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey. In 19% of households in New York, adults reported that children weren't eating enough because they couldn't afford food. The figures were both 2% higher than the average response across the U.S.

The new COVID-19 relief bill Congress passed in December includes help for more families with mixed immigration status, who were excluded from previous \$1,200 stimulus payments. And lawmakers in some states such as New York are proposing measures that would create relief funds for workers shut out of jobless payments.

Average personal income was up in almost every state in the third quarter of 2020 compared with 2019, according to a Stateline analysis of data from the federal Bureau of Economic Analysis. That's in part because many unemployed people were still getting supplemental \$600 weekly checks through July 26, as well as the earlier \$1,200 lump sum. A smaller \$300 weekly unemployment supplement and \$600 lump sum are in the new relief bill.

But at the same time, poverty rose more than 2 points nationwide between June and November to 11.7%, the fastest jump in history, according to a study by the University of Chicago and the University of Notre Dame. The largest increase previously recorded was 1.3 points between 1979 and 1980, during a deep recession caused by a spike in oil prices. The recent increase of 7.3 million more people in poverty hit minorities and those without a college education the hardest, along with residents of states with less effective unemployment systems, said Bruce Meyer, a co-author of the study and University of Chicago professor of public policy.

While the unemployment rate has dropped since its springtime high — the rate declined from 14.7% in April to 6.7% in November — low-wage restaurant and hospitality jobs have been slow to come back, and many of those employers are now shutting down again as the virus surges.

Even people able to get government help may have fallen into poverty as extra jobless aid expired, Meyer said.

"Those payments were a long time ago. There's a lot of people who have been out of work since the spring," Meyer said. "They used up their savings, stopped paying



bills and borrowed money from family and friends. Now they're cutting back on groceries and those bills are really starting to accumulate. Their situation has gotten a lot more dire."

A coalition of progressive groups is calling for more help for jobless workers excluded from typical unemployment benefits, including immigrants or recent graduates who haven't built up enough time in the labor force to qualify for unemployment benefits, and therefore the supplemental payments.

In a Dec. 17 report, the left-leaning Economic Policy Institute and National Employment Law Project called on states to start relief funds to "provide financial assistance for unemployed immigrant workers and other jobless workers shut out of unemployment insurance programs."

A petition for such a plan, which would raise taxes on wealthy residents to provide \$3.5 billion for excluded workers, is circulating in New York state, and a similar bill was proposed in the state Assembly and Senate. Both bills are still in committee.

"While our communities die during the pandemic, (rich New Yorkers') wealth keeps increasing," said Assemblywoman Carmen N. De La Rosa of Manhattan in a December news conference supporting the bill. In the New York City area, 43.7% of people had trouble paying bills in December, up 10.7 percentage points since August.

City and state revenue have declined during the pandemic, making aid to workers excluded from payments a hard sell. Washington, D.C., considered a \$33 million fund, but it was deemed too costly. In April, the city's convention authority approved \$18 million for hospitality workers, including \$5 million for immigrants without legal status.

Immigrants are a large share of the people not receiving aid. Others include people with criminal convictions, new graduates without a work history, and people who have experienced gaps in employment, said Paul Sonn, state policy director for the National Employment Law Project.

For instance, of the 500,000 people who applied for extended unemployment in North Carolina during the pandemic, 140,000 were denied.

Iran Has Upper Hands...

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Addressing the ceremony, Masoud Karbasian said the project was put on the agenda by Iranian Minister of Petroleum Bijan Zangeneh and was endorsed by the Economic Council back in 2018.

Afterwards, 10 contracts were signed in the same year to be followed by 13 others. This time, 8 more contracts have been signed with a total value of \$1.2 billion and with the aim of enhancing production by 95,000 b/d.

He said that 33 packages of the plan to maintain and increase oil production include 29 onshore projects and four offshore projects, and expressed hope that with the full implementation of 33 packages, the country's daily oil production capacity will increase by about 280,000 barrels.

Referring to the maximum use of the potential of Iranian companies in the implementation of these projects, Karbasian pointed to the presence of 17 competent companies in the field of exploration and production, 16 drilling companies and 22 EPC companies ranked first in Iranian tenders. "A total of 31 contracts have been awarded to 22 Iranian companies."

He estimated the total value of the contracts awarded in these 31 projects at \$3.7 billion.

The CEO of the National Iranian Oil Company, referring to the average of 30% progress of 10 contracts in the first phase of the maintenance and enhancement of oil production, said "The progress of projects is closely monitored through NIOC's project management system."

Karbasian stated that another advantage of this plan is the maximum share of domestic manufacturing, and added: "By implementing the localization plan of 10 groups of widely-used oil items, which started off in the Iranian Ministry of Petroleum back in 2014, it is possible to tap the potentialities of Iranian manufacturers in three parts: wellhead equipment, downhole equipment and seamless pipes."

He said the share of domestic production in the plan to maintain and enhance oil production is 72%, and said this share is expected to reach more than 80% by the end of the contracts.

According to the official, 18 drilling rigs are currently active in the plan, which will increase to 55 rigs with the activation of all 33 contract packages.

Karbasian said the allocation of 4% of the contracts' value to fulfill social responsibilities is another benefit of this national plan.

Seoul...

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Hemmati highlighted, "There were even correspondences with Korean officials that, despite promises, were fruitless and we could not even use our assets to buy goods and medicine."

"\$7 billion has been frozen in South Korean banks for more than two years," he said expressing hope that this issue, which is an obstacle to Iran-South Korea relations, will be resolved as soon as possible.

"The main goal of these talks is definitely to solve the banking problem," he added.

Regarding South Korea's attitude towards Iran's assets in this country, Hemmati noted, "This attitude of South Korea is a big mistake and it is basically unacceptable for Korea to freeze Iran's assets following a third country order."

Emphasizing that business partners must be together in sensitive and difficult situations, he said, "We expect the South Korean government to decide independently, regardless of the orders, including the U.S. government."

He also emphasized legal proceedings in this regard, saying, "If this issue is not resolved, we will continue the legal paths we have started and will continue to pursue our rights and use our assets in Korea."

Stating that South Korea should not trust the Americans, Hemmati noted, "I believe that South Korea should not base its old and intimate relations with Iran on the relations of other countries and a person like Trump."

South Korean delegation arrived in Tehran on Sunday in order to discuss Iran's access to its financial resources.

Iran Exports...

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As the trade volume between Iran and Iraq grows, Iraq is becoming Iran's main export market, and even in some months of the year, Iran's export to Iraq has outgrown the volume with China.

With the aim of developing trade with Iraq, Iran's ministries of industry and economy, as well as the Central Bank of Iran, have already increased granting foreign exchange assistance to support exporters of technical and engineering services to Iraq for two years.

According to Secretary-General of Iran-Iraq Chamber of Commerce Hamid Hosseni, 80% of Iranian companies use the Iraqi Kurdistan Region to take part in the Iraq market.

Turkey, EU Ready To Work Together

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and European Commission head Ursula von der Leyen on Jan. 9 discussed the steps aimed at enhancing the relations between Turkey and the European Union, the Turkish authorities have said.

In a video conference, Erdoğan and the EU official discussed the ways to develop relations between Turkey and the EU and addressed regional developments, Turkey's Communications Directorate said in a statement.

The EU is on the priority of Turkey's agenda, Erdoğan told von der Leyen, reiterating that Turkey sees its future in Europe.

He also pointed out the importance of resuming regular Turkey-EU summits and high-level dialogue meetings.

Turkey wants to open a new page in relations with the EU in the new year, Erdoğan said, adding that the year 2020 could not be made enough use of due to the whims and artificial problems that some EU members produced, according to the statement.

He added that this situation was not sustainable not only in terms of maintaining future relations but also in terms of the broad common geography. Erdoğan also said that updating the 2016 refugee deal would be the first step for a positive agenda on Turkey-EU relations.

Turkey and the EU signed a refugee deal in 2016, which aimed to discourage irregular migration through the Aegean Sea by taking stricter measures against human traffickers and improving the conditions of nearly four million Syrian refugees in Turkey. Erdoğan pointed out that the year 2021 offers a productive environment for new cooperation to be initiated in the field of migration.

The Customs Union agreement between Turkey and EU should be updated, Erdoğan stated, adding that Turkish nationals should be allowed visa-free travel within the Schengen area and steps should be taken in talks on Turkey's EU accession.

He also mentioned reestablishing mutual trust and renouncing the consultation mechanism. Erdoğan underlined the need for an end to "exclusionary and discriminatory rhetoric" against Turkey.

Iran to Return...

FROM PAGE 1

"They were supposed to respond in 60 days," he said. "Iran did this in detail and care. The approach of some countries and the arrival of some known bankrupt elements shows that some seek to politicize this issue and do not seek to resolve it."

Regarding the European Troika statement on 20% enrichment, he said: "Not only did these countries not fulfill their duties, but they were also America's partner in violating JCPOA. These countries are better aware of what Iran is doing today to reduce its obligations under the JCPOA and within the framework of Paragraph 26 and 36 of this agreement."

Khatibzadeh said "It is better for these countries to return to fulfilling their obligations. Taking pandemics to prevent fever does not cure the disease. The day Europe and the United States return to fulfilling their commitments, we will return to our commitments." He pointed to the joint production of the vaccine with Cuba, adding: "We are a member of Kovax and from the first day we knew what the Americans and some European countries are doing to us. We chose other vaccines."

Khatibzadeh said: "Which vaccine is used is technically related to the Ministry of Health. Our vision has never been political at all, unlike those who wanted to use it politically." He added: "There have been frequent meetings between Iranian and Syrian officials, and during the Syrian Foreign Minister's visit, one of the most important topics was economic and trade cooperation. We are trying to persuade the private sector to be present in Syria."

"I call on France to respect international law," Khatibzadeh said in response to a question about the seized South Korean tanker, "The marine environment must be protected. The Korean ship was guided to the shore due to the pollution of the marine environment in the Persian Gulf and the mistake is made, with a prior warning and a court order, and it was a completely technical matter. Those who seek to politicize the issue are going in the wrong direction."

"The Korean ship can get a lawyer legally," he said. "We have a responsibility to protect the marine environment. We have repeatedly told the Korean side and the other parties that making it a political issue will not help. We hope that they will provide the necessary documents to the court. We have provided the necessary assistance, both consular and non-consular."

Iran to Import...

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In a televised speech on Friday, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei prohibited the import of American and British coronavirus vaccines to Iran, saying if the Americans were able to produce vaccines they weren't in such dire circumstances.

Following the Leader's remarks, Mohammad-Hassan Qossian-Moqaddam, the Iranian Red Crescent Society spokesman, said that importing Pfizer vaccines made by the United States "is no more the question".

Pakistan...

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During the meeting, Khan said a good understanding has been established in recent years to expand Pakistan's relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

"At the time of the start of the Movement for Justice government, bilateral relations with Iran may not have been satisfactory, but today I can say that there are excellent relations between the two countries," Khan said when asked to comment on his administration's foreign policy and relations with neighboring countries.

Iran and Pakistan enjoy cultural, religious and political relations in addition to close cooperation in security and economic sectors. Last month, the two states opened a border crossing point to bolster their bilateral economic and trade ties.

The Rimadan-Gabd border gateway was officially opened on December 19, becoming the second border crossing between Iran and Pakistan.

LONDON (AFP) - Sergio Agüero's disrupted season has suffered another setback with Manchester City's all-time top goalscorer forced into self-isolation after coming into close contact with a positive coronavirus case.

City have been hit by 11 positive cases to players and staff in recent weeks and even though Agüero has tested negative, manager Pep Guardiola confirmed the Argentine must isolate due to the protocols for close contacts.

Witsel Faces Months Out With Torn Achilles Tendon

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Borussia Dortmund confirmed Sunday that their Belgium midfielder Axel Witsel faces "months" on the sidelines with a torn Achilles tendon which threatens to end his season.

The Belgium defensive midfielder had to be helped off in Saturday's 3-1 win at RB Leipzig as Erling Braut Haaland scored twice and England winger Jadon Sancho claimed his second goal in as many Bundesliga games.

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Leeds Stunned by Crawley in FA Cup

LONDON (Dispatches) - Leeds suffered a humiliating FA Cup exit against Crawley as the League Two side swept to a shock 3-0 win, while Timo Werner ended his Chelsea goal drought and Bernardo Silva sparked for Manchester City as the Premier League giants eased into the fourth round on Sunday.

After the spiking coronavirus pandemic wreaked havoc with matches across the third round on Friday and Saturday, the FA Cup was back on more familiar ground as Leeds became the competition's latest big name to be knocked out by a feisty underdog.

Crawley's unexpected success encapsulated the FA Cup's unique charm and football's restorative powers at a time when the sport is badly in need of some positive news.

Numerous clubs have been hit by Covid-19 problems as the new variant sweeps across Britain, forcing Aston Villa and Derby to field entire teams of youth players while their senior stars went into self-isolation.

Villa's kids were beaten by Liverpool on Friday and Derby's youngsters lost to non-league Chorley, with Southampton's tie against Shrewsbury postponed after a virus outbreak at the League One side. Despite calls for the English season to be halted while the virus is contained, the FA Cup goes on for now and Crawley relished their chance to steal the spotlight.

Leeds sit 12th in the Premier League after a fine first season back in the top-flight, but boss Marcelo Bielsa paid the price for making seven changes at The People's Pension Stadium in leafy Sussex.

Crawley, sixth in League Two, had survived an incredible 6-5 win against Torquay in the FA Cup first round, but this victory was even more remarkable.

On a fairytale day for Crawley, it was fitting that Nick Tsaroullis should open the scoring with his first career goal in the 51st minute.

Ashley Nadesan's low shot crept under Leeds keeper Kiko Casilla's weak attempted save to double Crawley's lead two minutes later.

Jordan Tunnicliffe delivered the final blow in the 70th minute, forcing the ball into the roof of the net after Leeds failed to clear a Sam Matthews free-kick. It is not the first time Leeds have endured FA Cup ignominy after Don Revie's stars were famously eliminated by Colchester



in 1971, while the club's 2008 side were embarrassed by Histon and the 2017 squad lost to Sutton.

Chelsea, eight-time winners of the FA Cup and runners-up last season, showed Leeds how to deal with an upset threat as they thrashed League Two team Morecambe 4-0 at Stamford Bridge.

Two-time world heavyweight boxing champion Tyson Fury has a gym at Morecambe's Mazuma Stadium, but it was Chelsea who delivered the knockout blows.

Mason Mount marked his 22nd birthday in memorable fashion as the midfielder fired in from 25 yards in the 18th minute.

Werner finally got on the scoresheet in the 44th minute, bundling home after Kai Havertz headed into his path. Callum Hudson-Odoi struck in the 49th minute and Havertz got the fourth in the 85th minute.

Romantics looking for a shock at the Etihad Stadium were left disappointed as Manchester City cruised to a 3-0 win against second tier Birmingham.

Pep Guardiola made four changes from the team that beat Manchester United in the League Cup semi-finals on Wednesday.

Bernardo Silva was one of those who came in and he opened the scoring with a superb half-volley after eight minutes.

Silva struck again with a close-range finish in the 15th minute and Phil Foden got the third in the 33rd minute.

Harrison Stuns Top Seed Garin At Delray Beach

DELRAY BEACH (Reuters) - American qualifier Christian Harrison, ranked 789th in world tennis, stunned top seed Cristian Garin of Chile 7-6(3) 6-2 at the Delray Beach Open in Florida to book a maiden quarter-final spot in his injury-plagued career.

The 26-year-old reached a ranking of 162 in 2015 but has seen his career flag due to eight surgeries.

His win against world number 22 Garin made him the second-lowest ranked quarter-finalist in the tournament's history, after 2009 U.S. Open champion Juan Martin del Potro, who reached the same stage as 1,042nd in 2016.

"I just love the sport, I love what I'm doing," Harrison told reporters. "I just can't wait to keep playing and hopefully have a good, healthy next couple of years."

It was Harrison's first victory against a top 50 player and he would next meet Italian Gianluca Mager, who beat sixth-seeded Sam Querrey 7-6(8) 6-1.

"He played well. He played very good, of course. He's won four matches this week" including qualifying, Garin said of his opponent.

"These conditions are good for him. He played really flat, really fast. The ball helps his game a lot, and I hope he can play like this the rest of the year."

Support for Olympics Hits New Low in Japan

TOKYO (AFP) - Support for holding the coronavirus-postponed Tokyo Olympics this summer has hit a new low in Japan, a poll found Sunday as the country battles a third wave of infections.

Just over 80 percent of those asked by Kyodo news agency said the huge global event should be cancelled or postponed again - a jump from around 60 percent in a December 6 survey by the same outlet.

Kyodo said the survey asked 1,041 participants nationwide, who were selected by random dialling.

Tokyo 2020 organisers have said another delay is out of the question and are insisting the Games will go ahead despite a state of emergency declared in the greater Tokyo area this week over a surge in Covid-19 cases.

In Sunday's national telephone poll, around 35 percent of people told Kyodo they favoured outright cancellation, while some 45 percent said the event should be postponed a second time.

The month-long emergency in the capital and surrounding regions is less strict than harsh lockdowns seen elsewhere in the world and primarily targets restaurants and bars, which have been asked to close early.

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga said this week that Japan is committed to holding a "safe and secure" Olympics.

He said he believed the public mood will change when the country begins vaccinations, currently scheduled for late February.

But senior International Olympic Committee official Dick Pound told the BBC he could not "be certain" the Games will go ahead, because "the ongoing elephant in the room would be the surges in the virus".

Public sentiment towards the Olympics in Japan has been less than optimistic for months.

Two polls in July showed the majority thought the event should be postponed again or cancelled, while a survey released in December by national broadcaster NHK found that only 27 percent of respondents supported holding the Games in 2021.



Kohli Denounces Racist Abuse in Sydney Test

SYDNEY (AFP) - India captain Virat Kohli has denounced as "absolutely unacceptable" the alleged racial abuse of the India team from sections of the crowd in the third Test against Australia in Sydney on Sunday.

Cricket chiefs are investigating after Mohammed Siraj and Jasprit Bumrah were apparently targeted while they fielded by the

In a second incident, play was halted just before the tea break on Sunday when Siraj ran from the fine leg boundary towards the umpires, pointing into the crowd.

Kohli is missing the final three Tests for the birth of his first child, but took to Twitter to support his players.

"Racial abuse is absolutely unacceptable," he wrote. "Having gone through many incidents of really pathetic things said on the boundary lines, this is the absolute peak of rowdy behaviour."

"It's sad to see this happen on the field." Kohli added: "The incident needs to be looked at with absolute urgency and seriousness and strict action against the offenders should set things straight for once."

Al-Rajhi Denies "Mr Dakar" On Marathon Stage

RIYADHI (Dispatches) - Toyota's Saudi driver Yazeed Al-Rajhi took the Dakar Rally marathon seventh stage honors on Sunday, the home hope denying Stephane Peterhansel, who nevertheless stretched his lead in pursuit of his record-extending 14th title.

Mini driver Peterhansel was on target to cross the line first at the end of the arduous 453km timed special featuring sand mountains between Ha'il and Sakaka.

But Al-Rajhi had other ideas, and with the benefit of his experienced co-driver Dirk Von Zitzewitz, an 18-Dakar veteran, he took command around 100km out.

He secured his first stage win in the event since 2015 and his Dakar debut with 48sec to spare over Peterhansel, with Carlos Sainz third at 1min 15sec. "We did our best, although we suffered two punctures. We still managed to push hard," said Al-Rajhi.

In fourth came Qatari Nasser Al-Ariyah, who is now 7min 53sec behind Peterhansel in the overall standings with last year's champion Sainz over 40 minutes adrift in third. Peterhansel, 55, first competed in the Dakar in 1988, the year leader Ari Vatanen's Peugeot 405 was infamously stolen in Bamako, with a ransom for its return demanded. It turned up eventually, but too late for Vatanen.

Since then Peterhansel has made motorsport's toughest test an annual pilgrimage, and with 15 wins on both two and four wheels he has rightly earned his nickname "Monsieur Dakar".

He now has six podium finishes in seven stages in 2021 and will be hoping to get his first win of 2021 on the board on Monday's eighth stage which sees the Dakar travelling circus heading west from Sakaka to the Red Sea resort of Neom.



Nuggets Beat Short-Handed 76ers

WASHINGTON (AFP) - The Philadelphia 76ers were routed 115-103 by the visiting Denver Nuggets, with the team so badly depleted by Covid-19 protocols and injuries that they were forced to dress an injured player.

The short-handed Sixers were down to just seven healthy players, pushing coach Doc Rivers to activate Mike Scott, who had a left knee injury, just so they could meet the league requirement to have a minimum of eight players. Scott sat on the team bench but didn't play.

"Covid created this but the concern is not Covid now," Rivers said. "The concern is injuries."

The Sixers were missing a number of starters, including Seth Curry, who tested positive for the coronavirus on Thursday.

Because of contact tracing, Covid-19 health protocols and injuries several other stars were also missing including Ben Simmons, Joel Embiid and Tobias Harris.

Before the game, Rivers said he felt it should have been postponed. "I don't think we should (play) but it's not for me to express that," Rivers said. "I do worry about our player health."

Also missing were Matisse Thybulle, Shake Milton and Vincent Poirier. "I trust the league and I trust the doctors as far as health-wise," Rivers said. "I'm more concerned with health on the floor." The game had a chance to be the season's second coronavirus-related game postponement. The Houston Rockets had their season opener against the Oklahoma City Thunder postponed because of a combination of positive tests and contact tracing for Houston.

