

**IRAN NEWS Extends Its
Condolences on the Occasion of
Martyrdom Anniversary of
Hazrat Fatemeh (A) Which Is on Sunday.
The Next Issue Will Hit the
News-Stands on Monday**

IRAN NEWS

**Spokeswoman for Iran's Health
Ministry Sima Sadat Lari
Announced on Wednesday That
97 More Iranians Died on the Past
24 Hours as the Death Toll
Mounted to 56,457**

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2 DOMESTIC

**President to Inaugurate
60 Projects in FTZs Today**

> SEE PAGE 2



3 DOMESTIC

**Tehran Ready to
Barter Electricity With
Rice From Islamabad**

> SEE PAGE 3



4 INTERNATIONAL

**Pence Rejects
Invoking 25th Amendment
To Oust Trump**

> SEE PAGE 4



8 SPORTS

**Bucks Ease Past
Magic to Celebrate Fifth
Win in 6 Games**

> SEE PAGE 8



Iran Does Not Need JCPOA Any Longer

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - IRGC chief commander said that today Iran was at a position that does not need JCPOA, whether the U.S. returns to it or not; "all their conspiracies have returned to themselves."

Delivering a speech in the commemoration ceremony of Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi, Hossein Salami stated: "Today our enemies are in trouble, the Zionist Regime has faced instability from within and those who have mocked us up, are being mocked up by all the world."

"Today, the enemy has broken down, maximum pressure has finished, and Donald Trump has failed, and no one listens to him anymore," he added.

Salami went on to say that what distinguishes Muslims from others is "wisdom"; despite having superiority in weapons, the US failed due to lack of "wisdom."

"Whatever our leader says is taken into account by the enemies (even regarding COVID vaccine) since they cannot tolerate the effects of his wise speech," he highlighted.

See Page 7

Tehran Blasts Pompeo For His Claims on Iran Ties With al-Qaeda

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran says U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's latest "preposterous" accusations against the Islamic Republic are part of the Trump administration's "failed policy of Iran-bashing" and show the lame-duck diplomat's "hysterical" anger at his failure.

Alireza Miryousefi, a spokesperson for the Iranian permanent mission to the United Nations, told Newsweek that Pompeo's claims about Tehran's links to al-Qaeda terrorist group were part of last-ditch attempts by President Donald Trump's administration to further vilify the Islamic Republic before a transition of power.

"These preposterous, false accusations are nothing new, and only reinforce the fact that the Trump administration is desperately continuing their failed policy of Iran-bashing," Miryousefi said shortly after Pompeo's rant against Iran on Tuesday.

Pompeo used his last days in office to accuse Iran, without any evidence, of being the al-Qaeda terrorist group's "new home base," and said the claims were part of, what he called, publicizing "declassified U.S. intelligence."

See Page 7

Iran Eyes Achieving \$20b Trade Target With Iraq



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Minister of Industries, Mining and Trade Alireza Razm-Hosseini on Wednesday called for achieving \$20 billion trade target with Iraq, saying that Iranian goods make up for 25 percent demands of the Iraqi market. Razm-Hosseini made the remarks in a meeting with the Iraqi Minister of Trade Alaa Ahmed al-Jubouri on Wednesday. Iran seeks to expand and deepen trade ties with neighbors to boost the export level, he said, adding that Iraq ranks first on exporting Iranian products to neighboring countries.

Regarding some potentials of Iranian industry, he noted: "Steel production in Iran hits 30 million tons, producing the capacity of 400,000 tons in copper industry and exports amounted to eight billion dollars."

"Iran will achieve production capacity of more than 52 million tons of steel in the near future, and in the next four years it will take place in the field of copper production in the number of top 10 countries in the world and these capacities are suitable fields for deepening trade relations between Iran and Iraq," he said.

Razm-Hosseini stressed Iran's readiness to hold specialized exhibits in the main cities of Iraq and activity in the field of modernizing industries, saying,

"Despite the sanctions on Iran, Iranian trade activists have taken great steps thanks to the domestic manufacturers to deepen cooperation of the two countries."

Iraqi Minister of Trade Alaa Ahmed al-Jubouri too for his part in this meeting, called for the development of trade ties between the two countries, especially in the barter trade.

The trade balance of Iran and Iraq is high, which is a positive field for the interests of the two countries, Iraqi Minister of Trade said, stressing the necessity of holding different exhibitions to offer products directly.

Al-Jubouri added: Iraq is the second largest trading partner of Iran after China.

The Iraqi Minister of Trade underlined the cooperation between two countries in the time of COVID-19 Pandemic, noting COVID-19 Pandemic impact on the world economy, emphasizing that the development of trade ties is essential and the development of trade co-operations is considered.

Meanwhile Iraq's delegation headed by the country's minister of trade, met Iran's minister of road and urban development. In this meeting which was held on Tuesday evening, Iranian and Iraqi officials exchanged their views over various economic and transportation issues.

At the end of the meeting, Alaa Ahmed al-Jubouri told Iran press that Iraq's delegation with representatives from its private sector arrived in Tehran, and technical and important meetings were held and more negotiations will be followed too.

Iran's minister of road and urban development, Mohammad Eslami also said that the Shalamcheh-Basrah railway was discussed at the meeting with the Iraqi delegation, and important political steps will be taken by Foreign Ministers of the two countries to reach final agreements and begin operations.

"Regarding non-stop transportation, since one of the merchants' problems was that cargoes are loaded on the boarder and they were damaged for this reason, we had fruitful discussion on this subject," Eslami added.

"Iraqi party in this regard said that there should be a balance, meaning that the same number of Iranian trucks moving in Iraq, Iraqi trucks can move in Iran too, so that we can sign agreements," he added.

Tehran, New Delhi Preferential Trade Pace Will Have Huge Potential

NEW DELHI (Dispatches)- Mohammad Hossein Bani Asadi, Consul General of Islamic Republic of Iran said, "Iran and India have the potential to cater to each other's needs provided the businessmen have the exposure to opportunities."

He hoped that Preferential Trade Agreement between India and Iran will be signed soon. Both the countries have the potential to touch \$10 billion trade.

He expressed interest to buy Telangana Sona Rice, according to a FTCCI statement.

On his maiden visit to The Federation of Telangana Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FTCCI), the consul General of Iran offered to start barter trade to facilitate the businessmen and to jack-up the volume of two-way trade.

He said the business community in the two countries and their Chambers of Commerce would have to focus on expansion of trade by holding exhibitions and trade delegations.

Speaking on strategic port of Chabahar in Iran, he said, "it is being developed to build a transport-and-trade corridor through Afghanistan giving India an access to global markets. The construction of this port assumes significance as it will allow bypassing the route for accessing markets in Europe and Central Asia and also save on time and cost of doing business."

Ramakanth Inani, President, FTCCI said, "Indian exports to Iran between 2011-12 and 2019-20 have grown by 45.60 per cent. The bilateral trade during 2019-20 was \$4.77 billion and there is potential to expand the bilateral trade."

Iran Navy Starts Military Drills in Southern Waters

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's Navy has launched massive military exercises in the Sea of Oman in order to elevate the preparedness and military prowess of the country's Armed Forces in the strategic southern waters.

The two-day naval drills, codenamed Eghedar-e Dayazi (Naval Strength) 99, started during a formal ceremony in a vast area spanning the Makran coastal strip on the Sea of Oman and north of the Indian Ocean on Wednesday.

The event was attended by Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Baqeri and Chief Commander of the Army Major General Abdolrahman Mousavi, and other senior commanders.

The Iranian Navy also took delivery of Makran helicopter carrier, a logistics ship designed to support the Navy's missions in farther waters, such as the northern part of the Indian Ocean, the Bab al-Mandab Strait, and the Red Sea.

Such vessels have been designed to serve as a "mobile seaport," and are, therefore, considered key infrastructural elements of any naval force.

Their flight deck serves as a mobile airbase for helicopters and gunships as well as unmanned aerial vehicles.

See Page 7

End of Trump Era Heralds Failure of Economic Terrorism, Bullying

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - President Hassan Rouhani says the American society is now faced with a huge rift ahead of a transition of power in the country while the Iranian nation celebrates the "disgraceful" end of President Donald Trump's era.

"On the same day that the Iranian people feel victorious against this pressure and terrorism, the American people witness great failure in their social and political lives and a huge rift inside the US," President Rouhani said in a Wednesday speech.

President Rouhani said the world is witnessing an "unprecedented phenomenon" of the fall of an "autocrat" in the U.S.

"The disgraceful and scandalous end of the US administration ... indicates that bullying, racism, and breaking the law will not come to a good end," he added.

See Page 7

Reduction of Budget Dependency on Oil On the Agenda

TEHRAN (IP) - The heads of Iran's three branches of government held a joint meeting and stressed the reduction of the budget dependency on oil as well as the necessity to supply the people's livelihood and health.

In their Tuesday meeting Hassan Rouhani, Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, and Ebrahim Raisi stressed the reduction of the budget dependency on oil as well as the necessity to supply the people's livelihood and fight against the coronavirus for their health.

President Hassan Rouhani mentioned health, livelihood, thwarting sanctions, and stressed the convergence of the government, judiciary, and parliament over the budget plan.

Rouhani appreciated people for their cooperation in observing health protocols, asking them for continuing the cooperation; with regard to the COVID-19 vaccine, he said millions of doses of vaccines have been bought to be provided for people.

Judiciary Chief Ebrahim Raisi referred to the comments made by the Leader of the Islamic Revolution on January 8 and pointed out: "The issue of neutralization of sanctions must be considered, and the effort of all agencies, based on the slogan 'we can', is to solve problems with the capable hands of our loved ones"

See Page 7

Sokhan Gostar Institute

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Leader to Deliver Speech on Hazrat Fatemeh(A) Martyrdom Anniversary

TEHRAN (MNA) – Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei will deliver live speech on IRIB TV Channels on the occasion of martyrdom anniversary of Hazrat Fatemeh (PBUH).

Unlike previous years that the ceremony was being held in the presence of people from all walks of life at the venue of Hosseiniyeh of Imam Khomeini (RA), this year's ceremony is held on Sunday without the participation of people due to the spread of the novel coronavirus, COVID-19.

The speech of the Leader of Islamic Revolution will be broadcast at IRIB Channel One and other TV network channels.

President to Inaugurate 60 Projects in FTZs Today

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – 60 production, industrial, trade and infrastructural projects will come on stream today (Thursday) through a video conference by President Hassan Rouhani.

Secretary of Iranian Free Zones High Council Mr. Morteza Bank in an interview announced that some 60 projects will come on stream by President Rouhani and through a videoconference. He said these projects will come on stream in the Anzali and Qeshm free trade zones and also in special economic energy zones of Pars, Sahlan, Kaveh and Salafchegan with investment of 30,000b rials plus \$260m and 13m euros, and creation of 3223 jobs.

He pointed to the projects in the Qeshm Free Area, and said super heavy crude oil refinery with daily production of 35,000 barrels of bitumen as well as 27 economic and infrastructural projects with investment of 160b tomans from the domestic resources of the area organization are to come on stream today.

Mr. Bank further pointed to investment of over 1,600b tomans plus \$240m of the private sector in this zone, adding that with implementation of these projects on Qeshm Island jobs will be produced for 2,240 people.

He also pointed to the projects which are to come on stream in Anzali Free Zone,



adding that through exploiting 18 projects in this zone with investment around 818b tomans, 470 jobs will be created.

He also pointed to the projects which are to come on stream in Pars Special Economic Energy Zone on Thursday, saying that the projects have been implemented with investment around 5m euros plus 30b tomans by the domestic private sector.

Mr Bank also delved into details of the other projects which are to come on stream today in Sahlan, Salafchegan and Kaveh special economic energy zones.

He further said that the first round of inauguration of the projects was held on September 10 when 58 mega investment projects with the investment value of 4,800b tomans plus 438m euros and creation of 4400 jobs came on stream.

Seoul Urged Not to Allow U.S. to Harm Its Ties With Tehran



TEHRAN (PressTV) – A senior Iranian lawmaker says Iran and South Korea should not allow the United States' ill-intentioned attempts to negatively affect growing relations between the two countries and endanger their interests.

In a meeting with South Korea's visiting First Vice Foreign Minister Choi Jong-kun on Tuesday, Chairman of the Iranian Parliament's Committee on National Security and Foreign Policy Mojtaba Zonnour said deep-rooted relations between Tehran and Seoul and the lack of any dark point in bilateral cooperation have prepared an appropriate ground for further expansion of ties in different fields.

He pointed to the move taken by South Korean banks to freeze the Islamic Republic's assets under US pressure and said officials in Seoul are expected to take a wise measure and release the Iranian resources in order to prevent any damage to mutual relations.

"The inhumane U.S. move to impose sanctions on the Iranian nation is against international rules and regulations and Tehran does not want mutual ties to be affected by the U.S. ill-intentioned policies," the Iranian legislator said.

The South Korean diplomat, for his part, said he held constructive talks with Iranian officials on ways to promote relations and solve problems in the way of expanding ties.

He added that his country was determined to release Iran's foreign exchange resources.

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.

10,000 Nurses Appreciate Leader Over His Stance in Healthcare

TEHRAN (IP) – More than 10,000 nurses signed the "Thank You My Leader" statement to express their support for the Leader's wise, authoritative, and proud positions on the COVID vaccine, as well as infrastructure issues in the field of nursing care.

The statement stated: "We, the nurses, support not only the recent positions of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei in the field of COVID vaccine, but also the basic issues in the field of nursing and the great infrastructure of the health system, and we consider ourselves the executor, defender, and agent of our beloved leader."

"We know that the vaccine is generally a preventive factor, but the home-made COVID vaccine in this situation is a factor of national pride and authority and a factor in ensuring the health of individuals, especially human resources in the health system."

"Wise positions, compassion, and special attention of the Leader to vaccine scientists, guaranteed health of the people and his emphasis on specialized attention to the number and condition of human resources in the field of nursing care is the main motive force of the slogan 'We Can'. Therefore, we wholeheartedly honor and support his wise positions, and congratulate ourselves and the people of Iran for having such a compassionate, punctual, and powerful leader."

"Undoubtedly, for those of us who have risked our lives in the fight against coronavirus for a year, we consider the vaccine import in the country aiming at completing foreign research projects a 'historical disgrace'."

Tehran Condemns U.S. Renaming of Cuba as "State Sponsor of Terrorism"

TEHRAN (PressTV) – Iran has strongly condemned the United States' designation of Cuba as a "state sponsor of terrorism," expressing solidarity with the Latin American country.

"This claim that Cuba has cooperated with Venezuela in the area of terrorism, like the Americans' other baseless claims, arises from their disgusting habit of leveling phony accusations against their opponents," Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said on Tuesday.

He said officials in the failed regime of outgoing U.S. President Donald Trump — who over the past four years turned into a source of tension in the world and had no success except destroying international achievements — were continuing unilateral measures and harboring grudges against other countries even in their final days in office.

Khatibzadeh said the terrorist U.S. regime had to be reminded that, as an active member of the United Nations (UN) and a pioneer in the fight against imperialism, Cuba was entitled to exercise its sovereignty and was free to choose which countries it wished to have relations with.

He warned the United States against interfering in the internal affairs of Cuba.

The official called out the double standard in the anti-Cuba move by the U.S., which has engaged in a terror operation to assassinate Iranian Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani and has sponsored

Daesh and other terrorist groups.

He reiterated the Islamic Republic's determination to consolidate relations with Cuba.

The Trump administration announced on Monday — just nine days before the defeated Republican president leaves office — that it was returning Cuba to the US list of "state sponsors of terrorism," a move that could complicate any efforts by the incoming Joe Biden administration to revive former President Barack Obama's détente with Havana.

Cuba raps as 'political opportunism' US return of Havana to 'terror sponsors' list

Cuba raps as 'political opportunism' US return of Havana to 'terror sponsors' list

Cuba's Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez has condemned the US' "hypocritical and cynical" move to return Havana to its list of "state sponsors of terrorism," describing it as political opportunism.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said Cuba was being blacklisted for "repeatedly providing support for acts of international terrorism" by harboring US fugitives as well as Colombian rebel leaders.

Pompeo also cited Communist-ruled Cuba's support for Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro.

Cuba's Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez condemned the US' "hypocritical and cynical" move, describing it as political opportunism.

Argument With South Korea Over Blocked Money Ends

TEHRAN (IP) – Iranian president's chief of staff expressed hope that the blocked money's status in South Korea would be finalized within a month.

Responding to Iran Press' question, Mahmoud Vaezi stated that under pressure from Iran's Central Bank and the Iranian Foreign Ministry, the South Korean deputy foreign minister came to Iran to present a report.

He noted that during the recent visit of the South Korean deputy foreign minister to Iran, the relevant officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Central Bank had a serious and firm attitude, and the argument with the South Korean side regarding the release of the blocked money had been finalized.

He expressed hope that the blocked money's status in South Korea, as well as other countries, would be finalized within a month.

He also said that the U.S. Secretary of State's claims that al-Qaeda has a base in Iran is psychological warfare and Iran is not worried about such statements.

Vaezi, in response to question, said that such statements and claims by Mike Pompeo are normal in the days when it is both the end of the current US administration and the end of the Trump administration's political life, and Iran is sure that such claims do not have any supporters.

He added that the wrong policies of the Trump administration in the last 4 years have shown themselves more than before with the events that took place in the United States in recent two weeks.

Vaezi noted that with the scandal caused by the U.S. President Donald Trump administration, it is natural for Pompeo to make such accusations and comments.

He said that after the Trump administration, there will be a better situation for Iran in terms of cooperation with other countries.

Vaezi stated that the post-Trump global situation will create a better situation for Iran in terms of cooperation with other countries, and our banking and export relations will be better than before, so it is natural that the outcome of these developments should affect the people's life.

Gov't Provides Facilities to Foreign-Graduated Students Returning Home

TEHRAN (IRNA) – Iran has provided facilities to over 1,400 students graduated from foreign universities who have returned to the country, an official with the knowledge of the issue said on Wednesday.

Parviz Karami, an advisor to the vice-president for scientific and technological affairs, made the remarks during an online ceremony in which the government unveiled its plan for cooperation with international experts and entrepreneurs.

He said that there is no accurate statistics of the number of Iranian citizens living abroad who have come back to live at their home country.

The official said that the new government plan aims to provide facilities to Iranian citizens and students living abroad who come back home to live in their home country.

He said that the plan also intends to make use of the knowledge and experiences of these Iranian people who have decided to return to the country.

Iran Plans to Reach \$20b In Trade With Iraq

TEHRAN (IP) – The First Vice President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, stating that the Joint Economic Commission can help accelerate the negotiations and the implementation of the Iran-Iraq agreements, said: "It is necessary to increase the volume of exchanges between the two countries to \$20 billion."

Eshaq Jahangiri on Tuesday in a meeting with the Iraqi Minister of Trade and Chairman of the Joint Commission of the two countries Alaa Ahmed al-Jubouri, stressed "The two sides have been in various negotiations, the implementation of which can help expand relations and meet the needs of the people of the two countries."

The first vice president of Iran added: "During the visit of the president of Iran to Baghdad, it was agreed to increase economic relations to \$ 20 billion in the future, and the joint commission should plan and formulate ways to achieve the target."

Alaa Ahmed al-Jubouri, the Iraqi Minister, also referred to the visit of a high-ranking Iraqi delegation to Tehran and said: "The trip is aimed at reviving the two countries' joint economic commission to set clear frameworks for the activities of all economic sectors."

The fourth meeting of the Joint Economic Commission of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Iraq was held in Tehran after six years.

Situation of Coronavirus in Country Not "Normal" Yet

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli stressed that the situation of the coronavirus in the country should not be considered normal.

In an operational meeting of the National Task Force for Combating coronavirus, Rahmani-Fazli added that two issues were evaluated: the "Soleimani Plan" in fighting against coronavirus, and the other is the plan of comprehensive smart management.

About the "Martyr Soleimani Plan," he stated that with all organizations' efforts, especially the Ministry of Health in all provinces and cities, the outbreak of coronavirus has reached from red to yellow and blue.

Rahmani-Fazli noted that many activities had been carried out in various fields, including cultural activities and jobs. Emphasizing that different organizations should continue their cooperation, he highlighted, "With scientific experiences, research and

considering priorities, we should be careful not to return to difficult situations."

Explaining the plan of comprehensive intelligence management, Rahmani-Fazli pointed out that if encounter an increase in disease or death in cities, coronavirus should not be spread to other areas.

Referring to the upcoming occasions such as 22 Bahman and Nowruz, he said that these occasions should observe health protocols.

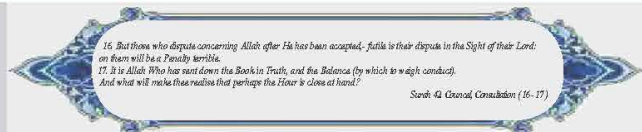
He also referred to the supply of domestic coronavirus vaccine and added, "We hope to achieve stability in the field of public health by providing vaccine with priority to specific groups."

The minister referred to the issue of coronavirus social and its psychological effects in the country and emphasized that the investigation and follow-up of coronavirus social effects to the social sphere of the Ministry of Interior and the follow-up of psychological issues of this disease in people were entrusted to the Ministry of Health.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:13
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:33
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:45
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	07:14



16. But those who dispute concerning Allah after He has been accepted, fulfill in their dispute in the Sight of their Lord: on them will be a Penalty terrible.
17. It is Allah Who has sent down the Book in Truth, and the Balance (by which to weigh conduct).
And what will make their reaction that perishes the Hour is close at hand?

Surah Q. Consultation (16-17)

Tehran Ready to Barter Electricity With Rice From Islamabad

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's minister of trade Alireza Razm Hosseini says the country is ready to barter its electricity with rice from Pakistan, saying the launch of the exchange mechanism is waiting for a final decision by financial authorities in Islamabad.

"In return for exports of electricity we can import rice from Pakistan and the issue is waiting for a decision by the related (government) departments in Pakistan including the country's central bank," said Razm Hosseini on Tuesday.

Rice exporters in Pakistan have been urging the government to use a barter system with Iran that could bypass US sanctions and allow Islamabad to settle its bills for Iranian electricity supplies while helping rice farmers and traders in Pakistan to expand their activity.

Some have also suggested a barter mechanism for rice against imports of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) from Iran although Tehran seems reluctant to make its precious supplies of liquid fuels available for such swaps.

Razm Hosseini's Tuesday remarks came following a phone call between the



minister and Abdul Razak Dawood, who serves as advisor on commerce, industries and production and investment to the Pakistani prime minister Imran Khan.

The phone call, held upon a request by the Pakistani embassy in Tehran, was in line with preparations for an upcoming meeting of Iran-Pakistan Joint Trade Committee in Tehran. Dawood is expected to attend the committee meeting to sign a series of key cooperation documents, including a potential deal on electricity for rice barter.

Iran's Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade (MIMT) said Dawood had stated in the Tuesday phone call with Razm Hosseini that Pakistan would be able to supply up to one million metric tons of rice a year to Iran in return for electricity imports from its neighbor.

Petchem Feedstock To Reach 2.2 mbd

TEHRAN (Shana) - The CEO of the National Petrochemical Company (NPC) consumption of petrochemical feedstock in Iran would reach an equivalent of 2.2 million barrels per day of oil by 2026.



Behzad Mohammadi voiced NPC's full support for the private sector, adding in the last 10 years, ceding project to state-owned and private holdings have increased, as at that time the issue of buying petrochemicals by the private sector was not raised, so semi-private holding companies went to buy petrochemical companies, but today the door is fully open for industry development and the National Petrochemical Company, as the custodian of the petrochemical industry, is ready to support investors.

He further added that 30% of the non-oil export market is owned by petrochemicals.

\$189m Worth Zinc Exported In Past Nine Months

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran has exported some \$189 million worth zinc over the past nine months of the current Iranian year, according to the latest statistics by Iran's Customs Administration.

Zinc products have been among Iran's 30 main exports items in the mining sector after steel and copper, the report said.

It added that Iran traded some 110 million tons of commodities valued at some \$52 billion with foreign countries over the past nine-month period.

Iran's exports accounted for some 85 million tons of commodities valued at \$25 billion in the above-mentioned period, it said.

Aluminum Ingot Output Climbs 51%

TEHRAN (MNA) - Production of the aluminum ingot in Iran rose 51.2 percent during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-December 20, 2020) compared to the same period of time in the past year.

The data released by the Industry, Mining and Trade Ministry show that the country's aluminum ingot output stood at 308,000 tons during the nine-month period of this year, while the figure was 203,800 tons in the corresponding time span of the previous year.

Annual production of the aluminum ingot in the country is planned to increase 63 percent by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20).

Iran's major aluminum producers produced 275,716 tons of aluminum ingots in the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19, 2020), according to the data released by the Industry, Mining and Trade Ministry.

The country's aluminum ingot production in the past year fell eight percent in comparison to the figure for its preceding year. The data show that among the country's top producers, Iranian Aluminum Company (IRALCO) had the best performance registering a four-percent rise during the mentioned period.

In last April, during the inauguration ceremony of Iran's biggest aluminum production complex (in the central Fars province), the former industry minister said the country's aluminum production is expected to be doubled with that unit going operational. The official put the value of the Iranian mining industry's production at about \$22 billion, saying that the country is relatively self-sufficient in minerals and a great deal is also exported every year.

Tehran, Dushanbe Discuss on Labor Market, Entrepreneurship

TEHRAN (MNA) - The Iranian envoy to Tajikistan met with the Tajik Minister of Labor so as to discuss the labor market, technical and vocational training, and entrepreneurship.

Referring to his meeting with Tajik Minister of Labor, Migration, and Employment, the Iranian Ambassador in Dushanbe wrote in his twitter account, "During the meeting with Ms. Shirin Amanzadeh, Minister of Labor, Immigration and Employment of Tajikistan, the fields of cooperation between Iran and Tajikistan in the fields of the labor market, technical and vocational education, and entrepreneurship were discussed."

Iran Red Crescent, Ivory Coast to Expand Cooperation



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The head of the Iranian Red Crescent and the head of the Ivory Coast Red Cross stressed the importance of expanding bilateral cooperation.

"Iran will work to improve the level of its relations with the Ivory Coast Red Cross," said Karim Hemmati, head of the Iranian Red Crescent, during a meeting with the head of Ivory Coast Red Cross, Leonce DA on Tuesday. Leonce DA, the head of the Ivory Coast Red Cross, also thanked the Iranian Red Crescent for its assistance in setting up a polyclinic center in the city of Abidjan.

"The Iranian Red Crescent Society cooperates with Ivory Coast as one of the most important and long-standing business partners and is one of the few countries that provide humanitarian services," He said.

In this meeting, it was decided that the two sides, in addition to joint cooperation in the fields of training and rescue, will expand and enhance their international cooperation at the level of the Federation of International Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

Accordingly, the Iranian Red Crescent Society will export medicine to Ivory Coast and West Africa, the IRCS head said in a meeting with the Minister of Health and Public Hygiene of Ivory Coast.

In addition to strengthening brotherhood and friendship, the message of friendship should be read between the two countries, said Hemmati. The head of the Iranian Red Crescent Society in a meeting with the Minister of Health and Public Hygiene in Ivory Coast Aouélé Eugène AKA.

"The medicine consignment of the Iranian Red Crescent Society will enter Abidjan and also, we need the support and cooperation of this ministry in terms of providing medical infrastructures", Hemmati said.

Stating that Iran is one of the friend countries of Ivory Coast and the Iranian Embassy in this country tries to stand by the Health Ministry of the country in all matters, Aouélé Eugène AKA also said, "I appreciate Iran for provision of essential services to the deprived and needy people in the suburbs of Abidjan."

Ivory Coast is interested in benefiting from all the services of Iran, therefore, with more cooperation, the Iranian Red Crescent can play an active role in Ivory Coast, especially in the field of medicine and medical equipment, he added.

Currently, IRCS medical centers in 13 countries, including Azerbaijan (Baku), Afghanistan (Zaranj and Kandahar), UAE (Dubai), Bolivia, Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone, Ghana, Congo, Kenya, Lebanon, Mali, Niger, and Ecuador are providing non-profit and humanitarian health services to deprived and low-income people.

Iran Sets 35% Rise in Steel Exports in One Month

TEHRAN (FNA) - Iran exported 35 percent more of its steel products in the calendar month of Azar (November 21-December 20) period compared to the similar month in 2019, as the country restores trade of lucrative metals after months of decreased activity due to the coronavirus epidemic.

According to a report, the steel exports had increased to over 0.721 million metric tons from November 21 to December 20, showing a 35% growth compared to the same period last year.

The 13 steel mills shipped more than 4.768 million tons of products over the nine-month period, a reduction of 13% compared to the similar period in 2019.

Steel billet exports from Iran surged by more than 500 percent in the same month while mills continued to ship higher volumes of wires and patterned hot-rolled coils compared to the initial nine months of 2019.

Iran ranks 10th among the steel producers in the world based on the volume of output.

A relevant report in December showed that Iran's steel ingot exports exceeded 3.7 million tons during the first 8 months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20- November 20), indicating a 13% decrease in comparison with the same period last year.

3,787,000 tons of steel were exported from Iran during the 8 months of the Iranian year, according to the statistical tables of Iranian Steel Producers Association (ISPA).

Largest Oil Field to Be Developed by KAC HQ

TEHRAN (MNA) - General Saeed Mohammad announced that the development project of the Alvaz oil field as the third-largest oil field in the world and the Reshadat oil field will be carried out by Khatam al-Anbiya construction Headquarters.

The development project of Alvaz oil field as the third-largest oil field in the world and the largest oil field in the country, as well as the Reshadat oil field, which will be carried out by Khatam al-Anbiya construction Headquarters, is a symbol of resistance and technical and managerial power of the country, Commander of the Khatam al-Anbiya construction Headquarters stated, explaining the two contracts for the development of the mentioned oilfields.

According to the contract, Khatam al-Anbiya construction Headquarters will dig 41 wells, providing the ground for extracting more than 33,000 barrels of crude oil production from the Alvaz field.

The project will be implemented in two parts: surface and construction of offshore structures and sub-part, including drilling 20 wells which will add more than 19,000 barrels per day to the country's oil production, he said.

The Reshadat oil field for the Iranian nation is a reminder of the hostility of the Americans during the imposed war, and today it can be shown to the enemies as a symbol of the country's resistance and technical and managerial ability, he stressed.

FAO Empowers Iranian Farmers to Improve Agro Water Productivity

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - In partnership with the local agricultural extension authorities in Qazvin Province, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) provides its assistance to equip Iranian farmers in the Qazvin Irrigation Network with the requisite technical knowledge and skills to improve agriculture water productivity.

Covering 80 000 ha of farmlands and hosting nearly 30 000 irrigators, the Qazvin Irrigation Network suffers from several challenges, including but not limited to the agriculture water efficiency and productivity.

As part of the water productivity component of a regional project "Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Water Efficiency/Productivity and Water Sustainability in NENA" funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and implemented by FAO, this activity in Qazvin Province is aimed to make agriculture more productive and sustainable. The activity also enables stakeholders and beneficiaries to make evidence-based decisions in the planning and management of the agricultural sectors and natural resources to support the transition to sustainable agricultural production systems.

In this endeavor, FAO uses Farmer Field Schools (FFS) to enhance agricultural extension workers' and facilitators' capability to support transferring technical knowledge and skills to Iranian farmers.

To this end, FAO in close partnership with the Qazvin Provincial Office of the Agricultural Research, Education and Extension Organization (AREEO) provides learning opportunities to the facilitators and farmers, training them on particular topics of concerns, including Training of Facilitators (TOF) on FFS method, Technical Knowledge Training of Facilitators (TK-TOF) on Water Productivity and Water Monitoring, and FFS Process Training for the Farmers.

Benefiting from a participatory approach, FFS also empowers farmers to identify and handle challenges of low water productivity, to understand and monitor their local water resources, and to decide as a group on the optimal cropping pattern.

These activities are directed at improved water productivity, increased farm-household income, and reduced water withdrawal in the Qazvin plain.

Being the lead UN agency in promoting climate-smart agricultural practices across the world, FAO lends its expertise to Member Countries to develop, implement and mainstream policies and programs to secure sustainable climate-resilient rural development.



Germany Tightens Travel Rules

BERLIN (Reuters) - Germany plans to tighten controls on people entering the country as part of efforts to bring under control a surge in coronavirus cases which is leading to record numbers of deaths in the European Union's most populous country.

The proposal, due to be approved by ministers on Wednesday, will require people arriving from countries with high case loads or where a new, more virulent strain of the virus is circulating to take a test for the disease.

Mobile phone operators will have to send information to arriving passengers as soon as their phones are switched on in Germany after a period of absence, according to the proposal, seen by Reuters.



Indonesia Leader Gets Nation's First Coronavirus Jab

JAKARTA (Dispatches) - Indonesian President Joko Widodo received the country's first Covid-19 jab Wednesday, as the sprawling archipelago of nearly 270 million kicked off a mass vaccination drive to clamp down on soaring case rates.

In a procedure broadcast live on television, the 59-year-old leader, better known as Jokowi, was inoculated at the state palace in Jakarta along with his health minister and several senior officials, as well as business and religious leaders.

"I don't feel it at all," he said with a laugh after receiving the injection, the first of two required. He will get the second at a later date.



Pence Rejects Invoking 25th Amendment to Oust Trump



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - U.S. Vice President Mike Pence told House leaders Tuesday he does not support invoking the 25th Amendment process to remove Donald Trump, all but guaranteeing an impeachment vote against the besieged president.

"With just eight days left in the President's term, you and the Democratic Caucus are demanding that the Cabinet and I invoke the 25th Amendment," Pence wrote to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, referring to the process that would declare Trump unable to fulfill his duties and install Pence as acting president for the remainder of the term.

"I do not believe that such a course of action is in the best interest of our nation or consistent with our Constitution," he said. Democrats mobilized rapidly to begin the process to have Trump removed after he encouraged his supporters last Wednesday to "march" to the US Capitol and "fight."

In a violent insurrection, the rioters stormed past outnumbered police, rampaged through and ransacked the building, and interrupted Congress as it was certifying Joe Biden's election victory. Pence, who was presiding over the vote, as well as Pelosi and other lawmakers, were forced to take shelter. Five people died during the unrest including a US Capitol Police officer.

The vice president's letter came just hours before the House of Representatives was to vote on a resolution that calls on Pence to initiate the 25th Amendment process and "declare what is obvious to a horrified nation: that the President is unable to successfully discharge the duties and powers of his office."

Pelosi has said Pence's failure to trigger that process would lead to a Trump impeachment vote on Wednesday. She has described Trump as being "unhinged."

But Pence told Pelosi that her call for invoking the 25th Amendment was misplaced, saying it was designed to "address presidential incapacity or disability," not as a "means of punishment or usurpation."

He also pointed out that despite intense pressure from within his party to invalidate the electoral votes from swing states won by Biden, he fulfilled his constitutional duty to certify the results.

"I will not now yield to efforts in the House of Representatives to play political games at a time so serious in the life of our nation," he wrote.

Earlier in the day U.S. President Donald Trump denied that his speech last week to thousands of supporters, encouraging them to march on Congress, had anything to do with the deadly violence that broke out shortly after.

Kim Urges Stronger Military Capabilities

SEOUL (Reuters) - North Korean leader Kim Jong Un called for increased military power and greater nuclear war deterrence, state news agency KCNA reported on Wednesday, as a rare ruling party congress came to a close after eight days of policy discussions.

The Eighth Party Congress occurred less than two weeks before U.S. President-elect Joe Biden takes office and amid a prolonged gridlock in talks aimed at ending the North's nuclear and missile programs in return for U.S. sanctions relief.

"We must do everything we can to increase nuclear war deterrence even further as we build the strongest military capability," KCNA quoted Kim as saying at the conclusion of the congress.

Since announcing a self-declared moratorium on nuclear and intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) tests in 2018, Kim has called for continued production of nuclear weapons for his arsenal, launched a series of smaller missiles, and unveiled what would be North Korea's largest ICBM yet at a parade in October.

Separately, Kim Yo Jong, the leader's sister and a member of the party Central Committee, criticised South Korea's military for monitoring a parade in Pyongyang. The move was an expression of the South's "hostile approach" towards the North, she said in a separate statement carried by KCNA.

South Korea's military said on Monday it had detected signs that North Korea held a nighttime military parade on Sunday for the congress.

Kim's remarks come after South Korean President Moon Jae-in pledged to help engineer a breakthrough in stalled denuclearisation talks.

Kim Yo Jong has been serving as her brother's "de facto second-in-command," and her remarks ignoring Moon's call for dialogue is a proof of her role in the regime, said Moon Seong-mook, a former South Korean military official and head of the Unification Strategy Center in Seoul.

"She didn't mention dialogues with South Korea at all, even though the statement came a day after Moon's New Year's speech, which hints that talks or meetings are distant," he said.

The results of the congress highlight how Kim Jong Un is continuing to tighten state control over society as well as the economy, said Benjamin Katzoff Silberstein, a North Korean economy expert at the U.S.-based Stimson Center think-tank.

"Kim's report is abundantly clear in stating that he wants the state to be the main planner and decision-maker not just over the general direction of the economy, but on a much more detailed level than that," he wrote in a report on Tuesday.



Erdogan Pledges to Put EU Ties Back on Track

ANKARA (AFP) - Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Tuesday he wanted to improve relations with the European Union and was hoping for the same "goodwill" from the 27-nation bloc.

Erdogan's more assertive foreign policy has rankled Brussels and led to escalations with Greece in the eastern Mediterranean and France in Libya and the Middle East.

But the strong-willed Turkish leader - facing the threat of sanctions from Europe and a tougher line from U.S. President-elect Joe Biden - struck a conciliatory note in a meeting with EU ambassadors in Ankara.

"We are ready to put our relations back on track," Erdogan told the ambassadors.

"We expect our European friends to show the same goodwill."

Turkey and Greece this week agreed to address their long-standing dispute over maritime borders at so-called exploratory talks in Istanbul on January 25.

The meeting will be the first since negotiations between the two uneasy NATO neighbours broke down after 60 fruitless rounds stretching 14 years in 2016.

"We believe that the exploratory talks with Greece... will be the harbinger of a new era," Erdogan said. Erdogan added that he was open to better relations with Paris after months of personal feuds with French President Emmanuel Macron.

"We want to save our relations with France from tensions," Erdogan said.

Erdogan began to soften his rhetoric after EU leaders decided last month to expand the list of Turkish targets for sanctions because of Ankara's "unilateral actions" in contested eastern Mediterranean waters.

The punitive steps could complicate Turkey's growing economic problems and shake Erdogan's popularity after 18 years of rule as prime minister and president. But Ankara and EU officials are about to launch a rare round of shuttle diplomacy that could set their relations on a more constructive course.



Ethiopia Warns Sudan Over Military Build-Up

KHARTOUM (Dispatches) - Ethiopia has accused Sudanese forces of pushing further into a contested border region that has been the site of deadly clashes in recent weeks, warning that its "peaceful" approach to the dispute "has its limit".

Sharing a 1,600km (994-mile) frontier, the two neighboring countries have long feuded over the al-Fasha region, where Ethiopian farmers cultivate fertile land claimed by Sudan.

The border tensions come at a time when Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt are also trying to resolve a three-way dispute over the controversial dam Ethiopia is building on the Blue Nile, known as the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD).

"The Sudanese side seems to be pushing in so as to inflame the situation on the ground," Ethiopian foreign ministry spokesman Dina Mufti told reporters on Tuesday. "Is Ethiopia going to start a war? Well, we are saying let's work on diplomacy."

"How long will Ethiopia continue to resolve the issue using diplomacy? Well, there is nothing that has no limit. Everything has a limit," he told a media briefing in the capital, Addis Ababa.

In early December, Sudan accused Ethiopian "forces and militias" of ambushing Sudanese troops along the border, leaving four dead and more than 20 wounded. Ethiopia, for its part, said last week that Sudan's military had "organized attacks by using heavy machine guns" and that "many civilians have been murdered and wounded".

Sudan's information minister and government spokesman Faisal Mohamed Saleh said the country did not want war with Ethiopia but its forces would respond to any aggression. "We fear that these comments contain a hostile position towards Sudan. We ask of Ethiopia to stop attacking Sudanese territory and Sudanese farmers," he told Reuters news agency.

Sudan said on December 31 it had taken control of all of the Sudanese territory in the area. Ethiopia says Sudan took advantage of its forces being distracted by the conflict in Tigray, northern Ethiopia, to occupy Ethiopian land and loot properties.

Omani Sultan's Eldest Son To Succeed Him

DUBAI (Reuters) - Oman's Sultan Haitham will be succeeded by his eldest son Dhi Yazan, according to a new basic law published on Tuesday that creates a new position of crown prince and establishes succession from ruler to the eldest son.

Sultan Haitham bin Tariq al-Said had announced plans for the constitutional change on Monday, a year after the death of his predecessor, Sultan Qaboos. The new basic law was published on Tuesday in the official gazette.

Sultan Qaboos fathered no children and designated no successor publicly during his 49-year reign.

Haitham's move to designate a crown prince could strengthen the predictability of Omani politics, following the final years of Sultan Qaboos' rule when secrecy about the succession raised concerns for stability.

Qaboos, who took power by overthrowing his father, named his cousin Haitham as his preferred successor in a sealed envelope to be opened after his death should the royal family disagree on the succession line. The family went with his choice. Sultan Haitham has overhauled government and state entities and moved to enact long-awaited fiscal reform since taking power, appointing finance and foreign affairs ministers and a central bank chairman - portfolios held by the late sultan.

Dhi Yazan bin Haitham, 30, was named minister of culture, sport and youth in August in the shake-up to become Oman's youngest minister. He previously worked at the foreign ministry, according to Omani media.

The new basic law published in the Gazette stipulates maintaining a foreign policy based on friendly relations with all states. It also retains an elected advisory Shura Council, the lower house of parliament.

A separate decree on Monday had created a new law for the parliament - the bicameral Council of Oman. The published text says changes to conditions of membership and the council's terms of reference have been made, but the full decree has not yet been published. Oman has traditionally charted an independent foreign policy, not taking sides in a power struggle between Saudi Arabia and Iran, or in a Persian Gulf dispute with Qatar.





Zaferanieh (\$2600)
240sq.m, 3bdrs
S/pool, Sauna
J, balcony
marble fl
Fully Furn

Shanon (adviser)

Tajeish Villa (\$5000)
1000sq.m
5bdrs, S/p
S, J, balcony
marble floor
Fully Furn

Parsian

Farmanieh (\$2400)
230sq.m, 3bdrs, S/pool
Sauna, Jacuzzi, pkg
marble floor, & F.F

Velenjak bldg (\$8000)
5storey, 20bdrs, S/p
S, J, pkg lots, storages
pkg lots, & brand new

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Airline Traffic and Bookings Stall Despite Vaccine Promise

PARIS (Reuters) - Airlines face a challenging wait for COVID-19 vaccines to end travel lockdowns, global industry body IATA said, as a recovery in traffic stalls and bookings dry up amid a resurgence of virus outbreaks and restrictions. "We've seen some deterioration in bookings globally from the fourth quarter which was already looking weak," Brian Pearce, chief economist at the International Air Transport Association, said during an online presentation on Tuesday.



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

HOUSTON (Reuters) - A decision by OPEC and allied countries to cut crude production through March delivered a late Christmas present for U.S. shale firms that have slashed costs, but any rise in prices spurred by the unexpected move may be just a modest stocking stuffer.

U.S. crude oil production has fallen 2 million barrels per day in the last year as low prices and demand forced output cuts. Investors had already been pressuring the industry to curb spending and boost returns before the pandemic hit.

On Tuesday, Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest oil exporter, said it would voluntarily reduce its production by 1 million barrels per day (bpd) in February and March, after Russia pushed to increase output of U.S. shale capitalizing on the group's cuts.

Russia and Kazakhstan will increase their output, reluctant to cede market share to the United States. Overall, OPEC+ had been due to restore 500,000 bpd in each of the two months. Saudi officials were concerned new increases would outpace demand during new coronavirus lockdowns.

Prices for West Texas Intermediate on Friday topped \$52 per barrel, and the 12-month futures' price, which producers use to plan spending on new wells, hit \$51.37 a barrel, up from \$44.63 at the start of December.

Crude prices are high enough to bolster U.S. producers' earnings given recent cost cuts and commitments to keeping output flat, but unlikely to draw producers off their promises to use any additional cash this year to boost investor returns or pay down debt.

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

In top two U.S. shale fields, oil and gas companies are profitable in the \$30 per barrel to low \$40s per barrel range, according to data firm Rystad Energy. This year's higher prices could push the shale group's cash from operations up by 32%, Rystad said. Another factor that will benefit producers is low oilfield service costs. Excess capacity at the companies that provide fracking sand and services cut fees and have not been able to raise them.

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

Liberty has kept existing customers through the pandemic, but pricing remains so low it has not made sense to go after new clients. Demand for fracking services is improving but falls short of levels that would boost U.S. shale production, he said.

Shale producers historically lifted production budgets with rising oil prices, said Linda Hein, senior research manager at consultancy Wood Mackenzie. But "this time is maybe a little bit different" because global demand remains uncertain, she said.

Oil would have to hit \$60 to \$65 per barrel to restore U.S. output by 1 million bpd while improving investor returns, said Raoul LeBlanc, a vice president at data provider IHS Markit.

Chinese Economy Likely to Grow 8.2% in 2021

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China's GDP growth is likely to amount to 8.2 percent in 2021 with domestic consumption unleashing more driving force to support the growth against the backdrop of COVID-19 pandemic receding globally following large-scale vaccination, a major investment bank said on Tuesday.



The world economy will gradually recover and the Chinese economy is forecast to continue its revival, UBS chief China economist Wang Tao told a media teleconference.

The GDP growth rate of the world's second-largest economy is forecast to have risen 2.1 percent in 2020, the year the novel coronavirus wreaked havoc on the economy.

The National Bureau of Statistics is set to release the yearly GDP data on January 18 and China is expected to be the only major economy in the world to post a positive growth in 2020.

According to the World Bank's latest forecasts, China's GDP growth rate is estimated at 7.9 percent in 2021. The global economy will record a 4-percent expansion this year after a 4.3-percent contraction in 2020, the Washington-based institution said.

"Compared with industrial production, which can recover at a faster rate, consumption needs more time to return to pre-pandemic level," Wang said.

Wang estimated a 10 percent increase of domestic consumption in 2021 due to the low base of last year as well as robust rebound potential through the year.

China's actual export growth rate in 2021 may reach more than 7 percent and exports denominated in US dollars will increase by 10 percent year-on-year.

As more countries will recover from COVID-19 fallout in 2021, there will be rising competition for trade orders, which is unlikely to pressure China's exports too much, because the world demand will become stronger, Wang said.

The growth for fixed-asset investment and exports, the two other major drivers of Chinese economic development, is forecast to be at 4-5 percent and over 3 percent, respectively, in 2020, according to Wang.

China's exports rose at the fastest pace in almost three years in November last year by 21.1 percent from a year earlier, data from Chinese customs showed, beating analysts' expectations, quickening from an 11.4 percent increase in October.

"In terms of macro policy, stimulus will be gradually phased out later this year and the Chinese government will place a higher priority on controlling the risks and lowering leverage ratio," Wang said. The debt-to-GDP ratio is estimated to drop by 2 percent this year, she added.

With the date of US President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration drawing near, China-US relations under Biden has become a hot topic of debate among foreign policy experts. "The bilateral relations are expected to ease with less risk and become more predictable," said Wang, adding that despite ongoing strategic rivalry, there remains room for the two countries to work together.

Turkey's Economy Seen Regaining Some Pace in 2021 After Slump

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkey's economy is expected to emerge this year from a prolonged slump and grow as much as 4% annually, propelled by resurgent consumer demand as the coronavirus pandemic ebbs, according to government officials, top businesses and analysts.

The \$760 billion economy is seen to have narrowly avoided a contraction in 2020 due to a burst of cheap lending in the first half of the year that cushioned the fallout from the coronavirus, which has surged again in recent months.

Virus-related curfews and restaurant closures, along with high interest rates meant to tackle double-digit inflation, will limit growth in coming months, they said.

Yet compared with the sluggish 2020, the economy should grow this year on the back of retail sales, manufacturing and a jump in foreign investment in Turkish assets since November, when the government named a new central bank chief and finance minister.

Haluk Burumcekci, of Istanbul-based Burumcekci Consulting, said the leadership overhaul and promise of economic reforms created a window to battle inflation after years of price rises well above a 5% target.

"Even with low credit growth, it will not be difficult for the economy to grow 4% this year," he said. "We made a very good start to this year adopting steps to create a market-friendly environment."

Turkey's economy was accustomed to regular 5% annual growth until a currency crisis in mid-2018. Since then, it has averaged 0.5% on a roller-coaster of recession, recovery and pandemic.

An economic policymaker told Reuters a big trade imbalance and high inflation remained risks this year. A balance needed to be struck too in the expansion of credit, he added, after loan growth soared 50% last year in an aggressive state-backed push.

Tajikistan Urges SCO Member-States to Develop Own E-Commerce Platforms

BEIJING (TASS) - Tajikistan has urged the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) member-states to develop their own platforms of e-commerce and digital infrastructure, as part of Dushanbe's chairmanship in the organization.

"The role and importance of digital

economy increased in the past decades as global trade is delving deeper into digital reality. SCO member-states are to develop cutting-edge national information and communication technologies, create own e-commerce platforms and extensive digital infrastructure, improve the regulatory framework," Tajikistan's Ambassador to China Saidzoda Zohir Ozod told a briefing devoted to his country's SCO chairmanship in 2021 on Tuesday.

The ambassador considers it necessary to unite "efforts of the state, business, experts, analysts, non-governmental organizations" to do that. "For those purposes Tajikistan plans to hold a roundtable in Dushanbe this year on the issues of digital economy, e-commerce and innovations," he added.

Moreover, Tajikistan "has offered holding an SCO Economic forum in Dushanbe this year," the diplomat said, adding that "those proposals will hopefully be welcomed by SCO partners."

The SCO member-countries are Russia, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, China, Pakistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. Afghanistan, Belarus, Iran and Mongolia have the observer status. Six countries - Azerbaijan, Armenia, Cambodia, Nepal, Turkey and Sri Lanka - are SCO dialogue partners. In 2004, the organization was awarded an observer status at the UN General Assembly.

On November 10, 2020 a meeting of the Council of heads of SCO states was held as a videoconference, after which a Moscow declaration and a number of other documents were approved. The summit marked the end of Russia's SCO chairmanship, which has shifted to Tajikistan this year. SCO Secretary General Vladimir Norov said earlier that the jubilee SCO summit is planned to be held on September 16-17, 2021 in Dushanbe.

Freezing Temperatures Push Asian Gas Prices to New Records

SINGAPORE (Reuters) - Freezing temperatures across Asia and Europe are driving liquefied natural gas (LNG) prices to record highs and pushing up wider gas prices as buyers grapple with shrinking inventories and a shortage of tankers.

But with a milder weather forecast, prices may peak soon as demand for heating fuel diminishes, traders and analysts said. S&P Global Platts' Japan-Korea-Marker (JKM), a reference point for Asian spot LNG prices, rose to \$28.221 per million British thermal units (mmBtu) on Monday for a cargo to be delivered in February. At least one Japanese utility paid over \$30 per mmBtu for a cargo for late January delivery, traders said.

On Tuesday, commodity trader Trafigura bought a 3.2 trillion British thermal unit (Tbtu) cargo for delivery in mid-February from Total Gas and Power Asia at \$39.30 per mmBtu, data from Platts showed.

This is worth nearly \$130 million, about 11% more than a cargo for 2 million barrels of oil, based on current prices, Reuters calculations show. Spot Asian LNG prices have led the energy complex, gaining more than 1,000% since touching a record low below \$2 per mmBtu in May during lockdowns to stem the spread of the coronavirus.

"Supply is super tight in the prompt months and inventory levels are quite low in many places," a Singapore-based LNG trader said. "But, as the weather gets mild and supply gradually returns, the situation might improve."

Temperatures are expected to rise to above average in Tokyo, Beijing, Seoul and Shanghai over the next few weeks, weather data from Refinitiv Eikon showed.

High Asian LNG prices have dragged the whole natural gas complex higher.

Dutch gas prices traded at the TTF hub, the European benchmark, rose to near three-year highs on Tuesday as LNG cargoes were re-routed to Asia and as speculative buying increased.

On Tuesday, the month-ahead TTF price hit 28.55 euros per megawatt hour, or about \$7.8/mmBtu, its highest level since the fourth quarter of 2018.

Given the premium in the Asian LNG market compared to Europe, spot cargoes were more likely to flow to Asia rather than Europe, analysts at ING Research said.

U.S. natural gas futures on Tuesday rose to a six-week high.

Analysts at Goldman Sachs said there were 10 U.S. cargo loading cancellations for February but they expect U.S. LNG exports to remain near capacity throughout the year.



U.S. Job Openings Fall in November



WASHINGTON (Reuters) - U.S. job openings fell in November, while layoffs mounted at restaurants and hotels amid rampant COVID-19 infections, supporting views that the labor market recovery from the pandemic was stalling.

Job openings, a measure of labor demand, dropped 105,000 to 6.527 million on the last day of November, the Labor Department said on Tuesday in its monthly Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey, or JOLTS. Vacancies have dropped from as high as 7.012 million in January.

The job openings rate slipped to 4.4% from 4.5% in October. Layoffs increased 295,000 to nearly 2.0 million. That lifted the layoffs rate to 1.4% from 1.2% in October. Layoffs were led by the accommodation and food services industry, which shed 263,000 workers. A resurgence in coronavirus cases has led to widespread curbs on businesses, with restaurants and bars hardest hit.

There were 42,000 job losses in the healthcare and social assistance sector. State and local governments, which are experiencing tight budgets because of the pandemic, laid off 21,000 workers.

Hiring was little changed at 5.979 million. The hiring rate was steady at 4.2%.

The JOLTS report followed on the heels of news last Friday that the economy shed 140,000 jobs in December, the first decline in nonfarm payrolls since April, after adding 336,000 positions in November. The economy has recovered 12.4 million of the 22.2 million jobs lost in March and April.

U.S. Angry for Failing Maximum Pressure Policy

TEHRAN (IP)- Foreign Ministry spokesman called the U.S. Secretary of State's recent tweets due to hysterical anger and failing maximum pressure policy.

Answering reporters' questions about Mike Pompeo's tweets on Tuesday, Saeed Khatibzadeh said that it was due to hysterical anger at the end of his scandalous term as Secretary of State and anger over the failure of the maximum pressure policy of the United States.

Addressing Mike Pompeo, Khatibzadeh added: Mr. Pompeo, be angry and die from this anger!



Kazakh GDP Shrinks By 2.6% in 2020

NUR-SULTAN (Dispatches) - The Kazakh economy shrank by 2.6 percent in 2020 as it takes a heavy hit from the coronavirus pandemic, said Kazakh Minister of National Economy Ruslan Dalenov.

State support measures, growing investment activity in the non-extractive sectors, real sector growth and increasing in lending supported the economy throughout 2020, said the minister.

"The outcomes of 2020 lay the firm foundation for economic growth this year," he added. The real sector grew by two percent in 2020, while the services sector that suffered from the coronavirus restrictions contracted by 5.6 percent.

In 2020, Kazakhstan commissioned 15.3 million square metres of housing demonstrating a record 16.8 percent growth compared to 2019. The Kazakh capital Nur-Sultan leads in housing construction.

The information and communication sector also showed an 8.6 percent increase, agriculture - 5.6 percent, processing industry - 3.9 percent and education - 2.3 percent.

"The share of processing in the total volume of the industry has increased by 9.4 percent from 39.4 percent in 2019 to 48.8 percent in 2020. There has been a double-digit growth in light industry, engineering and production of ready-made metal products. Exports of processed and finished goods have also increased. Thanks to the growth in the production, the share of Kazakh goods in total consumption grew by 4.7 percent," said Dalenov.

Online shopping rose by six percent and cashless payments increased by half.

One and four hundred million citizens received support in employment in 2020,



including 238,000 people as part of the employment road map.

"700,000 business people received tax breaks. 80 percent of borrowers had their loans deferred. Nearly 40,000 business projects were financed at a lower rate," said Dalenov.

The nation's social and economic development in 2020 will be discussed in more detail at an upcoming expanded government meeting with Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev.

Macron's Approval Rating Plummets

PARIS (Dispatches) - Emmanuel Macron's popularity has plummeted with his approval dropping to just 32 percent amid France's shambling COVID-19 vaccine roll-out and an economy in freefall.



New YouGov polling figures published by the Europe Elects poll aggregation and analysis service revealed a massive 61 percent disapproval of the French President's leadership while just 32 percent gave him their approval. Polling took place on January 5 and 6 when 1,061 people took part in the YouGov survey.

The poor approval ratings came with Mr Macron and his government under fire for the slow pace of the vaccine rollout which medical experts say is tangled in red tape and has left France lagging behind European neighbours such as Britain and Germany. COVID-19 has claimed more than 67,750 lives in France, the seventh-highest death toll in the world, while 2.78 million have been infected.

One in every two intensive care beds are occupied by COVID-19 patients and non-essential procedures are still being postponed to ease the burden on hospitals.

Mr Macron personally intervened to demand the acceleration of the vaccine programme and health officials took action to simplify the process but critics complain it is still far too slow and cumbersome.

Health Minister Olivier Veran defended bureaucratic safeguards but said procedures would be simplified and that shots would be delivered into arms faster.

But there is a growing mood of dissatisfaction across France and many commentators are already suggesting Mr Macron will pay a heavy price when the country goes to the polls next year. Political columnist Anne-Elisabeth Moutet predicted the French vaccine chaos will come back to jab Mr Macron "where it hurts".

And referring to the French President's late intervention in the disastrously slow start she said: "Whether it will vaccinate Emmanuel Macron against defeat in the 2022 election remains to be seen."

Indian Inflation Slows to Hit Central Bank's Target Range

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India's pace of inflation slowed markedly in December, falling within the central bank's target for the first time since the coronavirus pandemic began last year.

The consumer price index recorded an annual growth rate of 4.6 per cent in the final month of 2020, down from 6.9 per cent in November, largely due to a slowdown in the increasing cost of everyday food staples such as onions and potatoes. The drop was larger than analysts surveyed by Reuters had expected.

The data came as a relief to the Reserve Bank of India, which is mandated to keep inflation below 6 per cent and had not cut its repo rate since May due to concerns about the sustained rise in prices.

This, combined with India's severe economic contraction, prompted concerns that the country was becoming stuck in a cycle of stagflation. Retail inflation peaked in October at a multiyear high of 7.6 per cent.

High inflation has been an inconvenient thorn in the side of the RBI, said Aurodeep Nandi, an economist at Nomura based in Mumbai. "To that extent, the correction in the inflation trajectory bodes well and offers it some breathing space. But inflationary pressures haven't evaporated."

India's gross domestic product is expected to shrink 7.7 per cent in the year to the end of March, according to government statisticians.

The combination of a contracting economy and rising inflation has piled pressure on low-income Indians, millions of whom lost work or wages during the pandemic and the resulting lockdown and struggled to afford basic foodstuffs such as vegetables and pulses.

The easing in the pace of vegetable price increases is



partly due to the resolution of supply chain disruptions following the lockdown. India's food price index fell from 166 in November to 160.6 in December, according to the statistics ministry.

Prices for onions and potatoes arriving at the large Azadpur market in the Indian capital New Delhi fell sharply in December, according to an analysis by the Hindustan Times newspaper.

India was one of the countries hardest hit by coronavirus, recording the world's second-highest COVID-19 caseload at more than 10m. But new daily cases dropped sharply in the latter months of 2020, while the economy has shown signs of improvement.

Consumer demand and business activity indicators have picked up, though the recovery remains in its early stages and tentative.

Industrial production contracted 1.9 per cent in November compared with a year earlier, according to government data released on Tuesday, down from an increase in the previous month. Manufacturing and mining output shrank.

At its monetary policy meeting in December, the RBI cited the "adverse" outlook for inflation as an obstacle to further cuts but said it would maintain an accommodative stance in the months to come. The RBI committee is due to meet again in early February.

"We think that the latest fall in inflation could be enough for the RBI to resume its rate-cutting cycle," said research firm Capital Economics in a note. "The economy remains weak, even allowing for the recent rebound."

However, Mr Nandi thinks the RBI will hold off on further cuts for now. "I don't think this is enough for the RBI to lower its guard," he said.

Norway Eyes Sea Change in Deep Dive for Metals Instead of Oil

OSLO (Reuters) - Norway's oil and gas reserves have made it one of the world's wealthiest countries but its dreams for deep-sea discovery now centre on something different.

This time, Oslo is looking for a leading role in mining copper, zinc and other metals found on the seabed and in hot demand in green technologies.

Norway could license companies for deep-sea mining as early as 2023, its oil and energy ministry told Reuters, potentially placing it among the first countries to harvest seabed metals for electric vehicle batteries, wind turbines and solar farms. That could also place it on the front line of a controversy over the environmental risks posed by exploiting the world's unexplored seabeds, however.

Norway on Tuesday announced it was starting preparations for an environmental impact study needed to open areas of its seabed mineral exploration and production.

The move follows three years of expeditions on which Norway has found deep-sea deposits containing copper, zinc, cobalt, gold and silver, according to the Norwegian Petroleum Directorate which conducted the work.

There could be up to 21.7 million tons of copper - more than the world's copper output in 2019 - and 22.7 million tons of zinc on the Norwegian continental shelf, Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) researchers have estimated.

Reduction...

FROM PAGE 1

Parliament Speaker, Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf stressed the reduction of the dependency of the country's economy on oil and appreciated the government's effort to reach the goal, considering it as one of the most important and fundamental pivots in reforming the budget structure and inflation in the country.

He said the meetings of the branches' heads are held with more coordination to concentrate on the country's important issues with the solving of the people's problems on top priority.

Iran Does Not Need...

FROM PAGE 1

"Our leader is standing in the middle of the battlefield, and the war is going on, but fortunately this time Muslims are not making mistakes and will not leave their leader alone; the enemies will fail and leave the lands, examples of Martyr Soleimani emerge and enemies will be disappeared little by little," he noted.

Referring to Ayatollah Mesbah's characteristics, Salami said that he was supporting the Leader, and due to his supports, Muslims woke up.

"We have formed a government to implement Islam orders, and have formed power by the support of our leader; this is a big battlefield for all who believe in Islam to test their jihadi spirit and wisdom when facing conspiracies," he added.

Salami called Ayatollah Mesbah, a prominent scientist in the world of Islam, and said that Ayatollah Mesbah spent his reputation and validity for Islam and his departure includes a new birth.

Ayatollah Mesbah never ends, since he remains in the minds of the students he has trained, Salami concluded.

The commemoration ceremony of Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi was held at the former US embassy in Tehran on Wednesday, January 13, in the presence of IRGC Chief Commander Hossein Salami and the Leader's representative in IRGC Abdollah Haji Sadeqi.

Tehran Blasts Pompeo...

FROM PAGE 1

The Iranian Foreign Ministry denounced the accusations as "baseless," saying the claims show Washington's frustration and the failure of its so-called maximum pressure campaign against Iran.

Miryousefi said Iran was, in fact, a bulwark against such organizations, which Tehran has also fought in countries like Iraq and Syria.

It is the U.S. and its partners who are responsible for the conditions that allowed such groups to thrive in the region, the Iranian diplomat added.

"It is a well-known fact that Iran was and is the extremist terror groups' most hated enemy and that the founder of al-Qaeda and many of its followers hail from what is the US' close ally in the Middle East," Miryousefi said. "Needless to say, US officials have repeatedly acknowledged their role in creating extremist groups in the region, including al-Qaeda."

Shortly after his anti-Iran speech, the U.S. secretary of state further vented his outrage by posting at least 16 anti-Iran tweets, in which he leveled more accusations against the Islamic Republic.

In these tweets, which he posted in less than 10 hours, Pompeo reshaped earlier claims about "advocating for the Iranian people", but made no mention of the devastating impact of Washington's "maximum pressure" on ordinary people.

He also alleged that the world is "awakening to the threat posed" by Iran thanks to his State Department's "clear-eyed and aggressive" diplomacy.

The Iranian foreign ministry spokesman said Pompeo's tweets are the result of his "hysterical anger" at the end of his embarrassing term in office as U.S. Secretary of State as well as his anger caused by the failure of Washington's maximum pressure policy against Iran.

"As martyr Beheshti [former Iranian Judiciary chief] aptly put it, Mr. Pompeo! Be angry and die of this anger," Saeed Khatibzadeh said.

End of Trump...

FROM PAGE 1

Rouhani said these days are not marking the end of an administration, but the failure of a policy, namely the "maximum pressure" policy against the great nation of Iran.

"Today is the day of the failure of the economic terrorism policy, through which they sought to disrupt people's lives. Today, at the end of these three years of war, violence, and acts of terrorism...we are witnessing progress and stability in the country's economy despite all the pressures," Rouhani said.

The president said the growing trend of the country's exports proves the fact that not only has the U.S. pressure policy totally failed, but its mastermind are falling and their political life has come to an end.

"A president who lacked political understanding took the helm of a country, and was accompanied by a stupid foreign minister and an ignorant and radical national security advisor. He handled everything with his gambling and business-oriented mind, and we finally saw how his term ended," Rouhani said.

"No one could believe this law-breaker [Trump] would order riot against his own nation, his own security, and the country's legislature, and provoke people against the very democracy they believe in," he added.

Iran Navy...

FROM PAGE 1

Makran reportedly can carry 82,000 tons of logistics and supply them to naval units in various locations. It is also capable of making voyages for 1,000 days without a port call.

It is said to be Iran's largest military vessel and can carry five helicopters at the same time.

A missile-launching ship called Zereh (armor) also joined the Iranian Navy's southern fleet.

During the military exercises, Iranian surface combat units, sub-surface naval forces as well as aerial units will practice battles with mock enemy forces and perform calculated warfare tactics as well as joint operations against any possible military scenario.

Surface-to-surface cruise missiles and torpedoes will be fired from domestically-developed submarines during the war games, while aircraft, coastal and seaborne operational units will practice special tasks. Unmanned aerial operations and electronic warfare tactics will be exercised as well.

The naval drills come amid America's stepped-up military threats against Iran in the final days of US President Donald Trump in office.

Huesca, Alaves Sack Coaches

MADRID (Dispatches) - La Liga's bottom side Huesca dismissed coach Michel Sanchez on Tuesday after a run of just one win in 18 games, while Alaves sacked Pablo Machin with the club barely above the relegation zone. Huesca have lost four of their last five matches to fall six points adrift of safety following their promotion to Spain's top division for just the second time. Alaves parted ways with Machin following a poor series of results to leave the club in 16th place and only two points clear of the bottom three.

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Fiorentina's Lirola Joins Marseille on Loan

PARIS (Dispatches) - Marseille announced on Tuesday they have signed Fiorentina right-back Pol Lirola on loan until the end of the season. The French club have an option to buy the former Spain Under-21 defender for a reported fee of around 12 million euros (\$14.6 million). Coach Andre Villas-Boas said Lirola had been on sporting director Pablo Longoria's radar since the summer.

8 IRAN NEWS

SPORTS

THURSDAY JANUARY 14, 2021

Bucks Ease Past Magic to Celebrate Fifth Win in 6 Games

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 13 of his 22 points in the second half to lift the Bucks to a 121-99 victory over the host Orlando Magic on Monday, Milwaukee's fifth win in six games. Khris Middleton collected 20 points and 10 rebounds and Bobby Portis finished with 20 points off the bench for Milwaukee. Middleton made 9 of 17 shots and Portis went 9 of 13 for the Bucks, who shot 50.5 percent (46 of 91) from the floor. Orlando's Nikola Vucevic recorded 28 points and 13 rebounds for his third straight double-double and eighth of the season. Aaron Gordon had 21 points and eight assists for the Magic, who have dropped three in a row and five of seven since starting the season with a franchise-best 4-0 record.

Charlotte Hornets 109 - New York Knicks 88

Gordon Hayward scored 28 of his 34 points in the first half and host Charlotte picked up its fourth consecutive victory by defeating New York. Deonte' Graham added 19 points, P.J. Washington and Miles Bridges each provided 13 points each and Terry Rozier had 12 points for the Hornets. Rookie guard LaMelo Ball, a 19-year-old who became the youngest player in NBA history to produce a triple-double two nights earlier, pulled in a game-high 14 rebounds to go with eight points, seven assists and three steals in a reserve role. Kevin Knox II, coming off the bench, poured in 19 points to lead the Knicks. Elfrid Payton posted 15 points, Austin Rivers had 13, Mitchell Robinson scored 12 and Julius Randle and RJ Barrett both contributed 11. Barrett shot 5-for-18 from the field, missing all five of his 3-point attempts.

Memphis Grizzlies 101 - Cleveland Cavaliers 91

Dillon Brooks scored 21 points and Jonas Valanciunas notched two of his 12 points on a critical put-back with less than two minutes remaining as Memphis rallied to win at Cleveland. Brooks capped his team-high scoring performance on a deep 3-pointer with 36.1 seconds remaining, the final points of a game-sealing 7-0 run for the Grizzlies. The decisive stretch began on Valanciunas' put-back, which was one of the center's seven rebounds. The entire Cavaliers starting five scored in double figures, led by Andre Drummond with 19 points. Drummond also grabbed 14



rebounds to continue his streak of recording double-doubles in each of Cleveland's 11 games this season. Cedi Osman and Damyan Dotson both scored 14 points.

Atlanta Hawks 112 - Philadelphia 76ers 94

Trae Young had 26 points and eight assists to help host Atlanta end its four-game losing streak with a win over short-handed Philadelphia. Atlanta also got 15 points and seven rebounds from De'Andre Hunter, 12 points and 11 rebounds from Clint Capela and 12 points and seven rebounds from John Collins. Brandon Goodwin came off the bench to score 15. Philadelphia rookie Isaiah Joe made four 3-pointers and scored a season-high 18. Tyrese Maxey scored 15 and rookie Dakota Mathias scored a season-high 14. The 76ers lost their third straight game.

Washington Wizards 128 - Phoenix Suns 107

Bradley Beal finished with a game-high 34 points to go along with eight rebounds and a team-high nine assists to power host Washington to an easy victory over Phoenix. Davis Bertans finished with 18 points by making six 3-pointers off the bench for Washington. Raul Neto had 16 points, Robin Lopez and Garrison Mathews 11 apiece and Rui Hachimura 10. Lopez added a game-high 11 rebounds. Devin Booker came up one point short in his personal duel with Beal, totaling a team-high 33 points for the Suns, who never led. Chris Paul notched 14 points and a game-high 11 assists while Mikal Bridges chipped in 14 points and Dario Saric had 13.

Ozil Has No Regrets About Joining Arsenal



LONDON (Reuters) - Arsenal midfielder Mesut Ozil has been frozen out of the team since March last year but the German playmaker said he has no regrets about joining the Premier League side.

The 32-year-old, who is under contract until June and earns a reported 350,000 pounds (\$473,235) per week, was not included in the club's Premier and Europa League squads for the 2020-21 season.

Reports in British media say Ozil could move from the London club in January and manager Mikel Arteta has said he would be allowed to leave if they received a good offer.

"There have been many ups and downs so far, but all in all I've never regretted my decision to join Arsenal," Ozil said during a question and answer session with fans on Twitter.

"And, to be honest, the last couple of games before the coronavirus break in February and March 2020 made really a lot (of) fun. But after the break things unfortunately changed."

Since joining from Real Madrid in 2013, Ozil has scored 44 goals in 254 matches in all competitions.

Ozil is free to negotiate with other clubs this month and local media has reported he has held talks with Turkish club Fenerbahce and American side DC United.

Man Utd to Face Liverpool in FA Cup 4th Round

LONDON (Dispatches) - Manchester United will face Liverpool in the blockbuster tie of the FA Cup fourth round, while League Two Cheltenham host Manchester City. Liverpool and United will clash for two consecutive weekends with the top two also facing off in the Premier League on Sunday. National League North side Chorley's reward for their victory over a depleted Derby was a home tie with Premier League Wolves. Chorley manager Jamie Vermiglio told BBC Sport: "That's what we really wanted, Premier League opposition, great." "And there's a bit of history because in 1986, Chorley played against Wolves at home and beat them 3-0, so we just need to do that again." Should Chorley pull off another upset, they could face holders Arsenal in the fifth round. League Two Crawley, who thrashed Leeds 3-0 in the third round, travel to Bournemouth. The fourth round ties will be played across the weekend of January 22 to 25 with the fifth round taking place between February 9 to 11.

Strict Quarantine Awaits World's Top Tennis Stars in Australia

SYDNEY (Dispatches) - 'Tennis' top stars face the threat of sanctions if they breach stringent Covid-19 protocols when they arrive this week for an Australian Open deemed by its top boss as needing a "small miracle" to go off without a hitch. The calendar's first Grand Slam normally starts in the third week of January but planning for this year's tournament has been a logistical nightmare for beleaguered organisers. Tennis Australia initially wanted players arriving in Melbourne by mid-December. But restrictions on international arrivals to the state of Victoria pushed back the tournament start date to February 8, with a series of WTA and ATP events being played at Melbourne the week before to ensure players are up to speed.



Isner Skips Australian Open Over COVID-19 Protocols

LONDON (Reuters) - American John Isner will not travel to Melbourne for next month's Australian Open as strict COVID-19 health protocols would have forced him to be away from his family for an extended period, the 35-year-old said on Monday. Players are set to begin arriving in Melbourne this week for the Grand Slam event and Victoria's state government and Melbourne Park, which is also the venue for the Australian Open, from Jan. 31.

There are also restrictions on players' entourages travelling to Australia which forced Isner, the highest-ranked men's American player at 25th, to decide to stay at home. "At this stage of my career and in my life, I always had visions of being able to travel with my family," Isner, who has a two-year-old daughter and one-year-old son, told reporters after his defeat in the Delray Beach Open quarter-finals. "Of course, that wouldn't be the case for Australia this year. Understandably so, I get it. It really was just a situation where I didn't want to be away from my family for that long. I decided to stay home."

The Dallas resident, who is known for his towering frame and massive serve, has been ranked as high as number eight in the world and has won 15 ATP singles titles. "Me not going to Australia doesn't mean that I'm not committed, because I still am," Isner added. "I'm healthy, I feel really good and I'll continue to take care of my body. Once the tour gets back from Australia, I look forward to playing as full of a season as I possibly can."

Sabalenka to Face Kudermetova in Abu Dhabi Final

ABU DHABI (Dispatches) - World number 10 Aryna Sabalenka says she'll do everything she can to keep her winning streak alive after she posted a 14th consecutive victory in Abu Dhabi on Tuesday to reach her third final in as many tournaments. Sabalenka needed just 61 minutes to wrap up her 6-3, 6-2 success over the ninth-seeded Maria Sakkari and will take on Russia's Veronika Kudermetova in the title decider in the UAE capital on Wednesday. The 22-year-old from Belarus, who ended her 2020 season by picking up back-to-back titles in Ostrava and Linz, completed an Arabian Gulf hat-trick against Sakkari, having also defeated the Greek in Dubai and Doha 11 months ago. The longest winning streak in WTA history was Martina Navratilova's 74-match run in 1984. "It's an unbelievable number. Of course I'd like to go this far and I'll do everything I can to keep winning, so we'll see," said Sabalenka of Navratilova's record. "I think I'm putting my focus on the right place, I'm just focusing on the right things and this helps me to, first of all, not think about all these wins and secondly to keep winning. "I think I need to keep focusing on my game, on my movement on the court and try to do everything I can in the moment and I think that works really well with me." Contesting the biggest semi-final of her career, Kudermetova survived a 60-minute first-set battle on her way to a 7-6 (10/8), 6-4 win over Ukrainian teenager Marta Kostyuk.



Korda Reaches Delray Beach Semis

DELRAY BEACH (Dispatches) - Sebastian Korda kept his nerve to topple second-seeded John Isner 6-3, 4-6, 6-3 and reach the semi-finals of the ATP Delray Beach Open in Delray Beach, Florida. Korda, ranked 119th in the world, was serving for the match when he fell behind 0-40 against his big-serving compatriot. But the former juni world number one battled back to book his first ATP semi-final in one hour and 51 minutes. "I was super-happy with how I played that whole game," Korda said of the clincher. "I mean, he played an incredible first three points. "The way he played those, I was like, 'Too good.' I couldn't really do anything. He came to the net, he played big balls, he played a super-good three points. "I just stuck with it, I got a little bit more aggressive," said the 20-year-old, who will play Britain's Cameron Norrie for a place in the final. Norrie ousted 2018 champion Frances Tiafoe 6-0, 3-6, 6-4. "He fought real hard, and I managed to get a little bit lucky in the third set there with a couple netcorers and a couple close calls," Norrie said. "Real fortunate to get through." Christian Harrison's fairytale run continued with a 7-6 (7/2), 6-4 semi-final victory over Italian Gianluca Mager. Harrison, ranked 789th in the world, had toppled Chilean top seed Cristian Garin to reach the quarter-finals and said it felt "pretty amazing" to find himself in the last four.

