

Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei Will Deliver Speech on Friday Morning, January 8, To Mark Anniversary of 1978 Qom Anti-Shah Protest

IRAN NEWS

Spokeswoman for Iran's Ministry Of Health and Medical Education Sima Sadat Lari Announced on Wednesday That the COVID-19 Death Toll in Iran Has Dropped to 82 During the Past 24 Hours

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U.S. May Face Revenge at Home

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps Quds Force Brigadier General Esmail Qaani warned the US that it might face revenge inside its territory for the assassination of top Iranian commander Lt. General Qassem Soleimani.

Addressing a conference in commemoration of General Soleimani, held in Kerman on Wednesday morning, Qaani reminded the US that its downfall and the process of taking revenge have already begun.

"You cannot relax anymore even at your home, and it is not unlikely that we will take revenge inside the house," the top general warned the American enemy.

He advised the outgoing U.S. president and others behind the assassination of General Soleimani to learn lessons from the fate of Salman Rushdie, an author whose life has been spent in hiding and under police protection because of his offensive novel against Islam "The Satanic Verses".

"They cannot assassinate our hero and live in comfort afterwards," the general added.

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U.S. Adventurism Caused Ukrainian Plane Crash

TEHRAN (MNA) - IRGC in a statement on Wednesday said the Ukrainian flight PS752 tragedy was the result of adventure-seeking terrorism of the US.

The statement was released on the occasion of the first anniversary of the crash of Ukraine International Airlines Flight 752 (PS752).

"One year after the crash of a Ukrainian passenger plane, which took place after the US adventure-seeking and terrorist measure and also the subsequent missile strike on the US terrorist airbase in Iraq, that brought war conditions into the region, a great sorrow is felt in hearts of the Iranian nation."

"The heavy burden of parting with the dear children of Iran is truly hard and sad. This tragic event was the result of the inhumane adventure-seeking and terrorist acts of the United States in the region," it added. "The U.S. once again proved the depth of the malice of the global arrogance against the Islamic Republic and the Iranian nation," it said.

IRGC vowed hard revenge from the enemies. On January 8, 2019, the Kyiv-bound UTA Boeing 737 crashed shortly after taking off from Tehran on January 8, killing all 176 people on board, mostly Iranian and Canadian citizens. Iran said the plane was hit by an anti-aircraft missile due to human error.

World Bank Predicts Iran Economy to Bounce Back in 2021



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iranian economy is projected to grow by 1.5 percent in 2021 as the domestic markets are getting back on track and the negative impacts of the coronavirus pandemic begin to wane, according to the World Bank's Global Economic Prospects (GEP) report released on Tuesday.

"Growth in the Islamic Republic of Iran is expected to recover as domestic consumption and tourism begin to normalize, and disruptions related to COVID-19 taper," the report stated.

According to the mentioned report, Iran's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is going to continue its positive growth in 2022, expanding by 1.7 percent.

The World Bank on Tuesday predicted a moderate economic recovery for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) in 2021, while highlighting the many challenges still posed by the coronavirus pandemic.

The Washington-based institution said the pandemic had seen the region's economies shrink by about 5.0 percent in 2020, inflicting heavy job losses and a sharp increase in the number of people living below the poverty line of less than \$5.50 a day.

"Among oil exporters, growth is expected to recover to 1.8 percent this year, supported by normalising oil demand, the scheduled easing of the OPEC+ oil production cuts, policy support, and the gradual phasing out of domestic pandemic-related restrictions," it said in a report.

In January 2020, the World Bank had predicted a 1.1 percent GDP growth for Iran in 2020 and 2021. Global economic output is expected to grow by four percent in 2021 assuming widespread rollout of a COVID-19 vaccine throughout the year; the estimation however is still five percent below pre-pandemic levels.

A recovery, however, will likely be subdued, unless policymakers move decisively to tame the pandemic and implement investment-enhancing reforms, the World Bank says.

World Bank has reported Iran's economic growth in 2020 to be negative 3.7 percent, which is still 1.6 percent better than the entity's previous estimations. The average global economic growth in 2020 was negative 4.3 percent and the figure for advanced economies averaged negative 5.4 percent.

Based on the report, aggregate GDP in emerging markets and developing economies, including China, is expected to grow five percent in 2021, after a contraction of 2.6 percent in 2020.

Although the global economy is growing again after a 4.3 percent contraction in 2020, the pandemic has caused a heavy toll of deaths and illness, plunged millions into poverty, and may depress economic activity and incomes for a prolonged period.

Serious Evidences About "Israel's" Role in Scientist Fakhrizadeh Assassination

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Minister of Defense Brigadier General Amir Hatami announced that there is "serious evidence" about the role of the "Israeli" occupation regime in the November 2020 assassination of Iranian scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh.

Brigadier General Hatami made the remarks in a letter to his counterparts in over 60 world countries about Fakhrizadeh's assassination.

Dr. Fakhrizadeh, Deputy Minister of Defense and Head of the Research and Innovation Organization of the Ministry of Defense of Iran, who was described by the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei as "a distinguished nuclear and defense scientist", was assassinated and attained martyrdom on Friday evening, November 27, near the town of Absard, Damavand city, east to Tehran during a terrorist operation by the criminal agents of the Zionist regime.

At his letter, General Hatami wrote about scientific and research achievements and initiatives gained and developed by Dr. Fakhrizadeh.

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GitHub to Operate In Iran After Green Signal From U.S.

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - Open Source repository GitHub has secured a license from the U.S. government to offer its services to developers in Iran.

The Microsoft-owned company will now offer its full range of services in Iran, after imposing restrictions on the platform for Iranian developers due to U.S. sanctions.

"This includes all services for individuals and organizations, private and public, free and paid," GitHub CEO Nat Friedman wrote in a blog post published on Tuesday.

"Over the course of two years, we were able to demonstrate how developer use of GitHub advances human progress, international communication, and the enduring U.S. foreign policy of promoting free speech and the free flow of information," he added.

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EU to Redouble Efforts To Save Iran Nuclear Deal

BRUSSELS (AP) - The European Union said Tuesday it would redouble its efforts to save the Iran nuclear agreement despite what it calls Tehran's "important breach" of commitments made in the 2015 deal by starting to enrich uranium to new levels.

EU spokesman Peter Stano said that Iran's actions "will have serious implications when it comes to nuclear nonproliferation." Stano said it was in everyone's interest to rescue the deal and said the 27-nation bloc "will strengthen" its attempts to make sure all adhere to the commitments made in the landmark deal.

Iran began enriching uranium Monday to levels unseen since its 2015 nuclear deal with world powers. The decision appeared aimed at increasing Tehran's leverage in the waning days in office for U.S. President Donald Trump, whose unilateral withdrawal from the atomic accord in 2018 began a series of escalating incidents.

Increasing enrichment at its underground Fordo facility puts Tehran a technical step away from weapons-grade levels of 90%. Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said the action was "fully reversible" if other partners in the deal fully complied too, without elaborating. Iran informed the International Atomic Energy Agency of its plans to increase enrichment to 20% last week.

Iran's decision to begin enriching to 20% purity a decade ago nearly triggered an Israeli strike targeting its nuclear facilities, tensions that only abated with the 2015 atomic deal, which saw Iran limit its enrichment in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions.

Moscow Claims Iran's Enrichment of Uranium to 20% "Departure" From JCPOA

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Iran's resumption of uranium enrichment to 20% is a departure from the Comprehensive Joint Plan of Action for the Iranian nuclear program, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said.

"This question has nothing to do with Iran's compliance with its obligations under the Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement or the Nuclear Weapons Non-Proliferation Treaty. From this standpoint there are no claims to make against the Iranian side. All material enriched to 20% remains under the IAEA control. The Agency has not exposed any attempts to use it for undeclared purposes that might contradict the NPT. At the same time the resumption of uranium enrichment to 20% is a departure from the agreements enshrined in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action for a settlement over the Iranian nuclear program," TASS cited her as saying.

Zakharova stressed that Iran's decision to resume uranium enrichment at the Fordow Fuel Enrichment Plant was due to U.S. pressure.

"In recent years the international community developed the clear awareness that the root cause of such deviations should be seen in systematic crude violations of international obligations by the United States, which in defiance of article 25 of the UN Charter ignores the UN Security Council's Resolution 2231 and deliberately poses obstructions to its implementation by other countries. We have to recall once again that the JCPOA project for converting the FTEP to the production of stable isotopes has long been the target of Washington's sanctions, which is absolutely unacceptable," Zakharova said.

She stressed that Moscow appreciated the Iranian side's repeated statements it was prepared to resume full compliance with the agreements under the JCPOA, provided the balance of interests was observed.

"However, the current realities as they are, extra efforts and costs will now be required to bring the Fordow facility in conformity with the JCPOA again," Zakharova said, noting that Iran's actions were of "fundamental importance for further work to reconfigure this facility, which is an integral part of the nuclear deal."

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U.S. Maximum Pressure Strategy Fails

President Says Iran To Welcome Biden's Return to Rule of Law

TEHRAN (IFP) - President Hassan Rouhani says Tehran will welcome it if the incoming administration of U.S. President-elect Joe Biden would choose to return to the rule of law and comply with its commitments under the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran.

"We will welcome it if the other side obeys the law. A person who acts in a cruel way in the alley, breaks the windows with stone, but suddenly comes to his mind and says he doesn't want to break windows anymore; shouldn't we welcome it? We'd welcome such a move," Rouhani said in a Wednesday address to a cabinet session.

"The moment this lunatic who breaks our window came and said 'I'm sorry! I've now realized there's no point in breaking your window. I keep breaking your glass, and every time you replace it with a new one. What I'm doing has no effect. I impose damage on you and bother you, but that doesn't bring me anything. Now I've stopped doing it, and repented'; whenever they [Americans] do this, we'd welcome it."

Rouhani said "if the incoming U.S. administration of Mr Biden, which is to take office in two weeks, states that the U.S. is going to stop breaking windows, repent, tread on the path of law, and comply with its commitments; if they ask us, our answer

TEHRAN (IP) - The Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council of Iran said that the United States failed to achieve the goals of the "maximum pressure" strategy against the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Ali Shamkhani wrote on Twitter on Tuesday: "Donald Trump's strategy of maximum pressure was to force the Islamic Republic of Iran to surrender and eliminate its global and regional ties;

Trump is now removed from the political scene of the United States and the world, and Iran is pursuing a strategy of active resistance on a stronger domestic and foreign scale."

For the past four years, the President of the United States has pursued a strategy of maximum pressure by withdrawing from JCPOA and imposing new sanctions on Iran, which failed due to the resistance of the Iranian people.



will be quite clear, straightforward, and simple: we'd tell them if you comply with all your commitments, we would fulfill all our commitments as well."

However, he added, if the U.S. fails to live up to its commitments, Iran wouldn't bow to Americans.

"If you'd fulfil your commitments, it wouldn't be a favor to us. That's just reversing an unlawful behavior you used to show. That means you've regretted doing it and realized you were making a mistake," he made it clear.

Zarif Hails Qatar's Resistance, Urges Concerted Action for Strong Region

TEHRAN (IFP) - Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has lauded Qatar for its brave struggle against extortion following restoration of ties between four Arab states and Doha after years, calling on the Arab neighbors to take Iran's offer for a strong region.

"Congratulations to Qatar for the success of its brave resistance to pressure & extortion," the top Iranian diplomat said in a post on his Twitter account on Tuesday.

"To our other Arab neighbors: Iran is neither an enemy nor threat. Enough scapegoating—especially with your reckless patron on his way out," Zarif added, referring to the termination of Donald Trump's tenure as the U.S. president.

"Time to take our offer for a strong region," Foreign Minister Zarif noted, concluding his message with the hashtag "HOPE", a regional peace initiative proposed by Iran.

The tweet came after four Arab states that had imposed an embargo against Qatar for three years restored diplomatic relations with Qatar.

Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt cut ties with Qatar in 2017, accusing it of supporting terrorism.

Doha denied the accusation and rejected the conditions for ending the partial blockade, including closing the Doha-based Al Jazeera broadcast network and curbing relations with Iran.

Official Calls U.S. Regional Activities, "Psychological Warfare"

TEHRAN (IP) - Presidential chief of staff equated the U.S.'s recent activities in the region a form of "psychological warfare".

The Chief of the Presidential Staff Mahmoud Vaezi says that the Iranian military forces are seriously prepared for any possible military action.

Vaezi, in response to a question from Iran Press about the U.S., moves in the Persian Gulf and the alleged message about the attack on the U.S. Congress building in retaliation for the assassination of Gen. Soleimani said that the Americans, as in the past, waged a psychological war to worry the people, but the reality is different.

The Chief of the Presidential Staff of the Islamic Republic of Iran stated that, on the contrary, the

Americans are worried that Iran would take action on the anniversary of General Soleimani, and they took a defensive stance.

Vaezi stressed that, based on the analysis and evaluation, the Islamic Republic of Iran was not worried about a possible military event.

The official added that there were many problems inside the United States now and Democrats and Republicans are in sharp disagreement with each other and a president who did not understand the issues of democracy and while his opponent had won more votes he said he would not accept the result.

Vaezi stated that the remarks of the American officials these days are projection and Iran would wait another 12 days.

Iran Urges Seoul to Behave 'Responsibly' Over Seizure of Korean Tanker

TEHRAN (IFP) - The Iranian foreign ministry spokesman has called on Seoul to behave rationally and responsibly in dealing with Tehran's seizure of a South Korean vessel due to technical issues.

In comments on Tuesday, Saeed Khatibzadeh said, "The South Korean government's behaviour in this regard is not understandable and is rejected."

"We urge the Korean government to deal with this technical issue logically and responsibly," Khatibzadeh noted. "As announced before, the problem with the South Korean ship is a completely technical one," he said.

"Like all countries, the Islamic Republic of Iran is very sensitive about protecting its marine environment and deals with any violations in accordance with the law," Khatibzadeh explained.

"As the authority in charge of such issues, the [Iranian] Ports and Maritime Organization is professionally trying to offer the necessary assistance to the ship and its crew, and will inform the public about it accordingly," he said. He also weighed in on reports suggesting a South Korean delegation is traveling to Iran to follow up on the matter.

"A trip by South Korea's acting foreign minister was already on the agenda, and it was made public accordingly, and this visit will take place in the near future, but it has nothing to do with the issue [of the seized ship]," he added.

"And the two countries have not reached any agreement on a separate visit between the two sides because this issue is running its defined legal course within a technical framework, and there is no need for a diplomatic visit," he said.

Tehran Expects Commitments to JCPOA From Signatory Sides

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran expects certain corrections to be made within the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), so that the signatory sides would effectively implement their commitments, said the Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh.

He pointed out that Iran would like to see the other signatories to comply with their commitments.

"If so, Iran would be ready to remain committed as well," Khatibzadeh said.

"We hope the U.S. would use the opportunity for preserving the JCPOA. The P5+1 were our negotiation

side and with regards to the regional countries, there is a need to change of talks in the region and we hope leaders of these countries would consider it," he said.

"We did not comply with some of our commitments while they (JCPOA signatories) have fulfilled none of their commitments," Khatibzadeh said.

"Iran has commitments to the NPT and the JCPOA. All of our actions were due to the fact that the other side could not comply with its commitments," he said.

"We do not negotiate about the JCPOA, the negotiations have been finished and signed, we want the U.S. to effectively implement their commitments to the JCPOA," Khatibzadeh said.

ISCC Ratifies Act on Tackling Online Fake News, Disinformation

TEHRAN (IFP) - The Iranian Supreme Council of Cyberspace has ratified a document that imposes requirements to prevent and counter fake news and erroneous information in the virtual space.

In a Tuesday session of the Supreme Council of Cyberspace, chaired by President Hassan Rouhani, the document on requirements to prevent and act against dissemination of untrue information, news and content in the virtual space was ratified.

According to the document, the Judiciary should prepare the ground for prevention of cyber-related crimes within three months and take the necessary action against the falsified information, news and contents in the virtual space.

Moreover, the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance is tasked with developing a verification and ranking system in cooperation with the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) and designing a plan to grant quality signs to the online platforms publishing information on a yearly basis.

The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance is also obliged to take advantage of the capacities of civil institutions, media, and awareness programs to take the necessary measures for verification of information and news through a reference platform.

Azarakhsh Missile Test-Fired From National Drone

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran Army successfully test-fired Azarakhsh (Thunderstorm) missile from its Karrar-class drone at the second day of military drills on Wednesday.

Azarakhsh- air-to-air missile- could successfully identify and annihilate its hypothetical targets, according to the Army information center.

This is the first time the missile is being used in any drills. The hypothetical enemies were successfully annihilated by Karrar-class Azarakhsh missile carrying 500-pound bomb.

Rear Admiral Mahmoud Mousavi, spokesman for the drills, has announced that constantly monitoring the borders through the drones is among the aims of the maneuver.

Today, the borders are being carefully monitored and observed by the Army forces via drones equipped with surveillance and electronic information systems, Mousavi said.

"Today, Islamic Republic of Iran's Army is capable of giving strong response to any aggression by the enemy."

Majlis to Develop Free Zones

TEHRAN (IP) - Head of the Iranian Parliament's Economic Commission says the parliament is planning for the development of free trade industrial zones by amending the previous law on the management of the zones.

On the sidelines of a meeting to address the issues of free zones in the country on Tuesday, Mohammadreza Pourabrahimi said: "The bill to amend the Law on the Administration of Free Trade Industrial Zones was recently announced in the parliament and its generalities were approved by the Economic Commission."

"The parliament," he said, "is planning for the development of free trade industrial zones by transferring advanced knowledge and technologies, increase of income through exports instead of imports, increase incentives to attract foreign investment and facilitate and prosper economic activities."

Nuclear Steps Reversible If All Parties Abide by Commitments

TEHRAN (FNA) - Iran's Permanent Envoy to the UN Majid Takht Ravanchi criticized the European members of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action for their failure to live up to their obligations, adding that Tehran can reverse its nuclear steps provided that all parties to the nuclear deal observe their commitments.

"While Iran has resumed 20% enrichment, we have reiterated that all our nuclear steps will be reversed upon full implementation of JCPOA commitments by all," Takht Ravanchi tweeted on Tuesday. He stressed that Iranian government's top priority is the annulment of all sanctions that have been illegally imposed on the country.

In relevant remarks, Iranian Government Spokesman Ali Rabiyei announced that his country has started enriching uranium to the 20 percent purity level at Fordow nuclear facility in the early hours of Monday morning.

IAEA Warned Over Israelis' Covert Nuclear Program



TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran has called on the International Atomic Energy Agency over the Israeli regime's unlawful and clandestine nuclear activities. Iran's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the international organizations in Vienna sent a letter to the Director-General of the IAEA chief, Rafael Grossi, warning about the Zionist regime's covert nuclear weapons program, saying such activities pose a serious threat to regional and global security and stability.

He also called for the Zionist entity's immediate and unconditional accession to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Gharibabadi urged the IAEA to draw the attention of all members of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons to the threats posed by the Israeli regime as a result of its nuclear weapons and request them to support addressing this issue at the meetings of the Agency's Board of Governors and the General Conference as well as the tenth Review Conference of the NPT.

Noting that all in the Middle East region, except the Israeli regime, are parties to the NPT, the Iranian diplomat said the development of a clandestine nuclear weapon program by the Zionist regime poses a continuing serious threat not only to the security and stability of the region and the world but also to the effectiveness and efficiency of the NPT and the Agency's safeguards regime.

The Iranian diplomat added, "It should be rejected promptly and without any prejudices. Needless to say that Israel is not also a party to any of other major treaties governing weapons of mass destruction (WMD) non-proliferation."

Gharibabadi also pointed to the NPT Resolution on the Middle East in 1995, saying, "The Review and Extension Conference of the Parties to the NPT which was held in May 1995 adopted a package of decisions in which the Resolution on the Middle East was an integral part of the decision to an indefinite extension of the NPT."

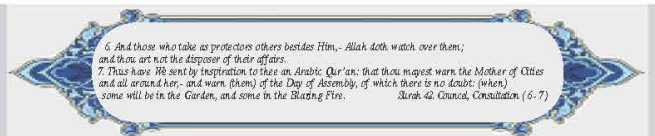
He said such resolution reflects the concerns of the States Parties to the Treaty about the dangerous situation in the Middle East resulting from the presence in the region of nuclear activities not subject to the IAEA safeguards, which puts regional and international peace and security at risk. The Iranian diplomat also noted that the Israeli regime kept developing an advanced nuclear weapon program despite the resolutions adopted by the General Conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency from 1987 to 2010.

Gharibabadi requested the IAEA chief to take necessary measures to address the mentioned concerns and subsequently inform the Member State of the results.



PRAYER TIME

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



Iran to Focus on Boosting Tourism, Non-Oil Exports To China in 2021

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mine and Agriculture (ICCIMA) held a webinar on reviewing opportunities and trade capacities between Iran and China where expansion of non-oil exports to China and developing tourism cooperation with this East Asian country were two major topics which were discussed.

In the webinar, the most important capacities for mutual economic cooperation between both states and especially Iran's non-oil exports to China were touched, and participants exchanged their views and raised solutions for removing hurdles for cooperation between Iran and China.

Addressing the webinar, Deputy Head for International Affairs of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mine and Agriculture (ICCIMA) Mr. Mohammad Reza Karbasi said that the department is determined to hold a series of webinars for introducing trade opportunities with different countries with the presence of the heads of joint chambers of commerce, and the first one was allocated to China and one of the most active joint chambers in the country.

He went on to say that in recent years the country has witnessed fairly favorable investments in some fields interested by the Chinese despite the U.S. sanctions. He added that due to their independent approach in international climate, Iran can have more extensive cooperation with China in the fields like production of medicines, auto, auto parts and development of oil, gas and petrochemical projects.

Karbasi believes with the change in consumption pattern and growth of this market in China, a good condition has been set for Iran's exports to China. He said despite the most foreign economic cooperation of Iran with China in recent years, for boosting the trade volume between both states especially in exports, it needs good planning, getting acquainted with China's consumption market and diversifying Iran's baskets of exporting goods.

He added that in 2018 and 2019, Iran's trade volume with China stood at \$20b and



\$21b respectively, and the figure has been around 13.5b in the first three quarters of the current year and these figures can be enhanced due to the existing capacities especially in terms of exports and turning the trade balance in favor of Iran.

Then chairman of Iran-China Joint Chamber of Commerce Majid Reza Hariri, for his part, emphasized that the joint chambers of commerce are to act like private sector embassies, adding that in this line, the office of Iran-China Chamber of Office and ICCIMA's representative is soon to start operation in Shanghai, China, in coordination with Iran's Embassy.

He then pointed to the project of developing non-oil exports to China which was to be planned beside dispatching 24 delegations and in return receiving 14 delegations but were postponed due to the outbreak of the coronavirus.

Hariri added that according to the China government's policies in the 14th plan, the issue of boosting consumption and imports has been raised and China's general policy is to become the biggest economy of the world in 2025.

He said China's 14th plan kicks off in 2021 and the growth rate of imports in this country is accordingly to be doubled, adding that Iran and China are to celebrate their 50th anniversary of restoring relations in 2021 and at the same time the Iran-China Joint Chamber of Commerce is to celebrate its 20th anniversary this year.

He reiterated that Iran-China Joint Chamber of Commerce is seriously pursuing two main projects of developing non-oil exports and tourism with China, adding that China's annual imports are around \$2,200b and Iran have a share around \$600b of this figure.

He said Iran has currently colorful presence in China in the fields of oil and petrochemicals and it needs to improve its presence in the non-oil fields.

Hariri added that with a good planning, Iran can enhance its non-oil exports to China as China's market has the capacity to welcome Iranian goods.

Tehran to Host Int'l Exhibitions on Electricity Industry, Water and Wastewater

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The 20th Iran International Electricity Exhibition and the 16 Iran International Water and Wastewater Exhibition will be held simultaneously at the Permanent Fairground of Tehran on January 12-15.

According to reports, after getting nod from the National Anti-Coronavirus Headquarters, it was decided two international exhibitions to be held simultaneously in Tehran on January 12-15.

The 20th specialized Iran International Electricity Exhibition will be held with the presence of some 200 Iranian and foreign companies. The exhibition will be held on an area around 800 square meters and will be not open to the public and it will be only for experts and activists of this field by observing all sanitary protocols. In the exhibitions, new achievements and products in the electricity field will be put on display.

Meanwhile at the same time, the 16th Iran International Water and Wastewater Exhibition will be held on a land around 2,500 square meters. New achievements and products in this field are to be displayed in the exhibition.



Narrowing of OPEC+ Cuts Insignificant To Global Supply

TEHRAN (PressTV) – Iran Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh says a Tuesday decision by an international grouping of oil producers known as OPEC+ to slightly narrow supply cuts agreed for January would not have a significant impact on global prices.

Zanganeh said after an OPEC+ ministerial meeting on Tuesday that planned increase in output by Russia and Kazakhstan by up to 150,000 barrels per day (bpd) until March would not significantly affect the steady supply of oil to the global markets in the upcoming months.

Zanganeh said that OPEC+ members observed the special conditions of oil production in the two countries in the current cold season as they agreed to the slight narrowing of cuts of 7.2 million bpd that had been agreed for January.

However, the Iranian minister hinted that agreeing to the increased production was a gesture by major producers like Saudi Arabia to ensure that countries like Russia would continue to contribute to future supply agreements in OPEC+.

Reports have suggested that members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries and allies agreed on Tuesday to allow Russia and Kazakhstan to increase their output by a combined 75,000 bpd in February and a further 75,000 bpd in March.

That would mean that OPEC+ would maintain an overall cut of 7.05 million bpd by March as the grouping seeks to prevent a collapse in global prices amid the unpredictable situation of the oil markets because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Earlier reports had suggested that Saudi Arabia, the main OPEC producer, had offered to make an extra cut of 400,000 bpd in February and March to persuade other OPEC+ members to hold production steady.

Zanganeh said that the extra cut by Saudi Arabia had not been officially confirmed during the virtual ministerial meeting held on Tuesday although he suggested it could be announced in later media briefings.

Iran, whose oil output has been affected by a series of American sanctions since 2018, is exempt from OPEC and non-OPEC cuts along with Libya and Venezuela.

CBI Governor Says Prepayment for COVID-19 Vaccines Now Finalized

TEHRAN (Dispatches) – Central Bank of Iran (CBI) Governor Abdolnasser Hemmati says the country has finally made a prepayment for purchase of vaccines to tackle COVID-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

Hemmati said on Tuesday that the prepayment for 16.8 million doses of vaccines from COVAX, an initiative sponsored by the World Health Organization (WHO), had taken place in the first day after January holidays.

He described the provision of the funds to the WHO agent in Switzerland as a complicated operation because it had to get round the U.S. sanctions on Iran and its access to the dollar system.

CBI's international affairs department, two Iranian banks and three European banks had contributed to the operation to finalize the prepayment, said Hemmati.

Iranian authorities have repeatedly criticized the United States for its inhuman way of pressuring Iran economically as U.S. sanctions have effectively barred

Tehran from accessing critical drugs and medical equipment it needs to battle one of the largest outbreaks of the coronavirus in the Middle East.

While pursuing a home-grown program to develop a safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine, Iran has allocated funds needed for imports of abundant supplies of vaccines from abroad.

However, Washington has blacklisted the entire banking system in Iran, making it extremely difficult for the country to settle payments that should be processed within the international banking system.

In his Tuesday post on Instagram, Hemmati did not elaborate on the amount of prepayment made for the supply of 16.8 million doses of COVAX vaccines to Iran. However, he reiterated that CBI had more funds ready for purchase of other types of COVID-19 vaccines if the Iranian health ministry authorizes those vaccines for use inside the country.

Afghan Diplomat Calls for Ties With Razavi Khorasan Province

MASHHAD (IRNA) – Afghan consular general in Mashad in a meeting with Razavi Khorasan governor called for cultural relations between Herat and Razavi Khorasan Province.

Abdoljaber Ansari called for removal of obstacles for developing cooperation. He said that Razavi Khorasan science and technology parks can cooperate with Afghan science parks in Herat. Meanwhile, Razavi Khorasan governor Mohammad Sadeq Motamedian said that there are extensive capacities on both countries to enhance level of economic cooperation.

Referring cultural, language and religious commonalities between Iran and Afghanistan, he called for developing cooperation between Herat and Razavi Khorasan.

He added that Iranian and Afghan private sectors would utilize economic and investment capacities for enhanced cooperation.

In the meantime, in a separate meeting deputy governor of Herat Munesh Hassanzadeh, Motamedian said both sides are willing to develop economic, social and cultural ties.

He also called for paving the way for developing tourism between two countries.

Tax Revenue to Increase in Next Year Budget

TEHRAN (IP) – The spokesman of the Budget Integration Commission of Iran's parliament says the total income of the government from taxes in the next year's budget has increased.

Speaking at a press conference on Tuesday, Rahim Zare elaborated on the approvals of the next year's budget in the commission regarding the government's revenue clauses.

The spokesman of the Parliamentary Budget Integration Commission announced the allocation of 15% of customs duties and commercial profits from the import of cosmetics for the treatment of special patients.

He said: "The government is required to levy a 10 percent tax on all physicians next Iranian year (Starting from March 21st)."

According to another approval of the Budget Integration Commission, for all individuals and entities who have not paid their taxes by the end of this year, the Iranian National Tax Administration will withdraw 30% of the deferred tax claims from their bank accounts.

In an exclusive interview with Iran Press on the sidelines of the press conference, Zare referred to the differences between the government and the parliament over the different rates for foreign currencies, saying: "17,500 toman will be the basis of calculation for dollar in the budget."

Zare said that the parliament has been working on next year's budget, to create jobs and improve people's livelihood.

Turkish Companies Seeking to Increase Cooperation With Iran

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Turkey Mohammad Farazmand said on Tuesday that Turkish companies are seeking to expand relations with Iran, Trend reports citing IRNA.

Farazmand said that Turkey is one of the most serious and important neighbors for the Islamic Republic of Iran. In 2019 and 2020, Iran and Turkey faced very unintended conditions that had a huge impact on Iran-Turkey relations, he added.

He went on to say that Iran is trying to continue its economic and political relations with Turkey through video contacts in the COVID-19 era. There are many requests from major Turkish holdings to operate in the Islamic Republic of Iran, which is a show of interest for Turkish investors to invest in Iran, he noted.

Minister Welcomes Connection of RPPC to National Rail Network

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – During the meeting of Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade Alireza Razm Hosseini and Head of Iran Chamber of Cooperatives (ICC) Bahman Abdollahi, it was announced Rafsanjan Pistachio Producers Cooperative (RPPC) is ready to connect to the national rail network and to cooperate in construction of a terminal for exports.

According to the ICC, pistachio is one of the most important export and agro items of the country which earns forex as the country's annual pistachio production is between 250,000 to 300,000 tons.

Rafsanjan Pistachio Producers Cooperative with more than 50 years of experience in this industry is located in the city of Rafsanjan, the pole of pistachio production of Iran and the world, and in fact in the capital of the world pistachio.

One of the important infrastructures for developing exports is the logistics and transportation. Currently the national rail network has been expanded and it has been connected to the neighboring states and from those countries to the world.

RPPC is located 20 kilometers off the main Rafsanjan rail line and the company has announced its readiness to connect to the rail network in order to reduce transportation cost and to speed up access to the markets and it has announced readiness for joint construction of railway for 20 kilometers in order that the company can have access to the main railway line of Rafsanjan and activate the export terminal.

The industry minister welcomed this idea and announced his support.



Johnson Cancels India Visit Amid COVID Crisis

LONDON (Dispatches) - British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has cancelled a trip to India scheduled for later this month, citing the need to oversee the COVID-19 pandemic response in the United Kingdom.

Johnson informed Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi of the change of plans on Tuesday, a day after announcing the start of a new national lockdown in England, a spokeswoman for his office said.

"In light of the national lockdown announced last night, and the speed at which the new coronavirus variant is spreading, the prime minister said that it was important for him to remain in the UK so he can focus on the domestic response to the virus," the spokeswoman said.



Dozens of Hong Kong Opposition Figures Arrested

HONG KONG (Dispatches) - As many as 50 Hong Kong opposition figures were arrested Wednesday under a new national security law in the largest operation yet against Beijing's critics, deepening a crackdown sweeping the financial hub.

The latest police operation comes as China stamps out opposition to its rule in the semi-autonomous business hub after millions hit the streets in 2019 with huge and sometimes violent democracy protests.

Opposition figures and parties took to their Facebook and Twitter accounts to confirm at least 21 arrests, most on a charge of "subversion".



Last Five Years Worst of the Worst for North Korea



PYONGYANG (Dispatches) - North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un admitted the country's economic development plan had fallen short in "almost all areas" as he opened a rare congress of the ruling Workers' Party, state media reported on Wednesday.

Kim called the past five years "unprecedented" and the "worst of the worst" time for the country.

"The surest and fastest way to tackle the current multiple challenges facing us is to make every possible effort to strengthen our own power and our own self-reliant capacity," he was quoted by Yonhap news agency as saying.

The gathering is the first of its kind in five years, only the eighth in the nuclear-armed country's history and comes weeks before US President-elect Joe Biden takes office.

Relations with Washington have been deadlocked since talks between Kim and President Donald Trump stalled over sanctions relief and what Pyongyang would be willing to give up in return.

At the same time the North is more isolated than ever after closing its borders last January to protect itself against the coronavirus that first emerged in neighbouring China, a key ally.

The congress opened on Tuesday in the capital, the official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reported.

Pictures in the Rodong Simmun ruling party newspaper showed 7,000 delegates and attendees packed into the cavernous hall, none of them wearing masks.

On the first day of his work review, Kim said the results of the last five-year economic development strategy "fell extremely short of our goals in almost all areas", KCNA reported.

The plan was quietly scrapped ahead of schedule last year.

"We intend to comprehensively analyse in depth ... our experiences, lessons and the errors committed," added Kim, who wore a black suit and a lapel badge of his father and grandfather.

KCNA's transcript did not specify any of the mistakes, and gave no indication Kim mentioned either Washington or Seoul in his speech, which is expected to continue on Wednesday.

Al Jazeera's Rob McBride, reporting from the South Korean capital, Seoul, described as "incredible" Kim's admission of failure.

"It does illustrate just how dire the economic position North Korea finds itself at the moment," he said.

The coronavirus pandemic has added to the pressures on the North, with Pyongyang blockading itself far more effectively than even the most hawkish backer of sanctions could ever hope to achieve.

Trade with China has shrunk to a tiny fraction of the usual level, while many foreign embassies have closed or drastically reduced their operations.

On the global pandemic, Kim lauded party workers for ensuring "stable situations against the coronavirus from beginning to end".

Venezuela Socialist Party Takes Control of Congress

CARACAS (Dispatches) - Nicolas Maduro extended his grip on power on Tuesday as the governing socialist party prepared to assume the leadership of Venezuela's congress, the last institution in the country it did not already control.

Maduro's allies swept legislative elections last month boycotted by the opposition and denounced as a sham by the United States, the European Union and several other foreign governments. While the vote was marred by extremely low turnout, it nonetheless seemed to relegate into irrelevancy the US-backed opposition led by 37-year-old legislator Juan Guaido.

Exactly a year ago, Guaido, in a blue suit and tie, tried to scale a spiked iron fence to get past a group of riot police blocking him from attending the parliament's inaugural session, which according to the constitution must be held every year on January 5. A far cry from that electric display of defiance, Guaido this year was expected to meet via Zoom with a cohort of opposition leaders for their own virtual parliamentary session.



Tedros "Very Disappointed" WHO Experts Blocked From China

GENEVA (Reuters) - The head of the World Health Organization said on Tuesday he was "very disappointed" that China has still not authorized the entry of a team of international experts to examine the origins of the coronavirus.

The 10-strong team had been due to set off in early January as part of a long-awaited mission to probe early cases of the coronavirus, first reported over a year ago in China's Wuhan.

"Today we learned that Chinese officials have not yet finalised the necessary permissions for the team's arrival in China," WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told an online news conference in Geneva.

"I have been in contact with senior Chinese officials and I have once again made it clear the mission is a priority for the WHO," he said of the trip he said was developed with Beijing. The mission was due to be led by Peter Ben Embarek, WHO's top expert on animal diseases that cross the species barrier, who went to China on a preliminary mission last July.

Two members of the international team had already set out on their journey to China. One has now turned back and the other is in transit in a third country, emergencies chief Mike Ryan said. However, he added: "We trust and hope that it is just a logistic and bureaucratic issue that can be resolved very quickly."

Ahead of the trip, Beijing has been seeking to shape the narrative about when and where the pandemic began, with senior diplomat Wang Yi saying "more and more studies" showed that it emerged in multiple regions. Ryan has previously called this "highly speculative".

China has dismissed criticism of its handling of early cases that emerged in late 2019, although some including U.S. President Donald Trump have questioned Beijing's actions during the outbreak.

Washington, which has announced plans to leave the WHO, has called for a "transparent" investigation and criticized its terms under which Chinese experts conducted the first phase of research.

Qataris Give Cautious Welcome to PGCC Agreement

DOHA (Dispatches) - An agreement signed by Persian Gulf Arab leaders aimed at resolving the Persian Gulf crisis has been cautiously welcomed by Qatari nationals on Tuesday.

Persian Gulf leaders signed a "solidarity and stability" agreement towards ending the diplomatic rift with Qatar at a summit in Saudi Arabia, the dialogue taking place amid a breakthrough in the dispute that started in June 2017.

Later on Tuesday, Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud said the kingdom and its three Arab allies agreed to restore full ties with Doha following the agreement.

Many Qataris received the latest developments with mixed feelings, saying they are relieved there is progress and the opening of the land border but remain concerned about the future.

"I was happy to hear [about the reconciliation] but I worry because of the trust ... the trust is not there any more," Ajayan al-Hebabi, a Qatari entrepreneur, told Al Jazeera.

"I think it [the deal] will last, but maybe it would take time [for the trust]," al-Hebabi, 45, said.

Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain cut diplomatic and trade ties and imposed a land, sea and air blockade on Qatar in June 2017.

The quartet accused Doha of, among other things,

supporting "terrorist" groups and being too close to Iran, allegations Qatar has consistently denied.

Following numerous rounds of talks - brokered by Kuwait and the United States - Saudi Arabia, on Monday, announced the reopening of its borders with Qatar ahead of the summit. Al-Hebabi said he was shocked when the blockade was imposed.

The first year was "especially" hard, he said, not just as a member of a tribe that spans across the Persian Gulf region, but also as a business owner.

Al-Hebabi, who owns a consultancy firm and a textiles company, hopes that solving the dispute and the lifting of the blockade will help his businesses after years of trying to remain afloat.

"The impact was huge because it affected the flow of customers ... especially those coming from other countries," he said. "It caused delays ... and cost us a lot of money to relocate our goods."

Like al-Hebabi, 21-year-old Ali Sultan is "very happy" with the developments but feels doubtful the calm will last.

"I don't think the reconciliation will last because Saudi Arabia is indecisive," Sultan told Al Jazeera.

Like thousands of other Qataris, Sultan has been unable to perform the pilgrimage at Islam's holiest site in Mecca but hopes he will be able to do so next year.



U.S. Intel Agencies Claim Russia Likely Behind Hacking

SAN FRANCISCO (Reuters) -

The office of the U.S. Director of National Intelligence on Tuesday said Russia was "likely" behind a string of hacks identified last month that gained access to several federal agencies.

The office, along with the FBI, the National Security Agency, and Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency inside the Department of Homeland Security, in a joint statement, said the hackers' goal appeared to be collecting intelligence, rather than any destructive acts. They said they had so far identified "fewer than 10" agencies that were hacked.

The agencies said that the actor, "likely Russian in origin, was responsible for most or all of the recently disclosed, ongoing cyber compromises of both government and non-governmental networks." The investigation is continuing, they said, and could turn up additional government victims.

It was the first formal statement of attribution by the Trump administration. Elected officials briefed on the inquiry and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo had previously said Russia was behind the hacking spree, but President Donald Trump said it could have been China. The incoming administration of Joe Biden has already promised a response to the SolarWinds hacks. On Tuesday, the top Democrats on the Congressional intelligence committees underscored that need.

"Congress will need to conduct a comprehensive review of the circumstances leading to this compromise, assess the deficiencies in our defenses, take stock of the sufficiency of our response in order to prevent this from happening again, and ensure that we respond appropriately," said Rep. Adam Schiff, head of the House committee. Russian officials have denied involvement and did not immediately respond to questions Tuesday.

The penetration of departments including Defense, State, Homeland Security, Treasury, and Commerce is already considered the worst known cyber-compromise at least since electronic dossiers on most Americans with security clearances were taken from the Office of Personnel Management five years ago. Officials briefed on the case said that the main target of the hackers appeared to be email. One said that no classified networks seem to have been breached and that fewer than 50 private companies had been fully compromised, a lower number than initially feared.



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S, J, & pkg
green yard
Fully Furn

Parsian

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Zaferanieh (\$1800) 180sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, S, J, & FF

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Indonesia Records Lowest Inflation in History

JAKARTA (VNA) - Indonesia's inflation rate in December 2020 was clocked at 0.45 percent and 1.68 percent all through 2020, according to the Central Statistics Agency (BPS).

The figure is the lowest full year number in history and below Bank Indonesia's (BI) target range of 2 to 4 percent last year.

Annual core inflation, which excludes volatile food and government administered prices, fell for nine consecutive months last year up to December to 1.6 percent, a level unseen since the BPS began recording the indicator in 2004, signaling weakening demand and purchasing power.



Saudi Arabia, Russia Reach Oil Compromise, Sending Crude Above \$50

LONDON (Dispatches) - Saudi Arabia and Russia reached a compromise on oil policy among the world's biggest producers, agreeing to maintain output levels through February and delay any increase until March, according to officials familiar with negotiations.

West Texas Intermediate futures, the gauge for U.S. crude, passed \$50 a barrel for the first time since February last year on the agreement, before slipping back to \$49.69, up 4.4% on the day. Brent crude, the international benchmark, rose 3.7% at \$52.98 a barrel.

After failing to agree to a deal on Monday, the two sides are set to complete the compromise later Tuesday, the people said, in a scheduled meeting between members of the Saudi-led Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and a Russian-led contingent of big oil producers.

OPEC met virtually Monday with 10 Russia-led producers, a group that together has been dubbed OPEC-plus, in the first of their monthly meetings to review global oil demand and their output strategy. Last month, they agreed to increase production by 500,000 barrels a day, bringing their net cuts since the start of the pandemic to some 7.2 million barrels a day. The group is planning to restore a total of 2 million barrels a day of output in the coming months.

Russia was initially opposed to a rollover of last month's restrictions and had pushed for an increase of 500,000 barrels a day for February, after winning agreement from the broader group for a similar increase in January. Moscow argued that oil demand would return as world-wide vaccination programs start to make a dent in the pandemic, delegates said.

But Saudi Arabia and most other producers wanted the current output restrictions extended, people familiar with their view said, concerned about the return of lockdowns and the slow rollout of vaccines. Algeria, for instance, pushed for them to be maintained until the end of March, they said.

A deal, while restricting supply in the short term, would signal continued willingness in the wider OPEC-plus group to work together to bolster prices. A Saudi-Russian standoff early last year contributed to a crash in prices just as the pandemic was destroying demand. But they quickly agreed to act together to cut global oil supplies and stabilize prices.

OPEC-plus agreed last year to cut output by a record 9.7 million barrels a day, and envisioned restoring it in increments of 2 million barrels a day assuming demand returned. In the summer, they moved to return the initial 2 million, and last month agreed to add a further 500,000 barrels a day.

Vietnam Buys Indian Rice for First Time in Decades

MUMBAI (Reuters) - Vietnam, the world's third biggest exporter of rice, has started buying the grain from rival India for the first time in decades after local prices jumped to their highest in nine years amid limited domestic supplies, four industry officials told Reuters.

The purchases underscore tightening supplies in Asia, which could lift rice prices in 2021 and even force traditional buyers of rice from Thailand and Vietnam to switch to India - the world's biggest exporter of the grain.

Indian traders have contracted to export 70,000 tons of 100% broken rice for January and February shipments at around \$310 per ton on a free-on-board (FOB) basis, the industry officials say.

"For the first time we are exporting to Vietnam," B.V. Krishna Rao, president of the Rice Exporters Association, told Reuters on Monday. "Indian prices are very attractive. The huge price difference is making exports possible."

Vietnam's 5% broken rice is offered around \$500-\$505 per ton, significantly higher compared to Indian prices of \$381-\$387.

"Rice imported from India is mainly used for producing animal feeds and for breweries," said a rice trader based in Ho Chi Minh City.

Dwindling supplies and continued Philippine buying lifted Vietnamese rice export prices to a fresh nine-year high.

Vietnam's total paddy output in 2020 fell 1.85% to 42.69 million tons, equivalent to around 21.35 million tons of rice, preliminary data from the government's General Statistics Office showed.



The country's rice exports in 2020 were forecast to have fallen by 3.5% to 6.15 million tons.

Robust demand from Asian and African countries has also been lifting Indian prices but they are still very competitive due to ample stocks, said Nitin Gupta, vice president of Olam India's rice business.

Vietnam could make more purchases as long as the price difference remains, Gupta said.

In December, the world's biggest rice importer China started buying Indian rice for the first time in at least three decades due to tightening supplies from Thailand, Myanmar and Vietnam and an offer of sharply discounted prices.

In 2020 India exported a record 14 million tons of rice, provisional data from the trade ministry showed.

Kuwait Discovers Two New Oil Fields

KUWAIT CITY (Dispatches) - Kuwait announced on Monday that it has discovered two new oil fields, described as of "great importance" to the national economy.

According to state news agency KUNA, which quoted Kuwait's oil minister Mohammad Al-Fares, one of the discoveries is in Houma oilfield in northwestern Kuwait, with production capacity of 1,452 barrels per day (bpd) of light oil.

The second is in the Al-Qashaniya field in the north of the country, where light oil was discovered with a commercial quantity of 1,819 bpd and 2.78 million cubic feet of associated gas per day, KUNA reported.

The minister said the discoveries were of "great economic importance" to the country, adding that they were made in regions of Kuwait not previously explored.

KUNA also said that conventional oil was also discovered in the north of the giant Burgan oilfield, with a daily production rate that exceeded 2,000 barrels, after drilling several wells in 2020 to determine the extent of the field.

Al-Fares praised the success of Kuwait Oil Company in making the discoveries at a time when the industry faced coronavirus-related challenges.



New Coronavirus Wave Seen Derailing Thailand's Economic Recovery

BANGKOK (Reuters) - A new round of restrictions in Thailand aimed at containing a fresh wave of coronavirus infections will likely derail the economy's nascent recovery from its 2020 slump.

Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha urged the public to stay home and avoid travel after authorities closed a series of venues - from schools to bars - and restricted business hours in Bangkok and some other provinces this month.

Thailand had largely controlled the virus by mid-2020 but a cluster linked to migrant workers in December has led to infections in more than half of its provinces.

Economists worry the latest outbreak will hurt retail spending and deal another blow to Thailand's key tourism industry, both central to the government's 1.9 trillion baht (\$63.57 billion) stimulus efforts to reignite growth.

"It's very tough. People don't want to spend," said Chanaporn Fongwichai, a 31-year-old clothes vendor in the city of Udon Thani, adding that sales at her shop have halved since the latest outbreak started.

Southeast Asia's second-largest economy suffered its biggest annual slump since the Asian financial crisis in the second quarter of 2020, hard hit by a ban on foreign visitors, while coronavirus curbs also hurt spending and investment.

While the loosening of restrictions gave way to a rebound in the third quarter, analysts worry fresh curbs will bring more pain to an economy expected to have slumped 6.7% in 2020 - which would be the biggest contraction in over two decades.

In December, the Bank of Thailand cut its 2021 growth forecast to 3.2% from 3.6% and some analysts have followed suit. It expects the economy to have slumped 6.6% in 2020.

CIMB Thai Bank last week slashed its 2021 growth forecast to 2.6% from 4.1%, while Tisco Group economist Thammarat Kittisiripat said he would cut his projection for this year to below 3% from 3.4% previously.

"The new wave of COVID-19 is more severe than earlier, which will disrupt the economic recovery this year," he said.

One key concern is that the outbreak could derail government efforts to revive Thailand's tourism industry, just as the country started to reopen to foreign tourists in October.

Thailand received nearly 40 million foreign visitors in 2019, whose spending accounted for 11.4% of gross domestic product that year. The government expects just 5 million foreign tourists to visit Thailand this year, down from 6.7 million in 2020.

China Tells Inefficient Firms to Shape Up or Prepare to Go Bust

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China is turning the screws on the nation's companies as authorities seek to take advantage of the global pandemic to strengthen its industrial might.

After letting inefficient firms survive for years, Beijing is now allowing them to fail. Bond defaults rose to a record \$30 billion in 2020, including high-profile enterprises that had previously counted on the implicit guarantees of the state. Scrutiny and punishment of credit-rating agencies are increasing, while domestic exchanges delisted at least 16 stocks from their main boards last year - the most in data going back to 1999.

The trend is set to pick up in 2021 as China's central bank tightens financial conditions, making it harder for both state-owned or private firms with inadequate cash flow to survive. An economic recovery and a strong currency are giving policy makers more room to focus on reducing the amount of debt in the financial system, which is at a record 277% of domestic output.

"The good thing is China will keep financial risks under control, but the bad thing is it won't bail out firms unless they are in an extreme situation," said Larry Hu, head of China economics at Macquarie Group Ltd. "The government wants to make the most of a solid growth recovery to tighten monetary policy. We may see more companies facing challenges in seeking cash."

Beijing has in recent months rolled out more measures aimed at increasing the efficiency of the country's capital markets, as well as the quality of its companies. In December alone, China tripled the maximum prison sentence for securities fraud to 15 years, proposed shortening the delisting process for unprofitable stocks and vowed to improve oversight of the country's credit-rating industry.

China also imposed a cap on bank lending to property developers, a sector that's laden with debt. In November, the top securities regulator pledged to enhance scrutiny of China's initial public offerings, while an October crackdown on the convertible bond market - a financing tool largely favored by small-cap risky issuers - involved publishing 37 directives in a single day.

As China gets tougher on industry, its loosening of control over financial markets will allow investors - rather than the state - to punish poorly-run companies and reward growth. Concern over China Inc.'s reliance on U.S. markets for fundraising may have partly driven that action, as well as the Communist Party's economic strategy of "dual circulation" that prioritizes strengthening domestic demand.

While the People's Bank of China is unlikely to hike interest rates in the coming months, it has repeatedly signaled it will moderate the supply of cheap credit. The timing makes sense - booming export growth has given the central bank room to cut back on stimulus measures deployed during the coronavirus pandemic.

Malaysia End-December Palm Oil Stocks Seen Hitting Over 13-Year Low



KUALA LUMPUR (Reuters) - Malaysia's palm oil inventories likely tumbled in December to their lowest in more than 13 years, as production of the edible oil fell for a third consecutive month while exports jumped, a Reuters survey showed.

Stockpiles in the world's second-largest producer were forecast to have declined 22% from the month before to 1.22 million tons, the smallest since June 2007, according to a median estimate of eight planters, traders and analysts polled by Reuters.

Production likely fell 11% to 1.33 million tons, its lowest since February, while exports were forecast to have risen 15% to 1.5 million tons after a sharp decline in November.

Malaysia's benchmark crude palm oil futures rallied 18% in 2020 to trade at an average of 2,700 ringgit (\$674.33) a ton, marking their second straight yearly gain, as supplies dried due to unfavorable weather while demand remained firm.

Harvesting and productivity in Malaysia's foreign workers-reliant palm plantations were hampered last year as the government barred the entry of migrant workers until the end of 2020 to curb the coronavirus outbreak.

"The market in January will observe the government's interaction on the labor moratorium and the likelihood of the re-hiring of Indonesian workers," said Marcello Cultrera, institutional sales manager and broker at Phillip Futures in Kuala Lumpur.

The Malaysian Palm Oil Board will release the official data for December on Jan. 11.

South Korean Diplomatic Delegation Heads to Tehran

TEHRAN (MNA) – A South Korean delegation is dispatched to Iran on Wednesday to discuss the issue of the chemicals tanker seized in Persian Gulf waters by IRGC due to environmental pollution.

A South Korean delegation is heading to Iran on Wednesday to seek the release of a chemicals tanker and its 20-member

crew seized in Persian Gulf waters by Iranian forces, Yonhap news agency reported.

South Korean Foreign Ministry spokesman Choi Yang Sam said on Tuesday that a delegation headed by the director-general of the region would be sent to Iran as soon as possible in an effort to resolve the issue of oil tanker seizures through negotiations.



Turkey's Exports Hit All-Time Monthly High of \$17.84b in December

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkey has closed 2020, a year overshadowed by the coronavirus pandemic, by achieving its highest December exports ever, the country's trade minister announced Tuesday.

"Turkey's exports have surged by 16% to an all-time monthly high of \$17.84 billion in December," Ruhsar Pekcan said during a year-end foreign trade evaluation meeting in the capital Ankara.

"Exports of \$17.8 billion are a concrete indicator of Turkey's strength and dynamism in foreign trade," Pekcan noted.

The headline figure, despite the severe economic contraction and shrinking in foreign demand in the country's main export markets, especially the European Union, is the exporters' success, the minister stressed.

"I sincerely congratulate our exporters who have ensured that a difficult year such as 2020 is closed with such an important record."

Imports came in at \$22.4 billion last month with an 11.7% increase compared with the same month of the previous year. Additionally, gold-excluding imports totaled \$20.3 billion in December, she stated.

Turkey's export-to-import coverage ratio reached 79.6% last month, up from 76.7% in December 2019.

Foreign trade has shown significant resistance in 2020, clouded by the outbreak and other global and regional factors, Pekcan said.

She said global exports are expected to see a nominal decrease of 11.7% in 2020, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The drop in Turkey came in below this figure to stand at 6.3%, said the minister.

"Due to the pandemic, our exports declined to \$32.4 billion in the second quarter of the year. In the third quarter of the year, they reached \$43.3 billion with a rapid recovery of 33.8% compared with the previous quarter," Pekcan said.

She noted that the last quarter of the year saw exports moving to the growth phase and coming above the level of \$50 billion for the first time.

"Exports worth \$51.2 billion in the last quarter have also marked the highest ever quarterly period," Pekcan said.

Sales surged 18.4% quarter-on-quarter in the October-December period. Compared with the same period of last year, they were up 6.7%.

The country closed 2020 with \$169.5 billion in exports, she said, exceeding the target of \$165.9 billion in the medium-term program.

On the other hand, imports were up 4.3% and reached \$219.4 billion. The exports-to-imports coverage ratio hit 77.3% in 2020.

"Turkey's imports excluding gold stood at \$194.2 billion, posting a decline of 2.4% during the same period."

Turkish exports in 2019 were around \$180.8 billion while imports totaled \$210.3 billion.

Pekcan emphasized that Turkey's exports displayed a better performance than other countries.

"A rapid recovery process started in our exports especially in the period after the second quarter," the minister noted. Compared with other countries, Turkey has given one of the fastest positive responses to policy measures taken after the pandemic and has been among positively decoupled countries, she said.



This would become even more visible once the other countries unveil their fourth-quarter trade figures, she added.

Turkey managed to boost its share in global trade to 1.03%, exceeding the 1% threshold for the first time ever in the January-October period, among the countries that have announced their data, Pekcan said. The country had taken a 0.96% share of global trade in 2019, which was the highest figure to date.

"This year, we will reach a 1% share in the global goods trade for the first time in our history. And in 2021, our primary goal will be to protect this share," said Turkish Exporters' Assembly (TİM) Chairperson Ismail Güllü.

Germany was the country's top export market in 2020 with \$16 billion, followed by the U.K. with \$11.2 billion and the U.S. with \$10.2 billion, the data showed.

Sales to Israel and Russia also saw a noteworthy increase, the minister said.

"In 2020, there were 44 countries where we broke export records. The top three of these were the United States, Israel and South Korea, respectively," Pekcan said.

On the other hand, Turkey received the most goods from China, boosted by an increase in imports of mobile phones, tablets and electronic goods, the minister noted.

China was followed by Germany and Russia, she added.

Looking at the industries, the automotive industry maintained its rank with the highest exports, ending 2020 with around \$25.55 billion, followed by chemical products with \$18.26 billion and ready-to-wear with \$17.14 billion, the data showed.

Turkey will boost efforts to analyze the transformation that emerged in global supply chains due to the outbreak and take action to strengthen its position in global trade, Pekcan said.

"We will work to achieve the program goal of \$184 billion," the minister noted.

The number of exporters in the country increased by 3.6% year-on-year, she said, exceeding 87,400.

U.S. May Face...

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He also referred to the massive funeral of General Soleimani as the "first slap" that the U.S. received in the face for the assassination attack, saying the second blow was Iran's missile strike on the U.S. base of Ain al-Assad in Iraq.

He said the next slap to the arrogant power, the U.S., would be the Islamic Republic's dominance in the software sector.

The commander said that Iran has given two slaps to the U.S. and the next one is imminent.

"The first slap was the great funeral held by the Iranian nation for the ex-IRGC Chief Qasem Soleimani, the second slap was IRGC's attack on the American airbase in Iraq, and the next slap is the software victory over the hegemony of arrogance, which is an important issue," he said.

He added that the U.S. worming policies applied in the region have all been failures.

Serious Evidences...

FROM PAGE 1

He further stressed the need to put aside double-standard behavior towards the fight against state terrorism.

Then, he called on global community to take part in the campaign against "this inhuman, illegitimate and felonious move."

Referring to the record "direct involvement" of Zionist regime's spy services in assassinating Iranian scientists, Hatami said that there is also serious evidence about the Zionist regime's role in this terror [assassination of Fakhri Zadeh].

Iran sees silence on this terrorist act as an excuse for its repetition and insecurity in the world, the defense minister underlined.

He further announced that Iran preserves right to respond to the assassination.

"First to investigate this crime and firmly prosecute its perpetrators and its commanders, second to continue the martyr's scientific and technological efforts in all the sectors where he was active," Khamenei.ir quoted the Leader of the Islamic Revolution His Eminence Imam Seyed Ali Khamenei as speaking about the incident.

GitHub...

FROM PAGE 1

The U.S. has long imposed broad sanctions on multiple countries, including Iran. These sanctions prohibit any U.S. company from doing business with anyone in a sanctioned country.

In 2019, GitHub implemented access restrictions for developers in Iran and several other countries to comply with U.S. sanctions laws.

"All developers should be free to use GitHub, no matter where they live. At the same time, GitHub respects and abides by US law, which means government sanctions have limited our ability to provide developers in some countries the full range of GitHub services," Friedman said.

GitHub took its case to the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), part of the U.S. Treasury Department, and began a lengthy and intensive process of advocating for broad and open access to GitHub in sanctioned countries.

GitHub said it was in the process of rolling back all restrictions on developers in Iran, and reinstating full access to affected accounts.

"We are working with the U.S. government to secure similar licenses for developers in Crimea and Syria as well," Friedman informed.

More than 56 million developers are now building on GitHub globally. This includes more than 1.9 billion contributions added and more than 60 million new repositories created, according to GitHub's annual State of the Octoverse Report.

U.K. Heads for Deeper Double Dip Recession With Third Lockdown



LONDON (Dispatches) - Britain is headed for a sharper double-dip recession after Prime Minister Boris Johnson plunged the nation back into a lockdown with no clear end.

Economists said the action, announced Monday to prevent the health service from being overwhelmed by surging coronavirus infections, all but certainly means the U.K. economy will shrink in the first quarter. That will delay the recovery from the worst downturn in three centuries, which analysts say already was unlikely before 2023.

Closing schools means this hit will be worse than the restrictions imposed in November, according to Bloomberg Economics. It also puts pressure on Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak to spend more supporting businesses and workers, an effort the Institute of Economic Affairs said the measures may cost the economy 18 billion pounds (\$24 billion) a month -- the equivalent of 18% of gross domestic product.

"This is bad," Ludovic Subran, chief economist at Allianz SE said in a Bloomberg Television interview. "The U.K. is a service economy, so it's all about shutting down services, and it's bad because things like schools are a big part of GDP. Also because they play a role in how much parents are able to work."

Sunak is due to announce a specific package. It may also prompt the Bank of England to provide more support, either through quickening the pace of its bond-purchase program, or taking more drastic measures such as cutting interest rates below zero for the first time.

"The financial support for businesses needs to be stepped up in line with the devastating restrictions being placed on them," said Adam Marshall, director general of the British Chambers of Commerce. "Businesses must not be allowed to fail now, when the vaccine rollout provides light at the end of this long tunnel."

U.S. Factory Activity Near 2-1/2-Year High

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - U.S. factory activity accelerated to its highest level in nearly 2-1/2 years in December as the coronavirus pandemic continues to pull demand away from services towards goods, though spiraling new infections are causing bottlenecks in supply chains.

The strength in manufacturing reported by the Institute for Supply Management (ISM) on Tuesday likely helped to soften the blow on the economy in the fourth quarter from the relentless spread of COVID-19 and government delays in approving another rescue package to help businesses and the unemployed.

The ISM said the virus was "limiting manufacturing growth potential" because of absenteeism and short-term shutdowns to sanitize facilities at factories and their suppliers.

"U.S. manufacturing should fare reasonably well this winter as businesses need to restock inventories and the shift in consumer spending away from services to goods helps manufacturers," said Ryan Sweet, a senior economist at Moody's Analytics in West Chester, Pennsylvania.

The ISM's index of national factory activity rebounded to a reading of 60.7 last month. That was the highest level since August 2018 and followed a reading of 57.5 in November. A reading above 50 indicates expansion in manufacturing, which accounts for 11.9% of the U.S. economy. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast the index would slip to 56.6 in December.

But some of the surprise rebound in the ISM index was due to an increase in the survey's measure of supplier deliveries to a reading of 67.6 last month from 61.7 in November.

A lengthening in suppliers' delivery times is normally associated with a strong economy and increased customer demand, which would be a positive contribution. But in this case slower supplier deliveries also indicate supply shortages related to the pandemic.

Nevertheless, demand for manufactured goods has been strong as the resurgence in new COVID-19 cases has led to fresh business restrictions across the United States, largely impacting the vast services sector.



A large section of the population continues to work and take classes at home, fueling a scramble for electronics, home improvement products and other goods like exercise equipment.

Computer and electronic products manufacturers said they continued to have "tailwinds from the COVID-19 pandemic research support for vaccines and treatments,"

adding that "business picked up for us in the last month."

Makers of miscellaneous products said "sales are now exceeding pre-COVID-19 levels." Electrical equipment, appliances and components producers reported that business was stronger than expected, "with higher demand for many products."

Despite strong demand, manufacturing output is still about 3.8% below its pre-pandemic level, according to the Federal Reserve. That could persist for a while as the new wave of infections causes disruptions to labor and the supply chain. Food manufacturers complained the virus was "affecting us more strongly now than back in March." Similar sentiments were echoed by transportation equipment makers who said the outbreaks were constraining suppliers. Plastics and rubber products also reported that their suppliers were having difficulty finding and retaining labor.

Moscow...

FROM PAGE 1

"The task of creating conditions for the stable implementation of comprehensive agreements has grown far more difficult," Zakharova said.

The Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman said that at the December 21 ministerial level meeting Russia stressed more than once that "guidelines for normalization over JCPOA are found in the plan proper" and require systematic compliance with the agreements by all parties that developed and concluded them.

"In the unanimously approved Joint Statement the vector for further onward movement was charted very clearly. All JCPOA signatories, including Iran, came out in favor of the need for handling the remaining challenges to the implementation of the JCPOA and urged the United States to instantly give up its subversive policies and to comply with all obligations assumed under the UN Security Council's Resolution 2231 without any preconditions," the spokesperson said.

She said that when this happened, Tehran must be prepared to reciprocate. "We proceed from the understanding that this should be precisely the focus of all available resources. There should be persistent collective work for the elimination of the accrued problems and against creating new ones," Zakharova concluded.

McLaren F1 Driver Norris Tests Positive for Coronavirus

LONDON (Dispatches) - British driver Lando Norris has tested positive for coronavirus while on holiday in Dubai, Formula One team McLaren said on Tuesday.

The 21-year-old, who finished ninth in last season's standings, with 97 points, is self-isolating at his hotel.

"McLaren can confirm that Lando Norris tested positive for Covid-19 yesterday in Dubai, where he is currently on holiday ahead of a planned training camp," read a statement on the team website.

Switchboard:
(+98) (21) 44253448
Public Relations Tel:
(+98) (21) 44253450
Editorial Board: 44253449
Public Relations Fax:
(+98) (21) 44253395
Advertising Department:
Tel/Fax: (+98) (21) 44253335-9/44253234
Website:
http://www.irannewsdaily.com

E-Mail Address:
info@irannewsdaily.com
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Juve Defender Alex Sandro Positive for Coronavirus

TURIN (Dispatches) - Juventus defender Alex Sandro has tested positive for coronavirus, the Italian champions confirmed.

Juventus said that "following the appearance of some mild symptoms" a test revealed the 29-year-old was positive for Covid-19. "The player has already been placed in isolation."

Braslian Sandro played for 83 minutes in Juventus' 4-1 win over Udinese on Sunday. Juventus added: "The club is in contact with Health Authorities to define an effective implementation of the protocols required to allow for the training and competition activities of the team."

8 IRAN NEWS

SPORTS

THURSDAY JANUARY 7, 2021

Antetokounmpo Nets 43 for Bucks to Defeat Pistons

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Giannis Antetokounmpo poured in 43 points -- including a career-high 30-point first half -- as the Milwaukee Bucks downed the visiting Detroit Pistons 125-115.

He added nine rebounds and four assists, while Khris Middleton contributed 19 points, nine rebounds and four assists. Jue Holiday had 15 points, seven assists, six rebounds and three steals and D.J. Augustin added 11 points and six assists. The teams will play once again in Milwaukee on Wednesday. Derrick Rose had 24 points and eight assists to lead Detroit. Jerami Grant also scored 24 points, while Svi Mykhailiuk, Sekou Doumbouya and Wayne Ellington added 13 apiece.

The Pistons played without starter Blake Griffin, who was rested with the team playing its third game in four days. Point guard Killian Hayes departed in the third quarter with a hip injury.

Dallas Mavericks 113 - Houston Rockets 100

Luka Doncic produced a 30-point triple-double, his first of the season, while Tim Hardaway Jr. repeatedly drilled timely perimeter shots as Dallas held off host Houston.

Doncic, who sat in a loss at Chicago on Sunday with a quad contusion, finished with 33 points, 16 rebounds and 11 assists to pace the Mavericks. Hardaway scored 30 points off the bench on 8-of-10 3-point shooting. Christian Wood led the Rockets with 23 points and seven rebounds, but the guard trio of James Harden (21 points, 10 assists), Eric Gordon (20 points) and John Wall (14 points, four assists) shot a combined 14 of 39.

Philadelphia 76ers 118 - Charlotte Hornets 101

Tobias Harris scored 22 points to lead seven players in double figures -- including all five starters -- as host Philadelphia defeated Charlotte.

Joel Embiid added 14 points and 11 rebounds, Danny Green contributed 13 points, and Ben Simmons had 12 points, 10 rebounds and six assists for the Sixers, who won their fourth in a row and 13th straight over the Hornets.

Seth Curry and Tyrese Maxey added 11 points each and Dwight Howard grabbed 13 rebounds off the bench. Shake Milton scored 10 points.



Golden State Warriors 137 - Sacramento Kings 106

Stephen Curry followed up a career-best 62-point effort with 30 more in just 31 minutes, propelling host Golden State to a second straight run-away win while ending a three-game losing streak to Sacramento. Seven Warriors, including three reserves, scored in double figures. Golden State tied the franchise record for points in the 2-year-old Chase Center -- set one night earlier.

Harrison Barnes, a member of Golden State's 2015 championship team, had 18 points for Sacramento, sharing team honors with De'Aaron Fox.

Orlando Magic 103 - Cleveland Cavaliers 83

Aaron Gordon highlighted his 24-point performance by sinking a career high-tying six 3-pointers to lift host Orlando to a victory over Cleveland.

Gordon added 11 rebounds and Orlando made a season-high 15 3-pointers. Nikola Vucevic had 23 points, Terrence Ross added 15 and Khem Birch collected 12 points and a career high-tying 12 rebounds for Orlando, who snapped a two-game losing streak.

Miami Heat 118 - Oklahoma City Thunder 90

Kelly Olynyk, making his first start of the season, had 11 points during a 20-0 third-quarter run, leading host Miami past Oklahoma City.

Bam Adebayo led Miami with 20 points on 9-for-10 shooting. He added eight rebounds and four assists. Olynyk finished with 19 points and eight rebounds, making 7-of-9 shots, including 5-of-7 on 3-pointers. Jimmy Butler finished with 18 points and six assists, and Tyler Herro notched seven points to go with game highs of nine rebounds and eight assists in just 29 minutes.

Guardiola Confident De Bruyne Will Commit Future to Man City

LONDON (Dispatches) - Pep Guardiola expects Kevin De Bruyne to commit his long-term future to Manchester City despite reports the Belgium midfielder's contract talks have stalled.

De Bruyne's current contract runs until 2023, but City have already offered him a new deal. That contract extension remains unsigned amid claims De Bruyne was "disappointed" City's offer did not significantly improve his reported salary of £280,000 (\$380,000) per week.

De Bruyne, voted the PFA Player of the Year last season, is said to want a deal that reflects his status as one of the world's best midfielders and vice-captain of the club.

Despite those issues, City boss Guardiola remains confident De Bruyne's future will be at the Etihad Stadium.

"I am pretty sure he will stay but at the same time we have to respect the process," Guardiola said on Tuesday.

"I don't know what is going on as I didn't speak with (City director of football) Txiki (Begiristain)."

"But he knows how we appreciate him, not just as a football player but as a person."

"He is very important for the club. I am not worried. But at the end of course it is his decision."

South Africa Complete Series Sweep

LONDON (Dispatches) - Rival captains Quinton de Kock and Dimuth Karunaratne highlighted the difficulties of "bubble life" after South Africa beat Sri Lanka by 10 wickets on the third day of the second and final Test at the Wanderers Stadium in Johannesburg on Tuesday.

The win completed a 2-0 series clean sweep for South Africa.

De Kock hailed South Africa's first series win in almost two years and praised a young bowling line-up who kept Sri Lanka under pressure for most of the two matches.

But he told SuperSport television he had "mixed feelings" about South Africa's next assignment, a tour of Pakistan later this month. "I'm keen to play some cricket but bubble life at times can be a bit frustrating," he said.

Both teams stayed at a country club for the duration of the series in a bio-secure environment to prevent the spread of Covid-19.

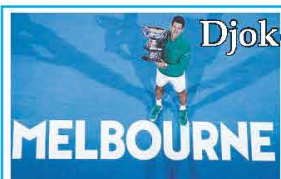
"It's really hard to stay in a bubble for a long time," said Karunaratne, who completed a tenth Test century on Tuesday morning before his dismissal for 103 started a collapse in which the last six wickets fell for 35 runs.

Sri Lanka were bowled out for 211 and South Africa knocked off the 67 runs they needed in 13.2 overs without losing a wicket.

While the South Africans will have a short time at home before leaving for Pakistan to start a two-Test series in Karachi on January 26, there will be no break for the Sri Lankans.

They will have to go into quarantine for six days after flying home on a charter flight and will have minimal time to prepare for two Tests against England in Galle, starting on January 14.

Karunaratne said he expected Sri Lanka to play well in home conditions but said both teams would face a test of mental strength because of the restrictions imposed by Covid.



Djokovic, Nadal Set to Return for 2nd ATP Cup in Australia

SYDNEY (AP) - ATP Cup champion Novak Djokovic and runner-up Rafael Nadal are set to return for the season-opening men's tennis event starting Feb. 1, but the United States will be missing because of a change in format that has halved the field.

The inaugural event last year featured 24 teams and was played in three Australian cities, with Djokovic's Serbia team beating Nadal and Spain in the final at Sydney's Ken Rosewall Arena.

The Feb. 1-5 second edition will involve 12 teams and be played entirely at Melbourne Park amid COVID-19 restrictions, along with WTA and ATP tournaments, in the week leading into the Australian Open.

The draw will be held Jan. 20, with teams divided into four groups. The winner of each

round-robin group will advance to the semifinals.

Qualification for the ATP Cup was based on the ranking of each country's top player, with Australia included on a wildcard entry. Other competing countries include Austria, Russia, Greece, Germany, Argentina, Italy, Japan, France and Canada.

All players arriving in Melbourne for the Australian Open will be required to quarantine for 14 days before the delayed start of the season's first major. The Australian Open is usually staged in the last two weeks of January, but has been pushed back to Feb. 8-21 because of travel and other restrictions in place for the COVID-19 pandemic.

Qualifying for the men's singles draw will take place in Doha, Qatar and for the women's in Dubai, both from Jan. 10-13.

As with other sports, the international tennis calendar was disrupted in 2020 because of the coronavirus pandemic, including the postponement of the French Open's start from May to September, and the cancellation of Wimbledon for the first time since World War II.

Son, Sissoko Send Spurs Into League Cup Final

LONDON (Dispatches) - Jose Mourinho urged Tottenham to kick on after Son Heung-min fired them into the League Cup final with the decisive goal in a 2-0 win against Brentford on Tuesday.

Moussa Sissoko put Mourinho's team ahead in the semi-final at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium.

But Tottenham were still searching for the knockout blow against spirited second tier Brentford until Son netted with 20 minutes remaining.

Tottenham will face Manchester United or holders Manchester City, who meet in the second semi-final, at Wembley on April 25.

It will be the club's first domestic final since losing the 2015 League Cup showpiece against Chelsea, and their first final in any competition since the 2019 Champions League defeat against Liverpool in Madrid.

"The final is now in a pocket for three months, we have to wait for the final so we have to focus on what we have coming up," Mourinho said.

"We have the FA Cup, the Premier League, the Europa League, so let's forget the final for now. But when April arrives we have to be ready and to fight for the trophy."

Mourinho, appointed in November 2019, is hoping to lead Tottenham to their first major trophy since the 2008 League Cup. He has already won the competition four times, landing his first silverware in English football in 2005 with Chelsea, where he won it twice more before a further success at Manchester United in 2017.

Mourinho is the third manager to reach a League Cup final with three different clubs, following Ron Atkinson and Ron Saunders.



Al-Attiyah Claims Dakar Third Stage Win

RIYADH (Dispatches) - Qatari driver Nasser al-Attiyah won the third stage of the Dakar Rally in Saudi Arabia on Tuesday, holding off the challenge of French arch-rival Stephane Peterhansel.

The three-time winner of the Dakar sped through a 403km loop around Wadi ad-Dawasir, the gateway to the Empty Quarter, a vast sand desert that covers much of the southern Arabian Peninsula, in 3hr 17min 39sec to take the victory.

Already winner of the prologue and Monday's second stage, Al-Attiyah finished 2:27 ahead of Toyota teammate Henk Lategan of South Africa.

"I'm quite happy," said Al-Attiyah, also an Olympic bronze medallist in the skeet at the 2012 London Games. "Today we really pushed a lot and Mathieu (Baumel, co-pilot) did the navigation well. Everything is working very well like we need it to."

"I'm really quite happy with the pace, because to open and to win the stage is good."

Peterhansel, a 13-time Dakar winner, consolidated his lead in the overall standings with a third-placed finish, 4:05 off the pace.

The Frenchman, whose previous Dakar victories came seven times in a car and six on a motorcycle, said a mixed terrain including big rocks, sandy canyons, dunes and a fast plateau had made it "a really complete stage".

"The result is not perfect because of the puncture," he said in reference to an early incident.

"But I'm really happy with the job done by Edouard Boulanger, my co-pilot. In the complicated places, he did a really good job. I'm happy with the car and I'm happy with the co-pilot, so it's good for the next day."

