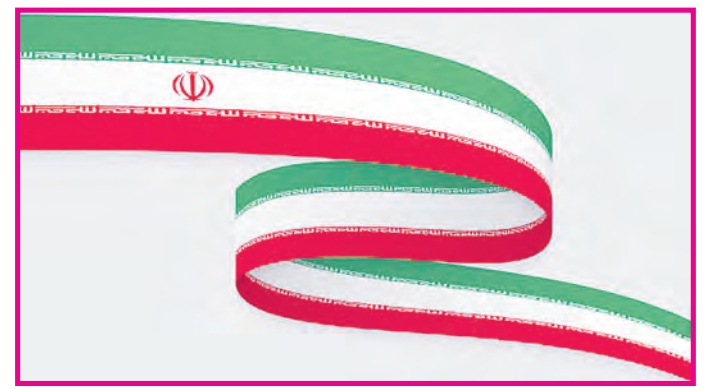


**Spokeswoman for Health and Medical Education Ministry
Sima Sadat Lari Said on Sunday That
Some 70 More Iranians Lost Their
Lives Due to COVID-19 Over the Past
24 Hours as the Death Toll Hit 57,959**

IRAN NEWS



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Iran Oil, Natural Gas Industries Growing Considerably

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Oil Minister says the country's oil and natural gas industries have developed tremendously since the victory of the 1979 Islamic Revolution of Iran. Bijan Namdar Zangeneh said Iran's natural gas reservoirs have also increased. "The [natural] gas industry has developed following the Revolution. [Natural] gas reserves amounted to 9 trillion cubic meters, but have now risen to 33 trillion cubic meters," he said. "Currently, more than 80 percent of the oil industry's stationary equipment is produced inside the country, and good progress has been made in this regard. The [production] capacity is not comparable to that of 15 years ago," the oil minister noted. "Iran is now among the top producers of petrochemical products in the region," he said. The minister noted that 95 percent of the country's population are now provided with natural gas. He also touched upon Iran's oil exports. "As long as oil sanctions are not lifted, I'm not going to make any comments," he said. **See Page 7**

Leader Pays Homage to the Founder of the Islamic Revolution



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The Ten-Day Dawn celebrations got off to an ebullient start in Iran on Sunday, marking the run-up to the 42nd anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, which overthrew the US-backed Pahlavi regime. The annual festivities started on Sunday morning, commemorating the moment the late founder of the Islamic Republic, Imam Khomeini, disembarked from an Air France jumbo jet to a massive welcome back home, ending his exile in Paris. Forty-two years ago, millions of Iranians thronged Tehran's Mehrabad Airport to catch a glimpse of the return from almost 15 years of exile of the iconoclast at whose impending arrival the British-installed and US-backed Shah had fled the country. The celebrations culminate on February 10, marking the resounding triumph of the Islamic Revolution which freed Iran from domestic despotism and foreign hegemony. The victory came under the astute leadership of Imam Khomeini who ended 2,500 years of monarchy in Iran. On Saturday, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei visited Imam Khomeini's mausoleum in southern Tehran to pay homage to the founder of the Islamic Republic. Ayatollah Khamenei visited the mausoleum of Imam Khomeini, south of Tehran, to pay tribute to the late founder of the Islamic Republic on Sunday morning. The Leader also paid tribute to Iranian martyrs laid to rest in a nearby cemetery, including the martyrs of the 1980-1988 Iraqi imposed war on Iran and a 1981 bombing in Tehran in which 72 officials were killed. With the new anniversary, the Islamic Iran puts behind a tough year which was marked by the assassination of two icons - a military commander and a nuclear scientist - and the U.S. escalation of its maximum pressure on Tehran amid a pandemic with the ultimate goal of ousting the Islamic Republic. Meanwhile yesterday, President Rouhani, in an online ceremony on Sunday inaugurated above 10 major water and electricity projects worth 47.76 trillion rials (about \$199mn) in the provinces of Kordestan and North Khorasan.

The projects included:

- The third steam unit of Shirvan combined cycle power plant in North Khorasan province using 14 trillion rials of funds for the economic development of the region, sustainable electricity supply, and increase in the capacity of the national electricity network;
 - A small-scale power station, four power supply projects, and two power transmission lines in Kordestan using 6,760 billion rials to provide electricity for subscribers and improving their satisfaction;
 - five water projects including Ramesht Dam, two water and wastewater treatment plants, and two irrigation and drainage networks in Kordestan.
- The named projects have been inaugurated on the occasion of the beginning of the 10-Day Fajr celebrations that mark the 42nd anniversary of Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution and under the framework of A-B-Iran program. A-B-Iran program (the acronyms A and B stand for water and electricity in Persian) was initiated in the Iranian calendar year 1398, during which the energy minister made 31 trips to various provinces for inaugurating over 220 major projects with a total investment of 335.6 trillion rials (about \$7.99 billion). One of the ministry's programs under the framework of the A-B-Iran is rewarding efficient electricity subscribers with a 100-percent discount on their bills.

Iran Begins Clearing Dues for Indian Basmati Rice

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - Iran, the largest importer of basmati rice, has begun to clear Indian exporters' dues, which since 2019 have risen to more than Rs 1,700 crore. The nation of the Middle East buys about 34% of the rice variety imported from India. But this exchange has been struck by a lack of an efficient payment mechanism. In recent days, Indian businesses have begun to collect payments from Iran, which has been delayed since 2019, said Vinod Kaul, executive director of the All India Rice Exporters Association. "Through UCO and IDBI banks, over 52 percent of the payment volume near Rs 900 crore to companies was issued. For the business, this is positive news." According to Kaul, in the period from April to November 2020, exports of basmati rice to Iran decreased by 25% compared to the same period in the previous year. "With the arrival of capital flows and the promise of payment, exports in this quarter will increase. By next month, a clear vision will appear," he said. **See Page 7**

ViewPoint By: Hamid Reza Naghashian U.S. Collapse With Biden to Be Accelerated

After the collapse and dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and Boris Yeltsin and later Mikhail Gorbachev's taking power, all predictions shifted towards the collapse of the hollow superpower U.S. Good old days when Muslim French Professor Roger Garaudy wrote a book titled "The U.S. at the Forefront of Degeneration" and in the book he reviewed the U.S. domestic and international situation and called the U.S. as the leader of degeneration in the world. Or some 20 years ago, the American Jewish professor Emmanuel Todd wrote a book titled "The Eagle Empire Has Fallen" where he went through the angles of the U.S. degeneration and emphasized that although the fall has already begun but still time for it to fall on the ground. Or some 12 years ago, Fareed Zakaria, a famous Indian-American journalist, political commentator, and author, and one of the renown ideologists of American think tanks and also one of the students of Samuel Huntington and published a book titled "The Post-American World" where he predicted a world where several countries and cultures play their roles and there is no news about the U.S. in view of the new world order theory and finally six years ago, the American political scientist and Harvard University Professor Joseph S. Nye wrote the book "Is the American Century Over?" where he predicted the end of the U.S. hegemony. However, none of these intellectuals and ideologists had predicted the trend of the collapse of this empire which has astonishingly been accelerated today. In an article I was reading which rightfully had been written very rationally that one should notice that the collapse of a phenomenon is different from degeneration and breakup. Collapse unlike degeneration and breakup, which has exterior form and is visible, begins from inside and it is not so visible unless it is heightened and reaches its final stages. In this regards, it is simplistic if it is thought that with departure of Donald Trump and change of administrations, the emotions and tensions from heartstrings of 80-million people camp, who voted for Trump in the 2020 presidential election, would ebb away; the heartstrings which were violent and will erode the U.S. from inside and it even may happen quietly. This shows that one cannot imagine an end to the Trumpism which enjoys certain behaviors, philosophy, school of thought, populism and lumpenism. The occupation of the U.S. Congress, known as the Capitol, which was unprecedented in the U.S. history was just a beginning. This incident, which is one of the simplest and primary signs in the crystalized political methodology in the Trump era in the U.S., should be considered as a starting point for accelerating the growing trend of extremism followed by violence and, consequently, the gradual collapse and from inside. **See Page 7**

President: Government Supports the Poor

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - President Hassan Rouhani said on Sunday that Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran supports the oppressed and poor people. President Rouhani made the remarks at an inauguration ceremony on several industrial and power projects in west and northeastern Iran. The ceremony was held through a video conference from Tehran. The government is proud of its services as it proved it is supporter of the poor people when it approved a plan to provide near half of population with free water and electricity, the president said. Pointing out that the receptions have been high throughout the history of Iran, the President noted: "It was a very glorious day in the history of Iran that all the streets from the airport to Behesht Zahra cemetery were full of people and that huge crowd of millions gathered in Behesht Zahra itself." **See Page 7**

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Islamic Revolution Successfully Thwarts Conspiracies

TEHRAN (IP)- The Army of the Islamic Republic of Iran announced in a statement that the Islamic Revolution, with support of the Iranian people, successfully defeated the various conspiracies of enemies of Islam.

The Army in a statement commemorating the anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Revolution of Iran stated: "The victory of the Islamic Revolution of Iran changed the equations of great

powers and foreign powers in the sensitive region of West Asia and shortened the illegitimate hand of the West in Iran."

The statement adds: "After 42 years, the Islamic Revolution of Iran has been able to strengthen its influential position in the field of regional and supra-regional developments more than ever, and to lead the movement for justice and freedom of the oppressed nations of the world."

Iran Backs Formation Of "All-Inclusive" Gov't in Afghanistan

TEHRAN (IFP) - Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has welcomed the idea of formation of an all-inclusive government with the participation of all ethnic and political groups in Afghanistan.

Zarif made the remarks in a Sunday meeting with a delegation of the Taliban, led by deputy head of the group's political bureau Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, in Tehran.

"Political decisions could not be made in a vacuum, and the formation of an all-inclusive government must take place in a participatory process and by taking into account the fundamental structures, institutions and laws, such as the Constitution," the top Iranian diplomat said.

Foreign Minister Zarif also expressed Iran's readiness to facilitate dialogue among the Taliban, the Afghan government and other Afghan groups, noting, "The noble people of Afghanistan have been wronged. The war and occupation of Afghanistan have dealt heavy blows to the Afghan people."

The senior Iranian diplomat further expressed hope that the Taliban would focus efforts on an immediate end to the pains and problems of Afghan people, so that the establishment of peace in Afghanistan would strip the outsiders of a pretext for occupation.



At the beginning of the meeting, head of the Taliban delegation gave a report of the Afghan peace process and the intra-Afghan negotiations.

Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar also noted that the relations between Afghanistan and Iran are based upon friendship and good neighbourliness, expressing hope for the expansion of relations between the two countries with the establishment of peace and calm in Afghanistan.

He also denounced the destructive role of ISIS in Afghanistan, expressed satisfaction with the process of intra-Afghan talks, and described the formation of an all-inclusive government with the participation of all ethnic and political groups as a necessary condition for the full establishment of peace in Afghanistan.

EGFI to Cover Iran Export Promotion to EAEU by \$800m

TEHRAN (MNA) - Chairman of Board of Directors and Chief Executive of Export Guarantee Fund of Iran (EGFI) said that the Fund is ready to back and cover export promotion and investment of Iran in Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU)'s member states.

Speaking in a meeting of Iran-EAEU Economic Diplomacy on Sat., Seyyed Abdollah Sajjadi pointed to the restriction of banking system of the country in brokerage relations with foreign banks due to the unjust and oppressive U.S. sanctions imposed against the Islamic Republic of Iran and stated that issuance of mutual guarantee letters with the help of peer institutions is of the new strategies of EGFI in line with creation of security of foreign trade.

Of five Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU)'s member states except Kyrgyzstan, other countries of the Union have been equipped with the National Export Guarantee Fund, he said, and revealed the conclusion of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Export Guarantee Fund of Iran and Export Guarantee Fund of five member states of EAEU to facilitate trade and investment activity between Iran and Eurasia.

Elsewhere in his remarks, CEO of Export Guarantee Fund of Iran pointed to the allocation of \$800 million worth of fund for promoting export activity of the Islamic Republic of Iran with five EAEU's member states including Russia, Kazakhstan, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Belarus and added, "Supporting and backing up export through coverage of Eurasia's political and trade risks will be prioritized by the Fund."

It should be noted that meeting of Iran-Eurasia Economic Diplomacy is being held with the participation of ambassadors of the country and diplomats of countries including Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan and also Iranian Minister of Energy Reza Ardakanian, Head of Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPOI) Hamid Zadboum and high-ranking economic officials.

Iranians Get Reward of Their Independence



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Majlis Speaker says the superpowers of the East and the West have always wanted to exert a lot of pressure on the country, but we have received the reward of our independence and thwarted the insidious plans of the enemy.

Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf said in an open session of the parliament today during the pre-agenda speech: "The Iranian people have been witnessing the U.S. and British bullying in Iran for many years, but the power given to them by the late Imam made the same people determine the fate of the country."

He added: "This fact provoked a reaction by the superpowers of the East and the West to exert a lot of pressure, but we have taken our reward for independence and at the same time we have thwarted the insidious plans of the enemy."

He said that if the United States believes in the JCPOA, instead of making a condition, it should show its adherence to it in practice. The JCPOA's experience is in front of the eyes of the Iranian people; the intelligent Iranians are not naive to re-enter the game of unfounded promises. It is as if we gave the money of goods to the seller but did not receive the goods. Who is willing to make such a deal? So instead of making preconditions, the new US administration should think about how to implement the lifting of sanctions and fulfill its legal obligations.

Qalibaf underlined: "Our nation, under the leadership of that right-seeking and unique great man, dared to make a revolution; a decision that, although accompanied by the hearts of many oppressed nations and the aspirations of many people, is not achieved by every nation during its lifetime. Iran was the backyard of powers that at no point in history have preferred justice and right to their colonial and arrogant interests."

He went on to say: "Nevertheless, today we have big and small problems in our country that people feel completely in their daily lives, but it is not the case that these problems are unsolvable. The revolutionary political system derived from Islam is not a dead-end for itself; because it has the promise of divine victory provided that it adheres to the divine traditions of the "public movement of the people."

The representative of the people of Tehran, Rey, Shemiranat, Eslamshahr, and Pardis in the Islamic Consultative Assembly continued by emphasizing that we consider reliance on divine guidance, trust in the people, especially the youth, and efficiency and rationality as a crucial solution in the path of the Islamic Revolution. Our way is to return to the original guidelines of the Imam: faith in God and the power of the people, self-confidence and efficiency.

Iran-Iraq Railway to Connect China to Mediterranean

TEHRAN (IFP) - First Vice-President Es'haq Jahangiri says the construction of the railway between Iran's Shalamcheh and Iraq's Basra will facilitate transit of cargos from China to the Mediterranean and connects Shalamcheh in Khuzestan province in south-western Iran to Iraq's Basra is very important to both neighboring countries.

"If it is constructed quickly, it will turn into one of the world's biggest railways," Jahangiri noted on the sidelines of a ceremony to inaugurate a number of construction projects at Abadan International Airport in Khuzestan province, south-west of Iran.

He said the railway can facilitate the transfer of goods from China to the Mediterranean with train, and will turn into one of the world's transit hubs.

The vice-president, however, noted that part of the railway that connects Iraq to Syria needs to be reconstructed. Iran had earlier linked its railway network to western Afghanistan through a joint project which was inaugurated in December 2020.

The 225-km railroad project, that connects Iran's Khaf to Afghanistan's Herat, includes four phases that are currently under construction. About 78 km of the project, which includes two phases, is on Iran's soil and the rest in Afghanistan.

Recent Nuclear Moves "Not a Violation of JCPOA"

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iranian Ambassador to Spain Hassan Qashqavi said that the recent move taken by the Islamic Republic of Iran in the nuclear field is its inalienable right not a violation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

Speaking in an interview with Spanish TV Network, Qashqavi noted that the measures taken by Iran over its nuclear program one year after former President Trump withdrew U.S. from JCPOA is based on exerting its rights under Paragraphs 26 and 36 of JCPOA and is not a violation of JCPOA commitments.

Asked about Iran's expectation of new US administration, he stated, "Basically, the United States withdrew from Iran's nuclear deal, JCPOA, and also from UNSCR 2231 and it (US) should return to JCPOA and compensates for the damages incurred to Iran as a result of its negative performance."

In response to a question on the way of Iran's taking of

revenge on the assassination of former IRGC Quds Force Commander Martyr Lt. Gen. Soleimani, Ghashghavi reiterated, "The sentiment of Iranian people following this terrorist act is exactly the same as that of the Spanish people after Madrid Railway terrorist attack in 2004 or after the Eta terrorist attacks."

The promise of taking revenge is not a political decision, but in fact the will of Iranian people, he continued.

Turning to the situation of the novel coronavirus, COVID-19, in Iran, he stated, "According to the statistics of World Health Organization (WHO), Islamic Republic of Iran showed excellent and successful performance in the fight against coronavirus despite tough and unjust sanctions imposed against the country."

Currently, three Iranian companies are producing COVID-19 vaccine independently or in cooperation with some other countries, he added.

Iranian, Indian Diplomats Discuss Bilateral Ties

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Director-General of the Middle East at the Indian Ministry of External Affairs JP Singh in a meeting with Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Abbas Araqchi on Saturday invited him to visit New Delhi for the second level of political dialogue.

JP Singh met and held talks with Araqchi on Saturday.

While presenting a report on the political dialogue process, he invited Araqchi to travel to New Delhi for the second level of political dialogue before holding the Joint Economic Commission of Iran and India.

The two sides discussed regional, international developments and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) issue.



Opening Regional Roads to Help Aras Economic Development

TABRIZ (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said economic development of Aras will be materialized by opening connecting roads in the region.

Speaking on the sidelines of his visit to Jolfa border customs office, meeting with official in Nakhchivan and visiting Iran-Nakhchivan border, Zarif said the first road which can be inaugurated would be Jolfa-Nakhchivan-Armenia, adding that it will help economic development in Jolfa and Aras.

During his visit, Zarif was briefed on the status of border trade between two countries.

He expressed happiness over ending war in Karabakh and hoped for establishing peace and friendship in the region.

Referring to his negotiations with officials of the regional states, he said closure of roads after the conflict in Karabakh was discussed and their opening will benefit all. Pointing to various facilities in the region, Zarif underlined blocking ways to conflict and restoring sustainable peace in the region.

Aseman Airlines Plans IPO Amid Pandemic Losses



TEHRAN (PressTV) - A major Iranian airline company is planning to offer its shares in the country's stock market as the aviation sector keeps grappling with the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic.

Aseman Airlines CEO Mehdi Qaderi said on Saturday that his company had started preparations to launch an initial public offering (IPO) in the local stock market.

Aseman, a subsidiary of Iran's Civil Servants Pension Fund, flies to more than 50 destinations. The airline is Iran's third largest by the size of fleet and staff.

Qaderi said Aseman's IPO is meant to enable the company to boost its cash flow and increase its financial transparency.

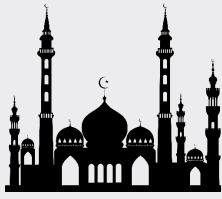
He said the move had been coordinated with high levels of the government, including people in the Iranian parliament.

The announcement comes as Iranian airlines continue to struggle with pandemic fallout, including lower demand for air travel and a series of government curbs meant to control the disease.

Iran's civil aviation authority said on Saturday that it had suspended for three weeks a weekly flight by Taban Air after the company violated social distancing requirements onboard its planes.

The government agency also said that airlines in Iran had been provided with more 20 trillion rials (\$83 million) in loans to help them cope with losses suffered because of the pandemic.

Aseman's IPO plan comes amid hopes that new rounds of divestments by government-run companies could help boost trade in Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE) where main index TEDPIX has fallen by almost a half from highs seen over the summer.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:18
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:50
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:37
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	07:03

32. And among His Signs are the ships, smooth-running through the ocean, (tall) as mountains.
33. If it be His Will He can still the Wind: then would they become motionless on the back of the (ocean).
Verily in this are Signs for everyone who patiently perseveres and is grateful.
Surah 42. Councel, Consultation (32 - 33)

Tehran, Jakarta Urged to Implement Barter Trade

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

In the meeting and pointing to this fact that Indonesia is the biggest and most populous Muslim country in the world, Karbasi said the country enjoys good potentials for cooperation. He further said the growing economic relations in the past years indicate the strong determination of both nations for developing their economic cooperation.

He then said that the trade volume of Iran and Indonesia was over \$2b in 2011 and despite several fields for cooperation, the trade volume of both states has sharply declined with intensification of the U.S. unilateral sanctions and the bilateral trade fell to \$240m in 2019. He stated fortunately the trade volume has bounced back in the first three quarters of 2020 and has stood at \$740m and this rise is an indication to the high capacities of both countries for cooperation.

Karbasi also explained that some part of trade between both countries is done indirectly and via Singapore, Dubai and Malaysia and these two countries should increase their capabilities for expanding their trade.

He also pointed to the necessity of signing preferential tariff agreement (PTA) and said ICCIMA has referred its request in this regards to the Trade Promotion Organization and it has also handed over the list of goods which can be used in barter trade and now it is the duty of Indonesian Embassy and its commercial counselors as well as ICCIMA to encourage tradesmen of both countries for cooperation.

Referring to the condition of banking relation of Tehran and Jakarta, he said there are different channels for advancing the common goals that the both sides can pick up the cooperation with using them, adding that one of those channels is barter trade for imports and exports with a mechanism accepted by both states. He noted that for such a barter trade, both sides can open a special account in the banks of both countries for imports and exports of the required goods and financial exchanges. Karbasi also reiterated that banks should ease trade for the private sector.

He further said both countries should encourage investors for investing in the suggested fields, adding that this type of investment is a win-win trade for both countries which make the bilateral tradition last longer.



Karbasi also talked about Iran's import of palm oil, saying that Malaysia is the major palm oil exporting country to Iran which is done on the barter traded basis, adding that he suggests Indonesia to use barter trade for boosting trade with Iran. He reiterated Indonesia exports palm oil to Iran and in return imports dates and this can be done on the barter trade basis. Karbasi further said Indonesia can take advantage of Iran's capabilities in the technical and engineering services, health and also transportation.

Then First Secretary of Indonesian Embassy Ms. Siti Asiyah, for his part, called for holding trade webinars and meeting in the current COVID-19 pandemic condition. She then said there are several fields for bilateral cooperation between both countries and called for access to the information about Iran's regulations regarding imports and exports.

She said one of the items for exports to Iran which has been studied by Indonesian government is the palm oil as Iran imports over one million tons of palm oil from Malaysia and other countries, and Jakarta Indonesia is keen to cooperate in this field.

Siti Asiyah also added that the field of health is of the other priorities of Indonesia for cooperation with Iran, adding that some talks have been held with Iranian tradesmen in the nanotechnology sector for joint cooperation for medical equipment.

He also said Indonesia is to hold an online trade conference on February 3, 2021 and the conference is a good opportunity for introducing capabilities and products of Indonesia.

Then the Third Secretary Ms. Novatiara, for her part, pointed to the financial and banking problems, and raised the issue of forming banking workgroup during the state talks and called for being provided with more information for barter trade in order they could be studied. She added that on cooperation in the field of palm oil, talks have started for launching a palm oil refining plant in Sirjan, Kerman Province, and Indonesian government is interested in investing in this field in Iran.

Then Indonesian Commercial Attach Dimas Prasetyo Wibowo, for his part, pointed to the decline in the volume of bilateral trade, saying that Indonesia exported 37,000 tons of palm oil to Iran in 2020 and Indonesian government seeks stability in trade and economic cooperation with Iran. He also announced the interest of Indonesian companies for cooperation with Iran and expressed hope the trade barriers would be lifted soon.

Number of Unemployed Announced

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - About 1 million people have lost their jobs in Iran over the past year, Director General of the Employment Department of the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labour, and Social Welfare of Iran Aladdin Azvaji told IRIB.

Azvaji stressed that 730,000 of them were paid unemployment insurance premiums. "There are currently 2.4 million unemployed in Iran. About 40 percent of them are university graduates. Every year, 5 percent is added to the number of unemployed university graduates," he said.

Azvaji noted that 600,000-700,000 people enter the Iranian labor market every year. "Over the past three years, an average of 450,000 jobs have been created in Iran for each year," he said.

According to the Iranian law, unemployment insurance premiums are 55 percent of the daily salary.

Sefid Dasht Co.'s Steel-Making Project Progresses 87%



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

ISFAHAN - The CEO of Sefid Dasht Steel Complex says completion and launch of the steel-making project and continuous casting is one of the important goals of the company.

Mr. Mahmoud Arbabzadeh says the project with the support and cooperation of Mobarakeh Steel Company and IMIDRO has so far progressed 87 percent physically and by its exploitation, the company can produce 800,000 tons of slab annually. He also announced the arrival of heavy roof cranes of the project into the launching stage, adding that with exploiting these cranes, the operation for installing the heavy equipment of furnaces will begin.

Arbabzadeh also said the infrastructural projects of this project include the transfer line of wastewater, power transfer line and 400-kilowatt substation with 99.5 percent progress aimed at supplying sustainable water and electric energy needed for the production units of the company will get ready to enjoy electricity blessing.

Meanwhile touching upon the implementation of developmental projects of the company like 56 percent progress of the central treatment plant of the company, manager of development and technology department Mr. Jamshid Ali Babaei said that currently the wastewater transfer line project of the town of Brojen has been launched and it functions now. He added that this project will provide different units of the company with sustainable industrial water based on the environmental standards and ISO-14001.

The company implemented quality management system based on ISO 9001:2015 standard this year and got the certificate from the international company SGS.

Iran Ready to Help Rebuild al-Biruni Tomb In Afghanistan



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts (CHTH) Ali Asghar Mounesan on Sunday expressed Iran's readiness for reconstruction of al-Biruni tomb in Afghanistan.

Mounesan said that due to the fact that al-Biruni tomb has been destroyed and is not in satisfactory situation, he had urged his deputy Mohammad Hassan Talebian to accelerate the reconstruction process.

Iran enjoys good knowledge for reconstruction of historical monuments and has prominent experts in this field, he added. As one of the greatest scholars of the medieval Islamic era, Abu Rayhan Muhammad ibn Ahmad Biruni was born on September 4, 973 in Kath, Khwarezm where he studied Islamic jurisprudence, theology, grammar, mathematics and medics, Iran Daily wrote on Thursday.

He was known as the most important analyst of Indian science to the Islamic world given his journeys to the Indian subcontinent which later led him to be recognized as the 'founder of Indology'. He was an impartial writer on custom and creeds of various nations, and was given the title 'The Master' for his remarkable description of the 11th-century India.

The scholar also made contributions to geology, and is regarded as the 'father of geodesy' for his important contributions to the field. Biruni was made court astrologer of the court of Mahmud of Ghaznavi in 1017 and accompanied him on his trips to India. He wrote his first significant work, 'Al-Athar al-Baqiyah' (Chronology of Ancient Nations) on historical and scientific chronology around 1000 A.D.

Biruni also contributed to the introduction of the experimental scientific method to mechanics, unified statics and dynamics into the science of mechanics, and combined the fields of hydro-statics with dynamics to create hydrodynamics.

Turkish Air Urged to Explain About Its Pilot Decision

TEHRAN (MNA) - Head of Civil Aviation Organization of Iran Touraj Dehqani Zangeneh said Iran has asked Turkish Air for an explanation about the decision of its pilot who changed its route to Baku.

"The pilot is the main decision-maker in a flight," he said, "On this flight, the flight visibility was 5 km with black clouds approaching."

"It was, for sure, the pilot's right to decide about the plane's destination and in this case, he chose Baku instead of Isfahan, which was not illegal."

"According to the order of the Iranian Minister of Roads, we have expressed our protest to Turkey and the Turkish Civil Aviation Authority and asked them for explanations in this regard," he added.

In related remarks on Sunday, Iranian Road Minister Mohammad Eslami said that there were no special conditions for this flight, except that the behavior of the Turkish pilot was not logical and he could have landed at Tehran's Imam Khomeini Airport."

"In unusual circumstances, Baku and Isfahan airports are alternatives for Turkish Air flights. Isfahan Airport is the first alternative, but the Turkish pilot showed unacceptable behavior and flew to Baku," Eslami added.

An Iran-bound Turkish flight from Istanbul was diverted to Baku in the early hours of Saturday.

EGFI to Cover Iran Export Promotion to EAEU by \$800m

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Speaking in a meeting of Iran-EAEU Economic Diplomacy on Sat., Seyyed Abdollah Sajjadi pointed to the restriction of banking system of the country in brokerage relations with foreign banks due to the unjust and oppressive U.S. sanctions imposed against the Islamic Republic of Iran and stated that issuance of mutual guarantee letters with the help of peer institutions is of the new strategies of EGFI in line with creation of security of foreign trade.

Of five Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU)'s member states except Kyrgyzstan, other countries of the Union have been equipped with the National Export Guarantee Fund, he said, and revealed the conclusion of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Export Guarantee Fund of Iran and Export Guarantee Fund of five member states of EAEU to facilitate trade and investment activity between Iran and Eurasia.

Elsewhere in his remarks, CEO of Export Guarantee Fund of Iran pointed to the allocation of \$800 million worth of fund for promoting export activity of the Islamic Republic of Iran with five EAEU's member states including Russia, Kazakhstan, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Belarus and added, "Supporting and backing up export through coverage of Eurasia's political and trade risks will be prioritized by the Fund."

It should be noted that meeting of Iran-Eurasia Economic Diplomacy is being held with the participation of ambassadors of the country and diplomats of countries including Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan and also Iranian Minister of Energy Reza Ardakanian, Head of Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPOI) Hamid Zadboum and high-ranking economic officials.

Iran Eyes 40% Surge in Copper Output by 2024

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's national copper company says output will surge to over half a million tons a year by 2024. Iran aims to significantly increase its copper production capacity to respond to a growing international demand for the precious metal, says a senior industry official.

Deputy Iranian industries minister Ardeshtir Saadmohmmadi said on Saturday that total capacity for copper production in Iran would increase by nearly 40 percent to top 550,000 metric tons a year by 2024.

Saadmohmmadi said Iran will spend nearly \$2.5 million to finish a total of 29 new copper production projects to meet the target. The official, who also heads the National Iranian Copper Industry Company (NICICO), said production of anode or raw copper will also surge by 16 percent this calendar year ending late March.

The NICICO aims to reach a record annual output of 280,000 tons at the end of the current calendar year. Production is expected to hit a target of 400,000 tons a year by 2024. Copper concentrate output will also double in the next two years to reach two million tons a year, according to figures by the company.

On exploration of mines, Saadmohmmadi said Iran's proven copper reserves would amount to 36.5 million tons this year with addition of two new mines, making the country the sixth largest holder of copper reserves in the world.

Facing U.S. sanctions that have hampered its crude sales, Iran has sought to activate its metals and mining sector to both boost government revenues and create thousands of new jobs. Washington started to target Iran's trade of lucrative metals in May 2019, one year after it imposed sanctions on the country's oil exports.

Algeria Launches Its Covid-19 Vaccination Campaign

ALGIERS (Dispatches) - Algeria symbolically launched its COVID-19 vaccination campaign on Saturday in the town where the country's first case of infection with the coronavirus was confirmed in March.

A 65-year-old retiree got the first shot of Russia's Sputnik-V vaccine at a hospital in the town of Blida, about 40 kilometers (25 miles) southwest of the capital, Algiers, in the presence of health authorities.

"All measures have been taken to ensure a good rollout of the vaccination campaign on the national territory," Health Minister Abderrahmane Benbouzid said. Vaccines will start being administered in all regions of the country on Sunday. The campaign is set to start with health care workers, the elderly and other vulnerable populations.



Germany Ready Ordering Vaccines for 2022

BERLIN (Reuters) - Germany is ordering vaccines for 2022 in case regular or booster doses are needed to keep the population immune against variants of COVID-19, Health Minister Jens Spahn said on Saturday, amid growing frustration in Europe at the slow pace of vaccination.

Speaking at an online town hall of healthcare workers, Spahn defended the progress made on procuring and administering vaccines, saying 2.3 million of Germany's 83 million people had already received a dose.

European governments have faced criticism over supply and production bottlenecks as vaccine makers AstraZeneca, Pfizer and Moderna have all announced cuts to delivery volumes just as they were expected to ramp up production.



New Protests in France Against Security Bill



PARIS (Dispatches) - Fresh protests were held Saturday against a French security bill which critics say will restrict the filming of police and posting images to social media, notably to document cases of police brutality.

A broad cross-section of protesters turned out in dozens of French cities, including activists from the anti-government "yellow vest" movement and others calling to protect the cultural sector.

"I have two reasons for coming today -- the comprehensive security law and also to support culture," said Kim, a 24-year-old civil service intern.

"Lots of stores are open, the metro is packed, yet cultural sites are closed, even though we can apply protective measures" against the coronavirus, she said.

Also among the protesters were young people calling for the right to hold rave parties such as one in Brittany that attracted 2,400 at the start of the year.

The demonstrators are protesting draft legislation that would ban filming police activities, which the ruling LREM party of President Emmanuel Macron has said it would rewrite.

But people are also protesting the use of surveillance tools such as drones and pedestrian cameras.

Footage of white police beating up an unarmed black music producer in his Paris studio on November 21 has fuelled anger over the legislation, condemned by many as signalling a swing to the right by Macron.

According to interior ministry figures, 32,077 people turned out to protest across France, significantly down on the 133,000 they said attended the largest protest against the measures, back in November -- although organisers put the true turnout then at more than half a million people.

Organisers put the fall in numbers down to the coronavirus restrictions, poor weather and the fact that this was just the latest in a long series of such protests.

France has recorded 75,000 deaths from coronavirus since the outbreak began and the country is bracing for another possible lockdown.

In Paris, the large Place de la République was half full, AFP journalists reported, while around 3,000 people had gathered in Montpellier, southern France.

At around 5 pm, an hour before the start of the overnight 6-6 curfew now in place as a measure against the coronavirus, clashes broke out between a group of around 50 youths and police.

After being pelted with projectiles, the police used water cannon to clear the square. The Paris prosecutors office said 26 people had been detained.

Myanmar Army Plays Down Coup Rhetoric as Fears Swirl

YANGON (AFP) - Myanmar's military on Saturday vowed to abide by the country's constitution, in an apparent backtracking after its commander-in-chief spurred fears of a coup when he suggested the charter could be repealed.

The army has for weeks alleged widespread irregularities in November's election, won in a landslide by Aung San Suu Kyi's ruling National League for Democracy (NLD).

Tensions were ramped up Tuesday when a military spokesman refused to rule out the possibility of a coup.

A day later, army chief General Min Aung Hlaing -- arguably the most powerful person in Myanmar -- said revoking the 2008 junta-scripted constitution could be "necessary" under certain circumstances.

His comments -- translated into English and published in the army-run Myawady newspaper -- sent shockwaves through the nascent democracy, which is only a decade out of the grips of a 49-year military junta.

On Saturday the army released a statement claiming its commander-in-chief had been misunderstood, though the statement did not directly address fears of an imminent coup.

"Some organisations and media defined the speech of the Commander-in-Chief as they liked... without respecting the full text of the speech," said an English translation of the statement.

"The Tatmadaw is abiding by the constitution... (and) will perform its tasks within the frame of enacted law while safeguarding it," it added, referring to the army by its official Burmese name.

The last time the country saw its constitution revoked was in 1988, when the military reinstated a junta after a popular uprising.

The general's comments on the constitution drew alarm from more than a dozen foreign missions and the United Nations, while smaller political parties called for a resolution between Suu Kyi and the military.

The country's highest Buddhist authority even stepped in, with senior monks of the State Sangha Maha Nayaka issuing a statement late Friday calling for negotiations to prevail "instead of heated arguments".

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Britain to Apply to Join Asia-Pacific Free Trade Bloc

LONDON (Dispatches) - Britain will apply to join a massive 11-nation free-trade bloc of Asia-Pacific countries, it announced Saturday, weeks after leaving the European single market with its departure from the EU.

International Trade Secretary Liz Truss will formally request Monday for Britain to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), a market representing half a billion people and roughly 13.5 percent of the global economy.

The CPTPP application will come one year after Britain left the European Union following more than forty years of membership -- and after five years of complex trade discussions.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said the potential new partnership would "bring enormous economic benefits for the people of Britain".

"Applying to be the first new country to join the CPTPP demonstrates our ambition to do business on the best terms with our friends and partners all over the world and be an enthusiastic champion of global free trade," he said.

Negotiations between the UK and the partnership -- which represents 11 Pacific Rim nations including Australia, Canada, Chile, Japan, Mexico and Vietnam -- are expected to start this year, the trade department said.

But opposition Labour party shadow international trade secretary Emily Thornberry questioned the lack of transparency surrounding the pact.

After five years of debate over Brexit trade agreements, she said people would question the British government's decision "to rush into joining another one on the other side of the world without any meaningful public consultation at all."

"At present, Liz Truss cannot even guarantee whether we would have the right to veto China's proposed accession if we join the bloc first," she said.

Republican Lawmaker Censured by Party for Voting to Impeach Trump

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - A Republican legislator from the US state of South Carolina has been censured by the state branch of the party after he voted to impeach former United States President Donald Trump earlier this month.

Congressman Tom Rice was one of 10 Republicans in the US House of Representatives who voted in favor of impeaching Trump on January 13 for "incitement of insurrection" concerning the deadly riot at the U.S. Capitol this month.

On Saturday, the South Carolina Republican Party (SCGOP) said it had formally censured Rice for his vote.

"We made our disappointment clear the night of the impeachment vote," SCGOP Chairman Drew McKissick said in a statement shared on social media, about the symbolic rebuke.

"Trying to impeach a president, with a week left in his term, is never legitimate and is nothing more than a political kick on the way out the door."

Rice has been a staunch supporter of Trump during the former president's term in the White House, but he said on January 13 that he voted for impeachment because the Capitol riot was "inexcusable".

"I have backed this President through thick and thin for four years. I campaigned for him and voted for him twice. But, this utter failure is inexcusable," Rice said in a statement at that time. Trump's impeachment for the Capitol insurrection -- his second as president -- has divided the Republican Party.

Republican Senator Mitt Romney has said he believes moving ahead with an impeachment trial in the US Senate is "appropriate", while other Republicans have questioned the constitutionality of proceedings taking place when Trump is no longer in office.

Members of the party have also argued that impeachment would hurt an already deeply divided country and urged Democrats to drop their initiative.

But despite that opposition, the Democrat-controlled House sent the impeachment article to the Senate last week and Trump's Senate trial is expected to begin in February.

To be convicted, the Senate needs a two-thirds majority of support. That means more than a dozen Republicans will need to join Democrats in voting in favour of impeachment.

Rice is not the only Republican who voted for impeachment to face backlash. Liz Cheney, currently the number three Republican in the House of Representatives, has been censured by the Republican Party in at least three of the 23 counties in her home state of Wyoming.



France's Le Pen Proposes Hijab Ban

PARIS (Dispatches) - French far-right leader Marine Le Pen proposed a ban on Muslim headscarves in all public places on Friday, seeking to build on a record recent poll putting her almost neck-and-neck with President Emmanuel Macron.

The hijab policy, which would be contested in court and almost certainly be ruled unconstitutional, saw the 53-year-old return to a familiar campaign theme 15 months from the country's 2022 presidential election.

"I consider that the headscarf is an Islamist item of clothing," Le Pen told reporters at a press conference where she proposed a new law to ban "Islamist ideologies" which she called "totalitarian and murderous."

Since taking over France's main far-right party from her father, Le Pen has run twice for the French presidency, losing badly in 2017 to political newcomer Macron in a defeat that she took months to recover from.

But recent polling shows her closer than ever to her ultimate prize and has led to a rash of new speculation about whether the anti-EU, anti-immigration populist could finally enter the Elysee Palace.

Despite recent setbacks for fellow ideologues such as Donald Trump, and Matteo Salvini in Italy, a survey reported earlier this week showed her within striking distance of Macron. The poll conducted online by Harris Interactive suggested that if a final-round presidential run-off were held today Le Pen would garner 48 percent while Macron would be re-elected with 52 percent, Le Parisien newspaper reported.

"It's a poll, it's a snapshot of a moment, but what it shows is that the idea of me winning is credible, plausible even," Le Pen said at the Friday press conference.

The prospect of a tight race set off alarm bells in the French political mainstream as the dual health and economic crises caused by the coronavirus pandemic sweep across the country.

"It's the highest she has ever been at," said Jean-Yves Camus, a French political scientist specialized in the far-right, while adding that it was "too early to take the polls at face value".

He said Le Pen was benefiting from frustration and anger over the pandemic, with France on the verge of a third lockdown, but also the beheading of a French school teacher by an Islamist last October.



Jordan Apt (\$2000)
200sq.m, 3bdrs
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J, balcony
marble fl
Fully Furn

Shanon (adviser)

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

Parsian

Farmanieh (\$2400) 200sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, S, J, & F.F
Zaferanieh (\$2800) 240sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, S, J, & F.F
Gheitarieh (\$2500) 270sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, S, J, & F.F

Elahieh bldg (\$5000)
4storey, 12bdrs, yard, pkgs

Darrous (\$1600)
2bdrs, pkg, & F.F

Vanak Office (\$4000)
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Xiaomi Files Legal Complaint Against U.S. Defense

SHANGHAI (Reuters) - Xiaomi Corp filed a complaint in a Washington district court on Friday against the U.S. Defense and Treasury Departments, seeking to remove the Chinese smartphone maker from an official list of companies with ties to China's military.

The Defense Department, under the Trump administration in mid-January, added Xiaomi and eight other companies to the list, which requires American investors to divest their holdings in the firms by a set deadline. In the complaint, addressed to Biden-appointed Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, Xiaomi called the judgment "unlawful and unconstitutional" and said the company was not controlled by the People's Liberation army.



Mexico's Economy in 2020 Suffers Worst Slump Since 1930s

MEXICO CITY (Reuters) - Mexico's economy last year suffered its biggest annual contraction since the 1930s, although it recovered better than expected from the ravages of the COVID-19 pandemic during the final quarter, preliminary data showed on Friday.

Gross domestic product in Latin America's second-biggest economy tumbled by 8.5% last year in seasonally adjusted terms, according to the estimate issued by national statistics agency INEGI. The fall was slightly shallower than the consensus forecast in a Reuters poll for an 8.8% decline.

Still, the contraction was the sharpest since 1932 during the Great Depression, data published by the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) show. And the economy has recently faced fresh headwinds due to a resurgence in COVID-19 cases.

During the second half of 2020, the economy made up much of the ground lost to the pandemic, and an unexpectedly robust performance in the October-December period helped lift the peso against the dollar early on Friday.

But the economy remains a major challenge for President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, whose efforts to strengthen the state's hand in the energy market have led to disputes with businesses and upset Mexico's allies, chilling investment.

The second quarter bore the brunt of economic disruptions caused by the pandemic, before a sharp increase in infections towards the end of 2020 led to renewed commercial restrictions in the Mexico City metropolitan area before Christmas.

That is expected to dent the recovery in early 2021, which has seen deaths from coronavirus hitting record levels. Lopez Obrador himself contracted COVID-19 this month.

On Friday, Deputy Finance Minister Gabriel Yorrio said a target of 4.6% economic growth in 2021 looked attainable, depending on the speed of the rollout of coronavirus vaccines. [L1N2K42W0]

During the final three months of 2020, GDP advanced by 3.1% from the previous quarter in adjusted terms, beating the prediction for 2.8% growth seen in a Reuters poll.

Nikhil Sanghani, an economist at Capital Economics, said the figures for the fourth quarter meant that Mexico had recouped more than 70% of its losses from the first half of 2020.

"However, the recent surge in new COVID-19 cases will cause the recovery to grind to a halt in Q1," he said.

A breakdown of the unadjusted 2020 GDP figures showed manufacturing took the biggest hit last year. Secondary activities, which encompass factory output, fell by 10%, while tertiary activities, which include services, declined by 7.7%.

By contrast, primary activities such as farming, fishing and forestry, rose by 2.0% from 2019, the data showed.

The latest data also showed that 2020 was the second year running in which the economy went backwards. In 2019, the economy shrank by 0.1% in unadjusted terms, INEGI said.

Manufacturing activity has bounced back quickly from the depths of the slump, but companies are still wary about investing in new factories, buildings and machinery.

In the ten months through October, which is the latest data available, gross fixed investment was down by 19.5% compared with the same period in 2019, INEGI data show. Goldman Sachs economist Alberto Ramos said in a client note that the outlook remained challenging for Mexico, though the rollout of a vaccination program would help the recovery. "Firm U.S. growth, stronger terms of trade, and additional moderate monetary policy easing should leverage the recovery," Ramos said. "With the better than expected fourth quarter 2020 print we now expect real GDP growth to firm to 4.0% in 2021."

U.S. Lobby Group Urges India Not to Tighten Foreign E-Commerce Rules

NEW DELHI (Reuters) - A U.S. lobby group which represents firms including Amazon.com and Walmart has urged India not to tighten foreign investment rules for e-commerce companies again, according to a letter seen by Reuters.

India is considering revising the rules after traders in the country accused Amazon's Indian division and Walmart's Flipkart of creating complex structures to bypass investment regulations, Reuters reported this month.

The U.S. companies deny any wrongdoing.

India only allows foreign e-commerce players to operate as a marketplace to connect buyers and sellers but local traders say the U.S. giants promote select sellers and offer deep discounts, which hurts business for smaller local retailers.

In 2018, India changed its foreign direct investment (FDI) rules to deter foreign firms offering products from sellers in which they have an equity stake.

The government is now considering tightening those rules again to include sellers in which a foreign e-commerce firm holds an indirect stake through its parent, Reuters reported. Such a change could hurt Amazon as it holds indirect stakes in two of its biggest online sellers in India, Cloudtail and Appario.

Citing the Reuters story in a Jan. 28 letter, the U.S.-India Business Council (USIBC), part of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, urged the Indian government not to make any more material restrictive changes to e-commerce investment rules.

"Any further changes in FDI rules would limit e-commerce firms from leveraging their scale," USIBC said in the letter seen by Reuters.



U.S. Consumer Spending Decreases Further

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - U.S. consumer spending fell for a second straight month in December amid renewed business restrictions to slow the spread of COVID-19 and a temporary expiration of government-funded benefits for millions of unemployed Americans.

The report from the Commerce Department on Friday also showed inflation steadily rising last month. Expectations that inflation would perk up this year were supported by other data showing a solid increase in labor costs in the fourth quarter.

But a rise above the Federal Reserve's 2% target, a flexible average, is unlikely to worry policymakers. The U.S. central bank is expected to maintain its ultra-easy monetary policy stance for a while as the economy battles the pandemic. Excess capacity remains throughout the economy, which could limit companies' ability to raise prices.

"The Fed would like inflation to average 2%, so it would like inflation to temporarily move above 2%," said Gus Faucher, chief economist at PNC Financial in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. "Inflation pressures will remain limited to a few sectors as high unemployment will restrain wage growth."

Consumer spending, which accounts for more than two-thirds of U.S. economic activity, slipped 0.2% last month as outlays at restaurants declined. Spending at hospitals also fell, likely as patients stayed away in fear of contracting the coronavirus.

Households also cut back spending on recreation. Consumer spending tumbled 0.7% in November. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast spending would fall 0.4% in December.

When adjusted for inflation, consumer spending decreased 0.6% last month after dropping 0.7% in November. That likely sets a lower base for consumer spending in the first quarter.

Another drop in January is not expected as states, including New York and California, have started easing pandemic-related restrictions. But outlays on long-lasting manufactured goods, the main driver of spending during the pandemic, fell for a second consecutive month in December. Spending on nondurable goods dropped for a third straight month. Services gained 0.1%.

"Goods spending has clearly rolled over, and we anticipate the pull-forward in demand in the second half of last year will also weigh on consumption of goods at the start of this year," said Tim Quinlan, a senior economist at Wells Fargo Securities in Charlotte, North Carolina. "We do not anticipate spending to pick up significantly until a vaccine is widely administered."

U.S. stocks fell sharply. The dollar was steady against a basket of currencies. U.S. Treasury prices were mostly lower.



White House Says U.S.-China Trade Deal Among Issues in Broad Review

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The Biden administration will review all national security measures put in place by former President Donald Trump, including the U.S.-China Phase 1 trade deal signed in January 2020, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said.

Asked if President Joe Biden viewed the deal as still in effect, she told a White House briefing: "Everything that the past administration has put in place is under review, as it relates to our national security approach, so I would not assume things are moving forward."

Psaki said the Biden administration was focused on approaching the U.S.-China relationship "from a position of strength, and that means, coordinating and communicating with our allies and partners about how we're going to work with China."

Trump signed the Phase 1 trade agreement with Chinese President Xi Jinping in January 2020, easing a nearly 18-month trade war in which U.S. and Chinese goods worth hundreds of billions of dollars were hit by tit-for-tat tariffs, slowing trade between the world's two largest economies.

Under the deal, Beijing promised to boost purchases of U.S. agricultural and manufactured goods, energy and services by \$200 billion above 2017 levels over two years. But its purchases fell far short in 2020.

Chad Bown, a fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics, this month released an analysis showing that China's purchases of U.S. goods in 2020 fell 42% short of the commitment Beijing made in the trade agreement.

No comment was immediately available from the White House on whether the Biden administration was actively considering withdrawing from the interim trade deal.

Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen told lawmakers before her confirmation that the Biden administration would conduct a comprehensive review of China's implementation of the trade deal, and said Washington would work more closely with allies to address "abusive" practices by the world's second-largest economy.

Italy Business Lobby Sees Economic Rebound From Second Half

ROME (Dispatches) - Italy's business lobby Confindustria said on Saturday it expected to revise down its growth estimate for the economy in 2021 despite a rebound projected

from the second half of the year.

A monthly report published by its research unit CSC said the rebound seen starting in the third quarter of the year would be strong and could exceed initial estimates if Italy's COVID-19 vaccination program was rapid and efficient.

Conversely, consumption and gross domestic product (GDP) would slow down in the first quarter as households put more money into savings amid uncertainty about the economic outlook and jobs, CSC added.

Consumer confidence would return once restrictions to control the pandemic were eased, it added.

"However, the decline estimated for the end of 2020 and the current weakness make a downward revision of overall growth for this year," CSC said.

Currently it estimates Italian GDP to grow 4.8% in 2021. However such projection does not include the effects of Rome's next budget maneuver and resources made available by the European union.

The report did not elaborate on the level of a possible future cut in the estimate.

Earlier this month Economy Minister Roberto Gualtieri said Italy would post economic growth this year "not far below" Rome's official target of 6%, set in September. (Reporting by Giulia Segreti Editing by Clelia Oziel)

Pakistan to Get Help From China In Improving Agriculture Sector



ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan said that the country is expected to get help from China in its efforts to improve the agriculture sector under the framework of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

The Pakistani government is collaborating with China in learning agricultural techniques under CPEC to enhance yield of crops, modernization of irrigation system and value addition, Xinhua news agency quoted Khan as saying at an event on Friday.

"The production of crops and dairy products in China is far more than that of Pakistan due to their advanced research and technology," the Prime Minister said.

He added that his government is taking revolutionary steps to uplift agro-based industries of the country to ensure sustainable development and prosperity, and China is willing to help Pakistan in this regard.

Agriculture is the backbone of the Pakistani economy, and cooperation with China could turn a new page in agricultural modernization and will be a destiny changer for the people of Pakistan, he said.

On Tuesday, China and Pakistan launched an online platform to collect and display information and achievements of agricultural and industrial cooperation between the two countries, aiming at enhancing bilateral cooperation under CPEC in the two sectors.

“Mostafa” Nominated For Four Awards

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iranian short film ‘Mostafa’ has been nominated for awards in four main sections of the International Kolkata Short Film Festival in India.

Directed by Alireza Teymouri and produced by Peyman Shahmohammadi, ‘Mostafa’ has been nominated for awards in four sections, namely Best Short Film, Best Director, Best Filmography, and Best Actor, at IKSFF.

The film has been made with the support of the South Regional Film Organization and the Swedish Institute Film.



Turkey Vows Heavy Fines for Tradesmen Amid Soaring Food Prices

ANKARA (Dispatches) - President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan reiterated his frustration with what he said were major differences in food prices and warned that tradesmen could face heavy fines if they keep charging unjustifiably high prices.

“We see that there are very serious price differences in vegetables, fruits and legumes,” Erdoğan told reporters after Friday prayers in Istanbul, as he vowed that the government would protect its citizens from being crushed by high prices.

The annual inflation edged higher to 14.6% in December and food prices soared more than 20% just as new coronavirus-related curbs and higher borrowing costs appeared.

Presenting the first inflation report of the year, Central Bank of the Republic of Turkey (CBRT) Governor Naci Ağbal on Thursday warned that rises in food prices were an important risk to overall inflation in 2021.

Having repeatedly said it would take a stronger approach to tackling inflation under the new governor Ağbal, the central bank has raised its policy rate by 675 basis points to 17% since November.

Ağbal on Thursday reaffirmed the bank’s commitment to upholding tight monetary policy even if more “front-loaded” steps are needed. He also stood by a forecast that inflation would fall to 9.4% this year.

He said the bank would keep policy tight until inflation comes down to the 5% target, which he said would not happen until 2023.

In November Erdoğan had said that “bitter medicine” like high rates were needed to cool prices.

Lütfi Elvan, the new treasury and finance minister, said he would take structural steps to fight inflation.

Ağbal’s presentation strengthened the message that the central bank has no intention to cut rates prematurely, said Piotr Matys, senior emerging markets forex strategist at Rabobank.

He added that a structural solution needs to be found to stabilize food prices, which have been the main driver behind the rise in inflation in recent months.

“I call on all tradesmen from here; if you continue this process in this way, very severe penalties could find you. And for that, please do what you do right, and do not oppress our citizens,” Erdoğan said.

The president this week instructed officials to investigate increases in food prices, saying that the Turkish people should not be expected to endure high inflation and high interest rates.

Amid complaints over rising costs, Turkish regulators this week launched nationwide price audits, handing around TL 3.6 million (\$492,000) in fines to 120 firms.

Some firms faced price-related fines ranging from TL 10,000 to TL 100,000, while others were handed fines between TL 50,000 and TL 500,000 for stockpiling goods.

To date, some 495 firms that have been found to have been charging exorbitant prices for basic goods and food have been fined TL 15.48 million by the Unfair Price Assessment Board, consisting of government officials and private sector representatives.



Erdoğan said audits by the Trade Ministry would continue more intensively in the coming months.

The country’s largest business groups this week stressed Turkey should make the battle against inflation the primary goal of economic and monetary policy.

“Every economic recovery that begins without price stability is short-lived and narrows the investment horizon for businesses,” said a statement by the Turkish Industry and Business Association (TÜSIAD), the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB), the Independent Industrialists and Businessmen Association (MÜSIAD) and the Turkey Tradesmen and Artisans Federation (TESK).

“We are closely following the reform agenda led by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and support the primary goal of fighting inflation,” they said.

Surveys projected inflation would slightly rise again this month.

A Reuters poll of 14 economists on Friday predicted that the annual inflation will rise to 14.68%. The median estimate for annual inflation was 14.68%, with forecasts ranging between 14.20% and 15.33%. The median for the month-on-month rise was 1.4%, with forecasts ranging between 1% and 2%.

A survey of 17 economists by Anadolu Agency (AA) on Friday also projected the inflation rate to hit 14.75%. The median forecast for monthly increase stood at 1.48%.

The Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat) is scheduled to announce January inflation data at 10 a.m. local time on Feb. 3.

U.S. Collapse With...

FROM PAGE 1

Of course it should be stipulated that “gradual” does not mean 20 years because today the U.S. is on the collapsing road in terms of behavior, ethics, economy, culture inversion of democracy and power hegemony, etc., and it is going to feel the bottom of the abyss.



Just a couple of days ago in my article I wrote that the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in a report revealed that China has outpaced the U.S. in attracting foreign direct investment. So one should not limit the issue of collapse and decline of the U.S. only to the performance or departure of Trump and arrival of Joe Biden because the main issue is something above these words. The U.S. has reached an era that the number of national guards for securing the inauguration ceremony of President Biden has unprecedentedly been more than the U.S. forces deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan. The U.S. has actually turned into a military barracks.

This country once through propagation was considered as the cradle of the 20th century and a symbol of a democracy with the affix of “liberalism.” Emergence and intervention of militarism and police between the two poles of people in the U.S. is a serious alarm and warning for a country which has the claim of hegemony in the world and considers itself as an undisputable power in the world, and the destruction power of its nuclear arsenals is two times of the Planet Earth. The country which carries the burden of 30 percent of the world economy and is the heart of liberal democracy and capitalism, and is considered as the utopia for the disillusioned and West or East oriented people, is now placed in a decadent and inflamed condition and is forced to deploy troops in the streets to secure the inauguration ceremony for the newly-elected president, and all of the country’s military, intelligence and security forces are kept on alert.

It is simplistic to think that the tension in the U.S. would come to an end. The 99 Percent Movement against one percent has shown itself in the votes of 80 million people for Trump. Trump was not elected four years ago in a condition that the U.S. is facing today. But Biden today has been elected in a condition that 80 million people dream of his killing and are ready to burn the U.S. flag in the Capitol and reflect their hatred towards the current U.S. in the camera.

Even if Trump fails to form the “Partisan Party”, the potential for decline of the two major political parties is the beginning for the collapse of the political power inside the U.S. and maybe in one or two years, this turns into underground struggles and in the very first term of Biden, it will lead the U.S. to chaos and anarchy because almost 50 percent of the American voters believe the current administration is a usurp and illegal administration and they will resort to any means even like damaging the Congress for toppling the Biden Administration.

Iran Oil...

FROM PAGE 1

The minister said Iran has received all its payments for oil exports.

Zangeneh also underlined the increase of the country’s gas reserves: “The country’s extractable gas reserves have increased from about 9 trillion cubic meters (before the Revolution) to more than 33 trillion cubic meters, and today Iran has achieved huge production capacity in the field of petrochemicals.”

He added: “The gas industry also grew after the victory of the Islamic Revolution. At that time, we had only a small gas refinery in Bidboland and a pipeline that ran from Bidboland to Astara, and a small population benefited from gas; the gas industry jumped after the victory of the revolution, especially with the development of South Pars. The production of the country’s petrochemical products was also very small and did not reach 2 million tons per year, while with the measures taken, the production capacity of Iran’s petrochemicals is expected to reach 100 million tons by the end of next calendar year [to March 2022].”

Zangeneh pointed out that with the construction of the Persian Gulf Bidboland Gas Refinery, in addition to the separation of bicarbonate and higher hydrocarbons as petrochemical feedstock, part of the No-Flaring project will be implemented, which will be completed by 2022, adding: “NGL 3200 in West Karoun, NGL 3100 Plant in Dehloran, Khark gas collection facility and Bidboland Persian Gulf refinery are among the projects that are being carried out in this field.” Zangeneh continued by stating that by operating the Persian Gulf Bidboland refinery, Gachsaran petrochemical plant’s feedstock and Dena ethylene line will be supplied. In the downstream of this refinery, a PDH unit with a capacity of 400,000 tons and a small gasoline unit will be built.

“In total, with the implementation of this refinery and the project of collecting flare gases in the oil-rich southern regions, more than 4.5 billion dollars will be invested in this field of which 3.4 billion dollars have already been commissioned,” he added. Asked if Iran could easily find its former market if the sanctions were lifted, he said: “Yes. We have no problem.”

Global Oil Consumption Crashed By 9% In 2020

LONDON (Dispatches) - Due to the coronavirus restrictions and lockdowns, global consumption of petroleum and other liquid fuels crashed by 9 percent to 92.2 million barrels per day (bpd) in 2020, the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) said on Friday, nothing this was the largest drop in EIA’s series dating back to 1980.

The world will return to more normal consumer behavior this year, and a continued recovery in economies is set to contribute to rising oil consumption in 2021 as the year progresses. EIA expects in its January Short-Term Energy Outlook that global liquid fuels consumption will grow by 5.6 million bpd this year, or by 6 percent compared to 2020, and rise by another 3.3 million bpd in 2022. The United States will contribute with a 1.4 million bpd consumption increase to the growth in 2021, the EIA forecasts.

Iran Begins...

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Local oil refiners used the India-Iran trade agreement to import crude oil from the Middle-East nation and make payments to UCO Bank’s allocated rupee account. There was no inflow of funds into the budget, as India did not buy crude oil.

In 2019-20, at an average price of Rs 8,846 crore, Iran brought 1.32 million tonnes of basmati rice from India. Exporters said banks were only advised to export to Iran if payment was made in advance. “To begin receiving the payments is a major relief for the sector. We expect the market to restart ahead of the festive season in Navroz, which is the start of Iran’s New Year. We hope that local buyers and the Government Trading Company of Iran will start,” said Shree Jagdamba Agrico Export’s Satish Goel, one of the largest exporters of Basmati rice to the Iranian market.

The peak season is from January to March for exports to Iran. During this time, over 40 percent of annual sales occur, said Goel, who is also chairman of the Iran Rice Committee. A rice exporter based in Sonapat said Indian firms are now collecting Dirham payments from UAE-based Iranian agents. “There is demand for Indian basmati rice in Iran, but exports are not smooth due to the delay in payments. Buyers have established offices in Dubai, however, and we’re now exporting via this path,” he said.

Exporters of Basmati rice said any effort to lift sanctions on Iran by the new US administration could lead to higher orders.

UK Accuses China of Damaging Trust in Global Trade System

LONDON (Reuters) - Britain said China had contributed to an erosion of trust in the global trade system, offering to work with the European Union, Japan the United States and others to clamp down on what it sees as unfair subsidies for state-owned enterprises.

Trade minister Liz Truss, who is in charge of building Britain’s new trade links around the world following its exit from the European Union, made the comments at a World Economic Forum online panel event titled “Fixing International Trade”.

“Some of the behavior by China on areas like forced technology transfer, subsidies by state-owned enterprises, and also IP (Intellectual Property) violations have led to some of the mistrust in the global trading system,” she said.

“People can see things are unfair, that if state-owned enterprises are able to subsidize and able to undermine free enterprise economies, then that can destroy trust in trade.”

Relations between Britain and China have cooled in recent years, from London heavily courting Chinese investment in British infrastructure in 2015 to last year banning telecoms firm Huawei from parts of the UK communications network and tightening rules on foreign investment over national security concerns.

Truss also repeated calls for World Trade Organization (WTO) reform, saying its paralyzed dispute resolution system must be upgraded, the blocks to the appointment of a new head must be removed, and trust restored in its procedures.

“Big countries, small countries, need to understand that they are going to be treated fairly under the WTO system, and that the rules will be impartially enforced,” she said.

Truss highlighted that the United States, which under former President Donald Trump blocked the appointment of new WTO judges, had indicated a more open attitude to reform under President Joe Biden who took office earlier this month.

The United States said earlier it was committed to “positive, constructive and active engagement” with all WTO members on reform, and is actively considering who to choose at its next chief.

Having quit the EU’s political and economic union and negotiated only a limited free trade agreement in its place, Britain is looking around the world for new markets and seeking to carve out a role for itself as a leading advocate of free trade.

Truss said that her top priority when meeting the Biden administration would be de-escalating existing disputes over steel and aircraft subsidies.

“We shouldn’t been in a position where the UK, the EU and the US have tariffs on each other. We need to work together,” she said.

Iran Torchbearer...

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Gharibabadi said Iran’s anti-narcotics forces had 2,851 cases of armed clashes with drug traffickers in 2020, which resulted in the dismantling of 2,196 drug gangs and destruction of their transit and distribution network.

Ten Iranian police were also killed in clashes with drug traffickers in 2020.

Iran, which has a 900-kilometer common border with Afghanistan, is used as a transit route for trafficking of narcotic drugs from Afghanistan to markets in Europe.

President...

FROM PAGE 1

Referring to the wisdom and prudence of Imam Khomeini upon his arrival in the country, Rouhani said: When Imam Khomeini entered the country, he first went to pay tributes to the martyrs, and this is very important. Imam first went to pay tribute to those who sacrificed their blood in this way and walked next to their holy graves. Imam wanted to say that his real inviter is the devotees of this land and at the top of it are the martyrs.

Referring to the very sensitive speech of Imam Rahel in Behesht Zahra, Rouhani said: “After this speech, the scholars followed a part of this speech that water and electricity should be free and said what happened.”

President Rouhani congratulated the nation on day of Bahman 12 (February 1, 1979 which falls on January 31 this year, 2021). February 1, 1979, is the first day of Ten-Day Fajr (Dawn). The ten days are annually celebrated across the country to mark the return of Imam Khomeini, the Founder of the Islamic Republic, to Iran from exile.

Salvadoran Ex-FIFA Official Extradited to U.S.

SAN SALVADOR (Dispatches) - Former El Salvador football federation chief Reynaldo Vasquez was on Friday extradited to the United States, where he faces bribery charges related to the massive FIFA corruption probe. Vasquez, Salvador's FESFUT football federation head between June 2009 and July 2010, was indicted by the United States in December 2015 over multi-million-dollar corruption at FIFA.

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Int'l Badminton Competition In Japan Cancelled Over Virus

TOKYO (Dispatches) - An international badminton competition due to take place this spring in Japan has been cancelled, organizers said Saturday, the latest sporting event to be hit by virus travel restrictions just six months before the Tokyo Olympics. The Yonex Osaka International Challenge for young players was called off "because it is difficult to host foreign players" under current immigration rules, the Nippon Badminton Association said.

Man City Move Clear at the Top

MANCHESTER (Reuters) - Manchester City beat bottom club Sheffield United 1-0 to move three points clear of Manchester United who were held to a goalless draw at Arsenal in the Premier League on Saturday.

Wolverhampton Wanderers' disappointing campaign continued with a 1-0 loss to Crystal Palace but Newcastle United ended their poor run of form with an impressive 2-0 win at Everton. A ninth-minute goal from Brazilian Gabriel Jesus gave City a 1-0 win over Sheffield United who had delivered the title-chasers a major boost with their midweek win at Manchester United.

Jesus slotted home from close range after Ferran Torres took advantage of poor defending to wriggle free and pick out his unmarked team mate.

City were not at their slickest best against Chris Wilder's well-organised defence, although goalkeeper Aaron Ramsdale did well to keep out a fine drive from Oleksandr Zinchenko and Aymeric Laporte's header.

The visitors threw on attacking players as they looked to sneak a point and they gave Pep Guardiola's side a scare with a late John Fleck effort that flashed wide. City have 44 points from 20 games with United three points behind but having played a game more. Third-placed Leicester City could leapfrog Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's side with a win over Leeds United on Sunday.

Chances were also hard to find at the Emirates where Manchester United ended a disappointing week having given up five points in the title race. Arsenal came out strongly after the interval and Alexandre Lacazette came closest to scoring for the hosts with a 56th-minute curling free kick that struck the bar.

The best two chances for United fell to Uruguayan forward Edinson Cavani but he was wide of the target both occasions. United set a new club record of 18 away games unbeaten in the league while Arsenal, eighth on 31 points, have not lost since Dec. 19. Wolves are without a win in eight games after Eberechi Eze's goal gave Palace a much-needed win at Selhurst



Park. Eze broke the deadlock on the hour, firing a low left-footed strike past Wolves goalkeeper Rui Patricio.

Newcastle United celebrated their first Premier League win in 10 games and lifted pressure off manager Steve Bruce after two goals from Callum Wilson secured a 2-0 win at Everton. Wilson fired the visitors in front with a brilliant header in the 73rd minute and the former Bournemouth forward added the second in stoppage time from close range.

Ivan Cavaleiro came off the substitutes bench to grab a late equaliser as Fulham held fellow strugglers West Bromwich Albion to a 2-2 draw at the Hawthorns. Fulham went ahead in the 10th minute when Aleksandar Mitrovic slipped a through ball to Bobby Cordova-Reid, who slotted it past West Brom goalkeeper Sam Johnstone. West Brom equalised early in the second period when Brazilian playmaker Matheus Pereira's cross was stabbed home by defender Kyle Bartley. Pereira appeared to have earned a first home league win for West Brom under manager Sam Allardyce when he smashed the ball past Fulham goalkeeper Alphonse Areola. But Fulham salvaged a point after Harrison Reed's cross found fellow substitute Cavaleiro who headed home 13 minutes from time.

In Saturday's late game, England midfielder Jack Grealish fired in a superb cross for Ross Barkley to head home as Aston Villa overcame a slow start to beat Southampton 1-0 at St Marys. Danny Ings had a late goal ruled out for offside for Southampton who slumped to their third league defeat in a row.

Bayern Punish Tolisso for Getting Tattoo During Pandemic



BERLIN (Dispatches) - Bayern Munich dropped World Cup winner Corentin Tolisso on Saturday and hit the France midfielder with an undisclosed "heavy" fine for breaking their hygiene rules during the coronavirus pandemic by getting a tattoo.

"Corentin Tolisso has violated our guidelines... which is very annoying and cannot be tolerated," Bayern chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge fumed in a statement on Saturday.

"We are very grateful that the Bundesliga games can currently take place despite the prevailing coronavirus situation."

The 26-year-old central midfielder, who won the 2018 World Cup with France, was dropped for Saturday's home league game against Hoffenheim.

Having "gotten a tattoo this week", Tolisso broke the club's strict hygiene rules, designed to limit the players contact outside the squad during the pandemic.

A video was posted on Friday which showed Tolisso getting a tattoo on his right forearm while not wearing a protective mouth-and-nose mask.

Tattoo parlours in Germany are currently closed due to the current lockdown. According to the European champions, the Frenchman has been handed a "heavy fine".

Noel Wins Slalom In Rainy Chamonix

PARIS (Dispatches) - France's Clement Noel held his nerve in rainy conditions to claim victory in Saturday's World Cup slalom in Chamonix, almost 12 months on from his last win, on the very same slope.

Third fastest in the opening leg, Noel clocked a winning aggregate of 1min 38.18sec over the two runs.

It was a seventh World Cup victory for the 23-year-old French racer, all having come in the slalom.

"It feels good. It was a great day," Noel said. "It wasn't a perfect day like last year when we had the sun, the hard snow and the crowd."

"This year, we don't have an audience, it's a bit different, but it's still a pretty great day because it's been a while since I last won."

Noel said the victory had lifted the weight off his shoulders, coming at a timely moment ahead of the February 8-22 world ski championships in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy.

"Winning a race in the winter is at least what I wanted to do," he said.

"I would have liked there to have been more victories but what's gone is water under the bridge."

"In the last four races I've finished second twice and once first. It's very, very good. I'll enjoy the moment before refocusing tomorrow on the world championships."

Switzerland's Ramon Zenhaeusern finished second, at 0.16sec, while Austrian Marco Schwarz, who was fastest in the first run, rounded out the podium, a further three-hundredths adrift.

Zenhaeusern's teammate Luca Aerni came close to causing a massive shock with a storming second run that saw him jump 25 places from 29th after the first run (+2.15) to fourth overall, just 0.47sec off Noel.

Alexis Pinturault consolidated his lead at the top of the overall World Cup standings, the Frenchman's eighth-placed finish netting him 32 points to take his season tally to 892pts.

Discipline leader Schwarz's podium finish saw him leapfrog Switzerland's Marco Odermatt (607) into second, on 626pts, in the general classification.

Gut-Behrami Completes Super-G Hat-Trick



BERLIN (Dispatches) - Swiss racer Lara Gut-Behrami completed her career hat-trick of World Cup super-G victories in Garmisch-Partenkirchen on Saturday in a perfect warm-up for next month's world championships.

After super-G victories in Garmisch in both 2016 and 2017, the 29-year-old bagged a third win after clocking 1min 15.70sec down the Kandahar course.

It was also a third straight super-G win this season for Gut-Behrami after previous first places in Crans Montana and St Anton. The victory consolidated the Swiss racer's place atop World Cup standings in the

discipline, and saw her leafrog teammate Michelle Gisin into second in the overall standings behind Slovakian Petra Vlhova, who bagged 26 valuable points with a joint 10th-placed finish.

Gut-Behrami was 0.68sec faster than second-placed Norwegian Kajsa Vickhoff Lie, 22, who earned the first podium finish of her career.

Canada's Maria-Michele Gagnon, a late runner with bib 29, took a surprise third, at 0.93sec, for only the fifth World Cup podium of her career and her first in super-G.

Gagnon knocked Sofia Goggia into fourth after the Italian came to the Bavarian Alps on the back of four straight downhill World Cup wins. Warm weather forced Saturday's planned downhill race in Garmisch to be replaced by the super-G.

A second super-G race is planned for Sunday, the final women's event before the world ski championships in Cortina d'Ampezzo from February 8-21.

Wawrinka Reveals Covid-19 Fight

LONDON (Dispatches) - Former Australian Open winner Stan Wawrinka said he tested positive for coronavirus at the end of 2020.

The 35-year-old, who won the first of his three Grand Slam titles in Melbourne in 2014, said he self-isolated at home in Switzerland.

World number 18 Wawrinka explained his physical preparations for the season-opening Slam had been affected by the setback.

However, he told the Herald Sun that he is "feeling better". On arrival in Australia, Wawrinka along with all other players had to quarantine for 14 days, a period of isolation which only ended Friday.

"I'm trying to get in shape. I was positive over Christmas so I had to stay more than 10 days at home, so I completely lost all the work I did off-season," added Wawrinka.

"I was feeling really bad during the first five days but the symptoms, you keep it, and are more tired every day and that lasts a few weeks."

"It was not a good experience. Now I finally start to feel better but it can touch you badly and it's important to be really careful."

Ahead of the Australian Open, which starts on February 8, Wawrinka will be top seed at the ATP Murray River Open tournament in Melbourne next week.

The Swiss star will be searching for his first title since Geneva in 2017.



Zverev Remains Confident Amid Personal Upheaval

MELBOURNE (AFP) - U.S. Open finalist Alexander Zverev insisted Saturday he is on track to contend for a maiden Grand Slam title despite a mounting personal toll off the court.

The world number seven will spearhead Germany in the ATP Cup starting in Melbourne Tuesday as he eyes a first Slam trophy at the subsequent Australian Open.

But Zverev, who fell agonisingly short in New York to Dominic Thiem, has endured a tumultuous period including allegations of domestic abuse by a former girlfriend and a recent split with coach David Ferrer.

The 23-year-old, however, said he remained buoyed by his strong showing in the majors last year, which included a semi-final finish at the Australian Open.

"I worked extremely hard in the off-season," he said. "I'd like to think that I did everything I could to be as well-prepared as I can be."

Zverev received criticism last year, most notably from outspoken Australian Nick Kyrgios, for flaunting social distancing rules at the ill-fated Adria Tour exhibition tournament organized by world No.1 Novak Djokovic. The German, however, backed the strict measures imposed on players ahead of the Australian season.

"I don't think I lost much (fitness)," he said. "Being able to play in front of a crowd, not living in a bubble now during the tournament, I think a lot of players really appreciate that."

"We shouldn't really complain too much about the circumstances."

