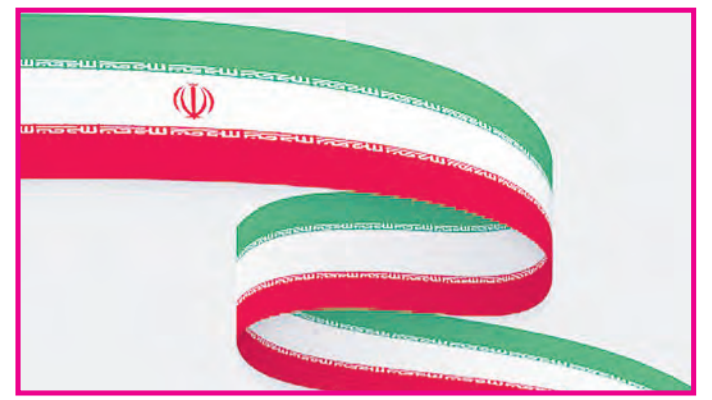


Spokeswoman for Iran Health Ministry Sima Sadat Lari Said On Wednesday That Some 79 More Iranians Lost Their Lives Over the Past 24 Hours as the Death Toll Mounted to 58,189

IRAN NEWS



VOL. XXVI, No. 7159 TEHRAN Price 40,000 Rials

www.irannewsdaily.com

THURSDAY FEBRUARY 4, 2021 - BAHMAN 16, 1399

2 DOMESTIC

Tehran Urges Severe Punishment for Soleimani's Murderers
 > SEE PAGE 2



3 DOMESTIC

Tehran, Prague Call for Boosting Economic Ties
 > SEE PAGE 3



President Rejects Calls For Changes to Iran Deal

TEHRAN (PressTV) - President Hassan Rouhani has once again rejected calls for changes to the content of the 2015 nuclear deal and its original participants, after France said any new negotiations on the multilateral agreement should also include the Saudi regime.

Speaking at a cabinet meeting in Tehran on Wednesday, Rouhani said the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) — as the nuclear deal is named — was not achieved easily, but was the fruit of 10 years of diplomatic endeavors. "No article of the JCPOA will be changed. No one will also be added to the JCPOA. If we are 4+1, we will remain the same. If we are 5+1, we will remain the same," he told the world community, especially the signatories to the agreement. **See Page 7**

Enemies Can Do Nothing to Confront Islamic Republic



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei said in an online meeting with the eulogists (Maddahan) on Wednesday that enemies cannot do anything to confront the Islamic Republic and that Islam and the Islamic Republic will become stronger and stronger every day. Ayatollah Khamenei said that of course, there has

been and there are problems and some ups and downs. The Supreme Leader added that some are helping and some have lost their capabilities, but the conclusion of the current situation shows progress.

Speaking about Mother's Day in Iran, he congratulated the birthday of the daughter of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) Fatimah (AS), adding that she was the incarnation of the highest Islamic concepts about women, mothers, and wives.

Criticizing the distortion of Islamic literature in some media and cyberspace, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution in his final advice to the maddahs and all the interlocutors and media, emphasized "preserving the Islamic literature in speaking" and pointed out that slander and profanity in society must be hindered and Islamic literature must spread.

He also termed Hazrat Fatemeh (A) the highest manifestation of Islamic concepts about woman, mother, and wife and noted that in the Islamic view, the strongest basis of human intellectual and spiritual education is in the center of the family, and it is in this center that the ground for the real growth of women in various fields is provided.

Ayatollah Khamenei congratulated Hazrat Zahra's birthday anniversary and celebrating the status of wife and mother, as well as the birth anniversary of Imam Khomeini and the blessed 10-Day Dawn, and considered Hazrat Zahra (A) and Hazrat Ali (A) and their dear children as a great example of an Islamic family whose example of companionship, empathy, sincerity, and struggle of those nobles can make Islamic society reach the peak.

The leader of the Islamic Revolution added that sometimes hearts are anxious in some matters, but they should not be disturbed, because the signs of that sincerity and struggle of the Ahl al-Bayt in the Islamic system are quite evident which learning the Basiji spirit, the anonymous services of the martyrs of the nuclear industry, the efforts of jihadi groups and thousands of young groups in the cultural and scientific fields, as well as the beautiful scenes and manifestations of nursing and medical groups in the Corona case, were in fact following the same comprehensive plan.

Ayatollah Khamenei, referring to the fundamental difference between the views of Islam and the West in the category of women, added: "The view of Islam and the Islamic Republic on women is a view of honor and respect, while the common view of the West is a commodity-oriented and instrumental view."

The Leader pointed out that in Islam, men and women are not different in terms of divine and human values. Of course, in addition to common duties, each man and woman have special duties, and that is why God Almighty had created the composition of their physical structure in accordance with these special duties.

The Leader of the Islamic Revolution emphasized: "We are proud of the view of Islam and we are completely protesting against the Western view of women and lifestyle."

Ayatollah Khamenei, referring to the Western propaganda that Islam and the Islamic Republic hinder the growth of women, said: "This is a clear lie and the obvious reason for its untruth is the situation of women in the Islamic Republic."

He added: "In no other historical period in Iran has an educated and active woman been present in various social, cultural and artistic, scientific, political and economic fields, and all this is due to the blessings of the Islamic Republic."

The view of Islam and the Islamic Republic towards women is based on respect and reverence, while the West looks at them as tools and merchandise, he said, adding that in Islam, men and women are no different in their divine and humane values.

Of course, alongside their common duties, each has a specific duty as well, and that's why God has created them physically different and according to their duties, Ayatollah Khamenei said.

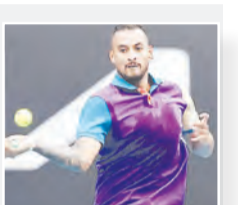
4 INTERNATIONAL

Trump Accused of Grievous Betrayal in Impeachment Trial Brief
 > SEE PAGE 4



8 SPORT

Kyrgios Makes Winning Return After Year Out
 > SEE PAGE 8



Iran Targeting World's 5th Place in Telecommunications

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iranian Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Minister Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi said on Tuesday that Iran is working to get among the top 5 countries in the world's space field in the next few years.

Azari Jahromi made the remarks on the occasion of the National Space Technology Day on Tuesday. Iran will be ranked among the top 5 in space technology and it is not a far-reaching goal at all, he underscored.

He highlighted that the future of Iran's space technology is very bright. Jahromi also said that Iran has expanded its cooperation with other countries in the space industry despite sanctions.

In a ceremony held at the Communication Museum on the occasion of National Aerospace Day (February 2) Jahromi said that Iran's interactions with other countries have increased and soon a group of world scientists in the field of aerospace will enter Iran and we will see its impact on the country's growth. **See Page 7**

Peaceful Nuclear Work Aimed at Boosting National Welfare

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) says the achievements secured in the country's nuclear industry are geared to the welfare of Iranians across the nation.

Ali-Akbar Salehi said peaceful atomic work is in line with the objectives of the human community.

"Moving on the path to achieving peaceful nuclear technology and enjoying the accomplishments, advantages and benefits of the nuclear industry are aimed at achieving human goals and creating welfare and comfort at the national level," said the AEOI chief.

He said among the blessings of the victory of the 1979 Islamic Revolution of Iran and the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran have been to reach self-sufficiency, boost domestic capabilities and pushing back the frontiers of science and technology. **See Page 7**

S. Korea Welcomes Iran's Decision to Release Detained Sailors

SEOUL (Xinhua) - South Korea welcomed Iran's decision to release the sailors of a South Korean oil tanker that has been detained at an Iranian port since early January, its Foreign Ministry said Wednesday (Feb 3).

South Korea's First Vice Foreign Minister Choi Jong-kun held phone talks with Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araghchi for about 30 minutes on Tuesday night to discuss the detention issue, according to the ministry.

During the talks, Araghchi notified Choi of Iran's decision to release all the sailors of the MT Hankuk Chemi, except the captain, who is a South Korean national, for the vessel's management.

A total of 20 sailors, including five South Koreans, 11 Myanmar nationals, two Indonesians and two Vietnamese, were on board the vessel when it was seized by Iran's military on Jan 4 due to alleged chemical pollution. **See Page 7**

5th February
کشمیر
Kashmir
Solidarity Day

Ayatollah Khamenei
We expect Government of India to adopt a just policy towards noble people of Kashmir

Iran to Appoint Woman Envoy to UN for First Time

TEHRAN (IRNA)- Iran is to appoint a woman as ambassador and deputy representative to the United Nations, the informed sources said.

Dr. Zahra Ershadi, who is to be appointed as the second person in Iran's mission to the UN, is now director-general of human rights at the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Tehran Urges Severe Punishment for Soleimani's Murderers

TEHRAN (MNA) – In his meeting with Iraqi Foreign Minister, the Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) called for severe punishment for the assassins of the ex-IRGC Cmdr. Gen. Lt. Soleimani and his comrades.

Secretary of SNSC Rear Admiral Ali Shamkhani and Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein met and held talks in Tehran on Wednesday.

"The perpetrators of the terrorist crime of the assassination of Martyr Soleimani and his comrades must be prosecuted and severely punished," Shamkhani said, appreciating Iraqi officials' measure of asking Interpol to issue a "red notice" for the arrest of ex-President Trump and Pompeo.

Referring to the warm relations between the two countries in various fields, he stressed the need to accelerate the full implementation of joint agreements in various sectors.

Highlighting the entanglement of security, stability, and tranquility in Iraq and Iran, Shamkhani said: "Consolidating the authority and sovereignty of the Iraqi government in implementing law and order is necessary to overcome the political, economic and security problems in this country."

"The main cause of instability and crisis in the region is the evil presence of foreign forces, especially American forces," he underlined, underscoring the vitality of implementing Iraq's ratified law about ousting the U.S. troops from the country.



He also underlined Baghdad's active role in resolving disputes and supporting permanent stability in Arab and Islamic countries.

Hussain, for his part, said developing cooperation in all sectors, especially accelerating the implementation of joint economic projects with Iran, is one of the main priorities of Iraq's foreign policy.

"The Iraqi people and government will never forget the vital rescuing support and assistance of the Iranian brothers in repelling ISIL in Iraq," he noted.

Hussein arrived in Tehran on Wednesday morning to hold meetings with Iranian officials.

Fuad Hussein's visit to Tehran will take place one day after the visit of Jeanine Antoinette Plasschaert, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, to Tehran.

The last visit of the Iraqi foreign minister to Tehran was made in September.

Obedience to Leader, Characteristic of Martyr Soleimani



TEHRAN (IP) - Judiciary Chief said that obedience to the Leader of the Islamic Revolution was one of Martyr Soleimani's characteristics.

Delivering a virtual speech at the "International Conference of the Second Step of the Islamic Revolution: Martyr Soleimani School", Ebrahim Raisi stated that Martyr Soleimani was successful in recognizing people and behaved correctly in both Iran and the region.

"Now the defense of the Yemeni people and all the uprisings in the world are due to the activities of this martyr," he added.

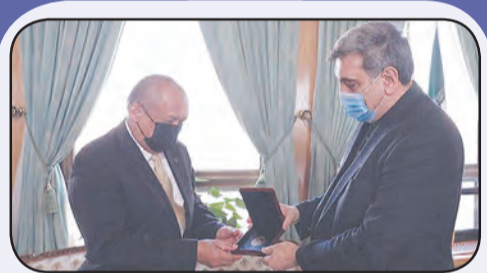
Pointing out that other characteristics of Martyr Soleimani were knowing Islam, and jihad for God, he noted that Martyr Soleimani could civilize the second step of the Islamic Revolution.

"In the second step of the Islamic Revolution, it is important to have self-confidence, and Imam Khomeini also noted that the Iranian nation can win by relying on God and self-confidence," Raisi said.

Referring to the resistance spirit in Martyr Soleimani, he highlighted that with resistance, sanctions could be neutralized and the enemies could be defeated.

He added that the blood of martyrs Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis would destroy modern ignorance and create enlightenment for the world.

Malaysia Keen on Sharing Know-How With Tehran Municipality



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Tehran Mayor Parviz Hanachi and the Malaysian Ambassador to Tehran Datuk Rustam Yahaya called for Tehran-Kuala Lumpur cooperation on urban civil services.

Hanachi described Malaysia as an Islamic state, saying Iranians are interested in Malaysia and it was one of the best destinations for tourists before the outbreak of coronavirus. Referring Malaysia experiences in metropolitan affairs, he said in addition to common problems like air pollution and traffic, Tehran is seriously facing with earthquake.

Meanwhile, Rustam Yahaya pointed to longstanding Malaysian friendship with Iran, saying that Malaysia respects Iranians and has announced opposition to the U.S. sanctions on Iran.

He hoped for lifting U.S. sanctions and developing cooperation between Iran and Malaysia.

Accordingly, a Malaysian economic delegation is to visit Tehran soon, he added.

He said that Malaysia is now hosting Iranian students. Malaysia is eager to use Tehran Municipality's experience to address civil services in metropolis Kuala Lumpur.

Ending U.S. Presence in Region Best Reaction Martyr Soleimani Assassination

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif appreciated Iraqi government and nation for pursuing the assassination of anti-terror commander Lieutenant General Qasem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Mohandes, saying ending the US presence in the region will be the best reaction to this terrorist act.

Zarif made the remarks in a meeting with his visiting Iraqi counterpart Fuad Hussein.

Both sides discussed the latest bilateral, regional and international developments.

Zarif hoped for punishing the perpetrators of assassinating Iranian and Iraqi commanders.

He expressed happiness for holding the joint economic commission meeting and hoped for implementing agreements reached between Iranian and Iraqi presidents on bilateral, transportation, industrial towns, border markets, pilgrims and businessmen.

Fuad Hussein, for his part, referred to exchange of delegations as determination to develop relations. He also emphasized the Iraqi Prime Minister's special attention to organizing relations between Iran and Iraq.

In addition to the meeting with Zarif, Hussein is also scheduled to meet with some other top-ranking Iranian officials.

The visit to Tehran by the Iraqi foreign minister is taking place a day after the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Iraq, Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, ended her two-day visit to Tehran.

Hussein visited Tehran last September when he carried a message of the Iraqi prime minister to Iranian President Hassan Rouhani.

Europe, U.S. Engaged in Talks on Iran

TEHRAN (IFP) - A senior Iranian official says Europe has in the past few weeks been engaged more actively with the United States on Iran and the nuclear deal.

Mahmoud Vaezi, the chief of staff of the President's Office, noted Europe and the US have been engaged in some talks, too.

"In the past few weeks, the European countries have become more active compared to the past and they are having consultations with the Americans," he said.

"Mr. Borrell, who is the coordinator for the JCPOA,

... has become active as well. His deputy has held talks with Mr. Araqchi (Iran's deputy foreign minister)," he added.

"They have become active and are working. Now that the new US administration has taken shape, it seems more activities are going on," he said.

However, he stressed that there have been no contacts between Iran and the U.S.

"Except for whatever is announced publicly, we have had no bilateral contacts with the Americans," he said.

Iran, India Must Boost Mutual Cooperation

TEHRAN (IFP) - Iran's defense minister, who is visiting India on an official trip, says Tehran and New Delhi should boost their cooperation in different areas.

Brigadier General Amir Hatami said upon arrival in India that Iran and India are two important countries in the region which have enjoyed stable relations over years.

The defense chief noted the two countries have very good cooperation on different fronts given their historical and cultural commonalities as well as their common ground on regional and international issues.

General Hatami said India lies next to the important Indian Ocean, and Iran is located near the strategic Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz. Hence, he added, the two sides can further expand their cooperation at bilateral and regional levels.

The Iranian defense minister is on a trip to India to discuss Tehran-New Delhi cooperation.

"This trip comes at the invitation of the Indian defense minister," he said.

"I'm going to meet him as well as a number of military and political officials," the top general added.

"In addition to these meetings, I will take part in the first conference of the Indian Ocean Rim countries. I'm going to deliver a lecture there," he said. "I will also attend the opening ceremony of an air exhibition held by the Indian Defense Ministry and I will visit the exhibit," General Hatami added.



Foreign Tourists to Visit Iran Observing Health Protocols

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Foreign tourists will soon visit Iran observing the health protocol in limited and controlled numbers, Deputy Head of Iran's Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization (ICHTO), Vali Teymouri said.

Teymouri told that the outlines of a plan on the limited arrival of foreign tourists, observing all the health protocols was discussed and approved in the security committee of the National Task Force to Combat coronavirus (COVID-19).

He said that the new directive was issued by the deputy minister of health for the incoming tourists to Iran on January 29. Teymouri added that the protocol excluded tourists from the countries that face new variants of coronavirus, so that they are not allowed to come without clean health bill.

Iran's tourism industry had already been hurting because of the coronavirus.

Iran High-Tech Firms Sell 120 Trillion Tomans Worth of Products

TEHRAN (FP) - A senior Iranian official says the country has made tremendous progress on scientific and technological fronts, especially thanks to its knowledge-based companies.

Vice President for Science and Technology Sorena Sattari said a change of attitude by universities in the domain of science and technology has contributed positively to the nation's economy.

"Last year, knowledge-based companies sold 120 trillion tomans' worth of products. More than forty firms have also become active on the stock exchange," he said.

"At the moment, 247 innovation centres, 1,400 innovative companies, 144 accelerators, more than 50 [sci-tech] parks, 6,000 start-ups and 5,700 knowledge-based companies have been established in the country," said the vice president. He added some one million square metres of space have been added to land used for innovation purposes.

"This space has been set aside to develop technology and innovation ecosystems in the country, which focus on making optimum use of expert and knowledgeable manpower in the country," he added. "Nine innovation factories have been established in the country or are becoming operational. From A to Z of all these factories has been bankrolled by the private sector's investment," he said.

The official underlined good progress has also been made in the domain of biotechnology.

Iran Expects Word From Boeing on Jets Deal



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's Civil Aviation Organization has written to Boeing to inquire about the fate of a \$16.5 billion deal for 80 jets with the US aircraft maker, which was shelved in 2018 after the former Trump administration revoked the export license, CAO Chief Executive Touraj Dehqani Zanganeh says.

President Donald Trump's departure has kindled new hopes for a possible revival of the order which is part of Iran's \$36 billion deal signed in 2016 to buy airliners from Boeing, Airbus and ATR during a brief trade thaw.

"Iran's contract with Airbus and ATR has been suspended. Regarding the contract we have with Boeing, a letter has recently been written to clarify its fate," Dehqani Zanganeh told Tasnim news agency.

National flag carrier IranAir had ordered 100 passenger aircraft from Airbus, 80 from Boeing and 20 from ATR, but the deals depended on U.S. license because of the heavy use of American parts in the planes.

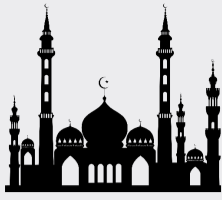
Iran had imported three aircraft from Airbus and 13 from ATR before the U.S. Treasury Department revoked export licenses.

With Trump gone, it is not clear whether the duopolists and the Franco-Italian turboprop maker will be able to consummate the deals.

Dehqani Zanganeh said, "There is definitely a possibility that ATR and Airbus contracts will be reactivated. If an opening occurs, they will have to return to the contracts."

Boeing played down the historic deal's prospects after Trump took office. The planemaker even quietly lined up other customers for some of the jetliners once intended for IranAir.

An Iranian lawmaker said at the time that Tehran would sue Boeing at international tribunals for failing to fulfill its deal with Iran.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:18
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:53
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:35
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	07:00

38. Those who hearken to their Lord, and establish regular Prayer; who (conduct) their affairs by mutual Consultation; who spend out of what We bestow on them for Sustenance; 39. And those who, when an oppressive wrong is inflicted on them, (are not cowed but) help and defend themselves.

Surah 42. Counsel, Consultation (38 - 39)

Tehran, Prague Call for Boosting Economic Ties

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The head of the parliamentary friendship group between Iran and the Czech Republic and the new ambassador of the Czech Republic in Tehran stressed the need to improve the level of economic and trade cooperation with Iran.

Mehdi Farshadan, the head of the parliamentary friendship group between Iran and the Czech Republic in the Islamic Consultative Assembly of Iran, said on Tuesday during a meeting with the new ambassador of the Czech Republic, Josep Richtar, in Tehran, that both countries should work to boost cooperation.

"We consider the relations as a sign of the progress and strengthening of the friendly relations between the two countries and we expect to see its impact more and more in the development of cooperation between the two countries," he added.

He also announced the readiness of the Iran-Czech Parliamentary Friendship Group in the Islamic Consultative Assembly to help facilitate and accelerate cooperation between the two countries saying "We hope that after the end of the coronavirus epidemic, we will see the exchange of parliamentary delegations between the two countries."

Farshadian then pointed to the capacities of the two countries for boosting bilateral



relations especially in the economic and trade fields, adding that unfortunately in recent years, the level of economic cooperation between Tehran and Prague has been affected by the cruel U.S. sanctions and it has declined and in the current condition it is expected the two sides to study ways for cooperation in order to return to the good days without interference of the third party.

The Czech Ambassador to Tehran Josep Richtar, for his part, stressed the importance of developing parliamentary cooperation between the two countries and expressed hope that talks between the Iranian and Czech parliaments would resume after the end of the coronavirus crisis.

He expressed hope for the lifting of U.S. unilateral sanctions against Iran and said: "We believe that the lifting of sanctions will help use the existing capacities of the two countries and strengthen economic relations between Iran and the Czech Republic."

Richtar also called for bolstering cooperation between both states in the fields of mining, energy, machineries and exchange of agro products.

Iran and Kazakhstan to Ease Visa Requirements

TEHRAN (Trend)- Iran and Kazakhstan to facilitate visa requirement if the direct flights from Gorgan to Aktau is successful said Governor of Golestan Province.



"It is currently mandatory for citizens of both countries to obtain visas for traveling and but if the flight is flourishing we would start to negotiate about facilitating visas. Iran is expected to launch direct flights from the city of Gorgan in Golestan Province to the city of Aktau in Kazakhstan in spring," Hadi Haghshenas told Trend in an interview.

According to the agreement between officials of Golestan Province, Kish Airlines, and officials of the Kazakhstan embassy in Iran, the first flight would start by full compliance with health protocols from Gorgan International Airport to Aktau on April 1.

It is expected that the flight would operate once a week and their major function would be for tourism. Iran and Kazakhstan have both agreed that tourists would be allowed to travel after being tested for Coronavirus. Kish Airlines is expected to operate these flights.

"The main reason for launching the direct flight is that there are 15,000 Kazakhs living in Gorgan and it is a good opportunity to simplify their transportation. There is considerable maritime transportation from Amirabad Port to Aktau and the crew of ships needs to return by airplane at some point. Other reasons include traveling businessmen and individuals from chambers of commerce of the two countries, while Afghan residents in Kazakhstan could also travel to their country via this flying route," he added.

"Kazakhstan's Council General in Golestan Province Aitzhan Aidashvili and the representatives of Iran Foreign Ministry and Kish Airlines have agreed during the meeting that Coronavirus situation has improved and the flying route could be successful," he noted.

Agro Export Up 8% In 10 Months

TEHRAN (MNA) - The value of Iran's agricultural products export has risen 8.4 percent during the first ten months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2020 - January 19, 2021), compared to the same period of time in the past year, according to an official with the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA). Mehrdad Jamal Orounaqi, the IRICA deputy head for technical and customs affairs, put the value of exported products at \$4.9 billion in the ten-month period of the present year.

The official said the weight of agricultural products exported in the mentioned period has risen 25.9 percent to stand at 7.085 million tons. He said that Iran had exported 5.6 million tons of agricultural products worth \$4.5 billion during the first ten months of the previous year.

Armenia Keen to Develop Economic Ties With Iran

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Armenian Minister of Economy Vahan Kerobyan said on Wednesday that expanding trade ties and facilitating of Iran access to the markets of countries is the most important topics of the Armenian agreement with Iran.

Armenian Economy Minister Vahan Kerobyan paid a visit to Tehran on January 22 to discuss the expansion of trade ties with Iran.

During the visit, Iran signed agreement with Armenia to boost trade.

Meanwhile, heads of a number of Iranian and Armenian small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) discussed establishment of a technology exchange center and during the meeting, both sides also shared views on ways of promoting cooperation on small and medium-size enterprises.

The CEO of Iran Small Industries and Industrial Towns Organization Ali Rasoulzadeh hailed close relationship between the Iranian and Armenian people as well as the great opportunities for cooperation, stressing the need for holding exhibitions by the Iranian and Armenian firms in Tehran and Yerevan.

Armenian Minister of Economy Vahan Kerobyan in an interview with IRNA said that in the visit to Tehran, "We decided to implement all agreements carried out in the field of commercial relations and economic cooperation for a better opportunity for exchanges so that we can adopt joint projects in the best form.

To achieve the goals, the working group will be set up on the agenda for the interests of the two countries to accelerate the agreement, Kerobyan said.

"Building equipment, fruits and vegetables and petrochemicals are the main trade exchange between the two countries and a limited portion of the metal and technical equipment is exported from Armenia to Iran, he pointed out.

Stating that Iran and Armenia are members of the Eurasian Economic Union, he added that Armenia can have a tremendous impact on the development of trade relations with Iran and with the entire Union by using its geographical position.

Kerobyan also called for the development of trade and economic relations between the two countries, particularly the investment and production activities of Iranian companies in Armenia.

IFZHC Secretary Visits Aras Free Zone

TEHRAN - Concurrent with the Ten-Day-Dawn (Fajr) festivities Secretary of Iranian Free Zones High Council (IFZHC) Morteza Bank travelled to Aras Free Trade Zone to inaugurate and inspect investment and agriculture projects.

According to reports, Mr. Bank in his one-day inaugurated 4 investment projects worth of 128b tomans and creation of 60 jobs in the zone.

Four investment projects of "construction of other projects which are underway in the Aras Free Trade Zone.

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK



Gharah Boroon", "Industrial Phase 2 of Asia Profile Company, "Faraz Barbar Company", and also greenhouse site of Azar Tanso Company were of the projects which were inaugurated by Mr. Bank during his visit.

Ground breaking of heavy industries site of "84-hectare Manara Greenhouse" was of the other programs of Mr. Bank.

He also paid a visit to some other projects which are underway in the Aras Free Trade Zone.

ESCO on Course to Reduce Cost and Boost Competitiveness

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

ISFAHAN - The CEO of Esfahan Steel Company during the 7th International SteelPrice Conference said this gigantic industrial complex whose steel products are in compliance with the latest world standards does not use subsidized energy and it produces its required electricity from its own power station and with taking different measures it is moving in direction of reducing the costs and boosting its competitiveness.

In the beginning of his speech in the conference, Mr. Mansour Yazdizadeh went through the current production condition in the company and said the starting point of rail production in Iran began at ESCO and currently the number-one steel producing company of the company is the only rail producing company in the West Asia.

He said production of rail includes two stages of steel production and then rolling, adding that in the past, the required ingots used to be imported, but today this ingot is produced at ESCO after launching VD project and there is no need to import of ingot any more.

Yazdizadeh went on to say that different types of rail are produced at ESCO. He said the company has signed its first contract for exporting its rail products to Afghanistan.

He reiterated that if ESCO only focuses on producing rail, it can produce 400,000 tons of rails annually.

He went on to say that the company has planned for production wheel and axle for expansion of rail lines in the country and its production will begin in collaboration with the private sector.



MSC Manufactures, Exploits 50-Ton Overhead Crane

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

ISFAHAN - The 50-ton overhead crane at the new hall of continuous casting unit of Mobarakeh Steel Company was manufactured by local experts without involvement of foreign experts, and after having several successful tests, it came into operation.



The expert on implementation of backup and lateral projects announced this success and said due to the rise of production capacity at the casting unit of the company and expansion of the hall of slab warehouse, the project for manufacturing the 50-ton overhead crane for installation at the new warehouse was put on the agenda of the company.

Mr. Ehsan Shirvanian said agility and increasing the pace of relocation of slabs plus boosting the safety were the key goals of this project, added that in design and manufacture of this crane the latest world state-of-the-art technologies have been used.

According to this expert of Mobarakeh Steel Company, the new overhead crane can relocate slab with the heat of 700 centigrade, adding that this type of cranes need complicated and specialized designs in their different parts.

He said one of the properties of this type of cranes is their regenerative capability which saves energy.

Shirvanian said the class of this crane is M8/A8 and the distance between its longitudinal motion is 35.5 meters and speed of its longitudinal motion is 120 meter per minute.

IranPlast to Host 200 Iranian Firms



TEHRAN (Shana) - The director of the 14th IranPlast International Exhibition said the show would be held with 200 Iranian companies as well as 250 foreign traders in Tehran.

According to the National Petrochemical Company, Ayub Banavi said in this edition of the fair, four commodity groups of raw materials will be put on display at Tehran's permanent fairground.

Regarding the distinguishing feature of the 14th IranPlast Exhibition, he said: "The distinguishing feature of this exhibition is the colorful presence of knowledge-based companies as well as holding virtual and online exhibitions, which will start on February 7 and last for two weeks.

Regarding the holding of the online exhibition, the director of the 14th IranPlast International Exhibition stated that the information of the virtual exhibition and invitations to visit have been sent to more than 22,000 foreign visitors, adding: "Although in the past, the virtual exhibition section on the IranPlast website was formed, this platform has been updated this year with facilities and capacities that fully comply with the standards of online exhibitions and has been made available to exhibitors and visitors."

Ayub Banavi pointed out: "In this edition, negotiations and correspondence have been held with 11 organizations with 80,000 members in the polymer and plastic industries to visit the online exhibition."

The physical section of the showcase will be held until February 10.

N. Ireland Halts Post-Brexit Checks

LARNE (Dispatches) - The British government on Tuesday condemned threats to port workers implementing controversial post-Brexit trade checks in Northern Ireland, calling for clear heads to ease fears of an upsurge in sectarian tensions.

Checks were suspended at Belfast and Larne ports late Monday, and the European Commission said it told its staff working at two border posts in the British province to stay away. The development comes just over a month into new trading arrangements after Brexit took full effect, and warnings it could stoke lingering community tensions in Northern Ireland.



Russia Expects India to Approve Sputnik V Vaccine

NEW DELHI (Reuters) - India is expected to grant emergency use authorization for Russia's Sputnik V COVID-19 vaccine this month or next, the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF), which markets the shot abroad, told Indian news agency ANI on Tuesday.

India has already approved two other vaccines for emergency use and has inoculated nearly 4 million people since mid-January in what the government touts as the world's biggest immunization campaign, aiming to vaccinate over 300 million people by August.



Trump Accused of Grievous Betrayal In Impeachment Trial Brief



WASHINGTON (AFP) - U.S. lawmakers leading the impeachment case against Donald Trump Tuesday accused the former president of a "betrayal" of historic proportions over his role in the storming of the U.S. Capitol, one week before his Senate trial begins.

In a pre-trial brief outlining their prosecution arguments, the House impeachment managers made their case for the Senate to convict Trump, saying the American people should be protected "against a President who provokes violence to subvert our democracy."

The managers, all Democrats, argued in the sweeping 77-page document that Trump, speaking to a crowd of supporters in Washington on January 6, whipped them into a "frenzy" shortly before they marched on the US Capitol building.

They declared him "singularly responsible" for the subsequent riot that left five people dead and threatened the lives of lawmakers and vice president Mike Pence.

"In a grievous betrayal of his oath of office, President Trump incited a violent mob to attack the United States Capitol" and impede Congress's confirmation of Joe Biden as the winner of the November election, wrote the lawmakers, led by congressman Jamie Raskin.

"If provoking an insurrectionary riot against a joint session of Congress after losing an election is not an impeachable offense, it is hard to imagine what would be," the brief states.

"Failure to convict would embolden future leaders to attempt to retain power by any and all means -- and would suggest that there is no line a president cannot cross."

Trump was impeached by the House of Representatives on January 13 for an unprecedented second time. But his term ended before the beginning of the Senate trial, prompting Republican lawmakers to argue it is unconstitutional to convict a president after he has left office.

It is an argument Trump's lawyers are expected to make in his defense, but the Democrats rejected that reasoning outright.

"There is no 'January Exception' to impeachment or any other provision of the Constitution," they wrote, adding that a president must answer for his conduct in office "from his first day in office through his last."

The brief points to multiple videos -- expected to be used as evidence in the trial -- which they say show Trump inciting the crowd to commit violence, and show rioters chanting "Hang Mike Pence!" and hunting for House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

Trump spent much of his time after the November 3 vote claiming that the election was stolen through massive fraud.

Dozens of courts in multiple states found the argument baseless.

Russian Court Jails Navalny, West Demands His Release

MOSCOW (Reuters) - A Russian court jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny on Tuesday in a ruling which the opposition politician blamed on what he called President Vladimir Putin's hatred and fear of him.

The Moscow court handed Navalny a three-and-a-half-year sentence but his lawyer said the anti-corruption blogger would serve only two years and eight months in jail because of time he has already spent under house arrest.

The widely anticipated ruling, which followed nationwide protests calling for Navalny's release, is likely to further strain relations with the West, which is likely to consider imposing sanctions on Russia over its handling of the case.

The United States, Britain and Germany urged Moscow to immediately free Navalny, with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken saying Washington would coordinate closely with allies to hold Russia accountable.

A Navalny ally had urged the West before the hearing to hit Putin's inner circle with personal sanctions.

Navalny's supporters urged people to gather in central Moscow though riot police had already taken up position. His lawyers said they would appeal the ruling.

Navalny, one of Putin's most prominent critics, was arrested on Jan. 17 for alleged parole violations after returning from Germany where he had been recovering from being poisoned with a military-grade nerve agent.

Navalny said Russian state security agents had put the poison in his underpants, something the Kremlin denied. It has suggested that Navalny is a CIA asset, a charge he rejects, and has told the West to stay out of its domestic affairs.

After his arrest, Navalny released a YouTube video making allegations about Putin's wealth that was viewed over 100 million times. The Kremlin said it was false.

Tuesday's hearing focused on Navalny's alleged parole violations over a suspended sentence in a 2014 embezzlement case Navalny says was trumped up.

But Navalny, in a fiery speech to the court, alleged he was jailed because of Putin's concerns about him as a political rival, a suggestion the Kremlin has laughed off, referring to Navalny as a troublesome blogger without wide popular support.



Anger in Cyprus After Church Demolishes Protected Buildings

NICOSIA (AFP) - The powerful Church of Cyprus has sparked anger on the Mediterranean island by demolishing four listed buildings next to a new cathedral it is building in Nicosia's historic old city.

The interior ministry said Tuesday it was "deeply troubled and concerned over the arbitrary and illegal demolition of the preserved buildings" in the capital the previous day.

It said that while the houses were on church-owned land, their demolition violated laws protecting cultural heritage.

The Cypriot Orthodox Church has considerable political clout on the island, but its decision to demolish the buildings sparked a public outcry against Archbishop Chrysostomos II. Nicosia's Mayor Constantinos Yiorkadjis told state radio CyBC on Tuesday that the demolitions were illegal and took place without any prior permit issued by the municipality.

Yiorkadjis said the municipality would demand the restoration of the buildings, which according to Cypriot records date back to 1927.

The interior ministry says 7,000 buildings have been listed across the island in an attempt to preserve the island's cultural legacy "for generations to come". "The protection of architectural, but also historical heritage, is a priority for the state," it added.

The Technical Chamber of Cyprus, advisory body on engineering and building standards, said the Church did not have the appropriate licenses to demolish the buildings and accused it of violating the terms of its planning permission for the new cathedral.

It said the Church had a contractual obligation to maintain and restore the surrounding buildings. The houses, a stone's throw from the archbishop's headquarters, lie in the old centre of Nicosia with its Venetian-era walls and some architectural relics dating back to centuries earlier.

The archbishop's office did not immediately respond to AFP's request for comment.

Turkey's Student Protests Turn Increasingly Violent

ISTANBUL (Dispatches) - Turkish police fired tear gas Tuesday and chased protesters down narrow Istanbul street as weeks of student protests against President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's appointment of a university rector turned increasingly violent.

Turkey has been hit by weeks of rallies across major campuses against Erdogan's appointment of a party loyalist to head Istanbul's exclusive Bogazici University at the start of the year.

Police detained 159 students after storming a protest staged inside the fenced-off campus on Monday night.

AFP reporters saw plain clothes police drag away dozens of students when they tried to march along a central street in the capital Ankara on Tuesday.

Police fired tear gas and used riot shields to disperse a crowd of around 1,000 people -- some carrying LGBT rainbow flags in support of past detainees --- when they tried to stage a demonstration on the Asian side of Istanbul later in the day.

An AFP reporter estimated that 50 to 60 people had been detained in Istanbul by Tuesday evening.

The rally had been banned on coronavirus grounds but several opposition lawmakers still turned up.

The standoff over the rector gained a new dimension when protesters hung a poster near his office

depicting Islam's holiest site covered in LGBT imagery last week.

Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu tweeted on Saturday that "four LGBT freaks" had been detained for "inciting hatred" with their poster.

Twitter took the rare step of hiding that message under a warning that it violated the platform's "rules about hateful conduct" -- the same thing it did to tweets from former US President Donald Trump before banning him last month.

Soylu posted a new message on Tuesday asking why Turkey should "tolerate LGBT deviants".

Twitter hid that message under another "hateful content" warning that requires an extra click to see what the minister said.

The youth-driven demonstrations have echoes of 2013 protests that sprang up against plans to demolish an Istanbul park before spreading nationally and presenting a direct challenge to Erdogan's rule. Students have relied heavily on Twitter to get their message out.

Most Turkish television stations and newspapers are controlled by government allies and the demonstrations have barely been mentioned by state media.

And the bond between Turkish protesters and Twitter appears to be growing stronger by the day.



Anti-Coup Protests Ring out In Myanmar's Main City

YANGON (Reuters) - The din of banging pots and honking car horns reverberated through Myanmar's biggest city of Yangon late on Tuesday in the first widespread protest against the military coup that overthrew elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

The party of the detained Nobel Peace laureate called for her release by the junta that seized power on Monday and is keeping her at an undisclosed location. It also demanded recognition of her victory in a November election.

A senior official from her National League for Democracy (NLD) said he had learned she was in good health a day after her arrest in a military takeover that derailed Myanmar's tentative progress towards full democracy.

The U.N. Security Council was due to meet later on Tuesday amid calls for a strong global response to the military's latest seizure of power in a country blighted for decades by army rule.

U.S. State Department officials said the takeover had been determined to constitute a coup d'etat, triggering restrictions in foreign assistance. Washington has threatened to reimpose sanctions on the generals who seized power.

In the biggest public display of anger so far, people in Yangon banged on pots and pans and honked car horns and chanted "evil be gone".

"It is a Myanmar tradition to drive away evil or bad karma by beating tin or metal buckets," said Yangon resident San Tint.

People have not taken to the streets so far in a country with a history of bloody repression of protests.

The coup followed a landslide win for Suu Kyi's NLD in an election on Nov. 8, a result the military has refused to accept, citing unsubstantiated allegations of fraud.

The army handed power to its commander, General Min Aung Hlaing, and imposed a state of emergency for a year.

Min Aung Hlaing told the first meeting of his new government on Tuesday that it was inevitable the army would have to take power after its protests over the alleged election fraud last year were rejected.



Zaferanieh (\$2500)
250sq.m, 4bdrs
S/p, Sauna
J, balcony
marble fl
Fully Furn

Shanon (adviser)

Jordan Villa (\$5000)
1000sq.m
5bdrs, S/p
S, J, balcony
parquet floor
Fully Furn

Parsian

Fereshteh (\$1800)
180sq.m, 3bdrs
S/pool, S, J
balcony, F.F

Niavaran (\$2000)
220sq.m, 3bdrs, S/pool
S, J, pkg, & F.F

Velenjak Bldg (\$10000)
5storey, 20bdrs
S/p, S, J, pkgs
Brand new, F.F

Shahrak-e-gharb (\$2000)
220sq.m, 2bdrs, balcony
pkg, & Fully Furn

Cell: +989121907875
Shanon_tari@yahoo.com
Tel : 88510081
Fax : 88506474

Vanak (Commercial office)
300sq.m, 200sq.m, 6bdrs
(\$30 per sq.m)

IRAN NEWS ADVERTISING
44253401

Don't Waste Your Time

Visit our website to choose your desired rental Properties

www.DeltaHOME.ir
The Most Specialized Website for Foreigners

HOME
Real Estate
Member of **DELTA** Real Estate Group
(021) 88888865

IRAN NEWS
PUBLISHER OF NEWSPAPERS
ADVERTISING

TEL: 44253448-50
FAX: 44253234
ADIRANNEWS@GMAIL.COM

Pandemic Drives BP to First Loss in a Decade

LONDON (Reuters) - BP plunged to a \$5.7 billion loss last year, its first in a decade, as the pandemic took a heavy toll on oil demand, and the energy company warned of a tough start to 2021 amid widespread travel restrictions.

Despite the weak environment, however, CEO Bernard Looney told Reuters the company's transition to a greener future remained on track. It is aiming to ramp up renewable power generation to

50 gigawatts (GW) by 2030 from 3.3 GW currently, while slashing oil output to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Capital expenditure is set to rise to \$13 billion this year, of which \$9 billion will still go to oil and gas, \$2 billion to low-carbon projects and \$2 billion to mobility, Chief Financial Officer Murray Auchincloss said. That compared with a budget of \$12 billion in 2020.



Eurozone Economy Drops Into Double-Dip Contraction

LONDON (FT) - The eurozone economy fell into a double-dip contraction in the final quarter of last year, shrinking 0.7 per cent from the previous three months but outperforming economists' expectations after fresh restrictions were imposed to contain the coronavirus pandemic.

The drop reversed some of the previous quarter's strong growth, leaving gross domestic product down 6.8 per cent over the full year after the bloc's historic recession in the first half of 2020, Eurostat said on Tuesday.

That compares with quarter-on-quarter GDP growth of 1 per cent in the US and 2.6 per cent in China in the final three months of 2020. The eurozone has been harder hit by the spread of the virus and is recovering more slowly than other major economies — it is not expected to return to its pre-pandemic output level until the middle of next year.

China has already shaken off the economic impact of Covid-19, growing 2.3 per cent over the course of 2020, while the US economy is expected to reach its pre-pandemic scale by the middle of this year after shrinking 3.5 per cent last year.

However, the eurozone's fourth-quarter contraction was milder than the 1.2 per cent fall expected by economists polled by Reuters, and better than the European Central Bank's forecast for a decline of 2.2 per cent.

Nadia Gharbi, economist at Pictet Wealth Management, said the "better than expected" GDP data — along with last week's increase in German inflation — "will relieve pressure on the ECB to add extra stimulus" but she warned that "the outlook is uncertain enough to keep it on the dovish side".

The fresh contraction was also much milder than the 11.7 per cent decline the bloc suffered in the second quarter of last year, when the initial coronavirus lockdowns were imposed.

"The eurozone economy got away with a black eye late last year," said Florian Hense, economist at Berenberg. "Stronger exports and some recovery in investment mitigated the decline in private consumption... Furlough schemes supported disposable incomes while corporate profits may have declined."

The stuttering pace of the recovery and the slow progress of vaccination schemes have prompted many economists to warn that the eurozone faces a double-dip recession this winter, given the risk of another contraction in the first quarter.

Global Business Travel to Grow 21% in 2021

LONDON (Reuters) - Business travel spending is forecast to grow 21% this year worldwide, helped by the rollout of COVID-19 vaccines, but will not recover to pre-pandemic levels until the middle of the decade, a business travel association said on Tuesday.

Spending on business travel is projected to rise to \$842 billion in 2021, according to the Global Business Travel Association's (GBTA) BTI Outlook, after dropping 52% in 2020 to \$694 billion due to the pandemic.

After a decade of steady annual growth, business travel is expected to have shown losses in 2020 that were 10 times greater than the declines after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks or the 2008 recession, GBTA said.

Despite the expected growth in travel in 2021, uncertainty around vaccination progress and U.S. President Joe Biden's policies can affect the recovery.

"The continued rollout of the vaccine will be central to recovery globally, as will decisions the new Biden Administration makes regarding global trade and border and quarantine policies," said Dave Hilfman, GBTA's interim executive director in a statement.

As U.S. airlines also expect, the group said businesses are likely to spend more on travel that cannot be duplicated with online meetings such as sales calls and service trips.

The proportion of companies' travel budget spent on internal meetings is estimated to decline 6%, compared with 2019, the group said.

By the end of 2024, business travel spending is projected to reach about \$1.4 trillion, nearly equaling the 2019 pre-pandemic revenue peak of \$1.43 trillion, the group said. It projects a full recovery in 2025.

Key developing economies in Asia Pacific will drive global growth in business travel over the next decade, the group said.

Venezuela's PDVSA Boosts Oil Exports in Jan

CARACAS (Reuters) - Venezuelan PDVSA's growing pool of new customers helped the state oil company boost exports in January, but the increase was not enough to offset the cumulative effect of U.S. sanctions, according to documents from the firm and vessel tracking data.

Washington imposed strict sanctions on PDVSA in early 2019, depriving the company of its main export market, the United States. The U.S. government has since added layers of complexity to the sanctions framework, often interrupting purchases from established clients and making difficult for PDVSA, its joint ventures and customers to find vessels to carry the oil to Asia.

In January, a total of 22 tankers left Venezuelan ports transporting crude and refined products for exports, mainly to China and other Asian destinations, shipping 544,290 barrels per day (bpd), the documents and data showed.

That average was almost 12% higher than volume exported in December, but 43% lower than the 960,000 bpd in the same time period a year ago and 60% below the 1.38 million bpd sent in January 2019, prior to sanctions. The newest customers were responsible for buying over 76% of total exports, or 414,000 bpd, while some 29,000 bpd of Venezuela crude and fuel ended up in Cuba, a top political ally of socialist President Nicolas Maduro.

PDVSA and Venezuela's oil ministry did not reply to requests for comment.

A handful of the state-run company's long-term customers have not resumed loadings after former U.S. Donald Trump's administration pushed them to pause oil swaps in the last quarter of 2020, according to PDVSA's documents. Some of them are pressing U.S. President Joseph Biden's administration to reverse the ban on crude-for-diesel swaps.

OPEC+ Sees Oil Market Deficit Despite Weaker Demand

LONDON (Reuters) - OPEC+ expects deep output cuts will keep the global oil market in deficit throughout the year, even though the producer group has revised down 2021 demand growth, a document seen by Reuters shows.

A Joint Technical Committee (JTC) of the alliance, which met on Tuesday, reviewed the demand outlook and countries' compliance with agreed output cuts. A ministerial panel meets to review the market on Wednesday.

Under a base case scenario, the JTC expects the oil market to be in deficit throughout 2021, peaking at 2 million barrels per day in May.

The document showed the group expected the deficit despite having lowered its forecast for oil demand growth this year to 5.6 million barrels per day (bpd), 300,000 bpd less than OPEC's most recently released estimate.

As the impact of the pandemic lingers, OPEC has cut its demand forecast repeatedly since last July.

In an alternative scenario that sees demand growth shrinking still further, the JTC sees the market flipping into a surplus in April and December, the document showed.

Following record output cuts by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and allies (OPEC+), oil has rallied from historic lows hit last year as the impact of the pandemic on travel destroyed demand.

On Tuesday, benchmark Brent crude hit its highest level in almost a year at nearly \$58 a barrel.

The JTC's base case scenario expects oil demand to recover to 97.9 million bpd in December, some 2 million bpd below pre-pandemic levels.

The JTC meeting and the ministerial meeting on Wednesday are not expected to recommend any adjustments to oil output policy, two OPEC sources said on condition of anonymity.

Amid Hope and Fear: Expression of Solidarity With People of Kashmir

BY: SAJID SHAUKAT

Of all the imaginable forms of terrorism, heinous as they are in their very essence and callous in their manifestations, terrorism sponsored and perpetuated by the State is unmatched in its viciousness and gravity. It leads unfailingly to despondence, despair and a perennial loss of hope in the victimized people. It robs the succeeding generations of their sense of entitlement to justice and all faith in their institutions.

Years of subjugation at the hands of Indians, had failed to deter the resolve of the valiant people of Kashmir, to perpetuate their silent struggle for peace and justice. However, Indian Constitutional changes in August 2019, has transformed the political and power discourse within Indian Occupied Jammu & Kashmir. The Indian abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A through an executive order, is aimed at predetermining the outcome of any future plebiscite in Kashmir. The legislative and demographic changes were a culmination of several years of scheming to change Jammu & Kashmir's special status and demographic composition. Indian officials had been long advocating this idea as the 'final solution' to the Kashmir problem.

Shortly after the constitutional changes, the entire valley of Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir was placed under an indefinite curfew prohibiting all movement and assembly and enforced a blanket communication blackout with a de-facto State of Emergency. During the course of an unabated military siege, the Modi administration dissolved the Jammu & Kashmir Legislative Assembly, centralized executive authority in Kashmir and revoked the special residency and land ownership rights of the Kashmiri population. These actions are illegal, void and in complete violation of the UNSC resolutions and 4th Geneva Convention.

The reign of terror unleashed on the Kashmiri population is replete with instances of extra-judicial killings in fake "encounters" and so-called cordon- and-search operations, torture, enforced disappearances and collective punishment of entire communities.

The special status of Kashmir was introduced in the Indian constitution as a transitional measure. It signified a recognition of the final settlement of the Kashmir dispute through the will of the people of Kashmir as enshrined in UN Security Council resolutions. The special status gave Kashmiris a right to permanent residence, right to purchase property in Kashmir and limited the applicability of the Indian Constitution to the State.

The UNHRC, EU, Parliaments around the world and various international, including Indian human rights and civil society organizations have strongly condemned the Indian atrocities in Kashmir. The Prime Minister of Pakistan has expressed steadfast and unequivocal support to the Kashmiri people in their struggle for freedom from the excesses of one of the most ruthless, inhumane & illegal Occupation in modern history.

It is no coincidence that the aggravating political and human rights situation in Kashmir runs parallel with a failing and vulnerable Indian government which is fast losing its credibility both internally and on the international front. Under his leadership, India is witnessing its lowest annual growth rate in decades. In 2020 alone, India's GDP growth was -10.2% and it witnessed the worst quarterly contraction of 23% in the last 24 years. India was also faced with 17 insurgencies, including Khalistan, Mizoram and Nagaland, as well as the indigenous struggle in Kashmir, where India had stationed 900,000 troops, the largest concentration of troops relative to population size anywhere in the world.

In order to divert attention from its domestic failings, the Modi administration has been conjuring war hysteria in the region through inciting violence in Kashmir and threatening to attack Pakistan-administered Kashmir. The Indian government is following the Israeli model of transforming a majority into a minority through resettlement and state-sanctioned legislation. Indian Prime Minister had allowed the pogrom of Gujrat to take place under his supervision and subscribed to a party that eulogized Nathuram Godse, who had assassinated Gandhi.

Since the Indian actions of 5th August 2019, the human rights situation in Kashmir has touched new lows. With the stroke of a pen, the Modi administration not only deprived the Kashmiris of their special legal status and unique cultural and historical identity, it divested them of the decades old promise of self-determination and inherent human dignity. The international community owes it to the future generations of Kashmiris to live and breathe in freedom and with an assuredness of wholeness and dignity. It is up to us to decide whether we would be on the right side of history when we are judged by the posterity.

Iran, Iraq Discuss Ways To Use Banking Resources

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Governor of the Central Bank of Iran Abdolnasser Hemmati and Chairman of the State-owned Trade Bank of Iraq (TBI) Salem Chalabi discussed the methods of using Iran's central bank's resources on Wednesday. Hemmati met and held talks with Chalabi on Wednesday. The two sides reviewed the methods of using Iranian Central Bank's resources. Under the talks, Iran is supposed to have access to financial resources from gas exports to Iraq.



Russia's Sputnik V Vaccine 91.6% Effective

PARIS (AFP) - Russia's Sputnik V vaccine is 91.6 percent effective against symptomatic Covid-19, according to results published in The Lancet on Tuesday that independent experts said allayed transparency concerns over the jab, which Moscow is already rolling out.

Sputnik V -- named after the Soviet-era satellite -- was approved in Russia months before results from its final-stage clinical trials were published, leading to scepticism from experts.

But the new analysis of data from 20,000 participants in Phase 3 trials suggests that the two-dose vaccination offers more than 90 percent efficacy against symptomatic Covid-19.

"The development of the Sputnik V vaccine has been criticised for unseemly haste, corner cutting, and an absence of transparency," said an independent Lancet commentary by Ian Jones of the University of Reading and Polly Roy of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

"But the outcome reported here is clear and the scientific principle of vaccination is demonstrated, which means another vaccine can now join the fight to reduce the incidence of Covid-19."

The results suggest Sputnik V is among the top performing vaccines, along with the Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna jabs that also reported more than 90 percent efficacy.

Pre-empting the results of the phase 3 trials, Russia has already launched a mass inoculation campaign for citizens 18 and older.

Several countries around the world have already registered Sputnik V, according to the Russian Direct Investment Fund which helped develop the vaccine, including Belarus, Venezuela, Bolivia and Algeria.

In January, Chancellor Angela Merkel said Germany had offered Russia support in Moscow's development of Sputnik V, after Russian authorities said they had applied for registration in the European Union.

The trial involved giving 14,964 participants in the vaccine group and 4,902 in the placebo group two jabs 21 days apart.

Those taking part were tested for Covid-19 at enrolment into the trial, again when they had the second dose and then after that if they reported symptoms.

From the second dose, 16 cases of symptomatic Covid-19 were confirmed in the vaccine group and 62 cases were reported in the placebo group, giving an efficacy equivalent to 91.6 percent.



The authors said, however, that efficacy was only calculated on symptomatic cases and said more research would be needed to assess how it affects asymptomatic disease.

They added that the follow-up period was around 48 days from the first dose, so the full period of protection is still unknown. The trial is ongoing and plans to recruit a total of 40,000 people.

Sputnik V uses two different disarmed strains of the adenovirus, a virus that causes the common cold, as vectors to deliver the vaccine dose.

Developers said that using a different adenovirus vector for the booster vaccination minimizes the risk of the immune system developing resistance to the initial vector, so it may help create a more powerful response.

Alexander Edwards, an Associate Professor in Biomedical Technology at the University of Reading, said the trial might help provide evidence to this theory of immune response.

"Pandemic means 'all' -- and the only way to address a global problem is with a global response -- sharing data, science, technology and medicines," he said.

The vaccine has the advantage of being able to be stored at normal refrigerator temperatures instead of the conditions far below freezing required for some other vaccines.

U.S., Japan Finance Chiefs Vow to Cooperate Closely



TOKYO (Dispatches) - Finance Minister Taro Aso said that he and newly appointed U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen agreed Monday to closely cooperate in addressing the economic fallout from the novel coronavirus pandemic during their discussion also involving policies on China.

"We exchanged views on the economic situations in the world and our countries, and confirmed that we'll keep cooperating closely," Aso, who has doubled as deputy prime minister since 2012, told reporters after the talks over the phone with Yellen, a former chief of the Federal Reserve.

"As for our fiscal policies, our priority is to come out from the crisis by taking bold economic measures," Aso added.

The two finance chiefs also discussed policies related to China, according to Aso, saying it is important to hold close discussions among the Group of Seven nations on the matter.

Yellen, for her part, conveyed her intention to deepen cooperation with Japan to strengthen both economies and her readiness to work closely with Japan, both bilaterally and multilaterally, over the economic response to the pandemic and climate change, the Treasury Department said in a statement.

Aso said he congratulated Yellen on her inauguration as treasury secretary, which the U.S. Senate approved last week under the administration of new President Joe Biden.

Yellen, who became the first woman to take up the post in the Treasury's over 230-year history, has already had talks by phone with her counterparts in Britain, Germany, France and Canada since she took office, according to the department.

Since last year, the pandemic has taken a heavy toll on the world's largest and third-largest economies, both of which saw the largest quarterly shrinkage on record in the April-June period.

Although the two countries have seen gradual economic recovery since then, recent resurgences of COVID-19 cases across the world have been clouding the outlook again.

To deal with the virus impact, Biden proposed in January a \$1.9 trillion emergency relief plan including additional cash benefits for individuals.

In Japan, the Cabinet of Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga decided in December its latest economic package worth ¥73.6 trillion (\$700 billion) including extending the domestic travel subsidy program to support the pandemic-hit tourism sector.

Home Appliance Manufacturing to Post a Record High

TEHRAN (MNA) - The manufacturing of home appliances will hit a record high in the current Iranian calendar year (ends on March 20), according to an official with the Ministry of Industry, Mining and Trade.

Keyvan Gardan, the director for the electrical and metals industries and home appliances office of the ministry, said that according to the plans and the efforts made, despite the continuation of sanctions and the coronavirus pandemic, this year the record of home appliance production will be broken after the victory of the Islamic Revolution (1979).

Making the remarks in a Wednesday meeting of industry owners with the directors of the Ministry of Industry, Mining and Trade in the field of formulating the strategy of Iran's home appliance industry on the horizon of 1404 (March 2025-March 2026), the official added, "Production was projected to grow by 30 percent this year, reaching a record of 12 million sets of home appliances, but the target was realized by the end of the tenth month (January 19)".

Despite all the sanctions and problems, this industry has been able to continue to grow decisively in the past two and a half years, he said, adding, "Of course, with the ban imposed on the import of home appliances, the people also cooperated and supported this industry, which led to its growth."

He pointed to the \$37-billion home appliance market of the neighboring countries and the region and the \$5-billion domestic market capacity and said, "We are trying to allocate more of this market to our country by providing conditions."

Two months ago, the secretary of the Association of Industries of Household Appliances of Iran said that domestic production of equipment and parts used in the home appliance industry has saved Iran \$220 million.

Iran, Afghanistan Move to Implement River-Sharing Deal

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran and Afghanistan have launched a month-long surveying operation in their joint border region to work out the topographic features of the Helmand River as they seek to implement the terms of an old river-sharing agreement.

A senior official from Iran's Energy Ministry said on Tuesday that a 20-member delegation from Afghanistan was in the eastern city of Zabol to participate in the surveying mission.

Issa Bozorgzadeh said that the surveying is meant to enable Iran to set up installations at the border to obtain its water right from the Helmand, known on the Iranian side as Hirmand, based on the terms of an agreement signed between Iran and Afghanistan in 1973.

Bozorgzadeh said surveying data will be used to construct sophisticated structures on the river that will enjoy precise devices to measure the amount of water

allocated to Iran.

"These devices should be state-of-the-art so that it is guaranteed that Iran obtains (its) water right based on the terms of the 1973 agreement on Hirmand River," he said.

The Energy Ministry said the surveying will mostly focus on topography of the river based on which Iran will construct its reservoir and measurement structures.

It said that Iran will start construction work on the river as soon as surveying is ended and approved by authorities the two sides.

Based on the agreement between the two neighboring countries, Iran has a right to 26 cubic meters per second (850 million cm per year) of water from the Helmand.

However, Iranian authorities believe Iran's share of water have dwindled over the past three decades mainly because of Afghanistan's moves to build dams for irrigation and electricity needs.

Peaceful Nuclear...

FROM PAGE 1

He said Iran takes pride in having made great progress on different scientific fronts, namely in the domains of quantum technology, laser, radiomedicines, nuclear agriculture, etc.

Salehi added a new chapter has opened in the development of the nation's peaceful nuclear technology.

Meanwhile on Tuesday Iran's representative to the Vienna-based organizations says the country has installed new cascades of advanced centrifuges at two nuclear sites in Natanz and Fordow to increase enrichment capacity.

"Thanks to our diligent nuclear scientists, two cascades of 348 IR2m centrifuges with almost 4 times the capacity of IR1 are now running with UF6 successfully in Natanz," Kazem Gharibabadi said in a post on his Twitter account on Tuesday. Thanks to our diligent nuclear scientists, two cascades of 348 IR2m centrifuges with almost 4 times the capacity of IR1 are now running with UF6 successfully in Natanz. Installation of 2 cascades of IR6 centrifuges has also been started in Fordow. There's more to come soon.

He added that Iran also started the installation of two "cascades of IR6 centrifuges" at its Fordow nuclear facility.

"There's more to come soon," the ambassador said.

In another tweet, Gharibabadi said Iran has informed the International Atomic Energy Agency of the progress as planned, adding that the IAEA "is yet able to verify."

President...

FROM PAGE 1

Rouhani was responding to certain calls for the participation of Saudi Arabia and other Persian Gulf states in any talks on reviving the JCPOA, better known as the Iran deal.

The latest such call came from France, whose President Emmanuel Macron said late last month that Riyadh and other regional allies of Paris.

"Dialogue with Iran will be rigorous, and they will need to include our allies in the region for a nuclear deal, and this includes Saudi Arabia," Macron told Al Arabiya on Friday.

The JCPOA was reached between Iran and a group of countries then known as the P5+1 — which included the United States, Britain, France, Russia, China, and Germany — in July 2015. It was ratified in the form of UN Security Council Resolution 2231.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Rouhani said Iran feels that the world's public opinion and politicians — including those in the U.S. — believe the JCPOA benefits security, peace and interactions among countries.

He further noted, "There have been seven chairs and we six parties are sitting on them [after the US quit]. One side was suddenly struck by periodic mania and left. Now, that party has come to its senses to some extent and the episode of mania has ended. It should return to the table. What does it have to do with the other [signatories] who are already at the table? The Americans must return to Resolution 2231 and international law."

"You commit even a bigger crime if you hesitate because you violated Resolution 2231... Of course, if you return, we will also honor our obligations completely, and this is very clear. We did not violate any resolution so that we would seek to amend it. We did not leave the JCPOA so we would want to return to it," the Iranian chief executive added.

"If we see any goodwill gesture, the response will be a goodwill gesture. If we see any practical measure, the response will be a [similar] measure. If the commitments are fully [fulfilled], there will be a full commitment on our part as well," the president said.

Iran Targeting...

FROM PAGE 1

He added that one of the main approaches of the government was to support space technology, which although there were international restrictions, Iran was able to develop space applications in the country.

"In the field of technology development, we have tried to outsource the work to the public and private sectors and try to provide the infrastructure ourselves," he added.

"Despite all the difficulties, we now have an Iranian operator and a satellite was prepared and put into orbit and we removed one of the obstacles," the minister noted.

"In the field of development of industrial applications, we aim to create business opportunities for students and experts, in which the government was one of the customers and invested in this field," Azari Jahromi stated.

"Today, the services of the space industry is used in the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Energy, especially in forecasting weather and crises," he noted.

Jahromi went on to say that today, more than one hundred space businesses have been formed and a Space Science and Technology Park in Mazandaran province will be inaugurated soon, which will be an effective measure in agriculture and business.

Earlier, head of Iran's Aerospace Research Institute Fathollah Ommi said that Iran has planned to send humans to space in 10 years (2031).

S. Korea...

FROM PAGE 1

Choi hailed Iran's decision while calling for a rapid release of the captain and the vessel.

Araqchi pledged to ensure the humanitarian treatment of and sufficient consular assistance for the captain in the course of judicial process, the South Korean foreign ministry said.

During the phone talks, Choi and Araqchi also agreed to restore the traditionally friendly bilateral relations by resolving the issue on Iran's money frozen in South Korea under the U.S. sanctions.

Choi said Seoul will speedily address the frozen asset issue the South Korean government can independently handle while consulting with the United States in a transparent way over the issue.

The two sides also agreed to continue close contacts for a substantive progress on the issue.

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

E-Mail Address:
info@irannewsdaily.com
ISSN 1024-6053
P.O. Box: 15875-8551
Address: No 13, Pajouhesh St.,
Golestan II St, Golestan St.Marzdaran
Blvd., Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran
Printed by:Honar Sarzmin Sabz
Distributed by:
Cities of Iran Cultural and
Artistic Institute
Managing Director: Fereydoon Taherpour Asl

Rugani Joins Struggling Cagliari on Loan

ROME (Dispatches) - Daniele Rugani has moved on loan to struggling Cagliari from Juventus after his spell with Rennes came to an end after just four months in France, according to Serie A.
In October Rugani was loaned to Ligue 1 outfit Rennes until the end of the season but according to the page on the Serie A website which lists confirmed transfer deals, the Italy international has agreed a temporary move to Sardinia.

Real Madrid President Tests Positive for Covid

LONDON (AFP) - Real Madrid president Florentino Perez, 73, has tested positive for Covid-19, the club announced on Tuesday.
The reigning Spanish champions said in a statement Perez "is not presenting any symptoms".
Perez's positive test comes after Real Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane also tested positive last month.
Zidane was asymptomatic and returned to Madrid's training ground on Tuesday morning following his period of isolation.

Kyrgios Makes Winning Return After Year Out

SYDNEY (Dispatches) - Showman Nick Kyrgios pulled victory "out of a hat" Tuesday in his first match for a year, rallying from a set down to get his Australian Open preparations off to a winning start.

The enigmatic 25-year-old last performed in February 2020 at the Acapulco Open, before a wrist injury and then the coronavirus pandemic brought his season to a halt.

He opted not to travel for the U.S. or French Opens, but said at the weekend he was mentally refreshed and excited to be back.

The Australian took time to get his groove back against 209th-ranked Frenchman Alexandre Muller, losing the first set, then needing left knee treatment before knuckling down to win 3-6, 6-4, 7-6 (7/4) in the Murray River Open.

"It was a tricky one, I haven't played a competitive match in about a year and I dealt with a couple of injuries when in quarantine," he said.

"I was just excited to come out here, any opponent for me was going to be tricky, I just wanted to find my feet.

"I just somehow pulled it out of a hat, which seems to be the story of my career, so just happy to get through. The body feels ok."

Meanwhile Dominic Thiem's Australian Open preparations got off to a slow start as the U.S. Open champion slumped to a 6-2 6-4 defeat to Italy's Matteo Berrettini in his opening match of the ATP Cup in Melbourne.

Blasting groundstrokes metres past the baseline, the Austrian was broken four times in a rusty display in the team-based event at Melbourne Park's John Cain Arena as world number 10 Berrettini dominated the clash of hard-hitters.

Playing his first tour match since the ATP Finals, the world number three rallied in the second set to break Berrettini for the first time but surrendered the match the way he played it, with a big swing at a backhand that thudded into the net.



Having pushed Novak Djokovic to five sets in the Australian Open final last year, Thiem is among the top contenders looking to dethrone the Serb at the Feb. 8-21 Grand Slam.

Berrettini was thrilled to take down Thiem in the Group C tie and put Italy back on level terms with Austria at 1-1 after Dennis Novak romped past Fabio Fognini 6-3 6-2 in the morning.

The tie will be decided by the doubles players later on Tuesday. France, the other Group C team, start their tournament against Italy.

The winning nations of the four groups advance to the semi-finals.

Now ranked 47, he will next play fellow Australian Harry Bourchier.

The Murray River Open is one of two ATP events being run concurrently at Melbourne Park ahead of next week's Australian Open.

Two-time Australian Open quarter-finalist Tennys Sandgren was also in the winners' circle, beating fellow American John-Patrick Smith 6-3, 5-7, 6-4 in the Great Ocean Road Open.

Sandgren saved 11 of the 15 break points he faced to set up a clash next up with Italian Salvatore Caruso. Seventeen-year-old Spaniard Carlos Alcaraz also advanced when his Hungarian opponent Attila Balazs retired with heel pain, setting up a second-round clash with top seed David Goffin.

Federer Targets Comeback at Doha Open in March

DOHA (Dispatches) - Roger Federer is targeting the Doha Open in March for his comeback after over a year on the sidelines recovering from two knee operations, the 20-time Grand Slam champion said on Tuesday.

The 39-year-old Swiss has been out of action since February 2020 and shelved plans in December to compete in the Australian Open, which makes a delayed start next week.

It will be the first time Federer has missed the season-opening Grand Slam in Melbourne. In an interview with Swiss radio SRF he said he now felt ready to begin his season in the tournament in Qatar which begins on March 8.

"For the first time I've got the feeling that my knee is once again ready for competition," said Federer, who has set Wimbledon and the Tokyo Olympics as his main objectives for 2021.

Federer's last appearance was a year ago in the Australian Open semi-final to eventual winner Novak Djokovic.

"This is my first attempt to return to a tournament. So it's important for me, for my team, that it's a minor event, and not a major, with all the stress that involves.



New Zealand Qualify for Test Championship Final

DUBAI (Dispatches) - New Zealand are the first team to qualify for the inaugural ICC World Test Championship, the organisers said Tuesday, following the postponement of the Test series between South Africa and Australia.

Australia pulled out of their Test tour to South Africa earlier Tuesday, citing an "unacceptable" risk to players with the coronavirus rampant in the country.

"(It) means New Zealand have become the first team to qualify for the inaugural ICC World Test Championship final to be held in England from June 18 to 22, with June 23 as the reserve day," the ICC said in a statement.

New Zealand, currently ranked second on the ICC WTC table, have a points percentage of 70 per cent, enough to secure them a place in the final.

"They will be joined by either India, England, or Australia with the second spot being determined by the outcome of the India v England four-match Test series due to start on Friday," the statement added.

"To book their place, India will have to win the series against England by 2-1, 2-0, 3-1, 3-0 or 4-0, margin.

"For England to qualify and join New Zealand, they will have to win the series against India by 3-1, 3-0 or 4-0 margin."

Australia can still qualify for the WTC final if the series between India and England is drawn, or if India win the series 1-0 or England win it by 1-0, 2-1 or a 2-1 margin.

Justin Langer's men were due to play three Tests against the Proteas, and Australia named their squad last week with the intent to fly out this month.

But the situation became untenable with the outbreak in South Africa accelerated by a new variant said to be more contagious than earlier strains of the virus.

With almost 1.5 million detected infections and more than 44,000 fatalities, it has the highest number of cases and deaths on the continent.

Cricket Australia interim chief Nick Hockley said the medical advice was not to travel.



top-ranked player Alex De Minaur, but opted to rest instead as he prepares for the Australian Open next week.

Nadal Pulls out of ATP Cup Tie With Stiff Back

MADRID (Dispatches) - World number two Rafael Nadal pulled out of Spain's opening ATP Cup tie against Australia Tuesday, complaining of a stiff lower back.

The 20-time Grand Slam champion was due to take the court against Australia's top-ranked player Alex De Minaur, but opted to rest instead as he prepares for the Australian Open next week.

"Hi all, we have decided with Team Spain and my team, to not play today the first match of the ATP Cup here in Melbourne since I have a stiff low back," he tweeted.

Nadal added that he hoped to have recovered by Thursday, when Spain meet Greece.

Spanish number two Roberto Bautista Agut will now face de Minaur, while John Millman takes on Pablo Carreno Busta in the opening rubber.

Nadal, who is aiming for a record-breaking 21st Slam title in Melbourne, moving him past the injured Roger Federer, played an exhibition in Adelaide on Friday, beating Dominic Thiem 7-5, 6-4.

Van Dijk Return This Season Would Be a Miracle

LONDON (Dispatches) - Jurgen Klopp says it would be a "miracle" if Virgil van Dijk played again this season after signing Ben Davies and Ozan Kabak to combat Liverpool's defensive crisis.

The Netherlands captain has been out of action after suffering knee ligament damage against Everton in October.

The club's other senior center-backs, Joe Gomez and Joel Matip are also long-term absentees.

"No doctor told me there's a chance for Virgil to play again this season," Klopp said on Tuesday. "I don't want to say it's impossible but it's not likely."

He added: "I think we have space for Virgil on the Champions League list. If we have space for it, then Virgil will be on the (Premier League) list.

"If there is no space, we have to make a decision. If he is on the list it is only because we hope for a miracle -- that is it."

The injury crisis forced the club to make a last-minute dip into the transfer market to sign Davies from Championship side Preston for an initial £500,000 (\$680,000) and bring in Schalke's Kabak on loan.

"At the moment we are without our first four centre-back choices and only one of them will come back in the next weeks and that is Fabinho -- and he is a six (midfielder)," said Klopp.

"Our problem is always if one more thing happens then we don't know what to do. It is not perfect, the January window is not my favorite window.

"We have solutions here and now we have more options. For both players it is a big chance and for us as well."

Klopp admits in normal circumstances he would not have gone to the Championship to bring in a player in January but was impressed with what he saw.

"I was a second division player myself and we all dreamt of playing in the first league," he said. "Ben did that as well and now it is a big opportunity for both sides.

"I am a big believer in opportunities and taking chances. Ben sees it the same way."



James Plays Down Row With Spectators In Win Over Hawks

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) - Los Angeles Lakers forward LeBron James said he was happy fans are back at some NBA games amid the COVID-19 pandemic despite a bizarre altercation with supporters that led to four of them being ejected from Monday's game at Atlanta Hawks.

The NBA superstar became involved in a row with a male spectator during the fourth quarter of their 107-99 win at the State Farm Arena - which is among a handful of venues allowing fans this season - before a woman began targeting the player.

The woman, who was escorted out by security personnel along with three others, posted an expletive-laden video on social media explaining the dispute started only after James had exchanged words with her husband.

"At the end of the day, I'm happy fans are back in the building. I miss that interaction ... we as players need that interaction. I don't feel like it was warranted to be kicked out," James told reporters.

"There was a back-and-forth between two grown men ... He said his piece, I said my piece. Then someone else jumped into it and said their piece.

"I didn't think they should have been kicked out. But they might have had a couple of drinks, maybe and they could have probably kept it going. It wouldn't have been about the game anymore ... The referees did what they had to do."

While James played down the incident, Lakers coach Frank Vogel was less than pleased with the fiery exchange after videos emerged on social media showing the woman with her mask hanging off her chin during the row. "It certainly exposed something with regard to having fans in the pandemic," Vogel said. "You obviously can't have fans taking their masks down and shouting at our players with the virus out there during these times."

James has been a fierce critic of former President Donald Trump, and has spoken out against racial inequality after the death of George Floyd, an unarmed Black man killed last year after being seen lying face down in the street while a white police officer knelt on his neck for several minutes.

