

**Spokeswoman for Health Ministry
Sima Sadat Lari Said on Friday That
75 More Iranians Died of COVID-19
During the Past 24 Hours as the
Death Toll Mounted to 57,225**

IRAN NEWS

**Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad
Zarif Said on Thursday the
Terrorist Bombings in Baghdad
And Netanyahu's Boot-Licking
Have No Goal But to Confront Iran**

VOL. XXVI, No. 7148 TEHRAN Price 40,000 Rials

www.irannewsdaily.com

SATURDAY JANUARY 23, 2021 - BAHMAN 4, 1399

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U.S. Urged to Immediately Remove Bans Against Syrians

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's ambassador to the United Nations has slammed the U.S. sanctions against the Syrian nation as "political, unlawful, and inhumane", calling for the immediate removal of those bans.

Majid Takht Ravanchi said the "political, unlawful and inhumane" U.S. sanctions imposed against Syria and some other countries are imposed at a time when Syrians are suffering badly from the terrorist acts and the Coronavirus pandemic."

"By occupying parts of Syria, the U.S. continues to violate the territorial integrity of the Arab country. In fact, the US is pursuing its illegitimate geopolitical interests including by shielding and supporting certain terrorist groups. All such acts are in material breach of international law and must come to an end immediately," he said, speaking at a meeting of the UN Security Council on political developments in Syria and the humanitarian contributions there.

The Iranian diplomat said "the imposition of unilateral sanctions on the Syrian people is another unlawful act by the United States and some other countries."

"While the Syrians are seriously suffering from terrorist acts and also the COVID-19 pandemic, such inhumane sanctions are simply adding insult to injury, targeting the most vulnerable people the most," Takht Ravanchi added.

In late December 2020, the outgoing administration of U.S. President Donald Trump imposed a new round of sanctions to ramp up pressure on the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad before Joe Biden takes office.

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Iran Completes Construction of Nahid-2 Satellite

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iranian experts have completed the construction of a communications satellite and an orbital transmission system.

"The construction projects of 'Nahid-2' communication satellite and 'Saman' Orbital Transmission System have been completed, and the devices will be delivered to the Iranian Space Agency by the [Iranian] yearend [March 2021]," Head of Iranian Space Agency Morteza Barari told Mehr on Thursday.

Nahid-2 (meaning Venus in Persian) has been designed and developed by the Iranian Space Research Center, and is currently passing the final testing stages, he said

"The satellite will be ready for launch before the current year ends," Barari added.

Nahid-2 is a telecommunication satellite that will be placed in a geosynchronous orbit. Nahid-2 is the successor to Nahid-1, a communications satellite that is to help improve Iran's ranking in space communications.

Weighing approximately 100 kilograms and measuring 64 by 64 centimeters, the mission of Nahid-2 is to focus on the development and testing of basic technologies needed for building geostationary communication satellites with an operational life of two years. It can establish communications and measure radiation and test simultaneous telephone connections.

Barari noted that the development project of the Saman Orbital Transmission System has also been completed, and it will be delivered to the Iranian Space Agency by March.

For the first mission, Saman-1 will be used to transfer a 100-kilogram satellite from a low Earth orbit about 400 km above the Earth's surface to a higher elliptical orbit at an altitude of 7000 km.

Following the parliament's approval, Iran's space program started in 2004 and launched its first domestically-made data-processing satellite named Omid (Hope) in 2009.

The country also sent its first bio-capsule containing living creatures into space in February 2010, using the indigenous Kavoshgar-3 (Explorer-3) carrier. Iran is a founding member of the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space.

Iran Oil Product Exports Hit Record High Despite Sanctions



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Oil Minister Bijan Zanganeh says Iran has achieved record high exports of petroleum products despite U.S. sanctions.

Addressing the inaugural ceremony of the 25th Iran Oil Show in Tehran, Zanganeh said former U.S. President Donald Trump and his secretary of state, Mike Pompeo, had "joined the dustbin of history, but we are alive and working with more hope to build the country."

"The enemy and Trump wanted us to perish and die, our exports to reach zero," he said.

"We set the highest record of exports in the history of the oil industry during the embargo period."

It is estimated that Iran exports less than 300,000 barrels of oil per day (bpd), compared with a peak of 2.8 million bpd in 2018.

Zanganeh said he did not worry about Iran regaining its oil market share in the wake of eased sanctions on Tehran.

The official said: "I am not worried about regaining Iran's lost oil market share, and oil buyers do not limit themselves to one or two sellers."

He also said if the sanctions are lifted, "we will return to the market stronger than before, sooner than you might think."

Also reacting to Iran's oil exports increase, he said: "Iran's oil exports have increased sharply in recent days."

Zanganeh also commemorated Iranian martyrs, noting that the enemies especially the United States were trying to reduce Iran's crude oil export to zero, but their attempt was doomed to failure.

The minister stated that Iran could hit the highest and historical record in exporting oil products, noting that the country is alive and it will continue the path with more hope than before and new investment is the main stimulus to improve the Iranian market.

Despite the fact that Iran has been under severe sanctions imposed by the United States, the Islamic country succeeded in manufacturing catalysts and chemical substances.

He stressed the need to hold the exhibition in order to preserve the link between producers and consumers, adding that the motto of the fair is the support for Iranian goods and services.

According to Zanganeh, the oil ministry has allotted 500 million dollars to support knowledge-based companies active in the development of oil industry.

The oil ministry will purchase equipment made by Iranian companies in order to uphold domestic innovation, he added.

The 25th Iran Oil, Gas, Refining and Petrochemical Exhibition started with the motto, "National Oil, Iranian Goods and Services," at the permanent Tehran fairgrounds on Friday morning.

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Biggest Mideast Refinery Launched in Iran

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran has opened a sprawling refinery in its oil-rich province of Khuzestan to collect gas flares that are normally burnt and wasted during crude production.

The Persian Gulf Bidboland Gas Refinery, a mega-project launched in the southwestern city of Behbahan, came on line on Thursday upon an order by Iranian President Hassan Rouhani who used a video conference call to open the facility.

Construction of the refinery began in 2015. It has cost \$3.4 billion, of which \$2.3 billion has come from Iran's sovereign wealth fund. Some 15,000 people contributed to the construction process which included works for over 1,000 kilometers of pipelines to collect flares from oilfields in three southern provinces of Khuzestan, Bushehr and Kohgiluyeh & Boyer-Ahmad.

Bidboland's CEO Mahmoud Aminnejad said that the refinery, the largest of its kind in West Asia region, was a first petroleum industry project in Iran's history whose construction ended without a single fatality.

Aminnejad said the refinery creates 1,100 permanent jobs, most of them reserved for local engineers and workers.

He said a first phase of the project will collect associated gas from crude production in East Karun oil region to produce some 2 billion cubic feet (nearly 57 million cubic meters) of useful gases per day. A second phase of the project will be dedicated to gases normally flared at West Karun oil region, he said.

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ViewPoint By: Hamid Reza Naghashian Biden + Zionists At the White House

When we look at the number of the Zionist elements in U.S. President Joe Biden's picks for his cabinet, we become more assured that a completely secret hand, which administers Jewish-Christian Zionism, does administer the U.S. and perhaps the West. Therefore, it actually does not differ for the world people who is elected as the U.S. President.

With such a trend, it gets clearer for all that the election dispute in the U.S. is indeed an inter-political party dispute. That Biden during his inauguration ceremony goes to the cemetery or to the church is in the structure of deceiving the nation which is just for media sake otherwise in the hidden Zionist thought, God-orientation is meaningless. Who can forget that President Donald Trump in his inauguration ceremony in 2017 promised to the American people to bring back the U.S. to its heydays by pursuing the foreign policy based on the U.S. interests? He notified that his commitment was because of an approach which believed the established international liberal system by the U.S. after the World War II did not meet the goals and interests of the country any longer, and undertakings and heavy costs of the U.S. regarding its allies have weakened and worn out the U.S. economy and power.

Unjust trade agreements and globalization have inflicted heavy damages on the U.S. economy and consequently Americans in the country are struggling with the recession in the wages and rise in the living costs. The same Trump, with these promises at the time when most of the world countries were focused on containing the coronavirus pandemic, was seeking to topple Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro by sending warships and planes to the South America.

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India Hopes for More Iran, Venezuela Oil Exports Under Biden

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India is hoping U.S. President Joe Biden's administration will take a softer line against adversaries Iran and Venezuela, enabling the world's third-largest oil importer to diversify its sources of crude.

India is hoping U.S. President Joe Biden's administration will take a softer line against adversaries Iran and Venezuela, enabling the world's third-largest oil importer to diversify its sources of crude.

The country would be happy if the number of oil-producing nations rise, Oil Minister Dharmendra Pradhan said in an interview on Bloomberg TV, reiterating comments that he made last month. "Some geopolitical changes are there," he said. "Let us wait for how things unfold."

The South Asian economy is heavily reliant on energy imports and its refiners struggled to cope as the White House's aggressive foreign policy over the last few years restricted access to Iranian and Venezuelan oil. Pradhan also expressed his exasperation with Saudi Arabia, after the de-facto leader of OPEC announced unilateral output cuts in response to a resurgence in Covid-19.

The sudden change in production policy has made economic planning more difficult and will add to inflation, he said. "We never expect low oil prices. But it should not be a knee-jerk reaction."

India halted imports from Iran, previously its third-largest oil supplier, in mid-2019 after the expiration of U.S. exemptions from sanctions. It purchased 7.65 million tons of Venezuelan crude from January to October last year, compared with 15.9 million tons in 2019. Iran has pledged to increase its oil exports, with shipments to China almost doubling last month from November.

FM to Visit Azerbaijan

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif will visit Russia and the Caucasus countries next week, Zarif told reporters.

According to him, the dates of visits to Azerbaijan, Russia, Georgia and Armenia are already known. In this regard, Mohammad Javad Zarif is awaiting the result of the coronavirus test.

Minister noted that the purpose of the visit is to conduct negotiations with countries that can contribute to peace and stability in Karabakh. Zarif added that, yesterday he had a telephone conversation with Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavushoglu and is planning to visit Turkey.

Enemies of Iranian Nation Overthrown in Disgrace

TEHRAN (MNA) – President Hassan Rouhani referred to the isolation of former US President Donald Trump after the election defeat, saying the enemies of the Iranian nation are now overthrown in disgrace.

The president made the remarks during a virtual inauguration ceremony of the Persian Gulf Bidboland Gas Refinery Project on Thursday.

The President appreciated Iranian engineers and experts for their efforts to construct the refinery, which is one of the Lartet projects of its kind in West Asia, and said “This major project is inaugurated on the same day that those [Trump administration] who claimed Iran would be overthrown by their bullying were themselves defeated with humiliation and shame.”

“The actions of those who conspired and planned against our nation in the last days of their miserable lives became clear to the whole world and to the American nation itself, and everyone saw how they [Trump administration] were anti-democratic,” Rouhani added.

Rouhani underlined that part of the Islamic Republic’s national power comes from its energy industry. “Our country is bestowed with great resources of oil and gas and is also situated next to the world’s major shipping routes.”



Referring to the undeniable role of Iran in the energy market, Rouhani said, “Iran has a special and important position in the region in terms of energy resources and with 32 trillion cubic meters of gas, it is the largest gas source in the world and in terms of gas resources stands on top.”

“Today, for the first time in the history of Iran, we are witnessing the daily production of one billion cubic meters of gas,” the president said.

“The world needs Iranian oil and gas,” he stressed.

Tokyo Keen to Expand Ties With Tehran



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN – Japan Ambassador to Tehran Ikawa Kazutoshi in meeting with Head of Iran-Japan Parliamentary Friendship Group Mr. Ruhollah Motefakker-Azad said his country is eager to expand its relations with Iran in different fields like political, economic, cultural and parliamentary.

In the meeting, Mr. Ikawa pointed to the significance of expanding friendly relations, announcing the interest of Japan government and people for expanding cooperation with the Islamic Republic of Iran in different fields interested by the both sides.

He added that the Iran-Japan Parliamentary Friendship Group plays important role in expanding ties and identifying the new fields for bilateral cooperation.

He also expressed hope that the ties between both states would improve because of efforts of political and parliamentary officials of the two countries.

Meanwhile Mr. Motefakker-Azad, for his part, said Majlis supports any move for boosting cooperation between both countries in all fields and voiced its readiness for helping to remove hurdles in way of boosting cooperation.

He also pointed to the role of ambassadors of the two countries in improving and easing the level of cooperation between Tehran and Tokyo and expressed hope that they would see the efforts to bear fruit for bolstering the ties.

Unlawful U.S. Sanctions Dealt Blow to Multilateralism

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has once again slammed the U.S. for turning its back on its obligations under the 2015 nuclear agreement, saying Washington has profoundly undermined multilateralism by imposing unlawful sanctions on others.

Speaking in a videoconference call with his Irish counterpart, Simon Coveney, on Wednesday, Zarif said Washington’s unilateral sanctions, especially those imposed on other countries over the past few years, run counter to the UN Charter and international accords, and have dealt a blow to multilateralism.

He further expressed Iran’s readiness to fully implement the nuclear deal — officially named the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) — if the United States lifts its sanctions against the Islamic Republic and returns to compliance with the multilateral agreement.

Iran had met all its obligations since the JCPOA took effect, Zarif said, adding that the country only started reducing its commitments under Article 36 of the accord since it was deprived of the pact’s benefits following the unilateral US withdrawal and Europe’s inability to live up to its obligations.

The fate of the JCPOA is now hanging in the balance after the European co-signatories — France, Britain and Germany — failed to counter the anti-Iran sanctions as required by the agreement, prompting Tehran to scale back parts of its commitments in retaliation.

The top Irish diplomat, for his part, told Zarif that his country considers the JCPOA an important achievement of multilateral diplomacy and intends to play an active role in preserving the accord, given its non-permanent membership of the Security Council and election as the Resolution 2231 facilitator.

He further described Trump’s “maximum pressure” policy as unconstructive, saying it undermined diplomacy.

Tehran, Bangkok to Work Together to Tackle COVID-19 Impact on Culture, Art

TEHRAN - Iran and Thailand have underlined the need to exchange experience on tackling losses inflicted on the culture and art sector due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Iranian Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Seyed Abbas Salehi sat down with the Thai ambassador to Tehran where the two sides called for the enhancement of mutual cooperation.

“Iran and Thailand have, since long ago, enjoyed good and extensive relations, and I hope these relations

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK



will further grow,” said the Iranian minister.

“Both countries are of significance in terms of tourism potential, historical and civilizational heritage and their status in the region,” said the minister.

“Iran and Thailand have age-old relations,” he added.

He said he is going to have a virtual meeting with the Thai culture minister next week where the two sides will hopefully discuss ways

of dealing with the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the culture sector.

Venezuela Open to Iranian Investors

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The Venezuelan ambassador to Iran said in an interview on the occasion of the Islamic Revolution anniversary that the doors of Venezuela are always open to friend and brother countries, especially the companies interested to invest there.

Carlos Antonio Alcala Cordones said that Iran and Venezuela have a 70-year long record of economic, political, and trade relations.

Saying that the relations between the two countries started in 1947, Cordones added that both Tehran and Caracas are against the North American colonial hegemony, which has united the two countries over the past 20 years.

The relations took form when late President Hugo Chavez visited Tehran, he said, adding that the people of Venezuela first fought with the Spanish and the North American colonization.

People of Venezuela are anti-Imperialism, he noted and said that the US is greedy for Venezuela’s energy reservoirs, and also because the country has a strategic location.

He said that the huge mineral and oil wealth of Venezuela was previously controlled by North America; they tried to deprive the people of their wealth.

He said that the U.S. is fighting Venezuela as a symbol for Latin Americans, and that to fight with Iran’s Islamic Revolution is a role model for the Venezuelans in their fight against imperialism.

He also lauded Iran for being brave and helping the people of Venezuela, saying that the economic improvement of the Venezuelan economy is due to Iran’s aids.

Cordones added that Iran has opened a large supermarket and huge drugstore in Venezuela, adding that several Venezuelan companies intend to invest in Iran.

Judiciary Summons Telecoms Minister Over Failure to Filter Instagram

TEHRAN (PressTV) - A court in Iran has summoned the country’s telecoms minister to investigate why he failed to filter photo-sharing website Instagram, among other charges filed against him.

A spokesman of the telecoms ministry said in a Wednesday tweet that Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi had returned to his office after being questioned by investigating judges in the Culture and Media Court.

The announcement said that Azari Jahromi had been summoned after Iran’s prosecutor general filed several charges against him.

The Iranian judiciary had said earlier that the minister should attend the court session to respond to queries about why he had failed to comply with an order to restrict foreign messenger services.

The report said that the minister had also failed to implement orders by Iran’s Supreme Council of Cyberspace to provide more support for locally-developed messenger and social media services and to block access to virtual private networks (VPNs).

However, an image of the complaint filed against Azari Jahromi published by ILNA showed that Iran’s prosecutor general had specifically charged the minister for his failure to block Instagram, a U.S.-based social media service which has tens of millions of users in Iran.

Iran, UN Commission Sign Agreement on 1st Day of Biden’s Tenure

TEHRAN (IFP) - The Islamic Republic of Iran and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) have signed an agreement on January 21 as the new U.S. president has taken office.

Iran and the ESCAP have reaffirmed resolve for closer cooperation by signing the administrative and financial agreement for the Asian and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management (APDIM).

The agreement was signed by Iran’s Ambassador to Bangkok and Permanent Representative of Iran to ESCAP, Seyyed Reza Nobakhti, and Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Under-Secretary General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ESCAP.

The proposal to establish APDIM was approved in an annual meeting of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) in 2015. In January 2018, Head of Iran’s Plan and Budget Organization Mohammad Baqer Nobakht and Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations Shamshad Akhtar signed the Memorandum of

Understanding for the establishment of APDIM. The Iranian administration’s proposed bill on the centre was ratified by Iran’s Guardian Council in 2019.

APDIM has been established with the purpose of natural disaster risk reduction through the exchange of technical capabilities and disaster information management among 66 Asian and Pacific countries. The Asian and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management would strengthen Iran’s international position in the fields of humanitarian activities and disaster risk reduction.



U.S. Hinders Transfer of Iran Fee Debt to UN

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The Iranian government allotted money to pay for its membership fee of the United Nations, but the United States got in the way of paying the membership debt, Iran’s Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohammad Javad Zarif says.

Zarif said on Friday that Iran wanted to pay 16 million dollars for voting rights and fee debt to the UN, but the US hampered the transfer of money to the UN account because of its unilateral sanctions on the Islamic Republic.

The government of President Hassan Rouhani allotted the amount of money from Iran’s credit at South Korean banks, the top diplomat noted.

Answering a question about Iran’s frozen money in South Korea, he said that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has no responsibility in this regard and it is accountable to facilitate transactions between the Central Bank of Iran and foreign organizations. He further noted that Iran should implement the resistance economy program in a bid to develop the economic situation of the Islamic country.

\$158m in Foreign Investment Went Into Iran’s Free Zones in 9 Months

TEHRAN (IFP) - Iranian free trade zones absorbed some \$158 million in foreign investment in the nine months to December 2020 despite the U.S. sanctions.

As much as \$200 million in foreign finances was also funneled into free zones last year, said an Iranian official. “In the twelve months to March 2020, the country absorbed an overall \$1.5 billion in foreign investment, \$200 million of which went into free zones,” said Ahmad Jamali, the deputy head of the Secretariat of the High Council of Free Trade-Industrial Zones and Special Economic Zones.

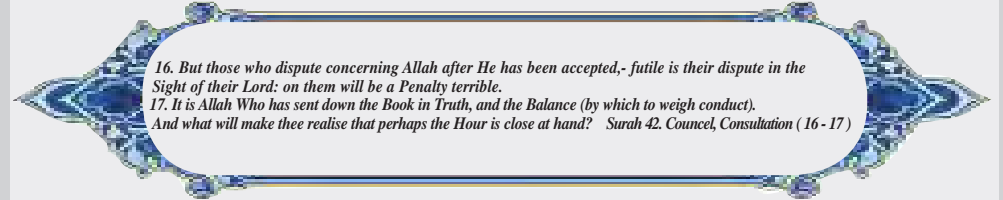
“The statistics show around 15% of the foreign investment in the country went into free zones,” he said.

He underlined the coronavirus pandemic and sanctions were two major contributors to a drop in investment in the country’s free zones. The official noted some \$138 billion worth of goods have been exported from Iran’s free zones so far, with imports standing at \$48 billion.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:16
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:41
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:42
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	07:09



16. But those who dispute concerning Allah after He has been accepted, - futile is their dispute in the Sight of their Lord: on them will be a Penalty terrible.
17. It is Allah Who has sent down the Book in Truth, and the Balance (by which to weigh conduct).
And what will make thee realise that perhaps the Hour is close at hand? Surah 42. Counsel, Consultation (16-17)

Tehran, Moscow Urged to Launch Joint Trade, Industrial Holdings

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – During a videoconference held on Wednesday, Iran and Russia were urged to form joint trade and industrial holdings in order to boost the bilateral trade cooperation.

Iran-Russia Industrial and Trade videoconference was hosted by Iran Trade Promotion Organization (ITPO) where the head of ITPO Mr. Hamid Zadboum, Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade of the Russian Federation Mr. Oleg Ryazantsev, Iran's Ambassador to Russia Kazem Jalali and some of the industrial and trade activists of both countries attended.

During the conference, participants emphasized the necessity of boosting bilateral cooperation in production of vehicle, plane, part-manufacturing, helicopter and ship-building and exchanged views on reinforcing industrial and trade cooperation between Iran and Russia.

Addressing the conference, Zadboum called for developing cooperation between both countries and suggested the trade to be added to the joint cooperation workgroup in order to seriously operationalize the trade issues of both countries.

He added the videoconference is a prelude to holding the meeting of industry workgroup of both countries in the framework of the joint commission. He noted that he expected the joint capacities of both countries, exchange of views and the unveiled issues would lead to some agreements in these fields. Zadboum also pointed to the free trade agreement between Iran and Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), adding that this agreement can provide a good opportunity for increasing the trade volume between both countries.

He expressed hope significant horizons to be opened in the cooperation of the two countries in building passenger, cargo and fishing ships. Meanwhile Ryazantsev, for his part, said that Russia is ready for constructive talks with its Iranian counterpart, adding that the videoconference is a prelude for holding the meeting of industry workgroup of Russia in the framework of the joint economic



cooperation commission of both countries. He noted that he expected unveil of projects by Iranian and Russian companies would lead to a certain agreement and it is registered as a positive point in the performance of the workgroups. Then Iran Ambassador to Moscow Mr. Jalali raised the idea of forming joint industrial and trade holdings by Iran and Russia in order to have optimum use of the customs green corridor, adding that joint cooperation of holdings of both countries can play important role in developing commercial exchanges between Iran and Russia.

He said joint production of vehicles and their parts, sharing experiences, research in innovation regarding the design and manufacture of heavy vehicles like bus, truck and cars, marketing and joint investments are of the other existing capacities for joint cooperation between Iran and Russia. He went on to say that developing trade, transit and transportation are the other important infrastructures for cooperation.

Overhaul of Pressurized Air Compressor At Khorasan Steel Company

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – For the first time in the country and due to endeavors of experts at Khorasan Steel Company, the sensitive and complicated parts of pressurized air compressors were overhauled at the oxygen unit of the company.



According to reports, this achievement was another sign of capabilities of Iranians and hard-working experts at Khorasan Steel Complex which led to overhaul of the main parts of the pressurized air compressors which happened for the first time in the country and it indicated the strong determination this industry.

Head of gas injection, oxygen and pressurized air production of Khorasan Steel Company delved into details of this success and said experts of the company began their efforts to overhaul the pressurized air compressors of the oxygen unit of the company in late December without involvement of any contractor company and finally did it successfully.

Mehdi Mohseni added that in the past, repair and fixing the sensitive and major parts of the compressors were handed over to contractor companies but experts of the company at the mechanics unit decided to overhaul the parts themselves without resorting to the contractor companies and finally did it successfully.

He hailed all of his colleagues and experts involved in such an achievement and thanked the managing director of the company for his spiritual support which encouraged the experts to work hard for this achievement.

Meanwhile the head of the repair team Mr. Ebrahim Arman said that periodic maintenance (PM) which is called overhaul is the priority of the company to keep industrial machines and equipment full ready to work and these services are devised and carried out by skillful experts.

He said one of the reasons that the company decided to overhaul the compressors by its experts is to save time and costs.

Head of Oxygen Unit of the Khorasan Steel Company Mr. Hamidzadeh also said the company has produced 3,200 tons of oxygen for hospitals and medical centers since the outbreak of the coronavirus in the country and it has taken a valuable step in line with observing its social responsibility.

Baku Embraces Ira's Offer to Form Working Group Of Kura-Aras Basin States

TEHRAN (IFP) - The Azerbaijan Republic has welcomed Iran's proposal to form a joint working group of Kura-Aras basin countries. Azerbaijani Deputy Prime Minister Shahin Mustafayev embraced the offer by Iranian Energy Minister Reza Ardekanian in a meeting with him on the sidelines of a session of the Iran-Azerbaijan Joint Economic Cooperation Commission.

Ardekanian had suggested in the meeting that a working group of the Kura-Aras basin region be formed by its littoral states, including Iran, the Azerbaijan Republic, Armenia and Turkey.

It was decided that with the establishment of the working group, the regional states officially discuss joint exploitation of resources in the Kura-Aras basin.

The energy minister further touched upon the good decisions adopted during a previous trip to Iran by Mustafayev back in December.

The Azerbaijani official, in turn, highlighted the importance of economic relations between the two sides and hailed agreements reached by the two countries during his last trip to Iran.

Managing Director of Anzali Free Zone Organization at the inauguration ceremony of development projects by the President:

Despite sanctions and Covid-19, 18 Infrastructure and Production Projects with an investment volume of 8175

Billions of rials of the private sector are in the circuit of production and services 68% growth in domestic investment achieved by reaching 16,000 billion rials and a 31% increase in foreign investment achieved by attracting \$ 53 million



Dr. Mohammad Vali Roozbehan, Chairman of the Board and CEO of the organization at the inauguration ceremony of infrastructure and production projects in the region, which was held by President Hassan Rouhani in a video conference, said: "Despite the oppressive sanctions and the problems caused by Covid-19, 18 infrastructure and production projects with a volume of investment of 8175 billion rials of the private sector are in the orbit of production and services. Anzali Free Zone with its geopolitical position, and two major ports of Anzali and Caspian and industrial, tourism and trade infrastructure, plays a pivotal role in trade between the Eurasian countries and the Caspian littoral countries. Corridors passing through this region, such as the China-Kazakhstan-Anzali corridor and the North-South corridor, have created the role of a hub for further development of re-export and supply of basic goods for this region. He said that his organization, in the year of the production leap, despite the widespread pressure of oppressive sanctions, the outbreak of Covid 19 disease has not only activated some stagnant units, but has also begun the implementation of the massive Industrial Park No. 3 project. The capacity of this project is more than two hundred industrial units and it will create more than 4,000 jobs. He added: with the third industrial town, the industrial capacity of the region will double. The CEO of the Anzali Free Zone Organization announced the volume of exports and re-exports of this region in the first nine months of this year to be about \$ 150 million. This amount has been accompanied by a 7% increase compared to last year's performance. He also said: In the same period, the amount of domestic investment realized with a growth of 68% has exceeded 16,000 billion rials. Foreign investment grew 31 percent to \$ 53 million. He specified: All 18 investment projects that will be inaugurated with the help of the private sector will start with a capital of more than 8175 billion Rials and direct employment for 468 people. These projects will be put into operation in the port, industrial, residential



Dr. Rouhani at the inauguration ceremony of the national projects of free and special economic zones of the country

- Rasht-Caspian Beck railway project is a very important and strategic project
Everyone should consider this project of special importance.
- Anzali port and Caspian port are very important ports in the Caspian Sea for communication with neighboring countries.
- We hope that this project will be inaugurated as a strategic project soon, following the Secretary of the Supreme Council of Free Zones, the Minister of Roads and Urban Development, the Governor of Gilan and the Managing Director of Anzali Free Zone.
- We must follow the project with all our might until it opens in early 2021, and therefore we are ready to provide any necessary funding through the Secretary of Supreme Council of Free Zones.
- Rasht-Caspian railway connects Gilan to the Persian Gulf

@afz_news

and tourism sectors by your order. Roozbehan referred to the president's order to complete the Caspian port complex and connect the national railway. During his visit to Anzali Free Trade-Industrial Zone as two pivotal programs of this region, he said: "The main project of today's opening program is to complete the infrastructure of the region's ports." This project is related to the operation of the wharf post No. 13 of the Caspian port complex and post-construction facilities, including indoor and outdoor warehouses, with an area of 15,000 square meters, oil tank of 7,000 tons. The CEO of Anzali Free Zone Organization added: with the operation of this wharf, the number of active wharves in the Caspian port complex has increased to 4 posts, while the construction of 3 more wharf posts is underway. Referring to the opening of 6,000 tons oil tanks in Anzali port complex, he specified: In addition, 10 production units in the field of electronics, textile, clothing, paper, plastic, etc. are also in the production circuit and Three residential and residential complexes with a capacity of 285 units will be put into operation along with the first phase of a commercial-service complex. It is worth mentioning that the governor of Gilan and the general managers of the executive organs of the province were present at this ceremony.

By order of Dr. Hassan Rouhani, President:

Dr. Mohammad Vali Roozbehan, Chairman of the Board and CEO of the organization announced the operation of 18 investment projects in the fields of manufacturing, industry, port infrastructure and tourism by order of Dr. Hassan Rouhani, President in the form of a video conference. These projects will be inaugurated at a cost of 8175 billion rials in the private sector and employment of 468 people. He said: for these projects, the private sector of Anzali Free Zone with an investment of 8175 billion rials has created direct and indirect employment for 1193 people. Four investment projects will be inaugurated in the Caspian port complex. These plans include Wharf No. 13, along with its backyard infrastructure, ie a 5,000-square-meter covered warehouse, a one-hectare backyard, and a 7,000-ton oil tank. These are formally placed in the service circuit in the form of a BOT contract concluded between the organization and the private sector investor, Caspian Gold. The CEO of Anzali Free Zone Organization, pointing out that 2000 billion Rials have been spent for the above projects and 300 people have been directly and indirectly created job opportunities, added: On the other hand, block B of Tavous residential complex with 256 residential units and phases First, the commercial and service campus complex with a total investment of 4500 billion rials by Anboush Sazan Zarrin Company of Anzali Free Zone, are ready for operation and will create jobs for 265 people. He stated: By the order of the President, 10 production-industrial projects, including the start of 6 new investment projects and the opening of 4 development projects in the current production units, will be put into production. 755 billion rials have been invested in the above projects and 456 people have been directly and indirectly employed. The CEO of the organization announced the start of operation of 6000 thousand tons of crude oil tanks, which were built in the framework of the BOT contract of the General Directorate of Ports and Maritime Affairs and Agrotamin Company and said: in this project, job opportunities have been created for 60 people with an investment of 170 billion rials. The chairman of the board of directors of the Anzali Free Zone Organization said: the first phase, including two residential and residential complexes of the private sector, will be put into operation. This phase has created job opportunities for 112 people directly and indirectly with an investment of 750 billion rials. Increasing the number of wharves of the port complex to four posts, along with adding port facilities, warehousing and storage tanks of goods, ie increasing the capacity and capacity of port services for private sector actors. This leads to capacity building to speed up the unloading and loading processes, supply of basic goods and raw materials to more production units in the region and the country. The direct consequence will be more production and exports to the markets of the Caspian and Eurasian basins. Dr. Roozbehan added: The new tourism facilities and infrastructure that will be inaugurated complete the puzzle pieces of the comprehensive development of the Anzali Free Zone. On the other hand, in the conditions of sanctions and restrictions caused by Covid-19 disease, 4 development projects are operating in production units. Six new industrial plants will also be officially launched at the regional level. This success shows the serious efforts and determination of this organization to prosper the business environment within the framework of the policies of the resistance economy and to achieve the goals of the production jump this year in order to increase export power, foreign exchange earnings and more employment.

27 projects with an investment of 17 thousand and 430 billion rials and 240 million dollars and job creation for 2263 people were inaugurated by the decree of the President in Qeshm

The Rapid pace of Development of the QESHM FREE ZONE in the Government of Prudence and Hope

Head of Government: 98% participation of the private sector and 2% of Qeshm Free Zone in the implementation of these 27 projects is very important.

Free and special economic zones have become a trump card for Iran's economy in recent years, with the rise of sanctions. These areas have a high potential to circumvent and defuse illegal US sanctions. The \$ 1 billion foreign investment in the first six months of this year also illustrates this well. Facilitating the conditions for starting a business and the existence of numerous other benefits for entrepreneurs and investors have increased the investment attractions of the free zones. Qeshm Free Zone was established in 1990 with an area of 3000 hectares. This large island is a special privilege for Iran due to its special geographical location and population. For this reason, by being included in the free zones, it was considered as a place to attract foreign and domestic investment. The largest island in the Persian Gulf, with an area of 1,500 square kilometers, is located in one of the most strategic commercial areas in the world. Due to its unique oil and energy resources and natural, cultural and tourism benefits, it is one of the attractive points for domestic and foreign investors in various economic fields. Qeshm Free Zone Organization in order to implement the policies of the Supreme Leader to create a map of the country's free zones in 2025 and also to help the future plans of the government of prudence and hope, over the past few years has been able to attract potential investors in Qeshm Island. Based on the favorable progress of the activities carried out so far, I hope that in the next few years we will see a significant boom in economic activities in the land of golden opportunities. Due to the implementation and operation of extensive development activities in various areas of infrastructure and infrastructure throughout Qeshm Island, in addition to creating numerous job opportunities, has paved the way for balanced and sustainable development in this region. Due to Qeshm's position for the construction of refineries and petrochemical units, storage and transportation of petroleum products and the construction of power plants in the not too distant future can be considered as one of the energy hubs of the country. On the other hand, investing in various fields of industry, fisheries and aquaculture, as well as tourism in recent years and with comprehensive and accurate planning will greatly increase the economic potential of the region. Qeshm Free Zone is trying to provide welfare and security for the residents in the year of the production leap by prioritizing the orders of the leadership. This is done by providing suitable facilities for the presence of investors, boosting the activities of various industries, creating employment and finally a stable income, especially in the field of foreign exchange and exports for the people of Qeshm Island and the country. In this regard, 14 inaugural projects were put into operation in September of this year by the highest executive official of the country in the Qeshm Free Zone. 27 economic, development and tourism projects worth \$ 240 million and 17,430 billion rials were inaugurated by the President in the Qeshm Free Zone on December 16, 2020, in the form of a video conference. On Thursday (December 16th), in the second period of inauguration of free zone projects, 60 new production, development and infrastructure projects with a capital of three thousand 53 billion Rials were inaugurated. The projects, worth \$ 241 million and € 12.9 million, brought in new public and private currency. These projects have created a total of 3,223 new jobs. The share of Qeshm Free Zone in the total of these projects is significant. Among the 60 projects inaugurated by the presidency in the second inauguration of the country's free zones, 27 economic, development and tourism projects were inaugurated in the Qeshm Free Zone. The foreign exchange value of these projects was \$ 240 million and its rial value was 17,430 billion rials. By exploiting these projects, job opportunities have been created for more than 2,263 people. In the discussion of employment, it should be important to keep in mind that the creation of any kind of job cannot be considered effective and high quality in the growth of the country's GDP. False jobs can also be included in the country's job creation list, but these jobs cannot create added value and growth in GDP due to lack of quality. According to official statistics and scientific research, two-thirds of the country's working population has no role in the production sector. Therefore, the creation of more than 2,200 jobs anticipated by new production and infrastructure projects in the Qeshm Free Zone are in the category of quality jobs that can help turn the wheel of the economy and lead to economic growth. The government's economic strategy is to create and facilitate conditions for investment and activation of the private sector in various fields of economy, development, tourism and services. Qeshm Free Zone Organization showed another golden leaf of its performance. According to reports, 91% of the Rial investment in the 27 projects inaugurated by the President in the Qeshm Free Zone belonged to the private sector. Only 9% of it is related to the investments of Qeshm Free Zone Organization. If we look at the amount of foreign exchange investment in this area, the share of the private sector will increase to 98%. Only 2% of the investment in 27 macroeconomic, development and tourism projects is related to the Qeshm Free Zone Organization. Following the inaugural presidential projects throughout the country, this free zone, 27 projects in both public and private sectors with a credit of 240 million dollars and 17 thousand and 430 billion rials and the creation of 2,263 jobs in five industries of oil, gas and Energy, manufacturing, fisheries, development and tourism opened. The titles of the projects implemented by the presidential decree in the second round of the opening of economic projects in the free and special economic zones of the country are:



Inauguration of the largest bitumen refinery in Qeshm

Hassan Rouhani inaugurated the super-heavy crude oil refinery of Pars Behin Qeshm Oil Refinery Company with a foreign exchange investment of \$ 164 million and a production capacity of 35,000 barrels per day. Pars Behin Qeshm Oil Refining Company is one of the subsidiaries of Pasargad Energy Development Company in the Qeshm Island Free Zone. The company is the private



investor of this project, which is to be built in two phases with the aim of building a heavy crude oil refinery in an area of 40 hectares; Production of bitumen as the main product and light crude oil as a by-product contribute to the economic self-sufficiency and currency appreciation of the country. One thousand and 100 workers were employed during the construction of this company, and after its opening, 250 people will be permanently employed in this company. Production of high quality products in accordance with Euro 2005 standards, reduction of environmental pollution, energy efficiency, helping to promote exports are the main goals of the company. According to the report, by the order of the head of state, the operation of launching the largest bitumen refinery in the country was put into operation, relying on the ability of local engineers. The refinery is being built in two different phases with similar products, including bitumen as the main product and light crude oil as the by-product. The refinery is designed in such a way that light crude oils can be replaced by naphtha, kerosene and diesel after the addition of sulfur.

Utilization of the first phase of meeting the requirements of the refinery

The first phase of meeting the prerequisites of Qeshm Refinery Qeshm Refinery was inaugurated with a \$ 76 million investment by Qeshm Molad Company in the year of the production leap by the head of the government in Qeshm Free Zone. With the opening of the first phase of meeting the requirements of the Qeshm Refinery, 21 MW of electricity, 8,000 cubic meters of fresh water and 38,000 tons of steam will be produced per day. Electricity, water and steam generated in this phase will be used as prerequisites for the production of bitumen in the Qeshm refinery so that the company can produce 35,000 barrels of bitumen per day and meet part of the country's need for this material in infrastructure projects. This phase will have the capacity to generate 70 MW of electricity and supply water and steam required by other refineries on Qeshm Island, which has been put into operation using the power of Iranian specialized forces. The project will create 150 jobs at the time of construction and will require 45 permanent workers at the time of operation.

27 projects in Qeshm were put into operation with employment for more than 2,000 people

By order of the President, 27 projects in Qeshm were put into operation through video conferencing, creating jobs for more than 2,000 people. The President of the Republic said at the ceremony of exploiting these projects: «In the implementation of these projects, the participation of 98% of the private sector and 2% of the Qeshm Free Zone is very important.» Dr. Hassan Rouhani added: «The basis of the country's economy is the activation of the private sector, and the government should only play the role of facilitator and supporter of investors.» He said: «Other free zones and other parts of the country should also provide conditions for the private sector to be active and to launch important projects.» «It is very gratifying that more than 2,200 people are employed in the shadow of these operations,» the president said. According to this report, the chairman of the board and the managing director of the Qeshm Free Zone Organization also said in a video conference with the president in this regard: «These projects are in the fields of energy, fisheries, civil engineering, oil and tourism.» Hamidreza Momeni added: 240 million dollars and 17 thousand and 430 billion rials have been spent for the implementation of these projects with the participation of the private sector. He said: «By exploiting these projects, the field of employment of 2,236 people was provided.» The CEO of Qeshm Free Zone Organization said: «The important point about the projects is that 91% of the Rial investment share of these projects belongs to the private sector and the Qeshm Free Zone Organization has a share of 9%.» The highest official of the Qeshm Free Zone Organization stated: Also, 98% of the total foreign exchange and rial investment made in 27 projects inaugurated by the President, belongs to the private sector and 2% belongs to the Qeshm Free Zone Organization. He continued: «Heavy crude oil refinery for the production of various types of bitumen and light oil, with an investment of \$ 164 million, and a storage capacity of 35,000 barrels per day is one of the most important projects that will be put into operation.» According to a believer; Pars Behin Refinery's super-heavy oil refinery was inaugurated as the largest bitumen refinery in the country, where all stages of design, implementation and operation were performed by specialized internal engineers. The CEO of Qeshm Free Zone Organization added: In the field of aquaculture and processing of fishery products, eight projects were put into operation, which will add more than 12,000 tons of shrimp and fish to the country's production. He added: in the field of production and industrial units, three projects were put into operation in the service, health and food sectors. Momeni added: «These projects include a cold storage with a storage capacity of 21,000 tons of products, a processing plant for the production of dried fish and aquatic feed with an annual capacity of 1,500 tons and a mask production plant.» He said: Exploitation of the Maritime Training Center, Safa Abad Tourism Garden with a capacity of 54 beds, Matia Residential Tower, Top Island Complex, 40 villas and construction of a 23-hectare residential site are other projects that were put into operation today with the presence of the President.



Inauguration of 3 industrial projects in Qeshm free zone

Three production and industrial projects in the Qeshm Free Zone with a credit of more than 710 billion rials and foreign exchange investment equivalent to \$ 500,000 were inaugurated by the President on Thursday (December 16th). These three projects started with the investment of the private sector and with the support of the Qeshm Free Zone Organization. At the time of construction and implementation of these industrial and production projects, 57 people were employed, which at the time of operation reaches 155 people. The cold storage owned by Shakil Qeshm Pearl Company with an annual capacity of 21,000 tons and an investment of 600 billion at the time of construction will create job opportunities for 25 people and 120 people will be employed by exploiting it. Dry fish and aquatic feed production unit owned by Qeshm Seed Feed Extract Company with an investment of 110 billion rials and an annual production capacity of 1,500 tons per year will create employment for 25 people at the time of construction and 20 people will be employed by exploiting it. Soba Mask Production Factory belongs to Qeshm Healthy Food Processing Complex Company with an investment of \$ 500,000, is another production and industrial complex of Qeshm Free Zone that creates job opportunities for 7 people during construction and 15 people after operation.

Simultaneous operation of 8 shrimp and fish breeding projects in Qeshm

8 billion rials were inaugurated today, Thursday (December 16) by the head of government. They started their activities with the investment made by the private sector and with the support of the Qeshm Free Zone Organization. According to the report, at the time of construction and implementation of these projects in the field of fisheries and aquaculture, 200 people were employed in them, and by exploiting these projects, 426 jobs will be created. The first phase of cage fish farming belongs to the companies of Hiran Kaveh Sahel Qeshm and Sharif Darya Pouyan Qeshm, with an investment of 1,673 billion rials and a total production capacity of 6,000 tons of fish per year at the time of construction for 40 people and exploitation of 104 people. They create job opportunities. Also, 6 shrimp farming complexes belonging to sailors, Safi Darya Qeshm, Padideh Sadaf Qeshm, Ittihad Mehr Kani, Azim Sahel Qeshm and Shrimp Dasht Kenar Siah Qeshm Cooperative Company with an investment of one thousand 323 billion rials, create jobs for 160 people during construction and will employ 322 people. In total, with the start of 6 shrimp farming projects, 6,120 tons of shrimp production capacity and by exploiting these two fish farming projects in cages, 6,000 tons will be added to the country's fish production capacity.



Opening of a maritime training center

Sanat Gostar Hava Darya Qeshm Maritime Training Center with 160 billion Rials private sector investment was officially inaugurated on Thursday, December 16, 2020, during a ceremony by the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran Dr. Hassan Rouhani via video conference. The center was set up in line with the development policies of the scientific-professional education of the Qeshm Free Zone Organization through the support of the private sector by the Qeshm Sea Air Development Company. The project has created employment for 35 people at the time of construction and 20 people after operation. According to the report, the training center offers courses related to vessels of less than 3,000 tons and more than 500 tons, as well as sub-500 tons, and offshore deck courses with maritime training facilities including equipped workshops, modern Radar-Arpa command simulators and GMDSS communications under the STCW Convention. Makes use of efficient professionals and instructors.

Exploitation of 12 infrastructure and development projects

12 infrastructural and development development projects with a credit of 13 thousand and 390 billion Rials were inaugurated by the President in Qeshm Free Zone. These 12 infrastructure, service, welfare and housing projects with the investment of both public and private sectors of Qeshm, were exploited in the form of video conferencing. This event was held on Thursday, January 16th, in the presence of the President, the Chairman of the Board and the Managing Director of the Qeshm Free Zone Organization and a group of deputies and managers of this organization. Eight of the 12 construction projects mentioned with the investment of Qeshm Free Zone Organization, include rural development, service and infrastructure projects. These projects include the construction of access boulevard to Dafari village, the western ring boulevard of Nariman town to the south coast with a length of four kilometers, the improvement of the three-way road to the airport and Shahid Sattari Square, the construction of three park camps Construction of surface water collection canal and implementation of the second water transfer line. The private sector is also participating in the opening projects of this free zone in December 2020, with the project of Matia Residential Tower, Top Island Complex, 40 villas and preparation of a 23-hectare site. The total of 12 development projects in Qeshm Free Zone have been able to create employment for 1,324 workers.

Inauguration of Safaabad Qeshm tourist garden

The construction project of Safaabad large tourist garden located in Gorzin Village of Qeshm Island with 180 billion Rials private sector investment was put into operation on Thursday, December 16, 2020 by President Hassan Rouhani. The construction of this tourist place, which is in line with the tourism development policy of the Qeshm Free Zone Organization through the support of the private sector, has created employment for 40 people during construction and 18 people after operation. The operator of this tourist garden is Qeshm Paydar Mobile Communication Company. This garden is built on a land with an area of 2,480 square meters and with 16 rooms and 54 beds has the capacity to receive more than 54 tourists. This plan can play an effective role in providing the services needed by the island's tourists.



Elahieh Apt (\$2200)
200sq.m, 3bdrs
S/pool, S, J
L.balcony
marble fl
Fully Furn

Shanon (adviser)

Darrou Villa (\$4000)
1000sq.m
5bdrs, S/p
S, J, & pkg
graan yard
Fully Furn

Parsian

Jordan (\$2000)
250sq.m, 4bdrs
S/pool, Sauna, J
balcony, pkg lot
Nicely Furn

Niavaran Apt
(\$1500) 2bdrs, 150sq.m, F.F
(\$2700) 3bdrs, 220sq.m, F.F
(\$3500) 4bdrs, 400sq.m, F.F
with S/p, S, J, yard

Farmanieh bldg
5storey, 20bdrs
S/pool, S, J, yard
pkg lots, balcony
Semi or unFurn

Heravi Apt (\$500)
2bdrs, pkg, & F.F

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Japan Court Upholds Ban On Dual Citizenship

TOKYO (Dispatches) - A Japanese court upheld a ban on dual citizenship on Thursday, rejecting a suit that challenged the measure's constitutionality and sought damages for those affected.

Japan is one of around 50 countries internationally, including China and South Korea, that only permits its citizens to hold one nationality.

Under current rules, Japanese people who acquire another passport are asked to relinquish their Japanese citizenship, but in 2018 eight plaintiffs started legal proceedings, arguing the rule was unconstitutional.



Thai Opposition Figure Vows to Fight on

BANGKOK (AFP) - A billionaire Thai opposition figure accused of defaming the country's monarchy has vowed to keep campaigning for reform, despite facing what he dubbed a "politically motivated" lawsuit.

Those convicted under Thailand's strict royal defamation laws can face up to 15 years in jail per charge, and earlier this week a former civil servant was sentenced to more than 43 years for sharing audio clips deemed defamatory to the monarchy.

Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit, founder of the now-dissolved Future Forward Party, is facing legal action over a video he posted Monday criticizing the government's vaccine strategy.



Deadly Twin Suicide Attack Hits Baghdad, 32 Killed



BAGHDAD (Dispatches) - At least 32 people have been killed and 110 wounded in a rare twin suicide bombing that tore through a busy area of central Baghdad on Thursday morning, Iraqi officials said.

Ministry of Defense Spokesperson Yahya Rasool told Al Jazeera one of the two perpetrators lured a crowd of people towards him in a market in the central Tayaran Square by feigning illness, only to detonate his explosives. The second bomber struck as people helped victims of the first attack, Rasool said.

The attack is the first twin bombing in Baghdad since January 2018, when 35 people were killed and 90 injured in the same square that was targeted on Thursday. Videos from Thursday's attack show scenes of chaos, with people running for cover and bodies strewn across pavements and the road.

The health ministry said the capital's hospitals were being mobilised to treat the wounded. While officials suggested the death toll is likely to rise as many of those injured in the attack are in critical condition.

No one immediately took responsibility for the attack. But Sajad Jiyad, an Iraq analyst and fellow at The Century Foundation think-tank, told Al Jazeera:

"This kind of attack bears the hallmark of ISIS [ISIL] who have targeted crowded civilian areas in Baghdad with suicide attacks many times in the past."

"This shows a security failure by the government who have been warned that ISIS is still active and in recent days have seen it target infrastructure and rural areas with similar attacks," said Jiyad.

"For Iraqis, this is a worrying development which saps confidence in the security forces and adds to the level of tension already present with geopolitical, economic and pandemic issues," he said. Iraq declared ISIL defeated at the end of 2017 after a fierce three-year campaign.

But ISIL attacks across the country have been on the rise again over the past year, particularly in northern Iraq where sleeper cells are still active.

By Thursday afternoon the area surrounding the market had come back to life. But some stalls near the blasts remained shut and a small crowd of people had gathered to examine the wreckage.

Dry blood was still visible on the tarmac, while the charred remains of toys and clothes once sold by vendors littered the floor. The Kurdistan Region Government Head of Foreign Relations Safeneh Dizaye condemned Thursday's attack.

"This horrific crime is a sad reminder that terror is still a real threat to peace and stability in the world. [The international] community must stand united against all acts of terrorism," Dizaye wrote in a tweet.

The United States embassy in Iraq also strongly condemned the attack in a statement. "This attack is a reprehensible act of cowardice that underscores the dangers of terrorism that millions of Iraqis continue to face. We extend our condolences to the families of these victims, and hope for the swift recovery for those who were injured," it said.

Biden Unveils Sweeping Covid-19 Plan in First Full Day in Office

WASHINGTON (AFP) - Joe Biden's administration unveiled a detailed Covid-19 roadmap Thursday to boost vaccinations and testing while centering scientific expertise, after the new U.S. president warned during his inaugural speech the pandemic was entering its "deadliest period."

Officials said Biden would immediately sign 10 executive orders and other directives to jumpstart the national strategy.

Experts have said that was sorely missing under his predecessor Donald Trump -- and on Thursday Biden's communications director Kate Bedingfield said the outgoing administration had left little in the way of a vaccination distribution program.

There was "not a lot of detail," she told CNN -- but she added that Biden would sign executive orders that same day to invoke emergency legislation to increase industrial production and "just to make sure that we have the material that we need to get these vaccinations into arms around the country."



Maduro Hopes for "Better Relations" With U.S.

CARACAS (Dispatches) - Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro says he hopes for better relations with Washington under U.S. President Joe Biden, nearly two years after diplomatic ties were severed during the Donald Trump administration.

"We must tell the United States: We want to improve our relations, to make it one of respect, of mutual acknowledgement, a relationship with a future," Maduro said during a televised presentation.

He urged the pro-government legislature, the National Assembly, to "take initiatives" towards a "new beginning" with Washington.

After years of a frosty relationship, Caracas and Washington fully broke diplomatic ties on January 23, 2019, when the US government recognised opposition leader Juan Guaido as Venezuela's interim president.

Biden's nominee for secretary of state, Anthony Blinken, has described Maduro as a "brutal dictator," and during his Senate confirmation hearing said he supported Trump's policy of supporting Guaido.

The Trump administration issued sanctions against Venezuela's socialist government, imposed an oil embargo, and refused to recognise Maduro's 2018 re-election, among other things.

Analysts believe the Biden administration will take a more moderate stance and will support international mediation for the transition towards a new government.

Maduro, who said he listened to Biden's inauguration speech "three times," asked the new U.S. administration to "turn the page ... after four years of Trumpist brutality."

Guaido earlier wrote that he and his supporters will continue to work towards "Venezuela's freedom and free elections". He said his "ambassador" in Washington was present at Biden's inauguration.

Death Toll in Madrid Gas Blast Rises to Four

MADRID (AFP) - The toll from a powerful explosion that gutted a church-owned building in Madrid rose to four on Thursday after a priest died from his injuries.

The 36-year-old, who was ordained a priest in June, was one of 11 people who were injured during Wednesday's blast that officials said was caused by a gas leak.

He died in hospital in the early hours of Thursday, the Madrid archdiocese said in a statement.

The explosion in the central La Latina district destroyed almost all of the multi-storey building which belongs to the nearby church of the Virgin de la Paloma.

It also killed two men, aged 85 and 47, who were walking down the street at the time, local officials said.

The younger man was a Bulgarian national, the country's foreign ministry confirmed Wednesday.

The other victim was a 35-year-old electrician and father-of-four who had been repairing a boiler on the fifth floor of the building.

Reportedly employed by Madrid metro's maintenance department, he lived on the street and was active in the local church.

A man who was initially reported missing was later confirmed to be the repairman, government representative Jose Manuel Franco told radio Cadena Ser.

Neighbors reported a strong smell of gas in the minutes before the blast, he said.

"I was just leaving a nearby clinic when I heard a very big explosion, it was so big I thought it was a bomb," Valentin Moreno, a 48-year-old salesman, told AFP.

"There were people running and a lot of smoke and when I got there, I saw the building's facade had been completely destroyed."

Pope Francis said he was praying for the victims and their families in these "difficult moments" in a telegram sent to the Archbishop of Madrid, Cardinal Carlos Osoro, the city's archdiocese said.

Despite the force of the explosion, no one was hurt in the elderly care home next door, nor in an adjacent school where tons of debris fell into the playground while children were in class.

Wednesday was the first day that schools reopened after a nine-day closure due to the heaviest snowfall in Madrid in 50 years.



Russia Pushes Back after Navalny's Putin "Palace" Probe

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russian prosecutors warned supporters of Alexei Navalny on Thursday against staging demonstrations, after his probe into President Vladimir Putin's alleged "palace" became the Kremlin critic's most-watched YouTube investigation.

Navalny's spokeswoman Kira Yarmysh said on Thursday that the two-hour video report into an opulent Black Sea property allegedly owned by Putin had been viewed more than 41 million times since its release Tuesday.

The 44-year-old anti-corruption campaigner published the investigation into "the world's most expensive palace" days after his arrest in Moscow on arrival from Germany.

Navalny in the video urged his supporters to take the streets on Saturday to protest Putin, who had ruled over Russia for two decades. Prosecutors responded on Thursday by warning Russians who called for "illegal mass protests" and demanded a ban on websites promoting Saturday's demonstrations.

"Law enforcement agencies have been advised to take preventative measures and take administrative action against violators," the Prosecutor General's Office said in a statement.

State communications watchdog Roskomnadzor later warned social media platforms including TikTok against encouraging minors to participate in the rallies, especially during the coronavirus pandemic.

"Administrative action will be taken against internet platforms," the watchdog said adding that failure to remove "banned information" could result in fines of up to 4 million rubles (\$54,000).

Following Navalny's arrest and latest graft report, many Russians took to social media -- including TikTok, a video app popular among teens, and even dating app Tinder -- to voice support and urge a large turnout on Saturday.

A number of public figures including actors, musicians and athletes have in recent days spoken out in support of the jailed opposition figure.

The retired former captain of Russia's national football team Igor Denisov said on Thursday that although he was never interested in politics, Navalny "should be freed".



25% Salary Increase For Iranian Employees

TEHRAN - The spokesman for the Budget Integration Commission in Iran's parliament said that a 25-percent salary increase for employees (except doctors) is approved in the commission.

Speaking at a press conference on Thursday, Rahim Zare stated that tax payment is also defined for various groups, those with under 4 million Tomans salary would not pay any tax, 4-8 m 10 percent, 8-12m 20 percent, 12-24m 25 percent, 24-32m 30 percent and over 32 million are obliged pay 35 percent tax. Zare noted that in 1400 (the new year in the Persian

calendar), all the banks and credit institutes are obliged to reconstruct 100 thousand rural and urban (with less than 25 thousand population) houses.

He pointed out that the budget Integration Commission has not yet determined the rest of the revenue sources from subsidies and is scheduled to do it in the next session of the commission on expenditures in medicine, livelihood, poverty reduction, family population policy, guaranteed wheat purchase, and those who have been suffered from the coronavirus outbreak.



India's Vaccine Diplomacy in South Asia Pushes Back Against China

NEW DELHI (Reuters) - India will give millions of doses of COVID-19 vaccine to South Asian countries in the next few weeks, government sources said on Thursday, drawing praise from its neighbours and pushing back against China's dominating presence in the region.

Free shipments of AstraZeneca's vaccine manufactured by the Serum Institute of India, the world's biggest producer of vaccines, have begun arriving in the Maldives, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Nepal.

Myanmar and the Seychelles are next in line to get free consignments as India uses its strength as one of the world's biggest makers of generic drugs to build friendships.

"The government of India has shown goodwill by providing the vaccine in grant. This is at the people's level, it is the public who are suffering the most from COVID-19," said Nepal's Minister for Health and Population Hridayesh Tripathi.

The gesture comes at a time that India's ties with Nepal have been strained by a territorial dispute and Indian concern over China's expanding political and economic influence in the Himalayan nation sandwiched between the Asian giants.

China, which had promised Nepal help to deal with the pandemic, is awaiting Nepali clearance for its Sinopharm shots.

"We've asked them to submit more documents and information before we give them the approval," said Santosh K.C., spokesman for Nepal's department of drug administration.

Bangladesh was supposed to get 110,000 doses of vaccine free from Chinese firm Sinovac Biotech, but Bangladesh refused to contribute towards the development cost of the vaccine leading to deadlock.

Bangladesh has instead turned to India for urgent supplies and on Thursday was due to receive 2 million shots of the AstraZeneca vaccine as a gift from India.

"India is making the AstraZeneca vaccine which makes all the difference. It can be stored and transported at normal refrigerated temperatures and countries like Bangladesh have that facility," a Bangladesh health official said.

Meanwhile India's arch-rival Pakistan on Thursday thanked China, its close strategic ally, for a pledge to provide half a million doses of the vaccine free of charge by the end of the month.

India for years has struggled to match the pace of Chinese investment in countries such as Sri Lanka, Nepal and the Maldives, where China is building ports, roads and



power stations as part of its Belt and Road Initiative.

But the demand for vaccines in these countries desperate to revive their tourism-dependent economies has offered Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government a way to claw back ground, diplomats say.

India is considering giving away anything from 12 million to 20 million shots to its neighbours in the first wave of assistance over the next three to four weeks, one government source said.

India is also helping with the training of health workers in some of these countries and the setting up of the infrastructure to administer the shots, the source said.

"It's a well-crafted, calibrated series of actions you are seeing, they confirm the validity of our 'neighbourhood first' policy," said a former Indian ambassador, Rajiv Bhatia.

"It plays to our strengths in science and pharma, and this is our moment to shine."

\$158m in Foreign Investment Went Into Iran's Free Zones in 9 Months

TEHRAN (IFP) - Iranian free trade zones absorbed some \$158 million in foreign investment in the nine months to December 2020 despite the U.S. sanctions.

As much as \$200 million in foreign finances was also funneled into free zones last year, said an Iranian official.

"In the twelve months to March 2020, the country absorbed an overall \$1.5 billion in foreign investment, \$200 million of which went into free zones," said Ahmad Jamali, the deputy head of the Secretariat of the High Council of Free Trade-Industrial Zones and Special Economic Zones.

"The statistics show around 15% of the foreign investment in the country went into free zones," he said.

He underlined the coronavirus pandemic and sanctions were two major contributors to a drop in investment in the country's free zones. The official noted some \$138 billion worth of goods have been exported from Iran's free zones so far, with imports standing at \$48 billion.

Biggest Mideast...

FROM PAGE 1

Meanwhile the CEO of the Persian Gulf Petrochemical Industries Company (PGPIC) said: "The launch of the Bidboland Persian Gulf gas refinery is the result of sanctions and the opening of credit for implementation of this project is the result of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)."

Addressing a virtual ceremony to launch the major gas project on Thursday, Jafar Rabiee said with the launch of the refinery, PGPIC's petrochemical investment in the current Iranian calendar year which began on March 21 has crossed \$5 billion in the petrochemical industry.

"Today, we are at a point where large-scale projects can be implemented by the non-government sector," he said, adding prior to its official inauguration, the refinery had already exported 5 shipments.

Rabiee further voiced the holding's preparedness to step in upstream projects of the oil industry.

"PGPIC has invested \$3.4 billion in the project of which \$2.2 billion was provided by the dipping into the National Development Fund of Iran and the rest were provided by the banking syndicate," he added.

Bidboland's output include 10.4 million metric tons a year (mt/y) of methane, a sweet gas used for household and industrial consumption, 1.5 mt/y of ethane, used as feed for petchem plants in southern Iran, and 1.5 mt/y of propane and butane, products normally sold to foreign customers. Other products include acid gas for the purpose of injection into oil wells to boost their production as well as gas condensates.

President Hassan Rouhani hailed Bidboland as a huge achievement for Iran at the time of increased US pressure, saying its inauguration just a day after former U.S. President Donald Trump left office was a sign that his ominous plans for the Iranian had failed for good.

"This huge project is inaugurated on a day when those who claimed they will defeat Iran through racketeering were annihilated with disgrace and shame," said Rouhani.

Tehran Condemns Terror Attacks in Iraq

TEHRAN (IFP) - Foreign ministry spokesman has condemned two terrorist explosions in the Iraqi capital, Baghdad, which killed or wounded a number of innocent Iraqi civilians.

In a Thursday statement, Saeed Khatibzadeh condoled with the families of victims on behalf of the Iranian government and nation. He further expressed condolences to the Iraqi government and people and wished a rapid recovery for those wounded in the terror act.

"Takfiri terrorism, which has taken a fresh breath, is targeting Iraq again and seeks to disrupt tranquility and

stability in this country and create a pretext for continued presence of foreigners," said the spokesman.

He reiterated Iran's support for the Iraqi government as well as for stability in, and the integrity of that country.

He also said Tehran backs measures adopted by the Iraqi government and security agencies to establish security and apprehend and punish those who order and perpetrate [acts of terror] and to eradicate the roots of Takfiri ideology.

"As before, the Islamic Republic of Iran stands ready to offer Iraq whatever help and assistance in the fight against terrorism and extremism," he said.

New U.S. Administration Behavior Matters for Iran, Not Its Words

TEHRAN (IP) - Special Assistant to the Speaker of Iran's Parliament for International Affairs stressed that what matters for the Iranian nation is the behavior of the White House inhabitants.

In his Thursday tweet, Hossein Amirabdollahian said: "White House's clear face of state terrorism Donald Trump has gone and made room for Biden-Harris."

Pointing to the fact that the JCPOA is now nothing but a bunch of paper, he said: "Change to the US longstanding hostile attitude & sanctions removal is vital. What matters to the Iranian nation is the real behavior of the new WH occupants."

Basic Goods Imports Exceed 4m Tons in 10 Months

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's Government Trading Company (GTC) says the country imported over four million metric tons of basic goods in the 10 months to late January despite pandemic-related restrictions imposed at borders and difficulties facing the country in settling trade payments.

Amir Talebi, a deputy head of the GTC, said on Thursday that a total of 194 ships carrying basic goods, including foods, staples, medicine and animal feed, had docked at Iranian ports in the first 10 months of the calendar year ending January 19. Iran's Port of Emam Khomeini, the country's largest grain ship port on the Persian Gulf's westernmost coast, was responsible for 45 percent of all basic goods consignments, said Talebi, adding that Bandar Abbas, the largest container port on the southern coast, took delivery of 31 percent of the cargoes.

Port operations boomed at Chabahar, Iran's sole ocean port on the Sea of Oman, where some 17 percent of all basic goods cargoes were handled, according to the GTC. Iran has been encouraging more activity at Chabahar, where it is implementing large-scale development plans to turn the gateway into a major trade hub in the region.

Government authorities believe basic goods consignments destined for major urban regions in east and northeast Iran can be processed through Chabahar where the infrastructure is being developed for loading and unloading of large container ships.

Ports along the Caspian Sea in north of Iran handled only seven percent of all basic goods cargoes, said Talebi, as he estimated that annual basic goods imports would reach 4.4 million tons with consignments of seed oils planned to dock at ports until the end of the current calendar year in late March. The Iranian government has announced on several occasions that it has earmarked billions of dollars in funds to ensure a smooth flow of basic goods into the country to prevent any shortages at a time of increased U.S. pressure and reduced economic activity because of the coronavirus pandemic.

In the name of God

FIRST ANNOUNCEMENT



ESCO
Esfahan Steel Company

Extension of International Two-stage Tender No. 9900805

Dear sir, Further to tender No.9900805 subject of purchasing Refractory Material for Tundish's Slide Gate of Casting Station, please be informed that the specified deadlines have been extended as follows:

		Previous Date	New Date
Deadline for submission of the offers	Confidential Secretariat of ESCO's Security Department	18.01.2021 at 12:00 a.m.	27.01.2021 at 12:00 a.m.
	Tehran Office	13.01.2021 at 12:00 a.m.	26.01.2021 at 12:00 a.m.
	Submitting through e-mail address toa@esfahansteel.ir	18.01.2021 at 12:00 a.m.	27.01.2021 at 12:00 a.m.
Date and hour of opening the envelopes		19.01.2021 at 10:00 a.m.	30.01.2021 at 12:00 a.m.

Thank you in advance for your nice attention.

To: **Esfahan Steel Company**

We hereby confirm the receipt of the extension.

Public Relation of Esfahan Steel Co.

Biden + Zionists...

FROM PAGE 1

The Trump Administration, by imposing the harshest sanctions, encouraging Venezuelan military officers for getting the power and for military threats, exerted considerable pressure on the Venezuelan government. The Trump Administration also restored close cooperation with the opposition forces in Venezuela and promised to earmark some budget for different programs and at the same time, it recognized the opposition leader Juan Guaido as the real leader of Venezuela. Meanwhile according to the U.S. Special Representative for Venezuela Elliot Abrams, even the U.S. Congress earmarked a significant amount of budget to help the opposition groups in Venezuela; a policy which has not yet bore any fruit for the U.S.

Now while the Biden Administration has not officially started its job, it has openly revealed the same approach in recent interviews of Biden's pick for the State Department. That some leaders of the countries and international organizations would welcome Biden instead of a lunatic who was booted out of the White House is nothing but a show because the legacy of Trump for other countries is the concern for taking office of a politician with Trump's properties in 2024 or the upcoming years.

Trump showed that the U.S. can enter international and multilateral agreements with other countries in some period, and in other period and by taking office of a new president, it can leave the same commitments unilaterally and inflict heavy expenses on the credit and dignity of all from the West to the East.

It seems the most important legacy left by Trump in his four-year in office for both Republican and Democrat parties is to accept this unpleasant reality that the U.S. cannot keep its role as the "reeve of the world" in its policy of global superiority beside its domestic economic stability because Trump Administration during the past four years only pursued the foreign policy and invested on supporting the Zionist regime, and it did not follow any other cohesive and specified strategy.

Appointment of the inexperienced members of the family for leading the foreign policy, repeatedly controversial appointments and dismissals, picking controversial figures, business-minded approach to the foreign policy, and repeatedly using of twitter for announcing the sensitive foreign policies had caused confusion and unpredictability in the U.S. foreign policy decisions.

So major part of Trump's time passed with dissolving most of policies of previous U.S. presidents especially the policies of Barack Obama, and the very idea of pullout of the JCPOA, emphasis on more sanctions, even leaving major international treaties and bodies and weakening the historic unions, questioned the international prestige of the U.S. and its capacity for effective performance in the international scene.

In these past four years it was made clear that Trump and Biden just get order from the same place which pays no heed to any other issues in the world but to the interests of Zionism in the world. So it is predicted Biden, in a secret action with a different media symbol based on its Zionist cabinet team picks, to go the same path that Trump had gone during his four years in the office.

Iran Oil...

FROM PAGE 1

This year's oil show, which was not held due to the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic on the usual date every year (May), kicked off this morning (Friday, January 22, 2021) a few minutes ago in the presence of the Oil Minister as well as senior oil industry executives.

The fair is held under strict health protocols and only oil industry experts are allowed in the showcase.

The fair will run until January 25.

Meanwhile on Thursday and addressing in a ceremony to launch Persian Gulf Bidboland Gas Refinery, Zangeneh said the country would generate \$1.5 billion/year by the project.

This is the 11th petrochemical project which has come online in Iran since last March. Plans were underway to launch 17 petrochemical projects with 11.4 billion dollars of investment in the country during the current Iranian calendar year which began on March 21 of which 11 have so far come on stream.

The oil minister stated that by March 2023, no gas will be flared in Iran and more than 95% of the collected associated gases will be consumed. Zangeneh announced that the 3200 NGL project would come online next calendar year and by exploiting it, all the gases of the West Karun region will be sent to Bandar Imam after collection and processing.

He added that the NGL 3100 plant would come online the following year along with a petrochemical plant with 1 million tons of annual production capacity in Dehloran.

Noting that the Persian Gulf Bidboland refinery has the capacity to produce 3.5 million tons of ethane, butane, propane, and pentane plus, he said, adding the Persian Gulf Petrochemical Industries Company (PGPIC) has been entrusted with another project to collect associated gases with \$1.1b of investment.

U.S. Urged...

FROM PAGE 1

Syria's Central Bank, high-ranking figures and economic entities supportive of Damascus were targeted in the fresh U.S. Treasury's sanctions.

Elsewhere in his Wednesday remarks, the Iranian diplomat strongly condemned Israel's continued aggression against Syria, urging that the Tel Aviv regime must immediately stop its "provocative military adventurism". He also reiterated Tehran's support for the Syrian people and government until they overcome the black boxes Takht Ravanchi said that Iran will continue to support the people and Government of Syria to overcome the threats of terrorism and foreign occupation, rebuild their country and ensure its unity and territorial integrity.

Sokratis Adds to Arsenal Clearout

LONDON (Dispatches) - Arsenal announced on Wednesday they had reached an agreement with defender Sokratis Papastathopoulos to cancel the final six months of his contract at the Emirates.

Sokratis, 32, last played for the Gunners in March and had not been included in Mikel Arteta's Premier League squad this season.

"Working closely with Sokratis and his team, we have decided to cancel his contract by mutual consent," Arsenal 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
ISSN 1024-6053
P.O. Box: 15875-8551
Address: No 13, Pajouhesh St.,
Golestan II St, Golestan St.Marzdaran
Blvd., Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran
Printed by:Honar Sarzmin Sabz
Distributed by:
Cities of Iran Cultural and
Artistic Institute
Managing Director: Fereydoon Taherpour Asl

Philip Rivers Retires After 17 Seasons

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Philip Rivers retired from the NFL after 17 seasons on Wednesday.

Rivers, the No. 4 pick in the 2004 draft in a class with Eli Manning and Ben Roethlisberger, played 16 seasons with the Chargers and the 2020 season with the Indianapolis Colts. The Chargers selected Manning with the No. 1 pick, then swapped him to the New York Giants.

8 IRAN NEWS

SPORTS

SATURDAY JANUARY 23, 2021

Juventus Beat Napoli In Italian Super Cup

TURIN (Dispatches) - Andrea Pirlo won his first trophy as a coach on Wednesday as Juventus beat Napoli 2-0 in the Italian Super Cup.

Cristiano Ronaldo blasted in his 20th goal of the season following a corner on 64 minutes in Reggio Emilia, before Napoli captain Lorenzo Insigne missed a penalty and Alvaro Morata added a second deep into injury time.

Pirlo, 41, clinched his first silverware five months after taking over at his former club where he won four league titles.

"Winning a first title (as a coach) is a great joy, different from that felt as a player, it's even more beautiful," said Pirlo, who lifted the trophy three times as a player with Juventus and AC Milan.

Juventus won the annual trophy, played between the league champions and Italian Cup holders, for the ninth time, having finished runners-up last year to Lazio.

"This trophy is very important because it can give us confidence for the rest of our season," said Ronaldo.

Juventus sit fifth in the league, 10 points behind leaders AC Milan, after losing 2-0 to second-placed Inter Milan last weekend.

"The Scudetto is possible, Milan and Inter are very strong, but there are still a lot of games to be played and we can still do it," added Ronaldo.

It was the first meeting between Pirlo and Napoli coach Gennaro Gattuso, who won the 2006 World Cup together and spent a decade as AC Milan teammates, winning two Serie A titles and two Champions League crowns together.

They have not faced off this season after Napoli refused to travel to Turin for their October league match because of coronavirus cases -- a fixture which has still to be played.

"I'm sorry for Gennaro Gattuso, but we wanted to react after the defeat against Inter Milan," said Pirlo.



Napoli had the best chance of the first half in the Mapei Stadium, with Juve keeper Wojciech Szczesny demonstrating quick reflexes to save Hirving Lozano's diving header just before the half-hour mark.

Federico Bernardeschi came off the bench after the break in place of Federico Chiesa and immediately had an impact.

Juventus piled on the pressure after an hour when Ronaldo was sent through on goal and defender Kostas Manolas almost deflected the ball into his own net.

But the five-time Ballon d'Or winner made the most of the resulting corner, with the ball bouncing off Tiemoue Bakayoko and into the path of the unmarked Portuguese forward to fire in his 20th goal of the season.

Napoli had a chance to equalise from the spot after Weston McKennie fouled Dries Mertens, but Insigne wasted the opportunity by dragging a woeful effort wide.

Szczesny pulled off another late save before a last-gasp Morata goal sealed victory.

"We all lost together, not because of Lorenzo's penalty. Let's move on," said Gattuso, 43, whose side beat Juventus in last season's Italian Cup.

"In the first half there was a bit of fear. I don't remember Juve's serious chances today.

"We could have done better, but the match is very similar to the one seven months ago. In fact, we suffered more seven months ago than today."

Pochettino Guarded Over Messi Move



PARIS (Dispatches) - Paris Saint-Germain coach Mauricio Pochettino played his cards close to his chest when tackled on Spanish radio over a potential move for Lionel Messi.

Pochettino's fellow Argentine is out of contract with Barcelona at the end of the season, prompting speculation of being reunited with former Barca teammate Neymar at PSG.

"Everyone dreams of having the best players with him," Pochettino told Cadena Ser late on Tuesday.

"I have huge respect for the players I have in my team but I must also have respect for players in other teams," the former Tottenham boss, who replaced Thomas Tuchel at the Parc des Princes at the start of this month, added.

Despite playing coy Pochettino highlighted the "very strong" bonds that existed between the two of them, "like love for Newell Old Boys", one of the clubs in Rosario in their homeland. "Both of us have come from there, I think it's something that strongly unites us, this passion for the red and black (Newell's club colours)."

Pochettino's comments followed those of PSG sporting director Leonardo, who told France Football that "the top players like Messi will always be on PSG's radar."

Pogba Fires Man Utd Back To Premier League Summit

LONDON (Dispatches) - Paul Pogba produced a moment of magic as Manchester United came from behind to beat Fulham 2-1 and reclaim the Premier League lead on Wednesday, ending Manchester City's short stay at the top.

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's in-form team started the match third in the table after 24 hours of chopping and changing at the summit.

The win sent the Red Devils two points clear and equaled the club record of 17 Premier League away games without defeat set by the treble-winning side of 1999.

United were forced to dig deep after Ademola Lookman punished them for an untidy start before Edinson Cavani pulled them level with a poacher's goal later in the first half.

Pogba -- back in the starting line-up in recent weeks after a spell on the periphery of Solskjaer's team -- put United in front with a stunning left-foot curling effort from outside the area in the second half.

United have now won seven Premier League games after going behind this season.

"Fantastic goal by Paul and we had some other chances to finish the game but of course when it is just one goal, and the players they put on, it is going to be like heart in your mouth," Solskjaer told BT Sport.

But the Norwegian refused to be drawn on a title challenge, even though United are top at the halfway point of the season.

"It is always going to be talked about when you are halfway through and top of the league but we are not thinking about this," he added. "We just have to go one game at a time. It is such an unpredictable season."

Koeman Hopes Messi's Two-Game Ban Will Be Reduced

MADRID (Dispatches) - Ronald Koeman hopes Lionel Messi's two-match ban will be reduced after he was sent off for the first time ever playing for Barcelona in the Spanish Super Cup final defeat by Athletic Bilbao on Sunday.

Koeman also responded on Wednesday to Paris Saint-Germain sporting director Leonardo claiming Messi was on their wish list, by saying he would be interested in PSG's Neymar and Kylian Mbappe too.



top men's players, with the field playing two singles matches in afternoon and evening sessions. The men's lineup includes Novak Djokovic, Rafael Nadal and Dominic Thiem.

Barty, who won the 2019 French Open title and reached the Australian Open semifinals

Barty to Make Return in Adelaide Exhibition

ADELAIDE (AP) - Ash Barty is set to return to the tennis court for something other than practice for the first time in 11 months.

The world No. 1-ranked Barty on Thursday said she'll play in a one-day exhibition event in Adelaide on Jan. 29 which includes Serena Williams, Naomi Osaka and Simona Halep.

Called "'A Day at the Drive,'" the exhibition at Memorial Drive also features four of the

last year, hasn't played a competitive match since she was a semifinalist at the Qatar Open in February. Barty didn't play last year's U.S. Open and the French Open because of the threat of COVID-19 and overseas travel restrictions for Australian citizens.

Following Adelaide, Barty plans to play in the WTA 500 tournament at Melbourne Park in the week leading up to the Australian Open beginning Feb. 8.

The star players and support staff in Adelaide arrived on a charter flight last week and so far there haven't been any positive COVID-19 tests among them, allowing them unencumbered practice sessions during their 14-day quarantine.

That's unlike the players who arrived into Melbourne on other charters. There have been confirmed positive COVID-19 cases from charter flights originating in Doha, Qatar; Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates and Los Angeles. That has forced 72 players from those three flights into hard quarantine without an opportunity to leave their hotel rooms to practice.

Djokovic Retreats Over Misconstrued Quarantine Demands

LONDON (Dispatches) - World number one Novak Djokovic published an open letter to the Australian public on Twitter on Wednesday in which he tried to "clarify" demands he appeared to make to the organizers of the Australian Open.

Djokovic, an eight-times champion in Melbourne, was widely harangued on Tuesday after reportedly issuing a list of demands in a letter to Tennis Australia that included moving quarantined players into private homes with tennis courts and getting them better meals.

Australian media zeroed in on the demands, portraying them as petulant and selfish while fellow player Nick Kyrgios called him a "tool".

In Wednesday's tweet, Djokovic said his letter to Australian Open director Craig Tiley had been taken the wrong way.

"My good intentions for my fellow competitors in Melbourne have been misconstrued as being selfish, difficult and ungrateful," said Djokovic.

"This couldn't be farther from the truth."

Djokovic said he was merely speaking up for fellow players who were not being treated as well as him. At least 72 players have been barred from leaving their rooms for two weeks after coronavirus cases were detected on their charter flights into the country.

Others are allowed out of their rooms for up to five hours a day to train under strictly-controlled conditions.

"I genuinely care about my fellow players and I also understand very well how the world is run and who gets bigger and better and why," said the 33-year-old Serb.

"I've earned my privileges the hard way and for that reason, it is very difficult for me to be a mere onlooker knowing how much every help, gesture and good word mattered to me when I was small and insignificant in the world pecking order.

"Hence, I use my position of privilege to be of service as much as I can where and when needed."



Zidane Still Has Players Backing After Real Madrid Humiliation

MADRID (Dispatches) - Zinedine Zidane insisted his players still believe in him after Real Madrid suffered an embarrassing defeat by third-tier side Alcobayano in the Copa del Rey on Wednesday.

La Liga's reigning champions lost 2-1 to Alcobayano, who scored a remarkable winner in extra-time after having a man sent off.

Real Madrid have now won only once in their last five games, with an extraordinary loss heaping more pressure on Zidane.

Asked if he still had the backing of the players, Zidane said: "Yes I believe so, you have to ask them. We've done good things this season, apart from the last four games. Now we have La Liga and the Champions League and we have to work. Whether my message gets through, you have to ask them, I can't answer that."

Zidane took responsibility for the defeat.

"I'm the coach, it's my fault," he said. "I am responsible, the players have tried but well, we're out."

Zidane rotated his starting line-up but a team that included the likes of Marcelo, Isco, Casemiro and Vinicius Junior should have had enough to beat opponents sitting fourth in their division in Segunda B.

And when Zidane threw on the likes of Eden Hazard, Karim Benzema and Toni Kroos as substitutes to put the game to bed, the opposite happened, as Alcobayano, a man down, scored the winner, Juanan diverting in at the near post to pull off an incredible upset.

Alcobayano have not graced Spain's top flight since 1951 and their El Collao stadium holds less than 5,000 spectators. The only shame here was their fans were not able to see it.

They were comfortable in the first period but Madrid scored with their first chance on the stroke of half-time as Marcelo's delivery to the back post found a diving Eder Militao, who headed in.

