

IRAN NEWS Felicitates the Beginning of Fajr Festivities, a Ten-Day Celebration of Imam Ruhollah Khomeini (R)'s Return to Iran in 1979 Which Led to the Victory of the Islamic Revolution

IRAN NEWS



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Trump's Prevention of COVID-19 Vaccine Export To Iran 'A Crime'

TEHRAN (IFP)- President Hassan Rouhani says the former U.S. administration committed the crime of preventing vaccine and medicine supplies to Iran amid the coronavirus outbreak.

In comments on Saturday, President Rouhani said the major difference between Iran and other countries in countering the coronavirus pandemic is that Iran began to fight the disease at a time when it was targeted by the United States' economic war.

"Our country was alone in the fight against the coronavirus and we had special restrictions and problems," he noted. "Even today, we have problems procuring foreign vaccines."

He then thanked domestic companies for producing medical equipment such as face masks and gloves needed to contain the spread of coronavirus in the wake of foreign sanctions. He said some Iranian cities hit by the virus are now in a "normal" state.

Nevertheless, he warned against possible laxity in observing health protocols, and added it would be "very dangerous" to believe the situation is back to normal as far as the COVID-19 pandemic is concerned.

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Iran COVID-19 Vaccine Effective Against UK Virus Variant

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The head of the production team of the Iranian coronavirus vaccine at the Headquarters for Executing the Order of Imam Khomeini says the vaccine, dubbed Coviran Barekat, works against the British variant of COVID-19.

"Coviran Barekat vaccine is effective against the British mutated virus," Dr. Hassan Jalili told Tasnim news agency on Saturday. "Tests show that the blood plasma of the people, who were jabbed with Coviran Barekat vaccine in a clinical trial, can completely neutralize the mutated British coronavirus."

Coviran Barekat, the first domestically-developed COVID-19 vaccine in Iran, was named after the pharmaceutical group that developed it.

Iran launched human trials of the vaccine late last month after successfully completing the initial steps, including tests on animals, and obtaining necessary approvals.

In parallel with efforts at developing home-made vaccines, Iranian authorities have said the county has plans to purchase foreign brands that pass safety and efficiency tests.

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2021 Presidential Election To Be Held in Just One Day



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – Deputy Interior Minister and Head of Election Commission Mr Jamal Orf refuted speculations that the 2021 presidential election will be held in two days due to the COVID-19 pandemic, saying that the law does not let the organizers hold the election in more than one day but the time of election could be extended.

Speaking at a presser on Saturday, Mr. Orf said the upcoming presidential election security headquarters is formed in the Ministry of Interior to take required measures. He went on to say that the presidential election security headquarters would examine electoral challenges and opportunities and make decisions accordingly.

He stated that if mayhem happened in some traditional electoral constituencies, the presidential election security headquarters would have been ready to prevent them.

He noted that the presidential election security headquarters would be chaired by the deputy interior minister for security and other related officials.

Responding to a question on Presidential Election Law's amendments in the Islamic Consultative Assembly and the changes on the election process from the registration to vote counting, Orf underlined that turning a plan into law was time-consuming and it could not be predicted right then.

He also reiterated that all sanitary protocols will be observed during the election and it will not be held in more than one day due to the law but according to the law, the time of election can be extended till midnight.

Various meetings will be held on the presidential election, and the first one is due this Wednesday, February 3, 2021.

The Assembly of Experts election will be held on April 2, the City Council elections on March 10, and the Village Council elections on April 5. The presidential election registration will be held on May 11. The public will be informed in case of any possible changes, he added.

Orf also stated that the former U.S. arrogant president was ousted and we hope that its new administration to act based on international laws.

He stated that the U.S. maximum pressure strategy has failed by people's resistance.

Orf added that in 2020, the world has faced Coronavirus and it is still challenging with this pandemic.

"With the cooperation of people and the beginning of vaccination process, Iran can contain the virus," he noted.

The presidential election is an important upcoming event in Iran, so all the needed procedures have been taken to hold it in the best possible way, Orf stressed.

He went on to say that registration for the candidates can be online but the volunteers should finally register in person in the election headquarters.

Indonesia Starts Probe Into Iranian, Panamanian Tankers

JAKARTA (Dispatches) - Indonesian authorities on Thursday began an investigation into a series of violations by Iranian and Panamanian tankers, which were seized on Sunday over suspected illegal oil transfer in the country's waters.

The Maritime Security Agency (Bakamla) impounded the two supertankers in waters bordering the South China Sea, off Pontianak, West Kalimantan province.

The Panamanian-flagged MT Freya, managed by a Shanghai-based company, and Iranian-flagged MT Horse, were approached by the agency's patrol ship, which detected an idle signal indicating that the automatic identification system of the vessels was turned off.

They were caught conducting a ship-to-ship fuel transfer from MT Horse to MT Freya, with hoses connected between them and oil spilling into the water. Bakamla said that the tankers seemed to have deliberately covered their hulls to conceal their identities.

The two tankers are now anchored in the waters off the agency's base in Batam, Riau Islands province, near Singapore. Their crew members are under arrest but are allowed to remain on their respective vessels.

"We were collecting and completing the data to determine which allegations constitute administrative and criminal offenses, before we hand the case over to law enforcement agencies for further investigation," Bakamla western zone commander, First Admiral Hadi Pranoto, told reporters after a meeting with an interagency from the police, customs and immigration.

He said that crew members of the ships — 25 Chinese nationals on MT Freya and 36 Iranian nationals on MT Horse — are facing a number of charges, including the violation of their right to innocent passage, being in Indonesian waters illegally, turning off their identification systems, illegal transfer of fuel, illegal anchorage, polluting the water with oil, and not flying their national flags.

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Iran Exports to Turkey Fall by 67% in 2020

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Official Turkish statistics show that imports from Iran fell sharply in 2020.

Turkey's statistics center said in a report on Friday, January 30, that the country imported \$1.191 million in imports from Iran last year, representing a 67 percent drop.

It was more than \$3 billion and \$600 million in 2019 and more than \$7 billion in 2018.

Much of the drop in Turkish imports from Iran is related to a complete halt to the purchase of Iranian oil and the dramatic fall in gas purchases from the Islamic Republic.

Turkey has not yet released details of 12 months of gas imports from Iran, but 11-month figures from the Country's Energy Market Regulatory Agency show it received 4.5 billion cubic meters of gas from Iran, compared to nearly 6.9 billion cubic meters in the same round of 2019.

Meanwhile yesterday Head of Iran-Turkey Joint Chamber of Commerce Mehrdad Saadat Dehghan in an interview with ILNA said there are good signals which show Iran-Turkey trade would bounce back and good news is coming soon.

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Afghan Official Urges Turkey, Iran, Pakistan To Join Talks

KABUL (Dispatches) - An Afghan lawmaker urged countries like Turkey, Pakistan and Iran to be more involved in ongoing peace talks between Afghanistan's government and the Taliban to help establish lasting peace in the country.

"In the intra-Afghan talks, regional countries like Turkey, Pakistan, Iran and others that are in the game have lots to do," Hamiduddin Yoldash from the northeastern Takhar province told an event titled Power Wars and Peace in Afghanistan, held by the Istanbul-based South Asia Strategic Research Center (GASAM).

Joining the videoconference meeting, Yoldash underlined that the biggest flaw in the peace talks was that regional countries were being kept out of the negotiations.

He welcomed the talks held in Qatar's capital of Doha as a "good step" for the resumption of the second round of the intra-Afghan talks.

The intra-Afghan talks began after a February 2020 agreement between the Taliban and the U.S. that set a timeline for the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan in exchange for security guarantees.

Kabul has insisted on a permanent cease-fire, a demand so far rejected by the insurgents.

Since then, the Taliban has freed at least 1,000 Afghan security forces in return for more than 5,000 insurgents released by the government.

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Syria Stresses Expansion Of Bilateral Economic Ties With Iran

TEHRAN (MNA) – Syrian Prime Minister Hussein Arnous stressed the need to increase bilateral economic relations and mutual commerce between Syria and Iran.

He made the remarks in his meeting with the board of Directors of the Syrian-Iranian Chamber of Commerce in Damascus.

Emphasizing the strategic relations between the two countries, Arnous stressed enhancing bilateral economic relations, increasing the mutual commerce between Syria and Iran, and expanding the joint investments that support the national economy and providing the requirements of the production process.

During the meeting, he affirmed the necessity of developing the chamber's working mechanism to be able to participate in the reconstruction process and develop the export sector, in particular, the demanding Syrian products in the Iranian markets.



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Iran 5th Country in Manufacturing ACU Technology

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran became the fifth country in manufacturing Airbag Control Unit (ACU) technology; the news was reported at the 15th Auto Parts Int'l Exhibition.

The accomplishment was announced at the 15th Auto Parts Int'l Exhibition underway in Tehran when Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade Alireza Razm-Hosseini took part in a ceremony in which the Iran-made ACU was unveiled.

Previously Japan, Germany, China and the USA produced the ACU which detects and evaluates the severity of an accident and then triggers the appropriate restraint systems.

Some 200 domestic companies have attended the 15th Auto Parts Int'l Exhibition being held at Tehran Permanent International Fairground.

Iran, Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic Discuss Closer Cooperation

TEHRAN (IFP) - Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has held talks with Vasif Talibov, the chairman of the Supreme Assembly of Nakhchivan, a landlocked exclave of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

In the Saturday meeting, which came on the last leg of Zarif's whistle-stop tour of the region, the top Iranian diplomat expressed content with his regional trips.

Zarif said he was happy to see the territories occupied during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict have been liberated.

"Although some people lost their lives in this conflict, the liberation of the occupied territories has made the Islamic Republic of Iran happy," said the foreign minister.

"Moreover, it is necessary to seize the opportunity that has been created for regional cooperation and prevent the outbreak of any such conflicts in the future," he noted.

Zarif elaborated on his regional tour and the negotiations he had as well as the viewpoints of officials of the countries he visited.

He said all those countries generally welcomed regional cooperation which, he stressed, is particularly important when it comes to transportation in the region and transit routes.

Zarif underlined Nakhchivan plays a key role in that regard.

He touched upon Talibov chairing the Iran-Nakhchivan Parliamentary Friendship Group, and called for closer parliamentary cooperation between the two sides.

Talibov, in turn, presented a report on the status of Nakhchivan's cooperation with



Iran in the areas of trade, electricity and culture, adding Nakhchivan stands ready for cooperation in the domains of railway, transportation, roads, customs and offering facilities to received transit goods in a bid to further cement regional cooperation.

Environmental issues of the Aras River, taking care of Iranian expatriates' affairs, and a seat for the Persian Language at Nakhchivan's state university were among other issues discussed by the two top officials.

In the meeting, the Iranian foreign minister also expressed his gratitude to Talibov for translating Zarif's book titled "Multilateral Diplomacy" into the Azeri language and teaching it at Nakhchivan's state university.

Zarif, Erdogan Discuss Bilateral Ties, Regional Issues

TEHRAN (IFP) - Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, who is in Turkey for talks with Turkish officials, had a meeting with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Istanbul on Friday afternoon.

In this meeting, which was also attended by the Turkish foreign minister, issues of mutual interest including the 3+3 format for Caucasus were discussed.

Agreement on pursuing issues in bilateral ties and expression of interest in restoring bilateral trade to the previous track, agreement on increasing railway lines between the two countries, agreement on cooperation in Iraq and Syria and trilateral cooperation with Afghanistan as well as agreement on supporting the rights of Palestinian people were among other issues discussed by Foreign Minister Zarif and the high-ranking Turkish officials.

Gov't Plans to Launch Biggest Middle East Railway

ABADAN (IRNA) - Construction of a railway joining Shalamche in southwestern Iran and the Iraqi port city of Basra, as the biggest railway project of the Middle East, is on the agenda of the Iranian government, First Vice-President Eshaq Jahangiri said on Saturday.

Jahangiri, who was speaking during a ceremony in the southwestern city of Abadan, said that the government has two plans for the development of Abadan and Khorramshahr and has made the necessary agreements with the Iraqi government in this regard.

Iran and Iraq are holding expert meetings about the

projects, the vice president said, expressing hope that executive operations will begin in the near future.

Once inaugurated, the Shalamche-Basra railway would facilitate the transfer of commodities from the East to the West and from China to the Mediterranean Sea, Jahangiri said.

He also said that Iran and Iraq have plans to dredge the Arvand River which runs on the joint border.

The vice president noted that in order to help return prosperity to the ports of Abadan and Khorramshahr, the ground needs to be prepared for commuting of trade ships.

Iran Shares Afghan Gov't's Concerns in Afghan Peace Process

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's former ambassador to Afghanistan Abolfazl Zohrevand said on Friday that Iran shares concerns of the Afghan Government in Afghan Peace Process.

Referring to the Taliban delegation's visit to Tehran, Zohrevand said in an interview with IRNA that Iran can help resolve this impasse without talking about the Doha agreement.

He added that Tehran's considerations in Afghan peace are close to the Afghan Government. Under the circumstances, if the Taliban see Tehran as their refuge, Afghan peace will be out of the deadlock.

The Kabul government insists that any agreement with the Taliban is a ceasefire and the establishment of peace, and Iran's view is that if the Taliban are serious about peace, this trip is a good opportunity for peace between the Taliban and the Kabul government, he stated.

He highlighted that Iran, as Afghanistan's neighbor, insists on peace, tranquility, and security in Afghanistan, adding that the Taliban delegation's visit to Tehran with Iran's considerations can create an opening for future agreements, but it is the Taliban's own decision to accept these considerations or not.

The former ambassador to Kabul described Tehran-Kabul relations as friendly and said that the two countries have special and privileged relations in terms of geopolitical, historical, economic, political, cultural, and religious affinities.

Tehran follows up the agenda of the Afghan people to achieve lasting peace as quickly as possible because stability in Afghanistan will stabilize peace in the region, he reiterated.

Iran Employs Most Advanced Tech at Borders

TEHRAN (IP) - The deputy commander of the Iranian Army has said that all the borders of the country are under full control using the most modern and advanced surveillance technology.

Deputy Commander of the Iranian Army Brigadier General Mohammad Hossein Dadras said that the Army is at the highest level of preparedness to defend the borders.

Dadras also stated that the enemies know very well the level and quality of the readiness of the armed forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran, including the Army.

He stressed that threats appear and become

practical when there is no readiness and defense power in a country, warning the enemies not to take any inappropriate action otherwise the Army's response will be far more destructive than the enemy's.

Touching upon the recent drills conducted by the Army, the Army deputy commander said the drills showed the enemies the high level of preparedness of the troops, warning the enemies' threats will receive a decisive response.

He also touched upon border security, saying that the borders are under full control using the most modern and advanced surveillance technology.

Leader to Receive Eulogists on Hazrat Zahra Birth Anniversary



TEHRAN (MNA) – Leader of Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei will receive religious eulogists and panegyrist on Wednesday through an online video conference.

The meeting will be held on the occasion of the birthday anniversary of Hazrat Fatima Zahra (PBUH), the daughter of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH), which is celebrated in Iran as National Women's Day and Mother's Day.

This year's meeting, however, will be held via video conference due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The meeting will be broadcast live on state TV channels.

Banking Restrictions to Apply To All, Not Just Foreigners



TEHRAN (MNA) – The Coordinating Council of Banks said in a statement announced that the blocked accounts will be activated as soon as they receive the so-called Shahab code.

Condemning the recent propaganda that claimed Iranian banks have blocked accounts of Afghan migrants in the country, the council said account holders had been earlier notified of the danger of being blocked and that the blocking was not just for Afghan citizens but for all those who have failed to obtain the required banking code known as 'Shahab'.

Observing the regulations for financial transparency is mandatory in Iran and most countries of the world, not only towards foreign nationals but also towards all bank account holders for various reasons, including the prevention of money laundering, noted the statement.

Here are the main points that the statement refers to:

1- Due to the need for transparency in financial operations and banking transactions and compliance with anti-money laundering laws and regulations, the Central Bank has long required obtaining complete and accurate identity information for customers and holders of bank accounts and cards.

2- The operational method to ensure the completeness and accuracy of each person's identity information is to obtain the Shahab code, which acts as the electronic bank ID.

A unique identity ID is defined for each bank customer by the NAHAB system. Shahab Code is the main interface between banking and Nahab systems and the NAHAB system can be used for all authorized banks and financial institutions.

3- To obtain the Shahab code, Iranian citizens need a national code, and non-Iranians need a comprehensive code that is being issued by the Ministry of Interior.

4- Since the beginning of the current year, numerous effective actions and follow-ups have been carried out by the Central Bank and the Coordination Council of Banks so that non-Iranians without Shahab code can complete their identity information and receive Shahab code. Fortunately, a large number of citizens of neighboring countries, especially Afghan brothers and sisters, were able to obtain the Shahab code, and of course, some of these loved ones apparently failed to obtain the code due to the illegality of their migration.

5- The information about the issue had been announced on several occasions and each of the account holders had received prior warnings and according to a directive of the Central Bank of Iran, providing services to accounts that had no Shahab code was stopped as of January 25.

Unfreezing Iranian Asset by Seoul, Effective For Tanker's Release

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Chairman of the Iranian Parliament (Majlis) National Security and Foreign Policy Commission Mojtaba Zonnouri said on Friday that release of Iranian assets by Seoul is effective on Iranian judiciary's decision about the tanker.

In a virtual meeting with Song Young-gil, chairman of the Foreign Affairs and Unification Committee of South Korea, Zonnouri noted the two countries enjoy historical background and longstanding relations in cultural, social, and political-economic areas that can be utilized for resolution of the dispute.

He complained that Seoul Government has blocked Iran's assets exercising the U.S. unlawful sanctions and despite promises made by South Korean Government to release them, no action has been taken in this regard, requiring serious steps need to be taken to end the impasse.

He called for expansion of cooperation and elimination of existing problems and obstacles through sense of understanding, saying that practical measures should be taken to create the atmosphere of trust once again in bilateral relations.

Referring to the seizure of the South Korean tanker, Zonnouri said that the South Korean ship has been seized due to contaminating the waters of the Persian Gulf, adding that it has nothing to do with Iran's blocked assets.

Young-gil said that Seoul is determined to strengthen relations with the Islamic Republic in various areas to develop and expand them.

He added that South Korean parliament insists on settlement of the issue of Iran's frozen assets in the country and is waiting for a resolution.

Siren Heard in Western Tehran Not Related to Any Security Issue

TEHRAN (IFP) - An Iranian official says that the siren heard in western Tehran on Friday night had nothing to do with any security issue.

The deputy governor general of Tehran province for security affairs told Tasnim News Agency that the siren was caused by a malfunction in the alarm system of an "organization" in Azmayesh neighborhood, west of Tehran.

Hamid Reza Goudarzi said a "leak caused by heavy rainfall" triggered the security alarm.

His comments came after several residents posted videos of a long and nonstop siren ringing out in west of the capital.

Minutes later, data by Flightradar24 indicated that a Turkish Airlines' Istanbul-Tehran flight was flying around Tehran, raising speculations about a security problem.

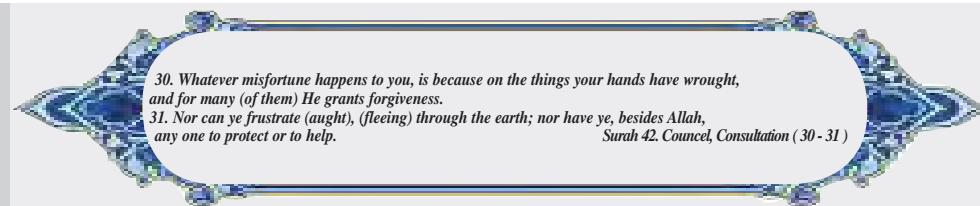
The public relations of Imam Khomeini International Airport said the Turkish flight noticed dangerous Cumulonimbus clouds when he wanted to land in Tehran, and decided to divert the plane northward. He has told Imam Khomeini Airport he will get back once the weather improves.

Flightradar24 data shows the flight has flown toward Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, and apparently landed there.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:17
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:49
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:38
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	07:04



Don't Ruin Iran-China Ties With Unprofessional Remarks

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Iran-China Joint Chamber of Commerce held a webinar to review the Iran-China trade cooperation in 2020 and the outlook of the economic relation of in 2021 where the participants exchanged views for improving cooperation, and criticized some unfair, biased, wrong and unprofessional remarks on Iran-China relation which may harm it, and called for shaping a positive public opinion regarding China among the public and the officials.

Head of Iran-China Joint Chamber of Commerce Majis Reza Hariri addressing the webinar hailed the activities of Iran Embassy in Beijing especially since the outbreak of coronavirus and said Iran Ambassador to Beijing Mr. Mohammad Keshavarz Zadeh has used all capacities of the embassy to help the relation between the two countries to improve but unfortunately the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus did not let him fully take advantage of capacities.

He further said the 50th anniversary of Iran-China relations and the 20th anniversary of establishment of Iran-China Joint Chamber of Commerce are two major events of 2021. He further said most of economic activists of the country criticize the existing bureaucracy in the country as well as the approach of state officials regarding the expansion of ties with China. He expressed hope officials understand the importance of ties between Iran and China and try to develop it.

He also criticized about media sabotage which is seen against the ties with China, reiterating the current shaped negative media climate against China can affect the tie with this country and even ruin it.

Hariri also highlighted major programs of the chamber for 2021.

Then Iran Ambassador to China Mr. Keshavarz Zadehm for his part, said since Iran-China economic relation is in peril of sanctions, some part of Iran-China trade volume is confidential and it cannot be announced publicly.



He went on to say that since 2016, the relations between Iran and China have entered a new phase but due to some issues, what was expected to happen after China President's visit to Tehran did not materialize, adding that but in 2019 we saw the then Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani's visit to Beijing which was a turning point in the relation of the two countries in a way that Chinese officials insisted on launching the joint trade commission.

Keshavarz Zadeh further said despite the virus pandemic, the relation between Iran and China in different fields continue and the 25-year Iran-Chin program has been pursued in an acceptable level.

He then highlighted some of China government's aids to Iran since the outbreak of the virus like sending some medicines that Iran was unable to buy due to sanctions restrictions and halt in international flights. He also pointed to opening of a financial channel for Iran by China for purchasing necessary commodities regarding the coronavirus.

He went on to say that unfortunately some of officials in the country do not have accurate information about China as China is progressing with high speed, adding that the volume of China's foreign trade is \$4,600b as the country could attract \$144b of foreign direct investment last year while the country was one of the first major centers affected by the virus.

Keshavarz Zadeh reiterated that some of non-expert and unprofessional remarks in the media climate are made against China which can affect the relations between the two countries. He said despite all political pressures, the relations between Tehran and Beijing have remained dynamic and one should not let it be ruined by wrong viewpoints and approaches especially in the current condition that Iran is facing sanctions and the condition is totally different from the past and most countries because of their fear of the U.S. are not ready to risk trading with Iran

Webinar to Be Held on Iran-Kazakhstan Trade Capacities

IRAN NEW ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The international department of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mine and Agriculture (ICCIMA) is to old a webinar on reviewing opportunities and capacities of trade between Iran and Kazakhstan on February 2.

According to the reports, the webinar will be hosted by ICCIMA where the head of Iran-Kazakhstan Joint Chamber of Commerce Mr. Amir Abedi and representatives of provincial chambers are to attend.

The webinar is to review the latest opportunities and challenges as well as obstacles in way of the private sector for cooperation with Kazakhstan and it will also review the latest economic and trade developments in this Central Asian country.

The participants are to exchange views for easing the arrival of Iranian companies in the Kazakhstan market.



Georgia Hinderings Imports of Iranian Goods

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Chairwoman of Iran-Georgia Chamber of Commerce Seyedeh Fatemeh Moghimi says with imposing the new restrictions by the Georgian government, imports of Iranian goods to this country have come to a halt and resolving the problem needs diplomatic talks by the government and the related bodies.

Speaking to TCCIMA news website, Moghimi pointed to the advantages of trade with Georgia for Iran and said Georgia because of its location en route to international transportation corridor can provide Iran with some special trade and logistic facilities, adding that in other words Iran can use these facilities to be connected to the target markets, and it can export its products to Northern Europe or any other destinations in the world.

She noted that Georgia is among the World Trade Organization observers and the country is strengthening its ties with EU and it is a good opportunity for Iran to export its products to this country or even to have re-exports from Georgia. She reiterated that one of the advantages of exports and re-export from Georgia is the zero customs tariff.

Moghimi went on to say that construction has seen a pick-up in Georgia and Iranian companies have exported construction materials to this country but in recent months, entrance of Iranian trucks into this country has been forbidden and despite the efforts of Iran's foreign ministry to resolve the issue, nothing has happened yet. She went on to say that some Iranian investors and drivers have bought Georgian trucks to ship Iranian goods with their Georgian trucks but this country since last week has stopped letting any Georgian truck carrying Iranian goods to enter the country.

She said this means hindering the arrival of Iranian goods into Georgian market, and resolving the problems needs talks in the higher level otherwise the presence of Iranian goods in Georgian market will face serious challenge.



South Pars Phase 22-24 LPG Storages Go Operational



TEHRAN (MNA) - Two liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) storage tanks of phase 22-24 of Iran's South Pars gas field have gone operational and ready to store 80,000 cubic meters of gas, the head of Iran's Pars Oil and Gas Company (POGC) announced on Saturday.

According to Mohammad Meshkinfam a total of four storage tanks, including two propane and two butane tanks, have been constructed for the mentioned phases, two of which have been completed and ready for receiving gas.

Meshkinfam stated that after cooling the natural gas, the loading of the propane tank with a capacity of 45,000 cubic meters and the butane tank with a capacity of 35,000 cubic meters will begin.

According to the official, the construction of the remaining two storage tanks has also been completed and POGC is waiting to receive the required propane and butane pumps from Iran Industrial Pumps Company to commission these two tanks as well.

The total LPG loading capacity in this project will be increased to 160,000 cubic meters after the remaining two tanks go operational by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20), he said.

POGC, which is in charge of developing the giant South Pars gas field, had previously inaugurated the gas condensate storage facilities of phase 14 of the field.

South Pars gas field, which Iran shares with Qatar in the Persian Gulf waters, is currently divided into 24 standard phases on the Iranian side and is estimated to contain a significant amount of natural gas, accounting for about eight percent of the world's reserves, and approximately 18 billion barrels of condensate.

The mentioned gas field covers an area of 9,700 square kilometers, 3,700 square kilometers of which, called South Pars, are in Iran's territorial waters. The remaining 6,000 square kilometers, called North Dome, are situated in Qatar's territorial waters.

Fishery Exports Increase 6% in 10 Months on Year

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran's value of fishery export has risen six percent during the first ten months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2020-January 19, 2021), compared to the same period of time in the past year, according to an official with Iran's Fishery Organization (IFO).

Isa Golshahi, IFO's director-general for quality improvement, processing, and market development, put the ten-month fishery export at 114,000 tons worth \$399 million, which was also four percent more than the last year's figure in terms of weight.

This year, with the completion of technical instructions and the launch of two industrial units for the production of dried fish and tiny dried fish, another product has been added to the country's fishery export basket, the official announced.

He stated that the amount of dried fish exports reached about 18,000 tons with an approximate value of \$18 million, adding that Oman, Myanmar and Malaysia are among the country's new export target markets.

Golshahi further expressed hope that through the export expansion plans, the country can achieve at least three new export markets and several new export products will be added to the export basket in the next year.

The official put the country's fishery consumption per capita at 13.3 kilograms.

Fishery production has increased noticeably in Iran in recent years.

Halabja, Kermanshah to Invest on Joint Border Market

KERMANSHAH (IP) - The Halabja delegation of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq held three days of consultations with provincial officials in Kermanshah, western Iran, to expand bilateral economic and trade cooperation including a joint border market.

The Iraqi Halabja delegation arrived in Kermanshah last Wednesday and visited some industrial units in this province until yesterday (Friday) while talking with the chairman and members of the Kermanshah Chamber of Commerce.

On the sidelines of the signing of the memorandum with Kermanshah merchants, the head of the Halabja Chamber of Commerce in Iraq, Pishwa Ahmed Mahmoud, referred to the good capacities of agriculture and tourism in Kermanshah Province and the common border with Iraq and announced Halabja traders' readiness to invest jointly in border areas with Iran. In an interview with Iran Press, the Iraqi Halabja Chamber of Commerce head stated that Iran had good agriculture and food production capacities, which Iraqi traders could use.

Pishwa Ahmed Mahmoud expressed hope that with the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between Kermanshah and Halabja merchants, the economic cooperation between the two sides would be expanded.

Export Volume of Agriculture Products Up 22% in 9 Months

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iran exported 6.1 million tons of agricultural products in the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (from March 21 to Dec. 20), showing a 22 and 20 percent growth in terms of volume and value respectively.

Despite spread of the novel coronavirus, COVID-19, in the country, Islamic Republic of Iran registered a considerable growth in export of agricultural products, the Deputy Ministry of Agriculture for Agricultural Processing Industries Development Affairs Zavvar Parmeh said.

He went on to say that the country exported 4.986 million tons of agricultural products, valued at \$4.79 billion, in the first nine months of the previous Iranian calendar year (from March 21 to Dec. 20, 2019).

About 889,000 tons of important horticultural products, valued at \$2.278 billion, was exported from the country in the first nine months of the current year, showing a 38 and 43 percent hike in terms of volume and value respectively as compared to the last year's corresponding period, Parmeh added.

Trade on IME Sees Upward Trend

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) witnessed trade of 689,307 tons of commodities worth more than \$306m last week, showing 62 and 26 percent of growth in volume and value of trades respectively.

According to a report by the IME's international affairs and PR, the exchange traded on its mineral and industrial trading floor 183,231 tons of various types of commodities valued at more than \$102m.

Commodities traded on this floor included 180,395 tons of steel, 1,600 tons of copper, 1,000 tons of aluminum, 120 tons of molybdenum concentrate, 6 tons of precious metals concentrate, 10 tons of lead and 100 tons of cast iron.

The next trading floor of the IME was the oil and petrochemical, which traded on its domestic and export rings 502,388 tons of commodities with a total trading value of more than \$204m.

On this floor, customers purchased 204,200 tons of vacuum bottom, 143,964 tons of bitumen, 65,899 tons of polymeric products, 32,126 tons of chemicals, 55,500 tons of lube cut, 1,560 tons of base oil and 325 tons of sulfur.

It's also worth noting that 3,688 tons of commodities changed hands on the IME's side market.



CAR War Crimes Suspect Appears at ICC

THE HAGUE (Dispatches) - A Central African Republic war crimes suspect made his first appearance at the International Criminal Court (ICC) on Friday after being handed over to the Hague-based tribunal.

Mahamat Said Abdel Kani, 50, an alleged leader of the Seleka, an armed group drawn largely from the Muslim minority, was surrendered to the custody of the ICC on Sunday by CAR authorities. Said faces accusations of committing crimes against humanity and war crimes, including torture, persecution, cruel treatment and enforced disappearances.



Navalny's Brother, Aides Placed Under House Arrest

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Kremlin critics say authorities are ramping up pressure on the opposition in an effort to smother dissent ahead of Sunday's nationwide rally.

The brother and aides of jailed Kremlin critic Alexey Navalny have been placed under house arrest ahead of new planned rallies where Russian authorities warned protesters could face charges of taking part in "mass unrest".

Kremlin critics say authorities are dramatically ramping up pressure on the Russian opposition in an effort to intimidate protesters and smother dissent ahead of new nationwide rallies planned for Sunday.



U.S. Military Slams Chinese Flights Over South China Sea



WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The U.S. military said on Friday that Chinese military flights in the past week in the South China Sea fit a pattern of destabilizing and aggressive behavior by Beijing but posed no threat to a U.S. Navy aircraft carrier strike group in the region.

"The Theodore Roosevelt Carrier Strike Group closely monitored all People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) and Air Force (PLAAF) activity, and at no time did they pose a threat to U.S. Navy ships, aircraft, or sailors," the U.S. military's Pacific Command said in a statement.

A U.S. official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the Chinese aircraft did not come within 250 nautical miles (460 km) of the U.S. Navy vessels.

Taiwan reported that several Chinese air force aircraft flew into the southwestern corner of its air defense identification zone last weekend, near the Taiwan-controlled Pratas Islands, including fighter jets and nuclear-capable H-6 bombers.

Regional security and diplomatic sources familiar with the situation said China's air force was dispatched on missions beginning mid-morning on Jan. 23, coinciding with the U.S. carrier group passing south of the Pratas.

China, which has long geared its military towards defending itself against the United States, was conducting exercises that would simulate an operation against an aircraft carrier, the sources said.

"They purposely conducted the drills when the U.S. carrier was passing through the Bashi Channel," one source said, referring to the waterway between southern Taiwan and the northern Philippines.

"That was not just meant for Taiwan. Most importantly, China is trying to tackle the issue of the South China Sea: it wants to stop the U.S. military from entering the South China Sea. China wants to diminish the United States' weight in the western Pacific."

The sources spoke to Reuters on condition of anonymity as they were not authorized to speak to the media.

China's Defense Ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

On Thursday, the ministry toughened its language towards Chinese-claimed Taiwan, warning after last weekend's stepped-up military activity near the island that "independence means war" and that its armed forces were acting in response to provocation and foreign interference.

China claims almost all the energy-rich waters of the South China Sea, where it has established military outposts on artificial islands. Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam also have claims to parts of the sea.

NATO Countries Want to Keep Forces in Afghanistan

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - NATO alliance members are "very much interested" in keeping troops in Afghanistan but they cannot remain without critical types of U.S. support, President Ashraf Ghani said on Friday.

The Afghan leader spoke as the new administration of U.S. President Joe Biden conducts a review of the U.S.-backed peace process and a February 2020 deal with the Taliban that set a May deadline for a full withdrawal of American forces.

Addressing an Aspen Institute-sponsored online program, Ghani said he had spoken to the leaders of Canada, Norway and Germany, as well as NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, and that NATO was "very much interested in continuing" the alliance mission in Afghanistan.

"But...NATO, without U.S. enablers, cannot continue its mission," he said, using a military term for intelligence, air power and other kinds of support the United States provides.



Ghani also said that the United States - now with only 2,500 troops in Afghanistan - and NATO "must take a very strong stand on the conditions-based approach" to withdrawing their troops.

The 2020 U.S.-Taliban deal stipulates that the U.S. withdrawal from America's longest war be based on conditions on the ground and the Islamist insurgents' fulfillment of commitments, including ending cooperation with al Qaeda.

Former president Donald Trump authorized the reduction of U.S. forces to their lowest level since the U.S.-led invasion in 2001, against the advice of some of his military commanders as violence surged and U.S. officials said the Taliban were still cooperating with al Qaeda.

The Taliban deny that there are al Qaeda militants in Afghanistan.

Senior Biden administration officials have said that they are reviewing the U.S.-Taliban deal to gain a full understanding of the commitments made by the Trump administration and the insurgents.

Putin Signs Off on Extension of New START Treaty

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russian President Vladimir Putin has signed off on legislation extending a key nuclear pact between Russia and the United States by five years, the Kremlin said on Friday.

"Russian President Vladimir Putin signed the federal law 'on the ratification of the extension of the agreement between Russia and the USA'," the Kremlin said in a statement, referring to New START.

"The current federal law enters force on the day of its official publication," the statement said. The New START treaty is the last remaining arms reduction pact between the former Cold War rivals.

The Kremlin said the extension of the pact "allows to preserve the transparency and predictability of strategic relations between Russia and the United States, (and) to support global strategic stability."

Russia's parliament had backed the extension earlier this week.

Putin had submitted the bill to both houses of parliament after the Russian leader and new US President Joe Biden held their first phone call Tuesday evening.

Addressing the World Economic Forum being held virtually this year, Putin on Wednesday hailed the extension of the treaty as a positive development in reducing global tensions.

"No doubt it is a step in the right direction," Putin said.

Signed in 2010, New START caps to 1,550 the number of nuclear warheads that can be deployed by Moscow and Washington, which control the world's largest nuclear arsenals.



The agreement, which is due to expire on February 5, is seen as a rare opportunity for compromise between Moscow and Washington, whose ties have dramatically deteriorated in recent years.

China to No Longer Recognize British National Passport for Hong Kongers

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China on Friday said it will "no longer recognise" the British National (Overseas) passport for Hong Kongers, as Britain prepares to offer millions of former colonial subjects a way to escape Beijing's crackdown on dissent.

From Sunday, those with a BN(O) passport and their dependents will be able to apply online for a visa allowing them to live and work in the United Kingdom. After five years they can then apply for citizenship.

The new immigration scheme is a response to Beijing's decision to impose a sweeping national security law on the city last year to snuff out huge and often violent democracy protests.

Britain accused China of tearing up its promise ahead of Hong Kong's 1997 handover that the financial hub would maintain key liberties and autonomy for 50 years. It argues it has a moral duty to protect its former subjects. But on Friday Beijing hit back ahead of the upcoming change.

"From January 31, China will no longer recognize the so-called BN(O) passport as a travel document and ID document, and reserves the right to take further actions," foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian told reporters.

It is unclear what China's declaration means in practical terms.

But it sets the stage for further confrontation with London, and the threat of further action suggests Beijing may be preparing more restrictions for BN(O) holders down the line.

Chinese officials warned last year that they might consider ending recognition of BN(O) passports. At the time they said it would mean BN(O) holders being unable to travel to the Chinese mainland.

However, it is unclear whether Chinese authorities would know who holds the document.

Hong Kongers use their own Hong Kong passport or ID card to leave the city. To enter mainland China, they need to use their Hong Kong passport or a mainland travel permit.

The only time they might use a BN(O) passport is on arrival into Britain or another country that recognizes the document.

"It's a strong message sent to the UK and other countries not to interfere into Hong Kong affairs, but in practical terms, I don't think people would be intimidated into not applying," Willie Lam, an expert at Hong Kong's Centre for China Studies, told AFP.



Syria Constitutional Talks in Peril

GENEVA (Reuters) - The United Nations Special Envoy for Syria voiced deep frustration on Friday that the Syrian Constitutional Committee had failed to start drafting a new charter at its latest session after the government delegation rejected proposals.

The committee, comprising representatives of Syria's government, opposition and civil society, has a mandate to draw up a new constitution leading to U.N.-supervised elections. This week in Geneva it held its fifth session since October 2019.

Representatives of President Bashar al-Assad rejected proposals by the Syrian opposition as well as the envoy's own ideas for moving the process forward, Geir Pedersen said.

"I told the 45 members of the drafting body that we can't continue like this, that the week has been a disappointment," Pedersen told a news conference. Pedersen said he hoped to go to Damascus soon to discuss resolving the issue and would hold talks with other parties.

After nearly 10 years of war, Syria is in the throes of a deep economic crisis amid a collapsing currency and skyrocketing inflation. However, fighting has largely ceased and Assad has taken back control of most of the country thanks to strong Russian military backing.

Ahmad Kuzbari, the Syrian government co-chair of the talks, said his delegation had put forward "positive" ideas, but the opposition co-chair, Hadi al-Bahra, accused the Assad delegation of failing to engage in drafting the new charter.

An opposition member of the committee, Bassma Kodmani, said that anti-Assad delegates hoped the new U.S. administration of President Joe Biden would quickly get involved in the process in coming weeks "so we keep this Constitutional Committee alive".

"Because it's the only track of the political process that is alive, but it is in intensive care, to be honest," she told Reuters.



Shanon
(adviser)

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200sq.m, 3bdrs
S/p, Sauna
J, balcony
fireplace
Fully Furn

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

Niavaran (\$2700) 280sq.m, 4bdrs, S/p, S, J, pkg, & F.F

Jordan (\$2200)
230sq.m, 3bdrs
S/p, S, J, pkg
balcony, & F.F

Velenjak Apt (\$2200)
220sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, F.F

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5storey, 20bdrs
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Ericsson Tops Forecasts as 5G Lifts Off

STOCKHOLM (Reuters) - Ericsson beat fourth-quarter core earnings forecasts on Friday, helped by strong sales of 5G equipment and the ban on Chinese rival Huawei in several countries.

The Swedish company's shares jumped 7% in early trading.

Not only is Ericsson selling more, but it is also earning more from each sale, with gross margins rising to 40.6% in the quarter from 36.8% a year earlier. Margins are now at levels of a decade ago, having recovered from the low-20% in 2017.

In particular, the core Networks business saw margins at 43.5% from 41.1% a year earlier, on a 20% rise in sales.



Euro Zone Economies' Plucky Fourth-Quarter Belies Troubled Growth Outlook

BERLIN (Reuters) - Growth in Germany and Spain and a smaller-than-expected contraction in France pointed to resilience in the euro zone economy in the final three months of last year, but the bright spot belies a more troubled outlook for the bloc.

In Germany, robust exports helped Europe's largest economy eke out 0.1% growth in the fourth quarter, staving off contraction despite a second wave of the new coronavirus slamming the brakes on consumption, data showed on Friday.

France, the euro zone's second-largest economy, shrank 1.3% in the final three months of 2020 after the country entered a second coronavirus lockdown in October to contain a second wave of infections.

Spain achieved timid quarterly growth of 0.4%. But that has not stopped Spain from recording its worst-ever annual economic contraction, with output falling 11% from 2019's level, official data showed.

"Numbers for Germany, France and Spain showed that GDP was relatively resilient in Q4," Nicola Nobile at Oxford Economics wrote in a research note. But he added, "there are not many indications that this dynamic could have continued in Q1."

"All in all, the disappointing vaccine roll-out so far, the extension of restrictions in many European countries and the latest data now point to continued weakness in the euro zone over the coming months."

The French slump, which followed an 18.5% rebound in the third quarter after a first lockdown, beat expectations for a 4% contraction on average in a Reuters poll of 28 economists, surpassing even the highest estimate of -1.4%.

But France is on tenterhooks to find out in the coming days whether the government will put the country under a new lockdown and in particular whether schools will be closed.

In Germany, Chancellor Angela Merkel and state leaders agreed last week to extend a lockdown until mid-February as the country, once a role model for fighting the pandemic, struggles with a second wave and record daily numbers of COVID-19 deaths.

On Wednesday, German government slashed its growth forecast to 3% this year, a sharp revision from last autumn's estimate of 4.4%, caused by a second coronavirus lockdown.

The economic outlook across the 19-country euro zone is being muddled by a row between the European Union and Anglo-Swedish firm AstraZeneca over its supply of vaccines to the bloc, and by the return of inflation in Germany.

The International Monetary Fund said this week the euro area is likely to slip behind the United States in its recovery.

"Recovery paths vary within the group, with the U.S. and Japan projected to regain end-2019 activity levels in the second half of 2021, while in the euro area and the United Kingdom activity is expected to remain below end-2019 levels into 2022," the IMF said in its in its World Economic Outlook.

The AstraZeneca supply issue is a blow to Europe's COVID-19 vaccination drive, and the German inflation spike - consumer prices turned positive and rose in January to 1.6% on the year - adds to a complex mix of data for the European Central Bank to assess.

ECB data released on Friday showed lending to euro zone companies picked up last month though the bloc was probably back in recession and banks said they were tightening access to credit amid fear of defaults amid a fresh wave of lockdowns.

More Than Half of World's Airline Pilots No Longer Flying

LONDON (Reuters) - More than half of the world's airline pilots are no longer flying for a living amid the plunge in demand during the coronavirus pandemic, according to a new survey, and those that are still flying feel less valued by their employers.

A poll of nearly 2,600 pilots by UK-based GOOSE Recruitment and industry publication FlightGlobal, released on Thursday, found only 43% were doing the job they had trained for, with 30% unemployed, 17% furloughed and 10% in non-flying roles.

Many pilots that are still flying have faced deteriorating working conditions. Hong Kong's Cathay Pacific Airways Ltd, for example, instituted permanent pay cuts of up to 58%, and Turkish Airways and Singapore Airlines Ltd have temporarily lowering salaries.

"We can see the effect the pandemic has had on employed pilots too," GOOSE Recruitment chief executive officer and founder Mark Charman said in a statement. "Large numbers are feeling insecure about their jobs, an increased number are planning to look for new roles this year as well as many feeling less valued by their employers."

For the unemployed pilots in the survey, 84% said it was due to the pandemic. Before COVID-19 hit, there had been widespread pilot shortages that had driven up demand for aviators and led to improving pay and conditions.

Now, 82% of unemployed pilots would take a pay cut for a new opportunity, the survey found. For those that have kept their jobs, pilots in Europe reported being the most stressed by COVID-19, with respondents citing the risk of catching the virus, disjointed rules and the possibility of being placed in quarantine during a rotation as among their concerns.

Forty percent of pilots said their mental health had been affected by the pandemic, with the figure higher among younger pilots.

"The amount of stress and anxiety the pandemic has caused me has permanently scared my outlook on life," one surveyed pilot said.



Global Financial Markets May Be Overconfident

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Investors may have become overly complacent about financial conditions, which poses the risk of a sharp downturn in markets, the IMF said yesterday. While policymakers must keep interest rates low to ensure the economy recovers from the Covid-19 crisis, they also must remain vigilant about potential problems, the IMF cautioned in the latest update of its Global Financial Stability Report.

"Financial stability risks have been in check so far, but we cannot take this for granted," said Tobias Adrian, head of the IMF's Monetary and Capital Markets Department.

With borrowing rates at record lows, and new vaccines boosting hopes of a solid recovery in activity this year, prices for stocks, corporate bonds, and other risk assets have risen, while markets have shrugged off new waves of coronavirus infections. Markets are "betting that continued policy support will offset any bad economic news in the short term and provide a bridge to the future," Adrian said.

But the "disconnect between exuberant financial markets" and the lagging economic recovery "raises the specter of a possible market correction." The Washington-based crisis lender, which projects global growth will recover by 5.5 percent this year, has hammered home the message that governments should continue to provide as much economic support as possible, and Adrian echoed that call.

"Reducing or withdrawing support at this stage could jeopardize the global economic recovery," he said. However, amid concerns around "excessive risk-taking and market exuberance," officials will need to address financial vulnerabilities exposed by the crisis. While banks have sufficient capital and have maintained the flow of credit, that may change if the institutions become concerned about debt levels or creditors' abilities to repay loans, the report cautioned.



Philippine Economy Posts Record Contraction in 2020

MANILA (Dispatches) - The Philippine economy shrank at a slower pace in the fourth quarter of last year, helped by higher government spending, but saw a record full-year contraction in 2020 as it grappled with the fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Gross domestic product (GDP) shrank 8.3 percent in the December quarter from a year earlier, the statistics agency said. Economists in a Reuters poll had forecast an 8.5 percent contraction after a fall of 11.4 percent in the third quarter.

A 4.4 percent year-on-year increase in government spending helped limit the slump.

For the whole year, GDP shrank 9.5 percent, the biggest contraction on record and compared with a government forecast for an 8.5 percent-9.5 percent slump in 2020. The Philippines, which has the highest number of coronavirus infections and COVID-19 deaths in Southeast Asia after Indonesia, suffered its first recession in nearly 30 years in the second quarter of 2020.

"Private consumption remained weak," said Economic Planning Secretary Karl Chua at a briefing. "Restrictions on the demand side notably the mobility of children and families prevented private consumption from making a stronger comeback." President Rodrigo Duterte has eased quarantine curbs from the strictest level imposed in March last year, but partial restrictions remain in the capital region as local cases reached over half a million and fatalities exceeded 10,000.

The restrictions reduced household spending by \$45.72 million a day, the government said.

The economy grew a seasonally adjusted 5.6 percent quarter-on-quarter, slowing from 8 percent growth in September quarter.

Chua said the prospects for 2021 were "encouraging," reiterating a government forecast for 6.5 percent-7.5 percent growth this year.

A recovery hinges on the government's plan to vaccinate as many as 70 million Filipinos, or two-thirds of the population, this year though supply could delay the timeline.

The Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP), which delivered 200 basis points of interest rate cuts last year to try to soften the blow from the pandemic, believes the current accommodative monetary stance is sufficient to revive growth.

"(The BSP) is likely out of ammunition with the policy rate at 2.0 percent while inflation trends closer to the top-end of their 2-4 percent inflation target," said ING senior economist Nicholas Mapa.

BOJ Drops More Hints of Bigger Yield Moves Ahead of March Review

TOKYO (Reuters) - Bank of Japan policymakers discussed the merits of allowing long-term yields to move more flexibly around the bank's target, a summary of opinions at their January meeting showed, a sign the idea will be a key element of its policy review in March.

As the coronavirus pandemic forces it to maintain a massive stimulus program for a prolonged period, the BOJ plans to announce in March ways to make its tools more sustainable.

"With our monetary easing steps to be prolonged, allowing the 10-year government bond yield to move upward and downward to some extent ... will contribute to financial system stability," said one member, according to the summary released on Friday.

Allowing 10-year yields to move more widely likely won't hurt the economy much, because most money raised by households and companies aren't directly affected by long-term rate moves, another opinion quoted in the summary showed.

The comments are the strongest hints to date that the BOJ will allow long-term rates to deviate further from its 0% target in its March policy review.

"It's crucial for the BOJ to conduct yield curve control and purchases of assets such as exchange-traded funds (ETF) more flexibly," another opinion showed, suggesting the March review will also result in some tweaks to its huge ETF purchases.

The BOJ announced on Friday its bond-buying plan for February that signaled its readiness to scale back buying for shorter-dated government bonds.

Under yield curve control (YCC), the BOJ guides short-term rates at -0.1% and 10-year bond yields around 0% through huge bond purchases. It also pledges to buy ETFs by up to 12 trillion yen (\$115 billion) per year as part of its stimulus program.

The measures have recently drawn criticism for drying up market liquidity and distorting pricing, forcing the BOJ to unveil in December a plan to examine ways to make its tools more "flexible and effective."

Former BOJ board member Sayuri Shirai expects the BOJ to allow 10-year yields to fluctuate at a wider range than the current implicit band of 40 basis points around its 0% target. She also expects the central bank will drop its pledge to buy ETFs at the current annual pace of 6 trillion yen.

"Inflation likely won't reach 2% during (Governor Haruhiko) Kuroda's remaining term," she said.

"The only thing the BOJ can do is to ensure it can maintain the current policy as long as possible, such as by allowing interest rates to move more flexibly around its target."

India Rice Prices Hit Two-Year Peak



NEW DELHI (Reuters) - Rice export prices in India rose to their highest level in nearly two years on the back of healthy demand and an appreciating rupee, while a slow harvest squeezed supply and lifted Vietnamese prices.

Top exporter India's 5% broken parboiled variety was quoted at \$390-\$394 per tonne this week, the highest since March 2019. Last week, prices were at \$385-\$391.

"Asian and African buyers are aggressively making purchases from India. Even after marginal price rise, Indian rice is far cheaper than Thai rice," said an exporter based at Kakinada in the southern state of Andhra Pradesh.

Vietnam's 5% broken rice rose to \$505-\$510 per ton on Thursday from \$500-\$505 last week on tight supplies.

"Though the winter-spring harvest has started, supplies remain low... Only 5%-6% of the crop has been harvested, and it won't peak until late February or early March," a trader based in Ho Chi Minh City said.

Trading activity is slow as buyers are waiting for the harvest to peak, traders said.

Meanwhile, Vietnam continued to buy low quality rice from India for beer production and animal feed, they added.

Thai rice prices were still lingering near a nine-month high, but traders were hopeful prices would ease a little with signs of the baht depreciating against the U.S. dollar.

Thailand's benchmark 5% broken rice prices widened slightly to \$520-\$530 per ton on Thursday, from last week's \$520-\$526.

"The market is still quiet but it is likely to pick up, as prices quoted by Vietnam were also edging higher and closer to ours and the baht has started to weaken slightly" a Bangkok-based trader said.

Bangladesh, which is striving to replenish its depleted reserves after last year's floods, will buy 100,000 tons of rice from Myanmar.

82 More Iranians Lose Their Lives to COVID-19

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Some 82 deaths were caused by COVID-19 in Iran over the past 24 hours, spokeswoman for Iran's Ministry of Health and Medical Education Sima Sadat Lari said on Saturday.

Lari said that another 82 people have lost their lives due to the deadly virus during the past 24 hours in Iran. According to her report, the number of the total death toll reached 57,889.

Elaborating on the latest situation of the coronavirus pandemic in Iran, Lari said that 6,317 new cases infected with the COVID-19 were found over the past 24 hours.

She added that 1,411,731 Iranians have totally been confirmed infected, some 1,202,893 of whom have either recovered or been discharged from hospitals.



IMF Calls for Central Banks to Keep Money Tap Open

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) called on central banks around the world to continue a policy of accommodative monetary policy until the coronavirus pandemic passes, as tepid roots of recovery begin to hit some economies.

Central banking authorities around the world opened up their coffers to an unprecedented degree last year in the face of an economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. In the US, the Federal Reserve announced a dramatic program of bond buying, offering a virtually unlimited amount of money to prop up the world's biggest economy.

Now, as the pandemic turns one year old, the IMF is calling for central banks to continue accommodative monetary policy, a term referring to when central banks attempt to boost a country's money supply while keeping interest rates low.

"We would still recommend monetary policy to stay accommodative until we are past the pandemic," Gita Gopinath, the IMF's chief economist told Al Arabiya's Maya Jureidini in an interview Wednesday.

However, keeping monetary policy loose, essentially leaving the supply of money running, can have negative implications, and leave an economy with too much money, causing inflation to skyrocket, and decreasing monetary value in the long term. Gopinath, however, was optimistic that this situation still remains far away.

"We don't have any expectation that there will be runaway inflation in advanced economies. And there are a couple of reasons for that. One is because inflation expectations remain well anchored and we expect that to be the case. And also, there is still a fair amount of slack in the labor market," she said.

Gopinath went on to add that central bank easing had "a very important role in preventing a global financial crisis alongside a major collapse in the world economy in 2020."

Last year, around \$14 trillion was deployed by authorities around the world to shield economies from the COVID-19 economic hit, but the use of capital was very unequal, Gopinath noted, with advanced economies spending significantly more.

"Advanced economies deployed about 24 percent of the GDP in fiscal support, emerging markets, middle income countries. That number was six percent and low-income countries, two percent. Now, that's a reflection also of the fiscal space, fiscal capacity that these countries had in terms of providing support. That's another reason



why you're seeing very different recoveries around the world," she explained.

In less advanced economies, where recovery is slower, and distribution of coronavirus vaccines is nascent, Gopinath said it was "very important" for lockdowns to be put in place and to "provide lifelines to households and businesses."

Vaccine distribution has becoming an increasingly heated topic as supply cannot keep up with demand, leaving richer countries able to secure doses of the lifesaving drug significantly faster than poorer countries. This dynamic will likely push out a full economic recovery from the impact of the pandemic out further towards 2022, Gopinath explained.

"Also [we have] to keep in mind that it still remains the case that by 2025, the cumulative loss to the global economy from this pandemic, relative to what we had projected before, is about \$22 trillion. So that's a very sizable amount that still remains to be recovered," she said.

Iraq Reactivates Cheap Oil Export Agreement With Jordan



BAGHDAD (Dispatches) - Iraq has agreed to reactivate a memorandum of understanding with Jordan stipulating the sale of ten thousand barrels of Iraqi crude oil per day at preferential prices, according to a statement issued by the prime minister's office.

The approval for the reactivation of the February 2019 memorandum came after talks between Jordanian Prime Minister Bisher al-Khasawneh and Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi in Baghdad.

In a joint statement, the parties said they discussed "issues of common concern" and ways to enhance coordination "to achieve integration of interests and strategy and in all economic, investment and trade fields".

Khasawneh, who is visiting Iraq for the first time since assuming the premiership in October, also met with Iraqi President Barham Salih "to deliver a written message from Jordanian King Abdullah bin Al-Hussein" and also met with the Iraqi Parliament Speaker Muhammad al-Halbousi.

Jordan has been suffering from serious shortages of fuel. Iraqi oil imports have been covering around 70 percent of the energy needs of its western neighbor.

The agreement between the two ministerial delegations also included the continuation of the implementation of a 300km dual-circuit electric antenna transmission line linking the Jordanian Risha conversion station and the Iraqi al-Qaim substation, which will contribute to providing 1000 GWh per year to Iraq.

Linking electrical networks was part of an agreement signed by Iraq and Jordan last year which aimed to connect the Iraqi national electricity grid to the electricity distribution network of a number of countries in the region, including Jordan.

Iraq is seeking to secure its electricity needs by concluding agreements with neighboring countries to reduce its heavy reliance on Iran, which has provided a third of its electricity and gas consumption needs since 2003.

At the beginning of this year, the U.S. extended the exemption granted to Iraq from sanctions imposed on Iran for another three months to allow Baghdad to continue importing gas and electricity from Tehran until an alternative is available.

Thursday's talks also included the Basra-Aqaba pipeline project to transport Iraqi oil to the Red Sea coast through the port of Aqaba.

No deal was made but the two sides agreed to continue "bilateral talks" until they sign "a framework agreement between the two countries" to implement the project.

Chinese GDP Approaches U.S. Economy, Proportion Exceeding 70% in 2020

BEIJING (Dispatches) - The economic output of China, the world's second-largest economy, came a step closer to the size of the U.S.' GDP, breaking through the 70 percent mark in 2020 when the world economy took a heavy blow from the raging coronavirus. The proportion is forecast to rise this year, experts told the Global Times on Friday.

Data from the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis showed on Thursday that the US' GDP declined 3.5 percent in 2020 on a yearly basis. The record decline is the first negative reading since the financial crisis in 2009 and the lowest since 1946.

Nearly every sector, except for the government and the housing market, contracted last year. Consumer spending, a major driver that accounts for more than two-thirds of the economy, tumbled by 3.9 percent, the worst performance since 1932.

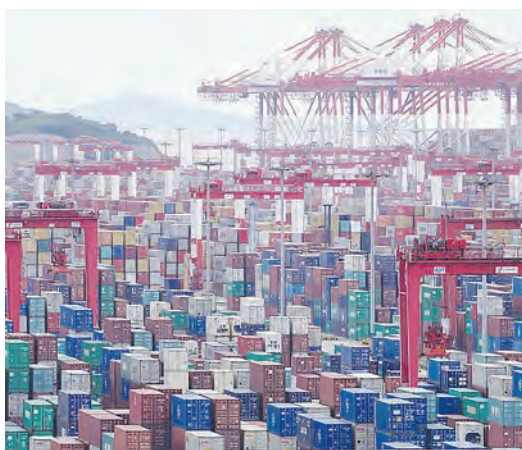
The pandemic has depressed consumer spending and business investment, putting many Americans into unemployment and poverty.

Current-dollar GDP decreased 2.3 percent, or \$500.6 billion, in 2020 to a level of \$20.93 trillion, official data showed, still making the US the largest economy in the world. In 2019, the nominal GDP of the US recorded \$21.43 trillion.

Based on the newly released figure, China's nominal GDP reaches 70.4 percent of that of the US, up from the 67 percent proportion in 2019.

As the first country emerging from the COVID-19 disruptions with effective prevention measures in place, China's GDP exceeded the 100 trillion yuan (\$15.42 trillion) threshold in 2020, growing 2.3 percent year-on-year to 101.5986 trillion yuan last year. And it is the only major economy to post growth in the pandemic-ravaged year.

With strong prospects that the world's two largest economies will rebound robustly this year and that China could register a higher increase in its economic output, the GDP gap will further narrow and the proportion that China's GDP takes up in that of the U.S.



will remain above 70 percent, experts said.

The Chinese economy is expected to expand by 8.2 percent in 2021, according to the median of the 20 experts surveyed by the Global Times. The IMF projected the growth would be 8.1 percent. China will overtake the U.S. to become the world's largest economy by 2028, five years earlier than previously forecast, said a report released in December by the UK-based Centre for

Economics and Business Research (CEBR).

It attributed this to China's "skillful" management of COVID-19, which will boost its relative growth compared to the U.S. and Europe in coming years.

Tian Yun, vice director of the Beijing Economic Operation Association, said that the around 8 percent forecast is a conservative one. He estimated that in 2021, China's total economic output will increase by over 9 trillion yuan, beating the record high of 8.3 trillion yuan achieved in 2017.

"Foreign trade, which is estimated to hit double-digit growth this year, will contribute strong momentum for economic growth," Tian told the Global Times on Friday, adding that the US, as a major trading partner, will also see its trading relations further interwoven with China.

As Tian observed, the economic and trading interaction between the world's two powers seems to be returning to the scenario of several years ago, where the US government desperately prints money and divides it among American people, who will spend that money to buy Chinese-imported goods.

"Since the second half of last year, we can obviously detect that trend," Tian noted.

China's exports to the US grew by 7.9 percent year-on-year to \$451.81 billion, while its imports from the U.S. rallied 9.8 percent to \$134.91 billion, according to data by the General Administration of Customs.

In growth terms, the US was a more thriving trade partner for China, despite it being the third-largest trading partner after the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the EU, in terms of total value.

Indonesia...

FROM PAGE 1

Iran has not commented on the case since Monday and has asked Indonesia to provide details about the tanker seizure.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman, Zhao Lijian, said on Wednesday that its embassy in Jakarta has asked Indonesia to investigate the case involving its nationals on MT Freya in a "lawful manner."

"The embassy expressed concerns to Indonesia, asking it to verify the situation of the Chinese seafarers and formally notify the Chinese side as soon as possible, investigate the case in a lawful and just manner, and guarantee the health, safety and legitimate rights and interests of the Chinese nationals," Lijian said, as quoted in a statement by the Chinese Foreign Ministry.

Trump's Prevention...

FROM PAGE 1

"If health protocols and instructions are not observed fully, we will have to impose and tighten restrictions," he said.

He also thanked medical personnel for their efforts to contain the deadly virus.

"We do insist on adopting measures, during these two months, to prevent a fourth surge in the disease, so that people's health and businesses will not be affected," he said.

The president said most of the services people need today are now being provided by the cyberspace, internet providers and electronic shops, and that makes it easier to stay at home.

Iran COVID-19 Vaccine...

FROM PAGE 1

However, inhumane U.S. sanctions have affected Iran's ability to make the payment for importing vaccines as well as life-saving medical equipment.

On Saturday, Iran's Ambassador to Moscow Kazem Jalali announced that Tehran has signed a deal with Russia to buy and jointly produce Sputnik V vaccine.

The first batch of the Russian vaccine will arrive in Iran by February 4, he said, adding that the second and third contingents are also expected in a few weeks.

Within the next 10 days, a delegation from the Iranian Health Ministry will travel to Moscow to hold talks on the Sputnik V joint production.

Kianoush Jahanpour, spokesman of Iran's Food and Drug Organization, tweeted that the import of the Russian vaccine could usher in a new era of cooperation between the two countries to gain a worthy position in the field of biotechnology and vaccine industry.

Earlier this week, he said the Food and Drug Organization has issued an emergency license for the use of Russia's Sputnik V vaccine, produced by the Gamaleya Research Institute, in the form of frozen solution and single-dose/5-dose vials in Iran.

He said Iran is also examining sourcing vaccines from other producers such as India and China.

So far, 1,405,414 Iranians have been infected with COVID-19 in the country. More than 57,800 people have died, while 1,196,374 have recovered.

Iran Exports to...

FROM PAGE 1

He said unfortunately due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Iran's exports to Turkey in the past 10 months slumped to \$1.8b and it is a great gap with the amount registered in the past years and it shows 41 percent fall comparing to the same period last year.

He then pointed to some problems regarding trade with Turkey, expressing hope they would be settled, adding that resolving some problems will take time.

Sadaat added that whatever is announced in Iran is reflected in Turkish media, noting problems should be settled basically. He pointed to the recent Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif's visit to Turkey, saying that it seems good news is coming soon but he is not aware of its details.

He expressed hope the trade volume between both countries would bounce back and touch \$21b record of the past years and even to the target of \$30b which has been set by presidents of both countries.

He went on to say that currently good signals are sent by both parties regarding improvement of ties.

Afghan Official...

FROM PAGE 1

The two sides have been engaged in the second round of talks in Doha since Jan. 10.

Yoldash noted the prolonged atmosphere of chaos and unrest in his country and said: "In Afghanistan, we need to set out by taking ethnic and religious factors into consideration and finding a solution to them. We can never achieve success without solving these problems."

Underlining that some of the most important problems in Afghanistan, such as poverty and inadequate education, have been increasingly causing social problems in the country, he said they also have a significant role in the internal political power balances in the country with the Afghan government "stuck in a box."

Differences of opinion and disagreements in domestic politics have strengthened the Taliban further, Yoldash said, adding that the negotiations were not expected to conclude in the short term, though "continuity is important."

Reiterating the need for cooperation with regional countries in the peace talks, Yoldash said, "Without Pakistan wanting it, peace can never come to Afghanistan."

Goretzka, Martinez Test Positive for Covid-19

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Bayern Munich midfielders Leon Goretzka and Javi Martinez have both tested positive for Covid-19, the European champions announced Friday.

The pair missed Saturday's home game against Hoffenheim at the Allianz Arena with Bayern seven points clear in the Bundesliga table. "Leon and Javi are in quarantine and will be out for the time being. It's a shame that it has hit them both," Bayern coach Hansi Flick said in Friday's press conference. "Everything has been settled with the health authorities."

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Barty Thrilled to Be Back Playing Again

MELBOURNE (Reuters) - Australia's world number one Ash Barty was delighted to return to competing again after 11 months on Friday although her comeback in Adelaide ended on a losing note against Simona Halep of Romania.

The 24-year-old skipped the U.S. Open and also decided not to defend her title at Roland Garros and had not played a competitive match since last February, opting to stay at home amid health concerns due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

8 IRAN NEWS

SPORTS

SUNDAY JANUARY 31, 2021

Serena, Nadal, Halep Win at Adelaide Exhibition

ADELAIDE (AP) - Serena Williams was preparing to play Naomi Osaka at an Adelaide exhibition tournament on Friday. But first things first — after 14 days in quarantine because of the COVID-19 pandemic regulations in Australia, the 23-time Grand Slam singles champion took her daughter to the zoo.

Williams said she'd been crossing off the 14 days of quarantine on a calendar, having spent the time with her three-year-old daughter Olympia.

"We went to the zoo," Williams said of her first movements outside of quarantine. "I am so glad it's over because to be in a room (for so long) with a three-year-old and being her best friend is definitely difficult, especially after training and working out."

"Honestly, I wouldn't trade anything, spending hours and hours and hours with her was really fun."

The visit must have been a good pre-match tonic for Williams. She beat Osaka 6-2, 2-6, 10-7. Both players showed obvious signs of rustiness, hitting set-up winners out of play or netting relatively easy shots.

"Thanks every one for having us. We honestly haven't played in front of a crowd for over a year, it's been a really long time, so this is really cool," Williams said.

She acknowledged the tough 14-day quarantine restrictions that were in place to allow the Australian Open to take place beginning Feb. 8.

No. 2 Rafael Nadal beat U.S. Open champion Dominic Thiem 7-5, 6-4 to open night play in Adelaide on hard courts at Memorial Drive.

In an on-court interview following his win, the oft-injured Nadal had a deadpan response when asked how he stays so young-looking at the age of 34.

Second-ranked Simona Halep beat No. 1 Ash Barty 3-6, 6-1, 10-8 in the final match of the night. It was Barty's first match in 11 months due to coronavirus-related travel restrictions and her decision not to defend her 2019 title at last year's delayed French Open.



Krajinovic won the first set 6-3 and Djokovic the second by the same score to give the Serbian tag-team victory.

A television close-up had earlier showed a large blister on the palm of his Djokovic's right hand, where his racket would sit.

The Adelaide tournament is the only Australian Open tune-up tournament that isn't being played in Melbourne. The others, including the ATP Cup and three WTA events, will start getting underway from Sunday. In Melbourne, the first of the players to leave quarantine were greeted with the city's often fickle weather — rain showers.

The National Tennis Centre at Melbourne Park has eight indoor courts and officials were expected to be inundated with requests from players, particularly those who have been in hard lockdown, for court time.

Those 72 players, who were on board the same three charter flights as the nine passengers who tested positive to COVID-19, have been unable to leave their rooms while others have been able to train for up to five hours a day. Tennis Australia chief executive Craig Tiley said players who had been in hard lockdown would be given priority.

Pistons silence

Lakers late, pull off upset

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Blake Griffin scored 23 points and the host Detroit Pistons held the Los Angeles Lakers scoreless for nearly seven minutes in the fourth quarter while pulling away to a 107-92 victory on Thursday.

For the Lakers, who played without Anthony Davis (quad), it marked their season low in scoring and their first time losing consecutive games this season. The Lakers lost their second straight road game after going 10-0 to start the season.

Wayne Ellington had 20 points, including six 3-pointers, and Mason Plumlee supplied 17 points and 10 rebounds. Jerami Grant and Derrick Rose added 14 points apiece for Detroit.

LeBron James had 22 points but only two after halftime for the Lakers. He also contributed 10 assists and seven rebounds. Kyle Kuzma had 22 points and 10 rebounds, and Talen Horton-Tucker added 13 points off the bench.

Los Angeles Clippers 109
Miami Heat 105

Nicholas Batum scored 18 points, helping Los Angeles rally past host Miami for its eighth win in nine games.

The Clippers also got 17 points from Lou Williams and 16 points each from Marcus Morris Sr. and Reggie Jackson. Morris scored 10 of his points in the fourth quarter. Terance Mann had 12 points for Los Angeles, and Serge Ibaka added 10 points and 13 rebounds.

Tyler Herro, in his first game off the injured list, led Miami with 19 points and added 10 rebounds and five assists. Gabe Vincent chipped in 18 points for the Heat, who also got 16 points, 13 rebounds and seven assists from Bam Adebayo. Miami lost its fifth straight game, the longest active skid in the NBA.

Victor Oladipo scored 25 points, Christian Wood added a double-double and host Houston erased an early 20-point deficit in defeating Portland.

Oladipo scored a driving layup with 26.2 seconds left to secure a three-point lead for Houston, which sealed its fourth consecutive victory with free throws from Wood and Eric Gordon down the stretch. Wood returned from a three-game injury hiatus and paired 22 points with 12 rebounds.



Djokovic Plays a Set in Adelaide Exhibition

MELBOURNE (Reuters) - World number one Novak Djokovic pulled out of an Adelaide exhibition because of a blistered hand on Friday before appearing on court to play a set after all, helping his compatriot Filip Krajinovic beat Jannik Sinner.

Djokovic was scheduled to kick off the "Day at the Drive" event in front of a crowd of 4,000 at Adelaide's Memorial Drive Tennis Club but pulled out minutes before he was due on court and was replaced by Krajinovic.

After his practice partner had won the first set, however, Djokovic bounded into the arena and proceeded to wrap up a 6-3 6-3 win over the Italian teenager.

"I'm sorry that I didn't step in on the court from the beginning," said Djokovic, who was celebrating his first day of freedom after 14 days in quarantine.

"I had to do some treatment with my physio, I wasn't feeling my best for the last two days and I didn't know how I was going to react."

Djokovic looked to be largely unhindered by the nasty-looking blister on the palm of his right hand. "It's not easy but it's part of what we do, we're professional athletes, we learn over the years to play with the pain," he added.

Djokovic and Krajinovic will join forces again in the Serbia team defending the ATP Cup in Melbourne next week before the former launches his bid for a ninth Australian Open title from Feb. 8.

Olympics Will Unite World In Hope

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga vowed Friday to hold the Olympics as a symbol of unity and hope, despite growing doubts over the virus-postponed event's fate.

"Japan will hold the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics this summer," Suga said at the annual World Economic Forum, held online as the pandemic continues to wreak havoc worldwide.

"I'm determined to realize the Games that will bring hope and courage to the world, as proof of mankind's victory over the virus and as a symbol of global unity."

His strident tone echoed that of Tokyo Olympics organizers and the International Olympic Committee, both of whom insisted this week that the Games will go ahead safely.

But with many countries still paralyzed by Covid-19 and large parts of Japan -- including Tokyo -- under a state of emergency, concern is growing over pushing ahead with the huge international event, due to start on July 23.

Tokyo's first Olympic test event of 2021, an artistic swimming competition scheduled for March, was postponed on Thursday for two months because of travel restrictions.

In December, Tokyo 2020 chiefs unveiled a 53-page anti-virus rulebook that they say will allow the Games to be held safely even without a vaccine.

But public support in Japan for holding the Games this year is low.

A poll conducted last weekend by the Asahi Shimbun newspaper showed only 11 percent of the 1,647 respondents said the Olympics should go ahead this summer.

In the survey, 51 percent supported postponement and 35 percent said it should be cancelled.



Ronaldo Does What He Wants

TURIN (Dispatches) - Juventus coach Andrea Pirlo said Friday it had nothing to do with him if star player Cristiano Ronaldo broke coronavirus rules with a visit to a mountain resort.

"Ronaldo had the day off, he can do what he wants in his private life," Pirlo said, after Italian media reported the striker defied travel restrictions earlier this week.

He added of all the footballers in the Serie A club: "Off the pitch they are free citizens and each one takes his own responsibility."

Ronaldo reportedly travelled to the resort of Courmayeur, 150 kilometres north-west of Juventus' Turin headquarters, for the birthday of his girlfriend Georgina Rodriguez.

The Gazzetta dello Sport newspaper said the couple spent Tuesday night in a hotel and took a ride on a snowmobile the next morning, before returning to Turin.

Under current Italian coronavirus rules, the couple should not have left the city of Turin. The multimillionaire player and his partner now risk a fine of up to 400 euros (\$485) each.

Several Italian media outlets reported that local Carabinieri police were looking into the claims about Ronaldo but AFP was unable to confirm this.

The 35-year-old footballer has been embroiled in coronavirus-related controversy before. He was criticized in October for travelling to Portugal while Juventus were in isolation after two virus cases.

Ronaldo then tested positive himself, and returned to Italy to spend a couple of weeks in isolation at home.

At the time, Italian Sports Minister Vincenzo Spadafora accused the star of "violating" coronavirus restrictions.

