

**Health Ministry Spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari Said on Tuesday That Some 98 More Iranians Have Died From the Coronavirus Disease Over the Past 24 Hours Bringing the Total Deaths to 55,748**

# IRAN NEWS

**Health Minister Saeed Namaki Broke the News on Tuesday, Saying That Iran Has Registered Its First Case of a Highly Contagious Coronavirus Variant That Emerged in Britain**

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## Army Stages Large-Scale Drone Drill

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's Army has launched a large-scale drill involving hundreds of combat drones belonging to the Ground, Navy and Air Defense Forces. The two-day exercise, which began on Tuesday, is taking place in the northern province of Semnan. Army Deputy Commander for Operations Rear Admiral Mahmoud Mousavi said the Islamic Republic is today one of the world's most powerful countries in the field of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). "During the Army's large-scale exercise, different types of drone systems in the Army's Ground, Air Defense, Air and Navy Forces will perform defined missions in real combat conditions," he added. The commander also said that the operational part of the drill will feature the widespread use of kamikaze drones as well as the aerial interception and destruction of targets by air-to-air missiles, along with the destruction of ground targets with bombs and precision-guided missiles. Navy drones, he noted, would practice flying from vessels in the southern waters of the country, while long-range kamikaze drones would drill precision strikes on vital targets at the depth of the enemy territory. **See Page 7**

## Iran to Enrich 8 to 9 Kg of 20% Uranium Monthly



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) Ali Akbar Salehi said that Iran will enrich 8 to 9 kg of 20% uranium monthly adding 1000 centrifuges are being installed. Stating that Iran has extensive activities in exploration and extraction, Salehi said, "Until three or four years ago, we used to produce an average of 4 to 5 tons of yellowcake, but now, for about two years, we have increased the production of yellowcake to 30 tons." "This year, the production of yellowcake will be between 35 and 40 tons, which means that we have increased the production of yellowcake 8 times," he added. "We were able to achieve 20% uranium enrichment technically within 24 hours after International Atomic Energy Agency's formalities," Salehi noted. "We can produce about 17 to 20 grams of enrichment per hour," he added. Stating that Iran can produce about 8 to 9 kg per month to reach 120 kg in line with the implementation of the Parliament's motion on 'strategic action to lift sanctions', AEOI chief highlighted, "You see that Iran has produced 20% enriched uranium in 24 hours." "We are currently installing a thousand IR-2m centrifuges, but 2 cascades are installed and working. We proceed according to the law and install these centrifuges even earlier than the legal deadline," he said. AEOI Spokesman Behrouz Kamalvandi also said that Iran has produced its first UF6 (uranium hexafluoride or hex) product a few hours after restarting the enrichment of uranium up to a purity level of 20 percent at Fordow nuclear facility. Kamalvandi announced late Monday that the first UF6 product was prepared a few hours ago. The process of injecting gas into the centrifuges and resuming uranium enrichment up to 20% started earlier in the day after informing inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the spokesman said. "Considering the previous experience of enrichment in Fordow facility, the new production line for enriching uranium to 20% was prepared very quickly," Kamalvandi said. He also noted that the country is prepared to enrich uranium at purity levels beyond 20 percent. Meanwhile on Monday Iran's ambassador to international organizations in Vienna says the UN nuclear watchdog has certified in a report that Iran has started to enrich uranium to a purity level of 20 percent. In comments on Monday, Kazem Gharibabadi said director-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has confirmed in a report that Iran has begun to enrich uranium up to a purity level of 20 percent. The envoy said the report came after Iran provided the IAEA with an amendment to the Design Information Questionnaire (DIQ) for Fordow Fuel Enrichment Plant (FFEP) where the IAEA inspectors visited on Monday morning to verify the information and to break seals on a cylinder containing uranium enriched to 4.1 percent. The UN nuclear agency's report declares that the IAEA inspectors have removed the seal on a 137.2 kg cylinder containing 4.1% uranium, the cylinder has been connected to the production line, and the enrichment of uranium up to purity level of 20% has begun, Gharibabadi added. The envoy noted that resumption of 20% uranium enrichment in Iran follows a letter that Tehran sent to the IAEA on December 31, 2020, saying the UN nuclear agency had been notified that the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran has plans to enrich uranium to 20% purity level in compliance with a bill recently ratified by the Iranian Parliament.

## Iran Submits "Red Notice" To Interpol Against Trump

TEHRAN (MNA) - The request to issue a 'Red Notice' against Trump and some other criminals was submitted to Interpol. "The request to issue 'Red Notice' for 48 people involved in the assassination of Martyr Qassem Soleimani, including the US President, as well as commanders and officials at the Pentagon and forces in the region, were handed over to Interpol," said Judiciary Spokesman Gholam Hossein Esmacili in his weekly presser on Tuesday. "The case of the terrorist crime that led to the martyrdom of Soleimani and his companions in the early days of the incident was filed in the Special Court for International Affairs in Tehran," he added, saying, "A comprehensive investigation was conducted into the operation leading to the martyrdom of Martyr Soleimani." "The culprits have been identified and 48 people involved in the incident, including the US president who was the main culprit, as well as commanders and officials at the Pentagon and forces in the region, have been identified," Esmacili highlighted. **See Page 7**

## ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

### JCOA Is Dead. Artificial Respiration Is in Vain

Nowadays the government is under a double-blade pressure and it does not know whether it implements the new bill of return to the pre-JCOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) approved by Majlis and communicated to it, or still pines its hopes on return of U.S.-President-elect Joe Biden to continue the path that Barack Obama and Europeans went through. Both Europe is living in illusion to keep alive the dead body of the JCOA through artificial respiration of waiting for Biden's decision, and the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, while is an endless illusion, hopes the revival of the JCOA that it has waited for seven years and it does not matter it even waits for seven months more. But according to confirmation of most realist think tanks and experts in the world, the JCOA will not revive any longer. Anthony H. Cordesman, head of Burke Chair in Strategy of Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), believes, "Return to the JCOA and talks with Iran is more difficult than what was four years ago on the U.S. President's table because one of the reasons is complexity of the progress of Iran's nuclear program. First, no one scientist dominated Iran's program that by his assassination, the program is crippled. It is the cumulative result of efforts that began under the Shah in the 1970s, and which have evolved ever since. It also now draws on some 75 years of data and leaks since the first nuclear weapon - especially data on how France, Israel, Pakistan, India, and North Korea have acquired their nuclear weapons... By 2013, there already were estimates that Iran had all of the technology it needed to make a weapon within a year if it could devote all of its enrichment activity to producing weapons-grade material. Such estimates were probably exaggerated then, and they may be exaggerated now, but one needs to be careful about the probable success of arms control efforts like the JCOA." Cordesman continues, "Other aspects of the military balance are shifting. In 2013, the United States and its Arab strategic partners still had a decisive advantage in terms of modern airpower and precision strike capability relative to Iran's mix of missiles and aging or mediocre combat aircraft. Today, Iran has demonstrated that it has advanced ballistic and cruise missile technology as well as conventional warhead design capability through its strikes on Saudi oil facilities. These advances in conventional strike capability have implications for Iran's potential nuclear capabilities as well. So far, No official source has discussed whether Iran has used its missile warfare capabilities to test simulated nuclear warheads - something it would need to do before it tested an actual nuclear warhead. However, a mix of telemetry and recovered, instrumented warheads could test many aspects of warhead design on a covert basis that the JCOA - or even IAEA inspections - could not address." **See Page 7**

### U.S. Extends Iraq Sanctions waiver for Further 3 Months

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) - The U.S. has granted Iraq a three-month extension to a sanctions waiver allowing it to import Iranian gas, an Iraqi official told AFP Monday. The move represents a welcome reprieve for a country that relies heavily on its neighbor for energy supplies. Iraq buys gas and electricity from Iran to supply about a third of its power sector, worn down by years of conflict and poor maintenance and unable to meet the needs of the country's 40 million population. The U.S. blacklisted Iran's energy industry in late 2018 as it ramped up sanctions, but granted Baghdad a series of temporary waivers, hoping Iraq would wean itself off Iranian energy by partnering with U.S. firms. The latest extension extends into the start of U.S. President-elect Joe Biden's mandate, as the administration of President Donald Trump departs the White House on January 20. **See Page 7**

### S. Korea to Send Delegates to Tehran to Discuss Tanker Seizure

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Seoul says it will dispatch a delegation to Tehran for talks following the seizure of a South Korean-flagged tanker which Iranian naval forces say took place for repetitive violations of maritime environmental law and polluting Persian Gulf waters with chemicals. Speaking at a regular press briefing on Tuesday, South Korea's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Choi Young-sam said the delegation, led by Director-General for African and Middle Eastern Affairs Koh Kyung-sok, will soon leave for the Iranian capital to resolve the issue of the seizure of MT Hankuk Chemi tanker through negotiations. He added that South Korean and Iranian officials will discuss a wide range of other issues of mutual interest, and Seoul will do its utmost to find a swift solution to the matter. Separately, South Korea's Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha said on Tuesday that she was making diplomatic efforts to secure the release of the tanker. Kang said she responded to Iranian officials on Monday, and that her ministry was engaged in talks with diplomats both in Tehran and Seoul. The public relations office of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC)'s Navy said Monday that the South Korean-flagged MT Hankuk Chemi tanker had been seized upon a request by Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization and a verdict by the prosecutor office of Hormozgan province. **See Page 7**

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## 20% Enrichment Reversible If JCPOA Fully Implemented by All

TEHRAN (IFP) - Foreign minister says the country's resumption of uranium enrichment a 20-percent purity level is fully reversible if other parties to the 2015 nuclear deal fully comply with the JCPOA.

In a tweet, Mohammad Javad Zarif noted the resumption enrichment work is in line with the recent parliamentary legislation. "We resumed 20% enrichment as legislated by our Parliament," he wrote. "IAEA has been duly notified," he added. "Our remedial action conforms fully with Paragraph 36 of JCPOA, after years of non-compliance by several other JCPOA participants," Zarif explained. "Our measures are fully reversible upon FULL compliance by ALL," the tweet also read.

## Rouhani: Investors Must Feel Safety

TEHRAN (IFP) - President Hassan Rouhani has highlighted his administration's strategy to facilitate investment activities to neutralize the US sanctions and achieve the resistance economy goals.

Addressing a Tuesday session of the Administration's Economic Coordination Headquarters, President Rouhani said the government has always pushed for the removal of obstacles to investment.

The administration has tried to revoke and reform the obstructive regulations and reduce the damaging bureaucracy for attraction of investment in order to neutralize the sanctions and attain the goal of a jump in production and improvement of resistance economy indices, the president added.

A rise in investment is one of the main factors in economic development, President Rouhani added, saying the enemies have imposed sanctions to impede foreign investment in the development of Iran's infrastructures.

"Erasing the motivation for the withdrawal of investment from the country and encouraging the attraction of investment from abroad are two basic steps in sustainable development and strengthening of the country's economy," the president noted.

The major element in attraction of investment is the mutual trust between the



government and the private sector, the president noted, stressing, "None of the investors making an investment in the country legally should feel economic, social and political insecurity in the process of participation in the development of the country."

President Rouhani also urged the Iranian ministries dealing with the investment issues to carry out their duties accurately, stressing the need to create "direct and indirect economic incentives" and formulate clear regulations on application for the permissions.

The Iranian administration provides special support for the domestic and foreign investors making investment in revenue-generating economic sector and would offer them incentives to ensure reliable and secure investment, the president added.

President Rouhani finally warned that the attempts to misrepresent the situation in Iran and carry out harmful psychological measures in the economic sector, as in the stock exchange and currency markets, are aimed at dissuading the community of economic activists and investors.

## Israelis, Saudis Plotting For Creating Crisis in region

TEHRAN (MNA) - Deputy Commander of IRGC Quds Force said that Zionist regime and Saudi Arabia are plotting to create crisis in the region in order to take revenge on Iran.

Brigadier General Seyed Mohammad Hejazi made the remarks on the occasion of 1st anniversary of martyrdom of former IRGC Quds Force Commander Lt. Gen. Soleimani, held in IRIB International Conferences Center, and added, "Bravery and sacrifice of martyr Lt. Gen. Soleimani was his salient characteristics in the fight against terrorism."

When U.S. President Trump assassinated martyr Lt. Gen. Soleimani, he thought that his heinous act would have been welcomed by some countries but the glorious and magnificent funeral ceremonies held for martyr Lt. Gen. Soleimani surprised him completely, Brigadier General Hejazi added.

In their opinions, Zionist regime and Saudi Arabia intend to take revenge on Iran by creating a crisis in the region firstly, he said, adding, "Secondly, these countries including Zionist regime and Saudi Arabia intend to push Joe Biden in a direction that will have to follow Trump's policies."

"We have received information from various informed sources that both Zionist regime and Saudi Arabia are trying to create a crisis in the last days of Trump's presidency in order to achieve their malicious goals," he added.

Certainly, the policies announced by future U.S. administration are not approved by the Zionist regime and Saudis and they want to prevent it, he reiterated.

## 20% Uranium Enrichment Does Not Mean JCPOA Death

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Abbas Araqchi said on Monday night that Iran began uranium enrichment at 20% upon the parliament's decision, adding that Iran's reduction of commitments is based on JCPOA and it does not mean death of the deal.

Speaking in an interview with TV, Araqchi said 20% enrichment has been one of the most important issues of Iran nuclear program. It is used for fueling Tehran reactor which had earlier been imported from abroad.

About 11 years ago, Tehran reactor fuel was finished and they did not fulfill our demand for supplying the fuel so Iranian scientists made 20% enrichment, he added.

Tehran reactor is used for research purposes and makes radio medicines, he said, adding that over one million cancer patients need these drugs.

Iran stopped 20% enrichment in the context of the JCPOA and had no urgent need at that time, he noted.

After U.S. withdrawal from Iran nuclear deal, Iran reduced its commitments in five steps. In the second step, Iran announced that it is not satisfied with 3.67% enrichment and need a higher level.

Iranian parliament in a legislation obliged government to do 20% enrichment, Araqchi said stressing that the enrichment procedure is based on NPT Agreements.

Putting pressure on Iran is not the way to preserve the JCPOA, Western parties should return to their commitments, he reiterated.

Iran has 4,000 kg under 5% enriched materials, he said adding that Iran has altered some limitations envisaged by the JCPOA.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Araqchi reacted to Zionist regime accusations against Iran of having weapons program, saying these allegations are baseless and the Israeli regime itself has suspicious activities.

Iran has proved its commitment not to produce nuclear weapon and implemented its commitments with goodwill, he said.

No one in the world can accuse Iran of ill will in the context of the JCPOA, he stated.

Iran did not leave the negotiation table, but it was the U.S. which left the table so they have to return to the deal and to lift sanctions.

Western states are deluded and think that Iran is ready to return to JCPOA under US pressures and they can set conditions for Iran, Araqchi said.

Iran has not opened its arms for returning to JCPOA, he said advising the U.S. to stop illusions.

Iran will not accept any condition for returning to JCPOA and will add no article to the deal, he said stressing that no other issue especially missile program will be negotiated.

## Spokesman Calls Seoul 'Hostage-Taker'

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Government Spokesman Ali Rabiei has dismissed the allegations that Iran is holding hostage the South Korean vessel seized in its southern waters, saying if there is any hostage-taker, it's the Seoul government which has frozen \$7 billion in Iranian funds.

"Regarding the allegations of 'hostage-taking' which I'm hearing these days; if there is a hostage taker here, that's the South Korean government which has taken hostage over \$7 billion in Iranian funds for groundless pretexts," Rabiei said in a Tuesday press conference.

Even when it comes to commodities like medicine which they claim are not under sanctions, they cite baseless pretexts to deny Iran's access despite the difficult conditions of our people, he noted.

"We haven't been a hostage-taker. If there is any hostage-taker here, I believe it's the Korean government. Our nation's historical memory will never forget it. They [Koreans] did not make any extra efforts to give the Iranian people access to their money," he reiterated.

"Regarding the vessel, it has been seized based on a judicial order, according to our military and judicial officials. It has been confiscated because of oil pollution in the Persian Gulf," Rabiei noted, referring to the IRGC Navy's Monday seizure of a South Korean chemical tanker in the Persian Gulf.

"It had earlier received warning, and the request for its seizure has been a technical one made by a technical organization. It is usual in the world, and it's nothing complicated," he added.

He also slammed the new psychological war waged by the outgoing US administration against Tehran, warning that the country will strongly defend its interests in case of any miscalculations by the United States in the region.

Speaking at a press conference on Tuesday, he said Tehran has evidence that some in the U.S. are seeking to trigger a new conflict in West Asia.

"It is very unlikely that the U.S. administration will miscalculate Iran's resolute intentions as well as its deterrence and retaliation capability. We have made it clear to them that we will not start any war directly or indirectly, but if a blatant mistake is made by the United States, we will defend our security and vital interests with full force," Rabiei added.

The remarks come amid heightened tensions between Iran and the U.S. in the final days of President Donald Trump's administration.

## Oil Industry Undergone Most Pressure From Sanctions

TEHRAN (IRNA) - First Vice President said on Tuesday that the oil and gas sector has undergone the most pressure from the sanctions, adding that the oil and gas and petrochemical sectors are crucial for the economic development of the country.

Speaking to the working group of "Surge in Production", Jahangiri hailed Petroleum Ministry performance with regard to create surge in production.

He said that the oil industry has been under the most pressures due to the cruel sanctions.

Some parts of these pressures were compensated by relying on the Resistance Economy and capabilities of experts in oil industry.

During the meeting, petroleum minister presented a report on increasing capacity of crude oil production, increasing production and export of natural gas, petrochemicals, developing technology, bolstering domestic production, supporting knowledge-based companies, optimizing fuel consumption and sharing experiences.

Earlier, Hamid Reza Oluomi-Yazdi, head of the Presidential Center for International Legal Affairs, said that all sectors of Iran's economy, including oil and gas and finance and banking have been affected by the cruel U.S. sanctions, which have inflicted financial and non-financial losses on the Iranian people and companies.

## U.S. Goal Is to Divide Countries of Region | Rapprochement Possible If Saudi Arabia Changes Tack

TEHRAN (IP)- The commander of the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps' Aerospace Force, stating that the Americans want the countries of the West Asian region to have no army and armed forces, added that the U.S.' goal is to divide the countries of the region.

Brigadier General Amir Ali Hajizadeh, said at the commemoration of the anniversary of General Qassem Soleimani, at Imam Hossein University in Tehran: "The United States has designed and implemented its strategies and scenarios with the goal of dominating the region."

He also referred to the fight of Martyr Soleimani against ISIS terrorists in Iraq and Syria, emphasizing: "Today, thanks to the courage of Martyr Soleimani and the martyrs who defended the shrine, the will and discourse of the Islamic Revolution and the resistance have affected from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea."

TEHRAN (IFP)- Foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh says a détente and rapprochement is possible between Tehran and Riyadh if Saudi Arabia gives up its wrong approach.

"Iran's message has remained the same. When Saudi Arabia comes to realize that it can talk to us and to the region in a straightforward manner, and return to the region and stop buying security from countries beyond the region, then the region will definitely have better days ahead," Khatibzadeh said. "Saudi Arabia is an important country. Saudi people are highly respected. We had good relations in the past. And it is possible to revive those relations if the Al Saud rulers stop following the wrong path they have chosen," he said.

He lashed out at Saudi Arabia for imposing a blockade and famine on the Yemeni nation, and said if the Yemen crisis is settled, it will benefit the whole region.

"What is happening in Yemen, and is happening every day is really saddening. Imposing a blockade and famine on a nation is a historical catastrophe," he said.

"Yemen is a close neighbor of Saudi Arabia, and Riyadh should know that this is not the right way of dealing with a neighbor," he added.

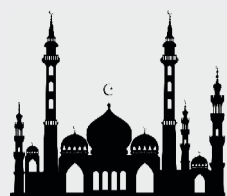
"Saudi Arabia has also maintained a blockade on Qatar for several years now, which is not good at all. We believe the sooner any of these two crises are settled, the better it will be for the region," said the spokesman.

## Iran, Pakistan to Establish Anti-Narcotics Information Exchange Committee

ISLAMABAD (IRNA) - Chief of Iran's Anti-Narcotics Police says Tehran and Islamabad have agreed to establish an information exchange committee between the anti-narcotics forces of the two neighboring states.

Brigadier-General Majid Karimi said after a meeting with Director-General of Pakistan Anti-Narcotics Forces (ANF) Major General Mohammad Arif Malik said the meeting was constructive and fruitful.

"Today's meeting focused on bilateral issues related to the latest situation and methods of drug trafficking in the region, especially at the border crossings," he said.



## PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:10
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:26
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:45
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	07:14

4. To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and on earth; and He is Most High, Most Great.  
5. The heavens are almost rent asunder from above them (by His Glory); and the angels celebrate the Praises of their Lord, and pray for forgiveness for (all) beings on earth: Behold! Verily Allah is He, the Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.  
Surah 42. Counsel, Consultation (4-5)

## Armenian Economic, Trade Delegation to Visit Tehran

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN - A high-level delegation from the public and private sectors, headed by the Armenian Minister of Economy, will travel to Tehran early next month to advance trade and economic goals, announced an Iranian official at TPO.**

Mojtaba Mousavian, an official at Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPO), made the announcement, saying that negotiations on the further development of goods in the Eurasian Economic Memorandum, banking and transit agreements, and coordination for holding a special exhibition of Iran in Yerevan are among the goals of this trip.

He added that the Armenian trade delegation will also visit several production and industrial centers and review the joint production and export of products to other countries.

Meanwhile Iran's Ambassador to Armenia Mr. Abbas Badakhshan pointed to the significance of Armenia and its market, adding that the political condition is ripe for entering the market.

He said Armenia as a member of Eurasian Economic Union and having preferential tariffs with some European countries is a distinguished country among Iran's neighboring states.

Yerevan government suspended the import of Turkish-made goods to Armenia for six months in response to Turkish military support for the Republic of Azerbaijan.



This ban was adopted on October 20, 2020, and came into force on January 1, 2021. An official from the Iranian Trade Promotion Organization announced that Armenia has announced that it is to replace 2,250 Turkish products with Iranian goods.

"Due to Turkish sanctions, Armenia intends to replace Iranian goods with 2,250 items imported from Turkey," the Iranian official said.

Meanwhile Ali Shariati, board member of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA), said Armenia's market is a new opportunity for Iranian producers.

Iran now has the advantage of exporting goods such as sweets and chocolates, ceramic tiles, detergents, shoes, flooring and carpets and textile and clothing to Armenia, in addition to the previously traded items, he told ILNA on Tuesday.

"We may not have been able to make good use of regional agreements in the past, but this is an opportunity for us to enter the Armenian market with full force," Shariati said.

## Future Months Determining for Oil Market

TEHRAN (Shana) – Iran Oil Minister Bijan Zangeneh said on Monday that future months are determining for oil market in terms of supply-demand uncertainties.

He made the remark on the sidelines of the 13th OPEC+ Ministerial Meeting, adding, "We could reach a consensus. There are two proposals. One suggests extending the previously-agreed decision, while the other suggests increasing output by 500,000 bpd."

I think holding monthly meeting by OPEC and non-OPEC members is logical. No decision will last for long term in the current conditions due the uncertainties, Zangeneh added.

Asking about some members' proposals for increasing oil output, he said the fact is that OPEC+ decisions are made by consensus and if a member disagrees, we cannot force them to agree, he stated.

There are different views on the importance of prices or market share for OPEC. Some members are in favor of market share, while prices matter for others. However, we have to reach a consensus on this, he said.

There should not be an increase in global oil reserves and output, he said, adding oil market is fragile and a mistake could decrease oil price and cause many problems.

## MSC, TCCIMA Sign MoU on Cooperation

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Mobarakeh Steel Company and Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mine and Agriculture (TCCIMA) signed a memorandum of understanding on cooperation in the digital development field in line with synergy, participation and strategic cooperation.

In a ceremony, manager of MSC Eng. Hamid Reza Azimian and Head of TCCIMA Mr. Masoud Khansari signed the MoU.

Speaking on the MoU, Mr. Azimian pointed to the necessity of implementing the digital development plan as a guarantee for competitiveness and keeping the current position of the company in the domestic and international markets, and highlighted the challenges and concerns in front of the company.

He pointed to the pressures of costs, competition, requirements of services, complexity of the process and needs of products as the main challenges ahead of the company, and termed legal and regulation requirements, customer and diversity in production of products beside many markets as the other challenges for the company in this regard.

Azimian also compared the position of Iran's steel industry among the top 20 countries in the world and said it ranks 11 in the world, adding that due to the existing capacity of Iran's steel industry in comparison to other economic field, it has this potential to compete in the world to improve its position in rankings.

He said by implementing the digital development plan, such achievement of the steel industry and especially in Mobarakeh Steel Company may happen.

He said the topics in the MOU are new, adding that there are good grounds for joint cooperation between MSC and TCCIMA and institutionalization of digital development in all national industries and participation in investment in infrastructures are some of those grounds.



## Iran Ranks 7th In World in Copper Reserves



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The Managing Director of National Iranian Copper Industries Company (NICICO) Ardeshir Sa'ad Mohammadi says Iran with having 36.5m tons of copper reserves ranks seventh in the world and the country seeks to increase its copper production to 600,000 tons per year in the next five years.

Speaking in the 3th Iran Non-Ferrous Industries Market and Related Technologies Conference and Exhibition which was held at Olympic Hotel of Tehran, Sa'ad Mohammadi said to create development and progress, the country needs change in thinking and also modern multisystem equipment and drilling fleet, adding that so far 15 new drilling machines have been purchased.

He went on to say that Iran by having 36.5m tons of copper reserves, equal to 4.2 percent of the world copper reserves, ranks seventh in the world. He said Sarcheshmeh copper mine ranks 29, Sungun mine ranks 76th and Miduk ranks 114th, and they are among the biggest copper mines in the world.

Sa'ad Mohammadi noted that NICICO is able to slip into the top 10 world copper producers, adding that world major copper companies are reducing the carat of their products to protect production and demand, and Iran is moving in the same direction but has increased its operational tonnage. He reiterated that the approach in this industry should change and the industry should move on course to reduce costs in terms of economic aspect and also to boost safety.

He said the copper cathode production has been 217,000 tons this year and the company can increase 180,000 tons more by the yearend and it means the company is 11 percent ahead of the schedule. He added that in anode production, the amount of production has been 14 percent more than the last year schedule, adding that the company has earned some 28,000b tomans through sales in nine months and the dividend of the company has increased 35 percent due to its good performance.

Sa'ad Mohammadi then pointed to some plans of the NICICO for the future, saying that the company is determined to increase the copper production to 600,000 tons per year in five years and currently the slag floatation unit is under construction at Sarcheshmeh Copper Complex.

## POGC Installs New SPM to Boost SP Condensate Exports

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Pars Oil and Gas Company (POGC), which is in charge of developing the country's giant South Pars gas field in the Persian Gulf, has installed a second single-point-mooring (SPM) system at Site 2 of the mentioned field to facilitate gas condensate exports from the region.

According to the POGC office of Public Relations, this SPM, with a loading capacity of 7,000 cubic meters per hour of gas condensate, was installed by the Sea Master Vessel in its designated place in the Persian Gulf waters on Monday.

With the installation of this new SPM system, the construction and quality tests of which were carried out by a foreign company and was delivered to Iran in May 2020, the loading capacity of the gas condensate at the South Pars phases will increase significantly.

Currently, the gas condensate produced at Pars 2 region is sent through a subsea pipeline to the SPM No. 1 of the South Pars Phase 12 to be loaded for exports, and the second SPM is also going to be connected to the site by a 36-inch subsea pipeline with a length of 6.8 kilometers.

The new SPM is also intended to increase the operational flexibility for gas condensate exports by making POGC able to carry out periodic facility repairs on both SPM systems, and will also prevent the deterioration of condensate measuring and loading equipment by balancing the operational loads between the two systems.

In late December 2020, Iran inaugurated its strategic gas condensate storage facilities in the South Pars region in a move to boost the storage and exports of the mentioned commodity.



## ESCO Inks Contract to Export Rail to Afghanistan

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

ISFAHAN - Islamic Republic of Iran signed an agreement for export of rail to neighboring Afghanistan.

According to the export promotion policy to 15 neighboring states, Islamic Republic of Iran signed a contract, valued at \$4.332 million, for exporting rail to Afghanistan, Iranian Steel Producers Association (ISPA) stated.

Under the contract, Esfahan Steel Company (ESCO) would be empowered to export its products to the international markets.

According to the statistics of ISPA, Islamic Republic of Iran exported 3,787,000 tons of steel ingots in the first eight months of the current year (from March 21 to Nov. 22), showing a 13 percent decline as compared to the last year's corresponding period.

Iran exported 4.377 million tons of steel ingot to other countries in the first eight months of the last Iranian calendar year (from March 21 to Nov. 22, 2019).

The rail produced by Esfahan Steel Company (ESCO) observes requirements of international standard and presently, country's railway development projects including Chabahar-Zahedan, Yazd-Eghlid, Hamedan-Sanandaj, Miyaneh-Ardabil, Bostanabad-Tabriz and Rasht-Caspian are under construction using

domestically-produced rail.

Statistics showed that 1.679 million tons of steel products were exported to target markets in the first eight months of the current year, registering a 30 percent decline as compared to the same period of last year.

## 50% Progress in Renovation of Worn Out Water Networks of Tiran, Karvan

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The manager of Tiran and Karvan Water and Wastewater Company in Isfahan Province says the project of renovating and reconstructing the worn out water distribution networks in towns of Tiran and Karvan has progressed 50 percent.

Mr. Saeed Abedini said that according to the 100-300 project, over 26 kilometers of the worn out water distribution network of 9 villages of the town are to be renovated, and since December, almost 13 kilometers of the network has been renovated and fixed.

He said in the project, it has been stipulated worn out projects in the villages of Kord Olia, Ali Abad, Ab Garm, Ab Poun, Allah Abad, Kharmanan, Darreh Bid, Mirabad and Varposht to be reconstructed and renovated and currently the process is underway.

He said 41 out of 50 villages in Tiran and Karvan region are under coverage of the Water and Wastewater Company of the town, adding that the rural population of Tiran and Karvan region is 37,000 people and so far over 16,000 service lines have been given to the villagers.

Abedini added that the length of rural water distribution network of Tiran and Karvan is 300 kilometers, adding that the rural water supply line is around 139 kilometers and 30 percent of distribution network needs reconstruction and renovation.

He said by full implementation of the 100-300 project in this region, the amount of waste of water will drop by 28 percent.

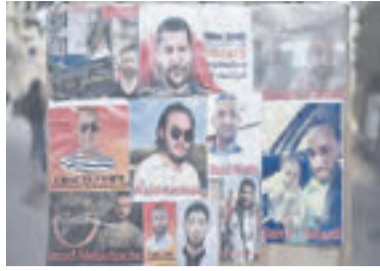


## Algerian Protester Sentenced to Three Years

ALGIERS (Dispatches) - An Algerian supporter of the Hirak protest movement was sentenced to three years in jail Monday for satirical social media posts mocking the government and religion, a campaign group said.

Walid Kechida, 25, was accused of insulting President Abdelmajid Tebboune and "offending the precepts" of Islam in internet memes and other online posts, said Kaci Tansaout, from the CNLD prisoners' rights group.

"Walid Kechida is sadly sentenced to three years in prison with a fine," Tansaout said, adding that lawyers would appeal.



## Former CAR President Under Investigation for Rebellion

CAPE TOWN (Dispatches) - The Central African Republic has launched an investigation into former President Francois Bozize, whom the government accuses of plotting a coup before last month's elections.

On December 19, the government accused Bozize of mounting "an attempted coup" with the help of armed groups, eight days before the troubled country held presidential and legislative elections.

Three armed groups had forced an alliance and were advancing on Bangui, it said.

The United Nations peacekeeping force MINUSCA said the following day that the advance had been halted or rolled back.



## Saudi Arabia, Qatar Agree to Open Airspace, Land and Sea Border



RIYADH (Dispatches) - Saudi Arabia will reopen its airspace and land and sea border to Qatar, as of Monday, Kuwait's foreign minister said, citing a deal towards resolving a political dispute that led Riyadh and its allies to impose a boycott on Qatar.

"Based on [Kuwait's ruler Emir] Sheikh Nawaf's proposal, it was agreed to open the airspace and land and sea borders between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the State of Qatar, starting from this evening," Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Ahmad Nasser Al-Sabah said on state TV on Monday. In June 2017, the blockading countries - Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt - accused Qatar, among other things, of supporting terrorism and being too close to Iran and severed economic and diplomatic ties. They also imposed a land, sea and air blockade on Qatar. Qatar has repeatedly denied the allegations and said there was "no legitimate justification" for the severance of relations.

Kuwait has been mediating between Qatar and four Arab states.

Last month, the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (PGCC) said Qatar's emir was invited to the bloc's summit meeting next week in Saudi Arabia amid efforts to heal the rifts.

Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani received a formal invitation from Saudi King Salman to the January 5 summit of the six-nation PGCC.

In remarks carried by the Saudi state-run news agency on Monday, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman said the PGCC summit will be "inclusive", leading the states toward "reunification and solidarity in facing the challenges of our region".

Al Jazeera's Jamal al-Shayyal said Monday's announcement was "very significant in the sense that it is paving the way to the announcement".

"One of the pre-conditions the Qataris had was that it made no sense to discuss or sign an agreement as long as it remained under an unjust and illegal blockade," he added.

## Canary Islands Sees More Than Eight-Fold Increase in Migrants in 2020

GRAN CANARIA (Reuters) - The number of undocumented migrants arriving in Spain's Canary Islands was more than eight times higher in 2020 than in the previous year, the Spanish Interior Ministry said on Monday.

With north and sub-Saharan Africans desperate losing income from tourism and other industries because of the COVID-19 pandemic, 23,023 migrants arrived in the archipelago last year, up from 2,687 in 2019, the ministry said.

Hundreds of people died last year making the perilous crossing to the islands in the Atlantic Ocean, often in overcrowded boats with unreliable engines, the International Organization for Migration said.

## Germany Mulls Delaying Second COVID-19 Vaccine Shot

BERLIN (Reuters) - Germany was weighing on Monday whether to allow a delay in administering a second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine from BioNTech and Pfizer to make scarce supplies go further, after a similar move by Britain last week.

Separately, Denmark approved on Monday a delay of up to six weeks between the first and second shots of the vaccine. In Berlin, the health ministry was seeking the view of an independent vaccination commission on whether to delay a second shot beyond a current 42-day maximum limit, according to a one-page document seen by Reuters on Monday.

The move came amid criticism of Health Minister Jens Spahn - including from his conservative political allies - that Germany has failed to procure enough vaccines and been too slow to ramp up its national inoculation campaign. Spahn told his Christian Democratic Union at a closed-door meeting on Monday that he hoped to offer vaccinations by this summer to everyone in Germany, once more vaccines have won regulatory approval, according to sources who attended.

Some German health experts have welcomed Britain's move to delay administering a second dose of the BioNTech/Pfizer shot, which comes as governments try to provide protection against coronavirus to as many people as possible by giving

them one shot and delaying a second.

"In view of the current scarcity of vaccines and the very high numbers of infections and hospitalisations (in Germany), a strategy in which as many people as possible are vaccinated as early as possible is more effective," said Leif-Erik Sander, head of the vaccine research team at Berlin's Charité hospital. However, BioNTech and Pfizer pointed in a joint statement to a lack of trial data to support delaying the second dose.

"The safety and efficacy of the vaccine has not been evaluated on different dosing schedules as the majority of trial participants received the second dose within the window specified in the study design," the companies said, referring to a prime shot and a booster given three weeks apart.

"There is no data to demonstrate that protection after the first dose is sustained after 21 days."

The European Medicines Agency said a maximum interval of 42 days between the first and the second shot of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine should be respected to obtain full protection.

According to the latest daily update from the Robert Koch Institute, Germany has vaccinated around 239,000 people since starting its campaign on Dec. 27 - well short of the 1.3 million doses that were delivered by the end of 2020.



## U.S. Will Continue to Seek Assange's Extradition

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The United States will continue to seek WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange's extradition, the U.S. Department of Justice said on Monday after a British judge ruled that he should not be extradited to face criminal charges.

"While we are extremely disappointed in the court's ultimate decision, we are gratified that the United States prevailed on every point of law raised. In particular, the court rejected all of Mr. Assange's arguments regarding political motivation, political offense, fair trial, and freedom of speech. We will continue to seek Mr. Assange's extradition to the United States," department spokesman Marc Raimondi said in a statement.

A British judge ruled on Monday that WikiLeaks founder Assange should not be extradited to the United States to face criminal charges including breaking a spying law, saying his mental health problems meant he would be at risk of suicide. The U.S. authorities accuse Assange of 18 offences relating to the release by WikiLeaks of vast troves of confidential



## Johnson Orders New England COVID Lockdown

LONDON (Dispatches) - British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has ordered England into a new national lockdown to try to slow a surge in COVID-19 cases that threatens to overwhelm parts of the health system before a vaccine program reaches a critical mass.

Johnson said on Monday a new, more contagious variant of the coronavirus was spreading at great speed and urgent action was needed to slow it down.

"As I speak to you tonight, our hospitals are under more pressure from COVID than any time since the start of the pandemic," Johnson said in a televised address to the country as he ditched his regional approach to fighting the pandemic. "With most of the country already under extreme measures, it's clear that we need to do more together to bring this new variant under control."

"We must therefore go into a national lockdown, which is tough enough to contain this variant. That means the government is once again instructing you to stay at home."

Johnson said the measures would include school closures from Tuesday and rules requiring most people to stay at home apart from essential shopping, exercise and other limited exceptions.

He said that if the timetable of the vaccination programme went as planned and the number of cases and deaths responded to the lockdown measures as expected, it should be possible to start moving out of lockdown by the middle of February.

However, he urged caution about the timetable.

As the United Kingdom grapples with the world's sixth-highest death toll and the number of daily cases hit a new high, the country's chief medical officers said the spread of COVID-19 risked overwhelming parts of the health system within 21 days. The surge in cases has been driven by the new variant of COVID-19, officials say, and while they acknowledge that the pandemic is spreading more quickly than expected, they say there is also light at the end of the tunnel - vaccinations.

## In Georgia, Trump Pressures Pence, Biden Promises New Day With Senate Runoffs

DALTON (Reuters) - President-elect Joe Biden and outgoing President Donald Trump held dueling rallies in Georgia on Monday to persuade supporters to turn out on Tuesday for runoff U.S. Senate elections that will determine the balance of power in Washington.

The Georgia races pit a pair of incumbent Republicans, Senators Kelly Loeffler and David Perdue, against Democratic challengers Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff, respectively.

Biden wants both Democrats to win so his party will control both houses of Congress when he takes office on January 20. Trump's team wants Republicans to win so that, with Senate control, his party can block or curtail Biden's legislative agenda.

Trump, a Republican who lost the November presidential election to his Democratic counterpart, has not conceded to Biden, and he spent part of his rally remarks in Dalton, a city in Georgia's heavily Republican northwest, suggesting that he would try to hold on to power.

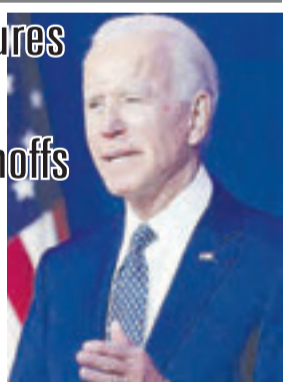
"They're not taking this White House. We're going to fight like hell," Trump said to cheers from the crowd, which chanted "Fight for Trump!"

Biden criticized the outgoing administration for its handling of the pandemic and promised a fresh start for the country with Democratic control. More than 350,000 people have died from the coronavirus in the United States, and it is spreading rapidly in most states.

"It's a new year, and tomorrow can be a new day for Atlanta, for Georgia and for America," Biden said.

He said the Trump administration had "gotten off to a god-awful start" with the slow rollout of the COVID-19 vaccines. "The president spends more time whining and complaining than doing something about the problem," he said.

Democratic candidates, if elected, would ensure that \$2,000 stimulus checks were delivered to Americans as the economy struggles during the coronavirus pandemic, Biden said.



**Shanon**  
(adviser)

**Elahieh Apt (\$2200)**  
250sq.m, 3bdrs  
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J, balcony  
fireplace  
Fully Furn

**Zaferanieh Villa (\$5000)**  
1000sq.m  
5bdrs, S/p  
S, J, balcony  
green yard  
Fully Furn

**Parsian**

**(\$1500)**  
**Velenjak Apt**  
130sq.m, 2bdrs  
S/p, S, J, pkg  
yard, gym, F.F

**Farmanieh Apt (\$2500)**  
200sq.m, 3bdrs, S/pool  
balcony, pkg, & Fully Furn

**(\$10000)**  
**Kamranieh bldg**  
5storey, 20bdrs  
S/pool, S, J, pkgs  
Brand new, & F.F

**Sa`adat abad Apt (\$1600)**  
160sq.m, 3bdrs, balcony  
pkg, marble fl, & Fully Furn

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## Singapore Economy Shrinks 5.8% in 2020

SINGAPORE (Dispatches) - Singapore closed its worst year of economic performance on an optimistic note as the economy shrank less than expected.

Gross domestic product (GDP) contracted by 5.8 per cent for the whole of 2020 amid the disruption to economic activities caused by the coronavirus pandemic, according to the Ministry of Trade and Industry's (MTI) advanced estimates released on Monday (Jan 4).

The full-year growth is an improvement on MTI's earlier forecast of a contraction of 6.5 per cent to 6 per cent made in November and is much lower than its previous estimate of a 7 per cent to 5 per cent shrinkage.



## Venezuela's Oil Exports Sink to 1940's Level

LONDON (Reuters) - Pressured by strict U.S. sanctions, Venezuela's oil exports plunged by 376,500 barrels per day (bpd) in 2020, according to Refinitiv Eikon data and internal documents from state-run PDVSA, financially squeezing socialist President Nicolas Maduro.

The administration of U.S. President Donald Trump also put curbs on PDVSA's main trading partners, the owners of tankers still transporting Venezuelan oil and on fuel supply to the gasoline-thirsty nation.

The punishment, aimed to oust Maduro after his 2018 re-election was called a sham by most Western nations, has led PDVSA to pursue new customers, rely on mostly unknown intermediaries to resell its oil and deepen ties with Iran, another country under U.S. sanctions.

Venezuela's exports of crude and refined products fell 37.5% in 2020 to 626,534 bpd, the lowest in 77 years. The decrease was even larger for fuel imports, which fell 51% compared with 2019, to 83,780 bpd, according to the data.

The drop in the crude oil offer was several times that of the global market, which fell about 9% last year from COVID-19 constraints. PDVSA did not reply to a request for comment.

Venezuela's oil exports swung wildly during the year, plummeting after Washington imposed sanctions on two units of PDVSA's main trade partner, Russia's Rosneft, and bouncing back when the Venezuelan state oil company found new customers and vessels to ship its oil.

Sanctions led to series of subterfuges. Unwilling to be seen at Venezuelan ports, some vessels turned to 'dark voyages' or transporting the oil with transponders turned off, and PDVSA began using the names of scrapped ships to disguise the real identity of tankers loading at its terminals.

The United Arab Emirates, one of Washington's closest allies in the Middle East, recently has emerged as a hub for shipping firms helping Venezuela skirt U.S. sanctions in a move similar to what happened with Iran in recent years.

In December, exports of crude and refined products by PDVSA and its joint ventures dropped to almost 487,000 bpd, while fuel imports - crucial to feed gasoline stations as domestic refineries are barely working - plummeted to 7,500 bpd, the data showed.

The state-run company's inability to revive exports and its new dependence on imported fuel have sunk OPEC member Venezuela's industry to levels not seen since the 1940s, when it was boosting crude output while planning its first refineries.

PDVSA inaugurated the 310,000-bpd Cardon refinery on the west coast in 1947. The facility, along with neighboring Amuay, remain mostly idled due to lack of maintenance, parts and proper crude to operate.

The company also has been forced to match its crude output to the low export level, leaving heavy oil upgraders, important for making exportable crude grades, to work intermittently in recent months, according to the firm's documents.

## German Manufacturing Picks Up Steam

BERLIN (Reuters) - German factories churned out more goods in December despite a stricter lockdown to head off a spike in coronavirus deaths in Europe's largest economy, a survey showed on Monday.

IHS Markit's final Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) for manufacturing, which accounts for about a fifth of the German economy, rose to 58.3 from 57.8 the previous month.

The December reading was slightly below a flash estimate released last month, but it still marked the highest reading since February 2018.

IHS Markit economist Phil Smith said German manufacturing continued to power on at the end of the year as only producers of consumer goods showed some weakness following fresh lockdowns at home and abroad.

Germany imposed a limited lockdown on Nov. 2 under which restaurants, bars, gyms and entertainment venues were closed while factories and shops remained open.

As those measures failed to bring down infection numbers, authorities put in place stricter curbs from Dec. 16 which have shuttered most stores as well as hair salons and other services.

The survey revealed growing supply chain pressures, with widespread reports of shortages of raw materials and components, bottlenecks in sea freight due to a lack of available containers and other COVID-19-related disruptions.

Those supply problems did not cause major disruptions in production in December, but they may start to bite in the coming months, Smith said.

"Nevertheless, manufacturers mainly see a bright future in 2021. With the rollout of the COVID vaccines, it's hoped that the pandemic will become less and less of a hindrance to demand and that investment will continue to recover in the year ahead."



## Asian Factories Bounce Back From COVID-19 Hit

TOKYO (Reuters) - Asian factory activity expanded moderately in December thanks to robust demand in regional giant China, business surveys showed on Monday, but the prospect of tougher coronavirus curbs clouded the outlook for the recovering sector.

Manufacturing activity expanded in Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, according to PMI surveys, the latest indication that manufacturers in the region continue to bounce back from the damage caused by the COVID-19 pandemic last year.

But a slowdown in China's factory activity growth underscores the challenges the region faces as rising cases globally force many countries to reimpose curbs on economic activity, clouding the outlook for exports. China's Caixin/Markit Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) fell in December to 53.0 - its lowest level in three months - but stayed well above the 50-level that separates growth from contraction.

"External demand was likely impacted by the continued global spread of COVID-19 and reimplementation of lockdowns," HSBC's China economist Erin Xin said in a research note.

The reading, which was lower than November's 54.9, fell roughly in line with the official gauge of factory activity that showed activity moderating at a high level.

Elsewhere in the region, output stabilised in Japan for the first time in two years, while India's factory sector ended a rough 2020 on a stronger note as manufacturers boosted production to meet rising demand. The final au Jibun Bank Japan PMI rose to a seasonally adjusted 50.0 in December from the previous month's 49.0, ending a record 19-month run of declines. "Japanese manufacturers signalled a broad stabilisation in operating conditions at the end of a tumultuous year," said Usamah Bhatti, an economist at IHS Markit.



## Kazakhstan to Chair Eurasian Economic Union in 2021

NUR-SULTAN (TCA) — In the coming year, Kazakhstan will assume the chairmanship of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) — an economic-integration bloc consisting of Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia, which will give Kazakhstan the opportunity to develop topical issues and generally promote the integration agenda, Bakhyt Sultanov, Minister of Trade and Integration of Kazakhstan, said while summing up the results of 2020, the Ministry of Trade and Integration of Kazakhstan reported on December 31.

Minister Sultanov said that trade in the EEU is at an insufficient level. Kazakhstan's trade turnover with partners in the Eurasian Union decreased by 11.6% in 2020. In part, the reason for the low turnover is the remaining trade barriers between its member countries.

On December 31, the Majilis (lower house of the Kazakh parliament) approved the ratification of the Free Trade Agreement of the Eurasian Economic Union with Serbia, Minister Sultanov said, adding that Kazakhstan, Belarus and Russia already have a free trade zone with Serbia on a bilateral basis. Now this procedure will be extended to other countries of the Union.

"Now we will be able to supply cheese, alcoholic beverages and cigarettes to Serbia duty-free," Minister Sultanov said. "The potential for increasing Kazakhstan's exports to this country is estimated at \$250 million. These are products of the petrochemical, chemical, metallurgical, machine-building, food industries and building materials.

In the past year, we have begun to study the feasibility of concluding similar agreements with Mongolia and Indonesia. Our potential to increase trade in the case of agreements with Mongolia is \$220 million, with Indonesia — \$525 million."

The minister said that Kazakhstan is negotiating free trade agreements with Egypt, Israel, and India. "We have already determined the list of exemptions and formed a list of goods of export interest. According to our calculations, if we conclude agreements with these three countries alone, we will be able to increase our trade turnover by \$800 million. Kazakhstan has the opportunity to increase exports to India alone for more than 1,800 types of goods (including 239 agricultural and 1646 industrial goods)," Minister Sultanov concluded.

## Euro Zone Companies See Productivity Boost From Pandemic

FRANKFURT (Reuters) -Euro zone companies expect to emerge more efficient from the coronavirus pandemic thanks to greater use of digital technologies and remote working, a European Central Bank survey showed on Monday.

The COVID-19 outbreak has caused the largest economic contraction in centuries,

but it might turn out to have a silver lining for firms in the long run by forcing them to modernise their business and become more adaptive.

The ECB asked 72 industrial and services firms about the long-term impact of the pandemic on the way they operate and the environment around them.

It found firms expected home office, virtual meetings and greater digitalisation to remain part of their daily life even after the pandemic, along with reduced demand.

"To a large extent, this seems to reflect a view that some changes in living and working habits brought about by the pandemic, especially the increased conduct of business and consumption online and a consequent reduction in travel, will become embedded," the ECB wrote in an article accompanying the survey's results.

These changes were seen helping boost productivity and reduce headcount.

"This would seem to reflect how businesses have learned to maintain production in spite of restrictions on labour inputs due to social distancing and the identification of related efficiency gains," the ECB said.

Germany was one of several euro zone countries set to extend a national lockdown this month to curb coronavirus infection rates that are still running high.

More than three-quarters of respondents in the ECB's survey said that their business would be more efficient and more resilient after the pandemic.

By contrast, some ideas that emerged in the early part of the outbreak, such as expectations that companies will internalise or localise part of their supply chain, had fallen out of favor.

## China's December Factory Activity Growth Slows



BEIJING (Reuters) - Activity in China's factory sector rose in December as the world's second-largest economy sustained its recovery to pre-pandemic levels, a business survey showed on Monday, however, increasing cost pressures slowed the pace of expansion.

The Caixin/Markit Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) fell to 53.0 from November's 54.9, with the gauge staying well above the 50-level that separates growth from contraction but missing expectations and easing to the softest pace in three months.

Analysts polled by Reuters had forecast the headline reading would slip to 54.8.

China's vast industrial sector has staged an impressive recovery from the coronavirus shock thanks to surprisingly strong exports. The economy is expected to expand around 2% for the whole of 2020 - the weakest pace in over three decades but much stronger than other major economies still struggling to contain infections.

However, tougher coronavirus control measures in many of its key trading partners in the west could dent industrial demand, weighing on the recovery.

The Caixin PMI reading comes after an official gauge of factory activity, focusing more on larger and state-owned firms, also moderated but remained strong.

"The negative impact of the pandemic on the domestic economy further subsided and the manufacturing industry continued to recover. Both the supply and demand sides continued to improve. Overseas demand also steadily increased," Wang Zhe, senior economist at Caixin Insight Group, wrote in a note accompanying the survey release.

The private sector survey also showed input prices rose sharply, at the fastest pace since 2017, with pricier raw materials, especially metals, blamed for the increase. Chinese factories also laid off more workers than they hired for the first time in four months, although the decline was modest.

## Iran Receives Most of Its Electricity Demand From Iraq

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Minister of Energy Reza Ardakanian said on Tuesday that Iraq's debt to the National Iranian Gas Company and the Power Generation, Distribution and Transmission Company (Tavanir) have been paid by the Iraqi government except for two months.

He said that Iran has two contracts regarding the exports of electricity and gas to Iraq.

Electricity exported from Iran to Iraq and other countries comes from various sectors such as hydroelectric power plants, electricity from liquid fuel, and gas-produced electricity, he added.

He went on to say that if all the electricity comes from gas production, all the gas that is consumed is less than 1 percent of the country's total daily gas production.



# U.S. Economy Plunges Into Recession Amid Pandemic

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - After plunging into the worst recession in decades amid COVID-19 shutdowns in 2020, the U.S. economy has been recovering in recent months.

With alarming case spikes and a long-delayed fiscal relief package, however, the recovery momentum is slipping away. Overshadowed even more by a behind-schedule vaccine rollout, the country will only find an uncertain and challenging economic recovery ahead.

What's worse, the economic pain inflicted by the pandemic has rippled unevenly across a variety of sectors, companies and communities, with certain service-intensive industries, smaller firms, and low-income Americans taking a disproportionate blow. Economists called this a K-shaped recovery, which widens inequality.

Amid COVID-19 shutdowns, the U.S. economy shrank at an annual rate of 5 percent in the first quarter of 2020, ending a decade-long economic expansion after the 2008 global financial crisis.

Then the economy went into free fall, dropping at a revised annual rate of 31.4 percent in the second quarter as COVID-19 fallout, registering the largest decline since the government began the records in 1947.

Some 22 million jobs disappeared in March-April, pushing the employment rate up to a staggering 14.7 percent. Economists estimated that at least 100,000 small businesses permanently closed in the spring.

As COVID-19 swept the country, U.S. states, under pressure to reopen the economy, started to deliver plans in late April or early May, regardless of warnings from experts that many states were not yet well prepared due to lack of a plan for large-scale nationwide testing and tracing actions.

"The U.S. situation remains bad and confused, with an absence of a national-level strategy for suppressing the virus, and therefore with no reliable strategy for the economic recovery," Jeffrey Sachs, economics professor at Columbia University and a senior United Nations advisor, told Xinhua in April 2020.

As businesses gradually reopened, the economy saw a robust rebound in the third quarter of 2020, expanding at a revised annual rate of 33.4 percent, though the performance still fell short of the pre-pandemic level.

Meanwhile, the unemployment rate has been falling, yet at a slowing pace in recent months. Weekly initial jobless claims, though largely trending down, increased in four weeks since the start of November, indicating a stalled recovery in the labor market.

The total number of COVID-19 cases in the United States topped 20 million on Friday, according to the Center for Systems Science and Engineering at Johns Hopkins University.

"The recovery is slowing down in the U.S. economy because of the surge in the coronavirus," Adam Posen, president of the Washington-based think tank Peterson



Institute for International Economics, recently told Xinhua via email. "The coronavirus surge was avoidable, but unfortunately our political leadership did not succeed in preventing it."

As businesses and families grappled with the pandemic-induced recession, lawmakers approved a 2.2-trillion-U.S.-dollar relief package in late March 2020 to salvage the economy, followed by months of deadlock over the size and scope of the next bailout.

The two parties spent so long to reach a deal because some politicians in Washington considered it not a help for them to win the election, and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi decided to wait for a meaningful size package, Posen said.

Recent COVID-19 spikes and a slowing recovery piled extra pressure on the lawmakers, and they eventually passed a 900-billion-dollar COVID-19 relief package, along with 1.4 trillion dollars in regular government funding for the rest of the fiscal year.

The relief plan allows another round of direct payments for individuals and federal unemployment benefits, both at a reduced level, as well as more funding for the Paycheck Protection Program to support small businesses, and for schools, testing and the distribution of vaccines.

## South Korea's Population Falls for First Time in Its History



SEOUL (Dispatches) - South Korea's population has fallen for the first time in the country's history, as it battles an ageing population and chronically low birth rate.

The latest census figures, released at the weekend, show the population stood at 51,829,023 at the end of December, down from 20,838 from the previous year.

South Korea's population had risen every year over the previous decade, although the growth rate had declined from 1.49% in 2010 to 0.05% by 2019, according to the Yonhap news agency.

Data reported by Yonhap showed the country recorded 275,815 births in 2020, compared with 307,764 deaths.

The trend, which has also led to a population decline in neighbouring Japan, is adding to pressure on the government to address the long-term demographic challenges posed by a rapidly ageing society and one of the lowest fertility rates in the world.

"Amid the rapidly declining birth rate, the government needs to undertake fundamental changes to its relevant policies," the interior ministry said.

As its overall population shrinks, South Korea - Asia's fourth-largest economy - is also experiencing a rise in the number of older people, with those aged 60 and over accounting for 24% of the total.

Depopulation is not confined to ageing rural regions; the population of the country's capital, Seoul, fell by just over 60,000 last year, Yonhap said.

The administration of the president, Moon Jae-in, recently announced initiatives to encourage couples to have bigger families, including a one-off payment of 1m won [€675] for pregnant women and monthly cash allowances for children aged under 12 months.

But critics say the measures do little to tackle much bigger financial obstacles to having more children, such as high education and housing costs.

Pressure on family finances aside, some experts have pointed to growing opposition among South Korean women to conforming to social norms by raising children and caring for ageing in-laws while their husbands work.

## U.S. to Terminate Pakistan's Designation as Major Non-NATO Ally

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - In a major blow to Islamabad, the U.S. House of Representatives has introduced a bill to terminate Pakistan's designation as a Major non-NATO ally. With the new bill, Pakistan will no longer enjoy access to U.S. defense supplies and cooperation in defense research and development projects.

The bill, introduced by Republican Congressman Andy Biggs on the first day of 117th Congress, does not allow the U.S. President to issue a separate designation to Pakistan as a Major non-NATO ally unless there is a presidential certification that Pakistan has undertaken military operations to disrupt safe haven and freedom of movement of the Haqqani Network in the country.

It also seeks presidential certification on Pakistan's steps demonstrating a commitment to preventing the Haqqani Network from using any Pakistani territory as a safe haven. It requires the Pakistan government to actively coordinate with Afghanistan to restrict the movement of militants.

Haqqani network, an insurgent organization, is part of the larger Taliban umbrella organization. It reportedly enjoys the backing of elements within the Pakistani

security establishment. Pakistan also needs to show progress in arresting and prosecuting Haqqani Network senior leaders and mid-level operatives, as per the bill.

The designation of the Major non-NATO ally is given to those countries which share a strategic relationship with the U.S. Armed Forces without being a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, a military alliance between 30 countries. Pakistan has been among the 17 Major non-NATO allies since 2004 when the Bush administration had made the country a strategic partnership. Pakistan was even designated as a Major Defense Partner by the U.S. under the Obama administration.

However, the ties between the two countries have been strained since 2018 when the Trump administration had suspended USD 3 billion in security assistance to Pakistan. President Trump had said that Pakistan did nothing for the U.S. despite billions of dollars given to the South Asian nation as aid.

The U.S. has been long accusing Pakistan of not taking satisfactory action against terror groups like Haqqani Network, Lashkar-e-Taiba, and Taliban. In the second term of Obama, U.S. lawmakers had begun introducing legislation to impose stringent conditions on Pakistan.

### Iran Submits...

FROM PAGE 1

He noted that Iran submitted the request to issue a 'Red Notice' for the culprits.

The U.S. terrorist forces assassinated Lt. General Soleimani, who was among the key figures in the fight against terrorism in Syria and Iraq in the past several years, and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the second-in-command of Iraq's pro-government Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) in an airstrike ordered by US President Donald Trump at Baghdad's international airport on January 3, 2020.

### S. Korea...

FROM PAGE 1

The statement added that the ship, carrying 7,200 tons of ethanol, was being held at Iran's southern Bandar Abbas port city.

Earlier, Director-General for African and Middle Eastern Affairs Koh Kyung-sok met with Iranian Ambassador Saeed Badamchi Shabestari, Yonhap news agency reported.

The Iranian ambassador told reporters prior to the meeting that the tanker's crew members were safe and healthy, but declined to comment on when the vessel would be released.

In another related development, South Korea said a naval destroyer operated by its anti-piracy Cheonghae Unit had arrived near the Strait of Hormuz to help the return of the MT Hankuk Chemi tanker from Iran.

Yonhap, citing an unnamed South Korean government official, reported that the vessel was expected to handle the task in close cooperation with the country's Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries as well as with the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF).

Meanwhile South Korean news agency claimed an estimated 10 trillion won (\$9.2 billion) in Iranian funds is currently frozen at South Korean banks under U.S. sanctions.

The figure was announced on Tuesday by South Korean news agency Yonhap, which quoted the country's banks as saying.

As of September last year, about 3 trillion won worth of Iranian money was held at the Bank of Korea.

The money was deposited by the Seoul branch of Bank Mellat of Iran.

Separately, about \$7 billion worth of Iranian oil money was frozen at two South Korean banks - Industrial Bank of Korea and Woori Bank.

### JCPOA Is Dead...

FROM PAGE 1

Of course I should mention this point here that Iran has announced hundreds of times that it has not been after making nuclear warhead and will not seek it, either, but media and think tanks in Europe and the U.S. insist on this big lie with the ill-intention of magnifying and Israelizing the opinions hypocritically.

On the occasion of Iran's resumption of enriching uranium to 20% purity at Martyr Alimohammadi Facility (Fordo) and anniversary of martyrdom of Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani and fortieth day of martyrdom of assassination of Iranian scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araqchi on Monday night and in a TV program, broadcast on IRIB's Channel 2, commemorated the day and said, "This action (resumption of enrichment) has a symbolic aspect which shows progresses in Iran are unstoppable."

On the process of enriching uranium to 20 percent purity, he said, "Enrichment of uranium to 20 percent purity is one of the most important issues in Iran's nuclear program. It is used as fuel at Tehran Research Reactor facility because since 2010, they did not give us fuel for the reactor and we managed to provide the fuel by ourselves and before the nuclear deal, the JCPOA, we had produced 400 kilograms of uranium with 20 percent purity. In the JCPOA, since our needs of fuel for reactors have been met for years, it had been accepted to stop enrichment of uranium to 20 percent purity. We had produced enough fuel. According to the JCPOA, we were to announce our need to fuel two years before the current stock finishes and they were supposed to pave condition for either purchase or production of fuel but our stock was enough for three to four years."

Araqchi added, when the U.S. pulled out of the JCPOA and Iran's interests in the framework of removal of sanction declined and even were zeroed, the country decided a five-step action to reduce its obligations in a way that the door for diplomacy remains open. In the second step, we announced that we are not any longer committed to enriching uranium to 3.67 percent purity and whatever we need, we increase the purity. Almost one year ago and after this step, the percentage of enrichment was increased but it was kept under 5 percent. Majlis in its new approved strategic law has assigned the government to resume enrichment of uranium to 20 percent purity as soon as possible despite differences between the government and Majlis but when the law was approved, it should have come into effect and its executive bylaw was prepared and it has come into effect as of today."

Now and by considering Majlis strategy in Iran as well as the realistic and unparalleled analysis of the CSIS think tank regarding the JCOA, who can still close his eyes on the death of the JCPOA and hide himself behind the curtain with unrealistic hopes that the very JCPOA will not revive any longer and if Europe has a new proposal, okay, better to offer it.

### Army Stages...

FROM PAGE 1

The participating drone units would also monitor land, air and sea borders, Mousavi said, adding that an exhibition would be held on the sidelines of the drill showcasing the Army's new achievements in the field of drones.

Separately on Tuesday, Deputy Chief of the Iranian Army Brigadier General Mohammad Hossein Dadras said the main message of the exercise is to establish peace and security in the region without foreign presence or meddling.

"The Army of the Islamic Republic of Iran always upgrades its equipment and holds specialized exercises and combat trainings in accordance with the threats posed by extra-regional countries and enemies," he said.

"Despite the cruel sanctions of the sworn enemies of the Islamic establishment, the zeal, capability and perseverance of the young people of this territory have led us to reach a stage of self-sufficiency in the field of production of new equipment that can compete with those of the developed countries."

### U.S. Extends...

FROM PAGE 1

The new exemption, which is longer than previous extensions, was granted after "long discussions", the official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

The reprieve, however, does not solve all of Baghdad's energy problems.

Tehran has demanded nearly \$6 billion in unpaid gas bills from Baghdad, recently reducing its supply to Iraq over the arrears.

While American exemptions allow Iraq to obtain supplies from its neighbor without risk of reprisals, they still prevent it from paying its Iranian bills in dollars - a currency that Iran, choked by sanctions, badly needs.



## England's Moeen Tests Positive For COVID-19 in Sri Lanka

COLOMBO (Dispatches) - England all-rounder Moeen Ali tested positive for Covid-19 in Sri Lanka after the team's arrival on the island, the country's cricket board said Monday. The tourists, led by Joe Root, arrived in Sri Lanka on Sunday as airport officials in hazmat suits sprayed the team with disinfectant before being tested. "Ali will now observe a period of 10 days self-isolation, in accordance with the Sri Lanka Government's protocol on quarantine," the England and Wales Cricket Board said in a statement.

**LICENCE HOLDER: SOKHAN GOSTAR INSTITUTE**

**Switchboard:**  
(+98) (21) 44253448

**Public Relations Tel:**  
(+98)(21) 44253450

Editorial Board: 44253449

**Public Relations Fax:**  
(+98)(21) 44253395

**Advertising Department:**  
Tel/Fax: (+98) (21) 44253335-9/44253234

**Website:**  
http://www.irannewsdaily.com

**E-Mail Address:**  
info@irannewsdaily.com

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## Catalan Gov't Gives Go-Ahead For 2021 Spanish GP

MADRID (Reuters) - The government of Catalonia has given the go-ahead for Spanish Grand Prix organizers to agree a contract extension with Formula One for 2021. The May 9 race at Barcelona's Circuit de Catalunya is listed as subject to contract on the sport's record 23-round provisional calendar. The regional government said in a statement it had authorized Circuits de Catalunya SL to sign the renewal. "The signature guarantees the celebration of the 31st consecutive edition of this event at the Circuit de Barcelona-Catalunya," it said.

# Browns, Ravens and Titans Secure NFL Playoff Berths

WASHINGTON (AFP) - The Cleveland Browns reached the NFL playoffs for the first time since 2002 by edging the Pittsburgh Steelers 24-22 Sunday as the regular season moved to a dramatic conclusion.

Nick Chubb and Jarvis Landry each ran for a touchdown and Baker Mayfield threw for another as the Browns snapped the NFL's longest active post-season drought while the Baltimore Ravens and Tennessee Titans also qualified for the playoffs, which start on Saturday.

"We wanted this. I could see that determination," Browns coach Kevin Stefanski said. "It's not over. We've got work left to do. I like how this team responds when their back is up against the wall." Lamar Jackson threw for 113 yards and three touchdowns and ran 11 times for 97 yards to spark Baltimore over Cincinnati 38-3 to clinch an AFC (American Conference) wildcard berth.

Jackson became the first quarterback in NFL history with back-to-back 1,000-yard rushing seasons while J.K. Dobbins ran for 160 yards and two touchdowns in the Ravens' romp.

The Titans, who played later at Houston, secured a playoff spot when the Miami Dolphins were routed 56-26 at Buffalo. Tennessee can claim an AFC South division crown with a win. Indianapolis will take the final AFC playoff berth by winning later at home over league-worst Jacksonville (1-14) but a loss by the Colts -- the only team beaten by the Jaguars all season -- would send Miami to the playoffs instead.

Also sustaining their playoff hopes were the New York Giants, who beat visiting Dallas 23-19 and could become the NFL's first 10-loss playoff team.

Washington (6-9) needs a victory at Philadelphia, where the host Eagles are missing nine players, to clinch the NFC East crown and a first-round home playoff game.

A Washington loss would hand the Giants, who started 1-7, a playoff spot and their first division title since 2011. Pittsburgh's Mason Rudolph threw two fourth-quarter touchdown passes but overthrew a tying 2-point conversion attempt while Cleveland recovered a Steelers onside-kick attempt and Mayfield ran for a first down to secure the Browns victory and grab the long-sought playoff spot.



"He works very hard at his craft," Stefanski said of Mayfield. "He made plays happen with his feet. For him to go get it I think was great."

The Browns, three years after a 0-16 campaign, withstood a disrupted week of preparation with a training facility closed three of the past four days due to Covid-19 issues.

Miami was forced to start reserve quarterback Tua Tagovailoa with Ryan Fitzpatrick on the Covid-19 reserve list and struggled offensively against the playoff-bound Bills.

Half of the NFL's 14 playoff berths were at stake on the final day of the campaign. In later games, the Los Angeles Rams-Arizona Cardinals winner will advance and Chicago could join them by beating Green Bay, which needs a victory to clinch the top seed in the NFC (National Conference) and a bye in the first round.

Defending Super Bowl champion Kansas City (14-1) had already clinched the AFC top seed with Pittsburgh and Buffalo also owning division titles entering the final week.

In the NFC, Green Bay, New Orleans, Seattle and Tampa Bay had already secured playoff berths. Tampa Bay's Mike Evans became the first player with more than 1,000 reception yards in each of his first seven NFL seasons with a 20-yard catch in the first quarter but departed on the next play with a left knee injury in the Buccaneers' 44-27 home triumph over Atlanta.

## Uruguayan FA Urges English FA to Review Cavani Ban

LONDON (Reuters) -The Uruguayan Football Association (AUF) criticized their English counterparts for banning Edinson Cavani on Monday, calling his three-match sanction for alleged racism "a flagrant injustice that damages the morals of an unimpeachable man."

The AUF "exhorts the FA to review its sanction," it said in a statement. "We are convinced, through our profound knowledge of the person and analysis of the incident, that he does not deserve (the ban) nor the consequential moral aggravation."

The Manchester United striker was suspended last week by the FA and fined 100,000 pounds (\$136,330) for a term he used in an Instagram post following his side's 3-2 win at Southampton on Nov. 29, before taking it down and apologizing.

The FA did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment.

The Uruguayan FA's request came shortly after a similar appeal by Cavani's national team mates.

The Uruguayan players' union (AFU) said the English FA "committed a discriminatory act against the culture and way of life of the Uruguayan people".

## Australian GP Likely To Be Postponed Due To COVID-19

LONDON (Reuters) - The Australian Formula One Grand Prix in Melbourne looks set to be rescheduled from its season-opening slot to later in the year due to the COVID-19 pandemic and a tightening of local quarantine rules.

Tickets for the March 21 race at Albert Park have yet to go on sale.

A Formula One spokesman, asked on Monday about media reports of a likely postponement, said the sport looked forward to racing again in March.

He did not specify where, with Bahrain's Grand Prix also scheduled for March.

"In 2020 we proved that we could return to racing safely and delivered what many thought was impossible in March," he said. "We have set out our 2021 calendar and look forward to the return of F1 in March this year."

Local organizers in Melbourne were not immediately available for comment but various reports said a postponement, rather than a cancellation for the second year in a row, was likely to be announced later in January. Construction work to erect fences and grandstands around the temporary street circuit would normally start by the end of the month.

Last year's Australian grand prix was called off, only hours before first practice was due to start at the Albert Park street circuit, when a McLaren team member tested positive to the virus.

The season eventually started in Austria in July, with the calendar heavily rescheduled and reduced from an original record 22 races to 17 in Europe and the Middle East.

Bahrain's Sakhir circuit, which is due to host round two on March 28, ended up hosting two races at the end of November and in early December.

Teams, drivers and travelling media had to test negative before travelling and again on arrival, with a short quarantine until the results were known.

Mercedes driver Lewis Hamilton, Britain's seven-times world champion, missed the second race at Sakhir after testing positive for the virus.

Melbourne would involve a far longer period of mandatory isolation.



# Marseille "Interested" in Napoli's Milik

club finishes at the end of the season.

"We are interested but there haven't been any advanced talks with the club or the player."

PARIS (Dispatches) - Marseille coach Andre Villas-Boas confirmed on Monday that he would like to sign Napoli's Poland striker Arkadiusz Milik during the January transfer window.

Villas-Boas has Argentinian Dario Benedetto, 30-year-old Valere Germain and teenager Marley Ake as his attacking options.

Milik, 26, is yet to feature for the Serie A side this term and his contract with the

club finishes at the end of the season. "It's not as advanced as that, it's not for the coming days. It's an interest, that unfortunately came out in the Italian press," Villas-Boas said at a press conference.

"Milik is not the only option. It's the hardest, maybe, because he's a significant players. It's not easy."

Ex-Chelsea and Tottenham manager Villas-Boas said he will discuss with majority shareholder Frank McCourt about the money available over the next four weeks.

"We will talk again with the owner to see where we can go. We know our limits. We can't spend too much," he said.

"I'm not going to put that type of pressure on the board."

Villas-Boas's side, who sit in fifth place and eight points behind leaders Lyon, return to Ligue 1 action on Wednesday by hosting Montpellier after the two-week winter break.

## Liverpool Stumble Again in Southampton Defeat

LONDON (Dispatches) - Liverpool failed to win for the third consecutive Premier League game as Danny Ings's second-minute goal earned Southampton a 1-0 win at St. Mary's on Monday.

The English champions remain top of the table on goal difference over Manchester United, but have now played a game more than the Red Devils.

Southampton are only four points off the top as they moved up to sixth in a tightly bunched division with just seven points separating Liverpool from West Ham in 10th.

A famous win continued a fine season so far for the Saints, and a size of the achievement was reflected in tears of joy from manager Ralph Hasenhuttl at full-time.

A first league defeat in three months may hasten Liverpool's search for a centre-back in the January transfer window.

Without the injured Virgil van Dijk, Joe Gomez and Joel Matip, Klopp started two of his first-choice midfielders from their title-winning campaign, Fabinho and Jordan Henderson, together at the heart of his defence.

Southampton had not scored in their last three games to temper their hopes of a push for European football, but took just two minutes to break the deadlock in style through former Liverpool striker Ings.

Liverpool did not deal with James Ward-Prowse's angled free-kick into the box and Ings perfectly hooked his shot over Alisson Becker into the far corner.

Southampton had key absentees themselves with goalkeeper Alex McCarthy missing due to a positive test for coronavirus, while Oriol Romeu, Jannik Vestergaard and Che Adams were out injured.

Fraser Forster was making his first Saints appearance since May 2019, but the former England international was rarely tested to earn his clean sheet.



## Results Not Age Key Factor for Federer Now

LONDON (Reuters) - Roger Federer's results in 2021 are more likely than any age milestone to determine when his glittering career comes to an end, said Australian Todd Woodbridge, who thinks the Swiss master may yet have another Wimbledon triumph in him.

Last week the holder of 20 Grand Slam singles titles confirmed that fitness issues after two knee operations in 2020 mean that fans will not see him in action at the Australian Open in February for the first time in more than two decades.

"A player of his stature, at some point when you're not winning, you start to wonder about why you're only making the quarter-finals, when you're used to being in the final," Woodbridge told Channel Nine this week.

"It doesn't give the same adrenaline rush as it always has, and that's when you start to think to yourself that you've got other things to do with your life."

A semi-final defeat in Melbourne in 2020 was Federer's last competitive match, and playing five-setters in the Australian summer heat after a lengthy injury and 14 days quarantine would have been a tricky proposition for the 39-year-old.

Federer has not missed a trip to Melbourne Park since a loss in qualifying in 1999.

Yves Allegro, Federer's fellow Swiss and former doubles partner, feels skipping the Australian Open was a logical decision.

"All his career, Roger Federer only lined up if he was 100% physically," Allegro told the 20min website www.20min.ch. "So he made the right decision, especially since he has plenty of time left to prepare for his main goals of Wimbledon and the Olympics."

Participating at a fifth Olympics featured prominently in Federer's agenda, and the postponement of the Tokyo Games by a year due to the COVID-19 pandemic worked perfectly for the Swiss, who would otherwise have missed it due to injury.

