

Iranian Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the UN Majid Takht Ravanchi Blasted the U.S. for Continuing to Violate UNSCR 2231 With Illegal Sanctions on Iran

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EU Advises Maximum Diplomacy in Dealing With Iran

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - The European Union says it is high time the former American administration's "maximum pressure" policy towards Iran was jettisoned in favor of diplomatic engagement and interaction, reminding how Washington undermined a 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and world powers through the approach.

"We need to move from 'maximum pressure' to 'maximum diplomacy' through the JCPOA Joint Commission," EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell told Russia's Interfax news agency before making a trip to Moscow on Thursday.

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ICJ Ruling Shows Iranian Nation's Power in Face of U.S.



TEHRAN (PressTV) - President Hassan Rouhani has congratulated Iranians on their "shining victory" against the United States at the UN's top court, saying the World Court's recent verdict on Tehran's case against US sanctions demonstrates the Iranian nation's grandeur in the face of the superpower.

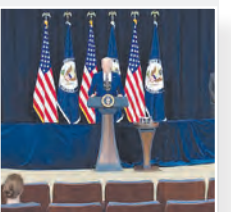
Rouhani made the remarks on Thursday, one day after the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled that it can take on Iran's bid to overturn illegal U.S. sanctions, which were re-imposed by former president Donald Trump in May 2018 after he pulled Washington out of a nuclear deal with Tehran and world powers.

"I congratulate dear Iranian people as the Administration of Prudence and Hope achieved a great success at The Hague-based court. This is one of the several victories that the government has secured at the International Court of Justice against the United States, and this is very important," he said during a video conference inaugurating five industrial projects in Zanjan Province.

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ViewPoint By: Hamid Reza Naghashian "Zuljanah" a Piece of Civilization Puzzle

Last week Zuljanah satellite carrier conducted its first successful test and became capable to reach a height of 500 kilometers. This powerful Iranian missile uses solid-fueled motor which has been manufactured by Islamic Iran's scientists in the Islamic Republic without involvement of any alien.

Background of this technology and assertion, and conducting the related successful tests and its operational tests in the country dates back to ten years ago to 2011 when this technology emerged and kicked off in the country. See Page 7

Ali Changi, CEO of Modern Industry Research Group

Threatening the Automotive Industry With the Import of Substandard Parts



During the last 30 years, significant investments have been made in various sectors of the automotive industry, which has provided the capacity to produce two million vehicles domestically. There is still investment attractiveness in this sector; In addition to the capacity of two million units for automakers, more than 20 million vehicles are in circulation in the country that need a proportionate volume of parts, and also due to the high prices of auto parts abroad, there is a good field for export in this regard. In general, this industry has a significant value creation, because in addition to economic characteristics, it brings the level of knowledge promotion in the country and by learning and expanding it, it promotes engineering behavior in the whole country; For example, in the comparison between parts manufacturing and oil and gas industries, learning the general level of engineering knowledge of parts manufacturing is very effective. In this regard, Ali Changi, CEO of Babian Modern Industry Research Group, said that in recent years, with increasing external pressures caused by sanctions, almost all sectors of industry, trade and services have been overshadowed by these sanctions, which should be rooted in the weak attitude of economic system policymakers. "Sanctions have led to good performance in parts manufacturing, especially in areas such as bodywork, trimmings, engines and powertrains, and have made carmakers' production lines less troubled, but less so in some areas, such as electricity and electronics and the fuel system," he said. It was or was monopolized that caused more problems for the automakers. According to him, the lack of proper understanding of the difficult conditions of sanctions inside the country has been far more harmful than the behavior of foreigners in the field of sanctions; For example, in order to circumvent the sanctions, the sanctioned goods should be imported in the name of other and similar goods, for which practically no solution has been found in this regard in the Ministry of SAMT and Customs, and they only slow down the import cycle of the

sanctioned goods. "Apart from sanctions, the import of low-quality parts is a problem for the industry," Changi said. We have to look for the root of low quality parts in the market in our internal system; A large number of parts consumed worldwide are produced in China and have almost no major problems, and this will continue as long as the illegal import is done by non-professionals on the basis of profit and personal gain. The only way out of this situation is to raise the level of knowledge, awareness of car service companies, tasks and public awareness. They should be able to identify good local producers and work towards the desired quality level and the growth and development of this profession. He added: "If we consider parts manufacturing as the basis of the automotive industry and the automaker as one of the most central parts of the transportation industry, followed by transportation as one of the pillars of growth and development of society, then we realize the role of parts internalization." Unfortunately, a large part of our transportation industry is done only with light and heavy vehicles. If the Americans target the auto industry in the first place with sanctions, they know full well that if they succeed, not only the auto industry, but at the macro level of transportation and larger, growth and development at all levels of the country will be disrupted. The enemy has imposed sanctions on car manufacturing and parts manufacturing. The way out of this impasse is to look at the internal capacity for production. This barrier can be overcome by effective communication with science, research centers and science and technology parks, as well as investing in knowledge-based companies. According to him, the modern industry research group currently produces 20,000 pieces, but it needs preconditions to improve production capacity. These components include liquidity to increase investment in equipment and lines, so according to the investments made and the existing infrastructure, the company has the ability to increase production capacity to 30,000 pieces per day. Changi noted that public trust and social capital are the most important assets of a system: "Unfortunately, some manufacturers have neglected this issue and have reduced public confidence in domestically produced products by profits from underemployment or underselling of goods and services." People accept protection of domestic goods if they are sure that the benefits of this protection will return to them. He said: "Branding and providing after-sales service and being responsive to the needs and expectations of consumers is a solution that is proposed to gain people's trust in domestic goods." In the meantime, however, raising public awareness of the social, political, and economic benefits of protecting domestic goods plays an important role, which is the task of government institutions and social media. Changi in response to the question of whether we can have a purely imported approach instead of production? He said: in the import of used cars to create a balance in supply and demand and price stability in the car market, it should be taken into account that due to the high import tariff on cars and related spare parts, this will not reduce prices in the car market. On the other hand, due to sanctions and lack of spare parts, it is not possible to provide service and after-sales service. This issue can only be viewed positively if a new technology is introduced with the arrival of a foreign car and the possibility of production and experience in Especially have car parts with you. In this case, it is possible to increase both the supply capacity of the car and the possibility of

producing spare parts and technical knowledge. "One of the necessities of making a leap in production is technology," he said. One of the problems in the economic efficiency of the automotive industry is the high overhead costs of this industry. Costs such as manpower and the cost of old technology increase the cost of production by reducing productivity. Based on the experience of partnering and launching production technology with foreign companies and relying on the technical knowledge of our experts and using reverse engineering as well as identifying the weaknesses of existing equipment, we designed and built production equipment with improved capabilities; This means not only eliminating equipment weaknesses and thereby improving the quality of our products, but also localizing our organizational knowledge of some technologies and eliminating the need for external specialists to troubleshoot. In the end, he said: "In recent years, the design and production of lights for the Dena and Denaplan families have been the most complex light production projects in the country's auto spare parts industry, which has been carried out by the Modern Industry Research Group with private sector investment." On the other hand, all the products of this company have the E-Mark standard from foreign institutes and laboratories and the national standard of Iran, and currently have ISO 9001, IATF 16949 in the quality management system in the automotive industry. Modern industry research group, despite the international restrictions imposed on the automotive industry, has produced more than 80% of consumer parts with the best domestic quality. By acquiring this capability, we have started to manufacture the equipment of our production lines based on the highest level of technology of foreign parts manufacturers. Due to the development of the company's activities in the field of production of brake pads, antifreeze and side mirrors of the entrepreneurial car has been achieved. This in turn has been an effective step in creating employment and creating new job opportunities. Today, the population of a large modern family can be estimated at 4,000.



Iran Congratulates Sri Lanka on Independence Day

TEHRAN (IFP) - The Iranian president has expressed congratulations on Sri Lanka's Independence Day.

In a message on Thursday, President Hassan Rouhani expressed congratulations on the arrival of the anniversary of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.

The president said he was confident that given the political will that leaders of both countries have, the two sides can further enhance mutual cooperation on different fronts to serve the interests of both nations.

Iran Purchases 2m Doses of Sputnik-V vaccine for COVID-19

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Head of Iran's Food and Drug Administration Mohammad Reza Shanehsaz says the country has purchased 2 million doses of Russia's Sputnik-V COVID-19 vaccine, whose first shipment arrived in Iran on Thursday.

"The first batch of the Russian vaccine arrived in the country today and our colleagues received it at Imam Khomeini International Airport," Shanehsaz said in a televised interview on Thursday.

He said the arrival of the Sputnik-V vaccine shipment showed the beginning of the implementation of a deal between Tehran and Moscow over the purchase of the vaccine.

The official said the next shipments will be delivered to Iran "very soon."

He explained that other reliable and authorized vaccines have been identified by Iranian experts and that the purchase of vaccines from companies in India and China is on the agenda.

"Also, we are trying to co-produce this vaccine with Cubans," he said.

Iran received the first shipment of the Sputnik-V vaccine earlier on Thursday, after the vaccine's efficacy was reported to be around 92%. The medical journal the Lancet published an article proving its effectiveness based on trial vaccination of nearly 22,000 volunteers. Seventy-five percent of the participants received the vaccine, while the rest were given placebos.

Iran's Ambassador to Moscow Kazem Jalali said the delivery was made after an agreement on January 29 to enable joint work on the vaccine's production.



Iran expects to receive two more such cargos by February 18 and February 28, the envoy said.

Jalali added that following the third shipment, more cargoes are to be sent over at respectively two-week- and one-month-long intervals.

The vaccine imports are made as inhumane U.S. sanctions have affected Iran's ability to make the payment for importing vaccines as well as life-saving medical equipment.

Iran is also testing its own coronavirus vaccine, called Coviran Barekat, which will be rolled out in early April.

"We are highly optimistic to begin vaccination plan against corona (virus) in the country using the Iranian vaccine in late Farvardin (early April)," Mohammad Mokhber, Director of the Executive Headquarters of Imam's Directive or SETAD, the organization behind the production of Coviran Barekat, said earlier this week.

Iran and Cuba signed an agreement last month to cooperate in a coronavirus vaccine project. The vaccine, called Subrana 2, is now undergoing the human phase trials by the Cuban Finlay Institute and the Pasteur Institute of Iran.

Tehran Strongly Condemns Belgian Court's Jail Term Against Its Diplomat

TEHRAN (IFP) - Foreign Ministry Spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh has categorically denounced a Belgian court's ruling against Iranian diplomat Assadollah Assadi.

In a statement on Thursday, Khatibzadeh said the Islamic Republic of Iran strongly condemns the 20-year jail term issued by a court in the Belgian city of Antwerp against Iranian diplomat Mr Assadollah Assadi.

"As we repeatedly announced earlier, all the procedures that have so far been taken against the diplomat, including his arrest, the case brought against him or the conviction, were all unlawful and amounted to blatant violation of international law, especially the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, and the Islamic Republic of Iran will never recognize it," he noted.

"Unfortunately, Belgium and some [other] European countries have taken such illegal and unjustifiable actions [against Assadi] under the influence of the atmosphere that has been created by the hostile MKO terrorist group on Europe's soil," Khatibzadeh noted.

Therefore, he added, they must be held accountable for their flagrant violation of the Iranian diplomat's rights, including the inhumane conditions of the time he faced under arrest in Germany and Belgium.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran reserves the right to resort to all possible legal and diplomatic means to realize the rights of Mr Assadollah Assadi and to hold accountable the governments that have violated their international obligations," Khatibzadeh said.

Iran Supporting Ceasefire in Afghanistan

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iran's special envoy for Afghanistan said that the Islamic Republic of Iran supports the enforcement of ceasefire in Afghanistan.

Mohammad Ebrahim Taherian made the remarks in a meeting with Afghan Foreign Minister Mohammad Hanif Atmar on Thursday.

The Iranian envoy briefed the Afghan foreign minister on the recent Taliban's visit to Tehran and further expressed the support of the Islamic Republic of Iran for securing a ceasefire in Afghanistan.

Both sides also discussed the expansion of bilateral relations and the latest development on Afghan peace talks.

The head of the Taliban's political office, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, and his accompanying delegation have traveled to Tehran last Tuesday upon the invitation of the Iranian Foreign Ministry to hold talks with Iranian officials on the Afghan peace process.

Taliban political delegation met and held talks with Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Ali Shamkhani and Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif.

Seoul Finalizing Talks on Using Iran Frozen Assets to Pay UN Dues

TEHRAN (PressTV) - A South Korean Foreign Ministry official says his country is finalizing talks with the U.S. on Iran's payment of its UN membership dues through using some of its frozen assets in the East Asian nation.

"The issue has been almost settled. We've finished discussions (with the U.S.) about paying dues and we need to have discussions on very technical parts," South Korea's Yonhap news agency quoted the official as saying.

"There's been considerable progress on the issue of dues and I think this served as a chance (for Iran) to feel our sincerity," the official added.

Some 7 billion dollars in Iranian assets have been frozen in South Korean banks due to the sanctions imposed by the U.S., which ban dollar-based transactions with Iran.

Iran has proposed paying part of its UN contributions in arrears with its frozen funds in South Korea.

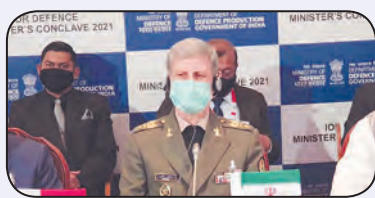
The South Korean ministry official added that the Seoul government has been in talks with Washington about a non-dollar payment method.

According to the official, South Korea and the U.S. are also in consultations over ways to expand other humanitarian trade with Iran using the frozen money.

The announcement came a day after Iran said it had given permission to the crew members of a South Korean vessel it seized last month for environmental pollution to leave the country.

Tehran Slams Outside Powers for Militarizing Indian Ocean

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's defense minister has warned against attempts by outsiders to provoke an arms race in the Indian Ocean and turn it into a weapons stockpile, saying colonial powers are militarizing the strategic region to sell more arms and advance their own economic interests.



In a Thursday address to the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) Defense Ministers' Conclave in Bangalore, Brigadier General Amir Hatami cautioned the ocean's littoral countries against foreign plots to destabilize the region in pursuit of their own goals.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran does not welcome militarization of the [Indian Ocean] region and is concerned about unconstructive arms races, accumulation of weapons and transformation of the region into a weapons arsenal," Hatami said

"This [situation] stems from a malevolent and ominous conspiracy hatched by some extra-regional colonial powers with the purpose of selling more arms to regional countries and making their own economies flourish by holding back the states in the region from making progress at home and [prompting them to] spend their limited resources on military affairs and thus fulfill their own interests by keeping the region occupied" with problems and conflicts, he added.

The IOR states are capable of collectively managing the region and dealing with insecurity by joining forces and strengthening empathy, he added.

Hatami said Iran regards the Indian Ocean as a gateway towards the world through the sea and believes that the Indian Ocean states are entitled to all the blessings of this vast body of water.

"Due to its unique geopolitical and geostrategic position created by its vast coastal lines along the Persian Gulf, the Sea of Oman and control over the strategic strait of Hormuz, Iran enjoys a distinguished position in the Indian Ocean since this vast body of water is the gateway towards Caucasus, Europe and West Asia," he said, expressing the country's willingness to use such an advantage for the benefit, progress and security of itself and other regional states.

The Iranian defense chief emphasized that the region must be governed via high domestic standards of security, saying, "We believe that the Indian Ocean enjoys high potentials for the global peace and it may serve as a role model for the rest of the world. This is achievable through mutual cooperation and commitments, innovation, rationality, and courage for taking action."

He stressed the importance of establishing collective security and making progress in the region based on regional potentials, capabilities and strengths with the participation of all neighboring countries.

Hatami said some littoral states are still facing poverty and underdevelopment, despite the existence of this vast and rich oceanic water, warning that such a situation could lead to insecurity in the region.

He called on regional states not to remain indifferent towards the security developments in the region, including the Indian Ocean, as insecurity in one place would impact the surrounding areas and beyond.

The Iranian defense minister further likened terrorism to a "contagious disease," which grows and spreads anywhere it finds a breeding ground, warning that the United States and the Israeli regime "would take advantage of terrorism as an instrument for influencing others and imposing their will on them."

Hatami warned against the expansion of terrorism and voiced the Islamic Republic's readiness to share its experience and knowledge with its neighbors in fighting the scourge.

He said the assassination of top Iranian and Iraqi anti-terror commanders Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis in Iraq early in 2020 as well as the murder of Iranian defense and nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh indicated that the perpetrators and sponsors of state terrorism "are not only untrustworthy but they also betray the lofty objectives of humanity such as combating terrorism and saving the oppressed people."

Enemy Cannot Tolerate Iran Progress

ARDABIL (IP) - The Commander-in-Chief of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC) said that the enemy cannot tolerate witnessing the progress of Islamic Iran.

Speaking at the ceremony of operating the first steam unit of the Sabalan Ardabil Combined Cycle Power Plant in northwestern Iran on Thursday, Commander-in-Chief of the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC), Maj. Gen. Hossein Salami added: "The enemy is worried about the flames of hope burning in the hearts of the people and wants to make our people tired and disappointed."

General Salami stated: "The enemies do not like a strong, advanced, prosperous, and faithful Iran and they like a dependent and surrendered Iran, but we still stand and build our country."

The Commander-in-Chief of IRGC pointed out that Iran has made the most amazing progress during the sanctions period, stressing: "Elimination of deprivation and building a prosperous country is a new and very necessary form of war against enemies; therefore, construction in the country should not be stopped."

ICJ's Rejection of U.S. Objections Another Legal Win for Iran

TEHRAN (IFP) - The Iranian foreign minister says the International Court of Justice's rejection of the United States' objections in a lawsuit brought by Tehran against Washington is yet another victory for Iran.

"The ICJ just dismissed all U.S. preliminary objections in the case brought by Iran over unlawful US sanctions," said Mohammad Javad Zarif in a tweet.

"Another legal victory for Iran following 3 Oct. 2018 Order," he added.

Zarif then called on the United States to deliver on international commitments.

"Iran has always fully respected int'l law. High time for the US to live up to int'l obligations," he said.

Iraq Calls for Iran's Assistance In Repairing "Kasra Arch"

BAGHDAD (IRNA) - Iraq's Minister of Culture, Tourism and Antiquities Hassan Nazem in a meeting with Iran's Ambassador to Iraq, Iraj Masjedi, on Thursday called for Tehran's assistance in repairing the historical "Kasra Arch".

During the meeting, the two officials also discussed issues such as restoration of the "Kasra Arch", agreement on joint cultural cooperation and development of religious tourism, formation of a bilateral cultural committee, cooperation in the production of films and.

The Iraqi minister briefed the Iranian official on measures taken so far for reconstruction of the "Kasra Arch" (Taq-e Kasra as it is called in Persian) and asked for Tehran's assistance in restoring it as well as the environment around this historical monument.

Masjedi stressed Iranian experts' readiness to help preserve and restore the "Kasra Arch", and called for speeding up the preparations for the team's presence in Iraq.

The Cultural Adviser of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Iraq, referring to the previous follow-up and negotiations regarding the repair and reconstruction of Kasra Arch, emphasized on the preservation and protection of this historical monument after reconstruction and called for the establishment of a mechanism for this issue.

The two sides also emphasized the need for activation and re-formation of the bilateral cultural committee to follow up memoranda and other cultural agreements signed between the two countries.

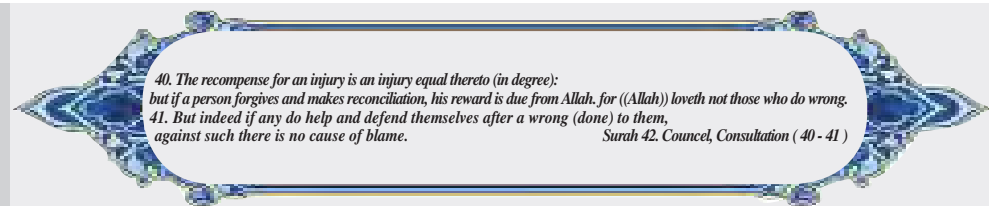
Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Ali-Asghar Mounesan had already said that Iran has reached an agreement with Iraq to repair the Iranian ancient monument of the Sassanid era, Taq-e Kasra in Ctesiphon, Iraq.

Munesan said that the initial estimation by CHHTO for the purpose is around 600,000 dollars, after whose provision the Iranian archeologists will be dispatched to Iraq.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:18
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:55
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:33
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:59



5 Industrial Macro Projects Put Into Operation

TEHRAN (IP) - Five industrial macro projects of Iran's Ministry of Industry, Mine, and Trade were inaugurated in Zanjan Province on Thursday via video conferencing in the presence of President Hassan Rouhani.

These national projects were put into operation with an investment of 7,000 billion tomans and job creation for 1,768 people in Abhar, Sain Qaleh, Soltanieh, and Zanjan.

These projects include steel, iron, plastic containers, yarns, fabrics, denim and linen garments industries.

On the sidelines of the ceremony, Minister of Industry, Mine, and Trade said that the policy of the Ministry is to support Iranian automakers.

Alireza Razm Hosseini stated at the opening ceremony of auto spare parts production lines: The situation has become more suitable for economic activity in Iran, and this year, which is the year of the surge in production, we have increased



production in more than 20 industries.

He said: The private sector in Iran has invested nearly 1000 billion Tomans in the car industry so if foreign automakers interested in, they can be a part."

"The policy of the Ministry is to support Iranian products and we will support all car companies," he highlighted.

Italian Embassy Screens Last Episode of "8 1/2 Theater Clips

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - "A New Beginning" is the title of the eighth and last episode of the exclusive series "8 1/2 Theater Clips. How Covid-19 Pandemic Has Changed Our Lives", produced by the Italian Embassy in Tehran, in cooperation with theater companies "Instabili Vaganti" from Italy and "Don Quixotte" from Iran.

The initiative, initiated in August 2020 following an original idea by the Italian Embassy in Tehran, consists of a virtual cooperation between Italian and Iranian artists, taking inspiration from the important dramaturgical traditions of the two countries, and focusing on the impact of the pandemic on people's lives.

The last episode, directed by Anna Dora Dorno in cooperation with Ali Shams and featuring Nicola Pianzola and Danial Kheirikhah on Riccardo Nanni's musical notes, conveys the hope of a new beginning thanks to the newly discovered vaccines.

"A New Beginning" goes through the most relevant moments highlighted by the theatre series: the changes in people's habits and the new daily rhythms imposed by the lockdowns; the impact on travel and work procedures; the establishment of a different relationship with the outside world and the restoration of lost artistic spaces. Nicola Pianzola's narrative voice in Italian speaks of the need for a "potion of

normality" which everybody anxiously longs for, in order to be able to return soon to "hugs, smiles, applause". Iranian actor Danial Kheirikhah, in a succession of artistic performances, through the use of medical devices, reveals a not too distant future, in which "alleys, squares and streets will be emptied of absence and filled with presence" thanks to a new weapon that, instead of killing, "will keep people alive".

The episode "A New Beginning" can be viewed (together with previous episodes "DIS-connection", "Flight Mode", "Alone", "Don't Call Me a Hero", "Notes of Absence", "The Night Shift" and "Beyond the Mirror") on the YouTube, Twitter and Instagram channels of the Italian Embassy in Tehran. In March a final talk between the artists participating in the project will be held, with the aim of highlighting the significance, artistic value and possible follow-up to the "8 1/2" project.



The largest Private Sector Investment in the Country's steel Sector in Bonab Sanat Steel Complex



With the construction of 6 development projects, the largest private sector investment in the country's steel sector will be made in the Bonab Sanat Steel Complex. According to the public relations of Bonab Sanat Steel Complex, the representatives of East Azarbaijan province visited its production lines this evening and were informed about the mega development projects of Shahriar Steel Development Project. Hoiyatollah Mohammad Bagheri Bonabi, the representative of the people of Bonab and Khoshe Mehr in the Islamic Consultative Assembly, referred to development plans during this visit. He said: "Tourism Finance Group, with an investment of 600 million Euros, has implemented 6 development projects in the form of Shahriar Steel Development Company." The contract for its implementation has been concluded with the Khatam al-Anbiya (PBUH) camp. The Speaker of the House of Representatives of East Azerbaijan Province also praised the development of Bonab Steel during the visit. "The € 600 million private sector investment is significant at the moment," he said. The development of Bonab steel industry is admirable. We have the utmost thanks and appreciation in this regard. In the Assembly of Representatives of the province, we are ready for any assistance and cooperation to grow and improve production and also to solve the problems of production units. Yousef Davoodi then referred to the plan to organize the steel market and said: the necessary measures and studies have been done to organize the steel market. We need to consider the controls needed to manage the market and protect consumers. Therefore, the report, the CEO of Bonab Sanat Steel Complex, introduced this steel complex and its subsidiaries. He announced the production of 850 thousand tons this year and added: by using 7 rolling lines and two smelting and casting units in the form of 5 subsidiaries of this complex, we have been able to

produce 750 thousand tons of products so far. This amount is unprecedented in the 10 years of the company's activity. By the end of 2020, we will increase production to 850,000 tons. This amount will increase to 1.2 million tons next year. Babak Alizad Shahir pointed to the doubling of exports: according to the amount of steel production in the country, the need for consumption and production surplus for natural exports. We have a plan in this regard. Due to geographical conditions, proximity to the border, production of quality and competitive products, we have witnessed a doubling of exports. This amount will also increase next year. We will play a significant role in the currency and development of the country's non-oil exports. Accordingly, this production unit has been selected as one of the sample exporters of the province. The managing director of Bonab Sanat Steel Complex, in response to the representatives about the issues and problems of the complex, said: it is necessary to provide raw materials, amend the laws related to production and export, facilitate the affairs of producers and supply electricity to production units. Distinguished members of parliament should pay special attention to these issues. In conclusion, Alizad Shahir said about the current situation of the complex: "With the support of the senior managers of the Tourism Finance Group and with the efforts of our colleagues this year, the factory has become profitable." With the increase of necessary capital and the amortization of bank debts, we will enter the stock market this year. Shahriar Steel Development CEO also explained the projects in this meeting. "The assembly has the capability," he said. It also has a young expert force. It is also possible to create development plans. In order to complete the production chain in the tourism finance group, a contract was signed with Khatam al-Anbia (PBUH) for the construction of these projects on a 50-hectare land. With an investment of 600 million euros for this contract, we are witnessing the largest private sector investment in the country's steel sector. Amin Rafiei pointed to a threefold increase in production capacity by creating these projects. He added: "By exploiting these projects, in the future we will see a threefold increase in production capacity and the creation of employment for a thousand people directly." According to him, these projects have included Zob Shahin under-roof project, doubling production, construction of a dedicated rail dock for transporting raw materials and products, and creating oxygen plant with an annual production capacity of 90 million cubic meters. Also, projects are being implemented including the construction of a ferroalloy, ferro-silica, silicon-manganese plant, smelting 1,450,000 tons for the production of slabs and billets, as well as the construction of 1,450,000-ton sheet rolling lines. These projects will create a huge change in the economy and employment in the region and the northwest of the country. Bonab city is one of the industrial areas in the northwest of the country that has high potentials and capacities in the steel production industry.



Foreign Debt at \$9.3b, Among Lowest Globally

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's foreign debt rose to \$9.3 billion by late December, up 3.5 percent compared to nine months earlier, according to figures released by the Central Bank of Iran (CBI).

In a report published on Wednesday, Iran's official IRNA news agency cited CBI figures showing that the country's foreign debt had amounted to \$9.348 billion at the end of ninth month of the current fiscal year on December 20.

The report said foreign debts had totaled \$9.031 billion at the end of last calendar year on March 19.

It said \$7.364 billion of the debts were long-term commitments and the rest, around \$2 billion, were debts that would mature in the short term.

However, it said that the ratio of foreign debt to gross domestic product had reached 3.5 percent, among the lowest in the world.

Iran has largely avoided borrowing from abroad despite financial hardships caused by the American sanctions and the spread of the coronavirus pandemic.

Tehran's request for a \$5-billion loan from the International Monetary Fund, a body where Iran is one of the founding members, has stalled because of incessant US pressure.

Webinar on Vietnam Trade Capacities Held

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Trade Promotion Organization held a webinar on the trade capacities of Vietnam where the participants reviewed ways of cooperation.

Director-General of the Asia-Pacific Office at Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) Seyed Reza Seyed Aghazadeh said that un this webinar some issues like economic data and information on Vietnam, the condition of trade of Vietnam with the world, Iran-Vietnam trade relations, challenges for entering this market, arrival of startups into the Vietnam market and target industries were of the major issues which were discussed in the webinar.

He added that in the past five years, the trade volume between Iran and Vietnam has been on average around \$300m and Iran's trade with this country has always been positive.

He noted that Vietnam's foreign trade is around \$500b that there is a balance between imports and exports of the country.

Seyed Aghazadeh noted that due to the sanctions and the U.S. sanctions, Iran's trade with Vietnam has declined and the trade volume has slumped to \$60m in nine months, as Iran's share of this figure has been \$36m.

MSC Posts 5% Rise in Offering Tin Plate in 10 Months



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

ISFAHAN - Mobarakeh Steel Company (MSC) Sales and Marketing Manager Mr. Mohammad Tajmir Riahi says the company has offered 88,380 tons of tin plate to the market in 10 months which shows 5 percent growth (83,770 tons) comparing to the same period last year.

He said that the rise in using tin plate by shortening and food producing companies for their production has been the main reason for chaos in offering this product in the market as those companies have stored tin plate in their warehouses.

On the price of tin plate, he said the price of domestically tin plate production is very lower than the international prices of this product and MSC has offered the tin plate in order to support producers of the packing cans for foodstuff like tomato paste and shortening.

He went on to say that the traded tonnage of tin plate in the Iran Mercantile Exchange has been lower than the amount which has been offered.

UN Calls for Bangladesh Army Probe

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - The United Nations is calling for a full investigation into evidence of corruption and illegality involving the Bangladesh army, which was exposed during an investigation released by Al Jazeera on Monday.

The corruption involves Bangladesh's Chief of Army Staff, General Aziz Ahmed, who is due to meet senior UN officials in New York next week. In All the Prime Minister's Men, Al Jazeera's Investigative Unit revealed that Bangladesh's military purchased sophisticated and highly intrusive mobile phone surveillance equipment from Israel, which Bangladesh military commanders claimed was "for one of the Army Contingents due to be deployed in the UN Peacekeeping Mission".



Trump Rejects Call to Testify At His Impeachment trial

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Former President Donald Trump's lawyers on Thursday rejected a request from Democrats to testify at his impeachment trial in the U.S. Senate next week, dismissing their invitation as a "public relations stunt."

Democrats in the House of Representatives accuse Trump of inciting insurrection when he urged supporters to "fight" his election defeat before they stormed the Capitol, fought with police and sent lawmakers scrambling for safety.

Five people died, including a Capitol police officer.



Biden Ends U.S. Support for Yemen War, Freezes Germany Troops Redeployment



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - President Joe Biden is ending U.S. military support for the war by its Saudi allies in Yemen, the White House said Thursday ahead of the Democrat's first major foreign policy speech.

"He's going to announce an end to American support for offensive operations in Yemen," National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan told reporters shortly before Biden was to make the speech at the State Department.

"That's a promise he made in the campaign he will be following through on."

The end on U.S. military support for the Saudi-led coalition fighting in Yemen reverses former president Donald Trump's policy of providing logistical assistance and selling huge amounts of advanced weaponry such as precision-guided bombs.

Signalling Washington's new approach to the war, which has led to a humanitarian crisis, the Biden administration is also appointing a Yemen envoy, Timothy Lenderking, said a person familiar with the matter.

Biden "will talk about the United States playing a more active and engaged role in the diplomacy to bring an end to the conflict," Sullivan said. Biden will also freeze plans set in motion by Trump to reduce the US troop presence in Germany, which has been a cornerstone of NATO security since the start of the Cold War.

"Today (Biden) will announce... a global force posture review and during the pendency of that review will freeze any troop redeployments from Germany," Sullivan said.

Trump's decision was seen as linked to his tense relationship with Germany and the European Union over trade issues, but sparked concerns that he was weakening the West's security in the face of a resurgent Russia.

Biden has quickly toughened Washington's posture toward Moscow.

He is blaming the Kremlin for a massive cyber attack and U.S. presidential election meddling, and also calling out Russia over the jailing of Alexei Navalny, one of the few remaining opponents of President Vladimir Putin. "Unlike the previous administration, we will be taking steps to hold Russia accountable for the range of malign activities that it has undertaken," Sullivan said.

"We will do that at a time and in a manner of our choosing," he said.

On Myanmar, Biden is considering new sanctions that would target specific individuals and entities connected to the all-powerful military, which took over the country after detaining civilian leaders this week.

"We are also looking at specific targeted sanctions both on individuals and on entities controlled by the military that enrich the military," Sullivan said.

In excerpts of the speech released by the White House, Biden will call for renewed alliance-building and U.S. leadership on the world stage.

"We must meet this new moment of accelerating global challenges — from a pandemic to the climate crisis to nuclear proliferation — challenges that will only be solved by nations working together in common cause," Biden was to say.

"Over the past two weeks, I've spoken with the leaders of many of our closest friends — Canada, Mexico, the UK, Germany, France, NATO, Japan, South Korea, and Australia — to begin re-forming the habits of cooperation and rebuilding the muscles of democratic alliances that have atrophied from four years of neglect and abuse," Biden was to say.

"America's alliances are among our greatest assets. And leading with diplomacy means standing shoulder to shoulder with our allies and key partners once more."

UN Security Council Orders Ceasefire Monitors Deployed to Libya

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - The UN Security Council on Thursday instructed Secretary General Antonio Guterres to deploy ceasefire monitors to war-torn Libya.

"As they examine your recommendation for an amended mandate for the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), the members of the Security Council request that you establish and deploy swiftly an advance team to Libya," the council said in a letter to Guterres that was seen by AFP.

Libya has been torn by civil war since a NATO-backed uprising led to the ouster and killing of long-time dictator Moamer Kadhafi in 2011.

Control of the country is now split between the Tripoli-based Government of National Accord (GNA) and its rival, the eastern-based House of Representatives backed by military strongman Khalifa Haftar, who launched a failed offensive to seize the capital in 2019.

A fragile ceasefire agreed in Geneva in October has largely held, despite threats by Haftar to resume fighting.

In the letter, the council said it expected within 45 days to receive reporting on preparations undertaken by the advance team and practical proposals for amending the mandate of the UN mission in Libya.

In a report late last year, Guterres called for the creation of an unarmed observer group for Libya, made up of civilians and retired military people from countries of the African Union, the European Union and the Arab League. He did not say how big it should be.

Deployment of ceasefire observers is being carried out with the approval of the parties in Libya. The advance



Draghi Starts Gov't Talks, Gets PD Backing

ROME (Reuters) - Former European Central Bank chief Mario Draghi started talks on Thursday on forming a new Italian government as the largest party in parliament as the 5-Star Movement, softened its initial hostility to his appointment.

The center-left Democratic Party (PD) gave Draghi its backing but it was still unclear whether he could muster a majority after Matteo Salvini's right-wing League said it would not support a government backed by 5-Star.

With Italy mired in a health and economic crisis, the head of state gave Draghi a mandate on Wednesday to form an administration after the previous coalition government, which included the anti-establishment 5-Star, collapsed in acrimony.

Outgoing Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte, in his first public comments on the political tumult, wished Draghi well and said he hoped the next government would have a political nature and not comprise only unaffiliated technocrats.

The words of Conte - himself not a member of any party but close to 5-Star - were seen as a signal that his cabinet allies should consider working with Draghi, one of the most respected institutional figures in both Italy and Europe.

Given its large presence in parliament, the 5-Star could play a crucial role in the coming days. Traditionally opposed to technocrat governments, it was instinctively hostile to Draghi when he was first given the nod.

However Luigi Di Maio, the outgoing foreign minister and senior 5-Star politician, urged caution on Thursday. "In my opinion, the 5-Star Movement has the duty to meet (Draghi), listen and then take a position," he said. "It is precisely in these circumstances that a political force shows itself to be mature in the eyes of the country."

Investors cheered Draghi's sudden arrival on the political scene, hoping that he can spearhead much-delayed reforms to boost growth in a country that has long underperformed its European peers, weighing down the whole euro zone.

Italy's borrowing costs dropped on Thursday, with the gap between Italian and German bond yields below 100 basis points for the first time since January.

Pakistanis in Tehran Observe Kashmir Solidarity Day

IRAN NEWS INTERNATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - To commemorate the Kashmir Solidarity Day, the Embassy of Pakistan in Tehran organized a seminar today to express support of Pakistani government and the nation for the Kashmiri people in their struggle against the continued Indian illegal occupation of Jammu & Kashmir. A number of Iranian academicians, media persons, members of Pakistani community including students participated in the event.

On the occasion, the messages from the President, Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister of Pakistan were read out.

In his remarks, the Ambassador reiterated Pakistan's call to the world leaders, international community including the United Nations, and all human rights

organizations to urge India to halt the brute use of force against the innocent Kashmiri people and resolve the Kashmir Dispute as per the charter of the United Nations and various UNSC Resolutions. The Ambassador thanked the Iranian leadership, civil society and media persons for their continued support to the Kashmir cause.

Hujjat-ul-Islam Dr. Salman Naqvi and senior students from Ferdowsi University, Mashhad and Tehran University, in their speeches, condemned the continuing atrocities and gross human rights violations being committed by the Indian occupation forces in IJOK.

At the end, a special prayer was held for the alleviation of sufferings of innocent Kashmiris and for their freedom from barbaric and illegal Indian rule.



Ambassador Rahim Hayat Qureshi, Hujjat-ul-Islam Syed Salman Naqvi, Syed Hassan Razaq Naqvi and Mousumeh Mahmood addressing a Seminar to observe Kashmir Solidarity Day in Tehran on 05.02.2021

Putin's Approval Rating Holds Steady

MOSCOW (Reuters) - Nationwide protests over the jailing of Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny and a sweeping police crackdown have so far had little impact on Russia President Vladimir Putin's approval rating, a survey by independent pollster Levada showed on Thursday.

A court on Tuesday sentenced Navalny, a prominent Putin opponent, to three and a half years for parole violations he said were trumped up, ignoring calls from the West and protesters at home to release him.

The Levada Centre poll, conducted in the leadup to the sentencing, showed an overall 1% drop in approval of Putin to 64% from 65% in November among 1,616 adults in 50 regions, a relatively small sample of Russia's 145 million population. Over the course of the year, his rating among younger respondents had dropped 17% to 51%, it said.

During the Jan 29-Feb 2 polling period, his supporters had been spurred on by more than 100 million views of an online video in which Navalny said Putin was the ultimate owner of an opulent palace on the Black Sea, an allegation he denies.

"The euphoria in the liberal community is clearly very exaggerated. The main mass of the population is responding inertly to all the events linked to Navalny," Lev Gudkov, director of the Moscow-based Levada pollster, told Reuters.

"It's got a bit worse among young people, but it practically hasn't changed for the main mass (of people)," he said of the rating.

Putin, 68, remained Russia's most trusted politician with a rating of 29%, five percentage points down from October, while that of Navalny, 44, rose to 5%, putting him in sixth place, Levada said. The poll highlighted dissatisfaction with the authorities concentrated in the younger generations, with 48% of 18-24 year-olds saying the country was moving in the wrong direction.

Putin's approval rating hit a low last year during the first wave of the pandemic and its fallout, before recovering.





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Shell's Profit Slumps in 2020 as the Pandemic Bites

LONDON (Reuters) - Royal Dutch Shell's profit last year dropped to its lowest in at least two decades as the coronavirus pandemic hit energy demand worldwide though the company's retail network and trading business helped cushion the blow.

The Anglo-Dutch oil major's annual profit slumped 71% to \$4.8 billion as its oil and gas production and profits from refining crude into fuels dropped sharply. In a sign of confidence, however, Shell said it planned to raise its dividend in the first quarter of 2021, which would be the second slight increase since its slashed its payout by two-thirds at the start of last year due to the pandemic.



Global Food Inflation Fears Grow As U.N. Index Hits 6-1/2-Year High

ROME (Reuters) - Global food prices rose for an eighth consecutive month in January to their highest since July 2014, the United Nations food agency said on Thursday, as economies continue to battle fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Food and Agriculture Organization's food price index, which measures monthly changes for a basket of cereals, oilseeds, dairy products, meat and sugar, averaged 113.3 points last month December's 108.6, revised up from 107.5. Jumps in cereals, sugar and vegetable oils led the rise, the agency said.

Some governments are taking action to tackle surging domestic food prices, although such moves drive global values higher by reducing supplies for international markets. The consequence is already evident in grain prices, such as corn, hitting multi-year highs.

Grain-consuming giant China is stockpiling supplies, while Argentina has suspended sales of maize for export until Feb. 28. Russia is imposing taxes on exports of wheat, barley and maize.

The World Bank said in December that food price increases, combined with reduced incomes, had aggravated chronic and acute hunger, hitting vulnerable households in almost every country.

The Rome-based FAO said in a statement that worldwide cereal harvests remained on course for an annual record in 2020, but warned of a sharp fall in stocks and signalled unexpectedly large import demands from China. FAO's cereal price index climbed 7.1% month-on-month in January, led higher by international maize prices. They soared 11.2%, some 42.3% above their level a year ago, buoyed in part by purchases by China and lower-than-expected U.S. production.

Wheat prices increased 6.8%, driven by strong global demand and expectations of reduced sales by Russia when its wheat export duty doubles in March 2021, FAO said.

Sugar jumped 8.1%, with worries about worsening crop prospects in the European Union, Russia and Thailand, and dry weather in South America, pushing up import demand. [SOF/L]

The vegetable oil price index increased 5.8% to its highest level since May 2012, driven in part by lower-than-expected palm oil production in Indonesia and Malaysia. Soybean prices were fuelled by reduced export opportunities and prolonged strikes in Argentina.

Dairy prices rose 1.6%, underpinned by heavy Chinese purchases ahead of the upcoming New Year holiday. The meat index posted a 1.0% gain, led by brisk imports of poultry, especially from Brazil, amid avian influenza outbreaks that have hampered exports from several European countries.

FAO revised up its forecast for the 2020 cereal season to 2.744 billion tons from a previous estimate of 2.742 billion tons made in December, with both wheat and rice yields seen rising. It trimmed forecast for coarse grains production due to reduced prospects for the United States and Ukraine.

The U.N. agency said China was importing unexpectedly large quantities of maize this season, which was having a significant knock-on impact on estimates for world utilization and stocks.

The forecast for world cereal utilization in 2020/21 was put at 2.761 billion tons against a previous estimate of 2.744 billion. The forecast for world cereal stocks was pegged at 802 million tons down from a previous 866.4 million tons.

"At this level, the world stocks-to-use ratio of cereals would decline from 29.7 percent in 2019/20 to 28.3 percent in 2020/21, marking a seven-year low," FAO said.

OPEC+ Sticks With Oil Policy as Prices Rise Towards One-Year High

LONDON (Reuters) - OPEC+ maintained its oil output policy at a meeting on Wednesday, a sign producers are happy that their deep supply cuts are draining inventories despite an uncertain outlook for a recovery in demand as the pandemic lingers.

A Joint Ministerial Monitoring Committee of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and allies, known as OPEC+, is "optimistic for (a) year of recovery in 2021," OPEC said in a statement after the panel met virtually. Oil has rallied from historic lows hit last year, thanks to record OPEC+ output cuts that the group is starting to unwind.

Global benchmark Brent extended gains after the meeting and rose towards \$59 a barrel, its highest since late February 2020.

"While inventories are drawing fast, the market is pricing in a smooth rollout of vaccines and that may be premature," said Amrita Sen, co-founder of Energy Aspects. The OPEC+ panel made no mention of changing policy, which calls for most members to hold supply steady in February and top exporter Saudi Arabia to cut output voluntarily by 1 million barrels per day this month and next.

"While economic prospects and oil demand would remain uncertain in the coming months, the gradual rollout of vaccines around the world is a positive factor for the rest of the year, boosting the global economy and oil demand," OPEC's statement said. A document seen by Reuters on Tuesday showed OPEC expects the output cuts will keep the market in deficit throughout 2021, even though the group cut its demand forecast.

Thai Central Bank Leaves Rate at Record Low

BANGKOK (Dispatches) - Thailand's central bank left its key interest rate unchanged at a record low on Wednesday, February 3, preserving its limited policy ammunition, but warned of risks as the country deals with a fresh wave of coronavirus infections.

Southeast Asia's second largest economy continues to recover but risks remain high and it could grow less than the previously forecast 3.2% this year, Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) Secretary Titanun Mallikamas told a news conference.

The Bank of Thailand (BOT)'s committee members voted unanimously to keep the one-day repurchase rate unchanged at

0.50% for a 6th straight meeting, after 3 cuts in the 1st half of 2020 to mitigate the impact of the pandemic.

The tourism-reliant economy still needs support from low interest rates and monetary policy will remain accommodative, he said.

The BOT said in a statement the impact of the recent outbreak on the Thai economy would be less severe than last year due to less strict containment measures, but it expects the economy to expand at a slower pace than previously forecast.

Support from the targeted government measures together with the export recovery will, however, support economic growth, it added.

Twelve economists surveyed by Reuters had expected the BOT to remain on hold, with two analysts predicting a 25-basis-point cut, citing the impact from the new spread.

Kobsidhi Silpachai, head of capital markets research at Kasikornbank, said the policy rate was likely to stay at 0.50% this year as the central bank prefers targeted measures.

"The MPC emphasized that there is light at the end of the tunnel, pinning hopes on ongoing global vaccinations to help support the global, and eventually, local economic recovery," he added.

However, Takit Chardcherdsak, economist at Asia Plus Securities, said "there is still a chance the key rate would be cut once more in the 1st half of the year...if the outbreak situation does not improve."

Thailand had largely contained the coronavirus by mid-2020 but the new cases detected in December have led to infections across the country. Economists worry the latest outbreak will hurt the country's fledgling recovery as tourism flounders.

In December, the BOT reduced its 2021 gross domestic product growth outlook to 3.2% from 3.6% due to the slump in tourism. On Wednesday, it said its growth outlook was in line with the finance ministry's projection.

IMF to Roll Out New Method to Judge Debt Sustainability

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The International Monetary Fund said it is launching a new method of assessing debt sustainability for countries with access to financial markets to more accurately predict risks of financial crises and improve transparency.

The update of the debt assessment methodology, the first since 2013 in the wake of a European sovereign debt crisis, is expected to be operational by the fourth quarter of 2021 or the first quarter of 2022, IMF officials said.

Assessing a country's debt sustainability has always been "more art than science," and the new system aims to inject a bit more science into the process, Jeromin Zettelmeyer, deputy director of the IMF Strategy, Policy and Review Department, told a Web briefing.

He said the IMF has revised its modeling of debt-related factors to provide "a more accurate framework that allows us to warn about or predict crises and unsustainable and sustainable debts."

The assessments are important because they help determine how much a country can borrow and still meet the IMF's stringent requirements that its debt does not fall into an unsustainable situation. For example, the IMF has been reluctant to grant a bailout program to Lebanon until the country's existing debts are put on a sustainable path, among other factor.

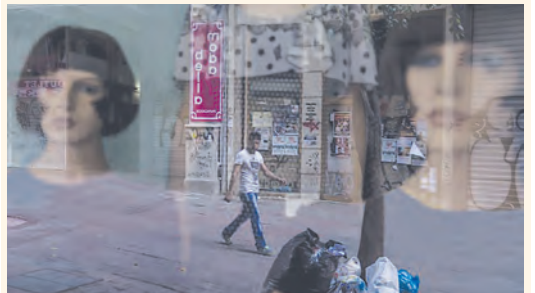
The current assessment method provides multiple indicators of potential danger areas for countries but leaves a lot of discretion for IMF staff to judge them, Zettelmeyer said. New tools and models will combine these into a statistically sound, "mechanical sustainability assessment" that will be more transparent, he added.

The new methodology also aims to better assess a country's ability to service its gross financing needs, through liquid resources, potential new revenue streams, and the robustness of its domestic financing markets, said Manrique Saenz, a deputy division chief in the Strategy, Policy and Review Department.

For countries dependent on natural resources, it will aim to better assess climate change and future shifts in demand for fossil fuels. It also aims to better capture the debt sustainability of state-owned enterprises, in both financial and non-financial sectors.

The IMF said the new debt assessment framework was developed after extensive consultations with external stakeholders, market participants, ratings agencies, academics, the European Union and the European Central Bank.

Euro Zone Inflation Surges, a Communications Headache for ECB



BRUSSELS (Reuters) - Euro zone inflation surged well past expectations last month, driven by rising energy costs and a German tax increase, posing a potential communications challenge for the European Central Bank.

Inflation has undershot the ECB's nearly 2% target for most of the past decade. The bank has promised ultra-easy policy for years to come, with price pressures muted and a recovery from a pandemic-induced recession dragging out.

But a surge in prices, even if temporary as many policymakers expect, could make it more difficult to justify exceptional stimulus, particularly in Germany, the euro zone's biggest economy, which has viewed copious monetary printing with deep skepticism for years.

Annual inflation in the 19 countries sharing the euro jumped to 0.9% in January from -0.3% over the previous four months, Eurostat said on Wednesday, the highest rate in nearly a year and beating economists' expectation for 0.5%.

The surge was primarily driven by the reversal of an earlier German tax cut, a rise in energy costs as oil prices surged and higher food prices, even as the cost of imported goods fell over the previous month.

Underlying inflation showed a similar surge. Inflation excluding food and energy costs, a key indicator watched by the ECB, rose to 1.4% from 0.4%. A narrower gauge that also excludes alcohol and tobacco rose to 1.4% from 0.2%.

Anticipating this surge, the ECB has already warned against taking this technical rebound for the return of sustained inflation. Indeed, ECB officials argue that inflation is merely returning to its pre-pandemic path. That is still too low, and ample slack after last year's deep recession will keep price growth under target for years to come.

This argument foreshadows fierce resistance against any policy tightening, even if inflation, at 0.9%, exceeds the 0.3% the ECB predicted for this quarter.

But the figures could make it more difficult for policymakers to argue for the extension of record-high support once emergency bond buys are set to run out in the first quarter of 2022.

Australia's Trade Surplus Hit 6 Month High in December

MELBOURNE (Dispatches) - Australia's trade surplus rose to a six-month high in December as iron ore exports to China easily weathered diplomatic squalls between the two countries, while coal shipments found new buyers beyond the world's second-largest economy.

China's reliance on steel-intensive infrastructure and construction to sustain economic growth means it has little choice but to keep importing Australian iron ore, even as prices for the mineral hit multi-year highs.

Data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics out on Thursday showed goods exports to China jumped 21% in December to a six-month high of A\$13.3 billion, with iron ore up sharply by both value and volume.

That helped Australia's trade surplus swell to A\$6.8 billion (\$5.19 billion) in December, from A\$5 billion the month before, as exports rose 2.8% and imports fell 2.4%.

The surplus for the December quarter widened by 28% to A\$17.4 billion, a timely positive for economic growth and tax revenue that is helping the country quickly recover from its first recession in three decades.

For all of 2020, exports climbed 12% in a resilient result given the disruptions caused by the global pandemic.



While China remains Australia's single biggest market, exporters are finding willing buyers elsewhere for goods targeted by Beijing's trade restrictions.

"In particular, Australian coal shut out of China is rapidly finding new homes," said Daniel Hynes, a senior commodity strategist at ANZ.

"The complete collapse of exports to China has been more than offset by gains in exports to Japan, India, South Korea and Thailand."

Shipments of hard coking coal jumped 28% in December, from the previous month, while thermal coal rose by a quarter.

Demand has proved so robust that prices for coking coal have risen by a quarter over the past year, while thermal coal shipped from the port of Newcastle is up nearly 60%.

With “Mank” and “The Crown”, Netflix Dominates Globes Nominations

NEW YORK (AP) — After a year where the pandemic nearly emptied movie theaters, Netflix dominated nominations to the 78th Golden Globe Awards on Wednesday, with David Fincher’s “Mank” leading film nominees with six nods and “The Crown” topping all television series.

The Globes, delayed about two months due to the coronavirus, tried to muster some of the awards’ usual buzz on Wednesday in a largely virtual awards season bereft the kind of red-carpet glamour the Globes annually feast on. And perhaps to account for the otherwise lack of it, the Hollywood Foreign Press Association heaped nominations on two lavish period pieces rich in royalty — both the Hollywood variety (the black-and-white “Mank” dramatizes the making of “Citizen Kane”) and the British kind.

“Mank,” about “Citizen Kane” co-writer Herman Mankiewicz, landed nominations for best film, drama; best actor for Gary Oldman; best director for Fincher; best supporting actress for Amanda Seyfried; best score;

and best screenplay for Jack Fincher, the director’s father who penned the script before dying in 2003.

Netflix, which topped all studios at the Globes last year, too, led with a commanding 42 nominations, with 22 coming in film categories and 20 in television. No other studio was close.

The day belonged to the streaming services. Disney+ (“The Mandalorian”) and HBO Max (“The Flight Attendant”) both notched their first Golden Globe nominations. Amazon, with Regina King’s “One Night in Miami,” about a meeting of four Black icons in 1964, and Steve McQueen’s film anthology “Small Axe,” landed 10 total nominations — a total matched by the Disney-owned Hulu, including nods for the Catherine the Great series “The Great,” with Elle Fanning, and the Andy Samberg time-warp comedy “Palm Springs.” Apple TV+, too, scored several nods including the Jason Sudeikis series “Ted Lasso,” the Irish animated film “Wolfwalkers” and Bill Murray’s performance in Sophia Coppola’s father-daughter comedy “On the Rocks.”

“The Crown” landed six nominations including best series, drama, and acting nods for Olivia Colman and Josh O’Connor. The final season of “Schitt’s Creek” trailed with five nominations, while Netflix’s “Ozark” (four nods) and “The Queen’s Gambit” (two nods) also added to the streamer’s totals. (“Queens Gambit” star Anya Taylor-Joy was nominated for both the hit show and for the Jane Austen adaptation “Emma.”)

Aaron Sorkin’s “The Trial of the Chicago 7” — also a Netflix release, about the countercultural clash and subsequent trial following the 1968 Democratic National Convention — came in second among movies with five nominations, including nods for best film, drama; best director and best screenplay for Sorkin; supporting actor for Sacha Baron Cohen; and best song.

The other nominees for best film in the drama category were Chloe Zhao’s itinerant drama “Nomadland,” Emerald Fennell’s “Promising Young Woman” and Florian Zeller’s dementia drama “The Father.”

“Zuljanah” a Piece of...

FROM PAGE 1

Today Iran has introduced itself to the world as a new player and becoming one of the top 10 countries in indigenizing the whole of this technology through launching satellite by its carrier into the orbit.

History prevails that Iran, despite all political and economic sanctions and after some successful launches by Safir-1 satellite carrier, has sent into the orbit its new and heavier satellite carrier but due to the technical reason and even suspicion of sabotage and aliens’ sabotage, the launch failed to perform successfully and it encouraged some rival countries and enemies to make hype regarding the past failure in order to stop Iran marching towards achieving technical and scientific progress but in April 2020, Iran successfully and surprisingly launched Nour Satellite into the orbit of 425 kilometers by the Qassed (Messenger) satellite carrier from Iran’s Central Desert and this success silenced the critics and negative propagations and pushed hose biased comments and remarks just to be made in the form of intelligence information in the bulletins of aliens’ intelligence services.

In those days, IRGC and Defense Ministry in the framework of missile and airspace technologies announced the official retirement of “Safir” carrier and its replacement by Simorgh (Phoenix). The outcome of tests of Simorgh satellite carrier paved the technical ground for emergence of new technology which is summarized in Zuljanah.

This new satellite carrier in its three full stages can carry ten Nour satellites, which were first sent into the orbit in April 2020 by Aerospace Force of IRGC, into the orbit with one launch. In recent test which was only conducted with the first stage solid-fueled motor, a series of required sensors had been installed in the first stage of the carrier for doing required calculations of the performance of systems of this satellite carrier. Now some questions are raised like why the solid fuel has not been used in the third stage of this satellite carrier. The answer is that in the final stage of the satellite carrier especially in the new condition of the country that the issue of moving between the orbit and injection with more precision is considered, it is necessary the period of combustion or the very activating the system to be more and in some occasions, the propulsion system needs to become inactive and then become re-activated.

After the experimental testing of this satellite carrier, aerospace experts have noticed this point that one of the important properties of this new Iranian satellite carrier is that it can be fired from a mobile launching pad and it means that the site of its launch will not be a certain place (for example Semnan Province is one of the main areas in the country for the aerospace launches) and the launch can be conducted from any part of the country especially from southeastern region or coasts of Makran.

The nature of having a mobile satellite carrier is that it protects a successful launch from any sabotage of enemies of the Islamic Republic of Iran from the long distance. The news of starting studies for building the second national space launch base in southeast of the country and in Chabahar Port can give the good news of a ground for launching installations and base equal to the NASA in the U.S.

For doing the civilization-making path, some paths have been naturally defined by Iran for control from the space as the country believes in the Re-Appearance of the savior of the humanity as a definite fact. In this framework until achieving the establishment of an appropriate space base fitting with Iran’s conditions in terms of its political, economic, geographical and security conditions, having mobile satellite launchers can enable the country to use regions like Chabahar with the least expense and infrastructure for its aerospace launches and tests.

The strategic importance of Chabahar region for the launch and reaching the required orbit by Iranian Space Agency from Chabahar is almost considered as the shortest route of the mainland of Iran to the Equator which is considered geographical prerequisites of conducting such launches, and due to the position of different earth orbits, the more the space launch gets closer to the Equator, the more distance for reaching different orbits will shorten and the action of fuel injection and regenerating the motors of the launcher will happen easier and in shorter time.

If we look carefully at the position of most aerospace bases in the world like the U.S. aerospace base in Florida, or the French aerospace base in the Caribbean Sea, it is crystal clear that the launch bases are actually located close to the Equator.

The Islamic Republic of Iran’s ten-year-old presence in this technology with the least cost due to the sanctions and economic condition of the country is the sign of strong determination of the Islamic Republic of Iran for creating necessary infrastructures for materializing the great Islamic Civilization, and officials in this field despite all hardships and restrictions have taken advantage of the opportunities at best. This shows we look at tomorrow with the close eyes and are not ready to sit passively and wait to let others do us a favor.

Therefore, Zuljanah satellite carrier itself is assessed as a piece of civilization-making puzzle and using super technologies on course to have access to the destination of the Re-Appearance in the Islamic civilization; and one day the very piece along with other pieces will bring for the humanity the rings comprised of durability and promotion of pure behavioral culture in the thought of the second step of the Islamic Revolution.



Indian Refiners to Buy Iranian Oil If Sanctions Eased

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - Indian refiners would resume imports of Iranian oil if the United States eases sanctions against Tehran, the chairman of state-run Hindustan Petroleum Corp said on Thursday.

US President Joe Biden’s administration is seeking a diplomatic solution to the nuclear dispute with Iran, which could see sanctions eased.

India, which was Iran’s top oil client after China, had stopped oil imports from the OPEC nation in mid-2019 under pressure from the stringent sanctions imposed by former US President Donald Trump.

“Iranian crude had been in the (import) basket of Indian refineries ... we will be happy to take that crude as and when the situation warrants and the crude is available,” MK Surana told a news conference.

Washington has been at loggerheads with Tehran for decades and relations between the two countries worsened under Trump, who withdrew from the 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and six world powers, and imposed more sanctions on Tehran.

On Monday, Iranian foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif for the first time hinted that Washington and Tehran should take synchronized steps to return to the Iran nuclear deal abandoned by Trump.

Surana said Iran was previously offering favourable terms for payment and freight discounts among others which made its oil “preferential” compared to other grades.

After stopping purchases from Iran, Indian refiners have diversified their crude imports.

“There are alternatives in the picture after that (sanctions). Now US crude is coming to India,” he said.

Oil minister Dharmendra Pradhan last year said India, the world’s third biggest oil importer and consumer, wants to diversify its oil imports, including the resumption of supplies from Iran and Venezuela, under Biden’s rule.

Surana said refiners evaluate alternative crudes available in the market and the value they generate to maximise revenue. “But yes, there is possibility. If the (Iranian) crude is available people will definitely look at those options,” he added.

Iran OPEC’s Biggest Gasoline Producer

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – A deputy oil minister said Iran needs to reduce the domestic gasoline consumption by switching to vehicles fueled by compressed natural gas (CNG) in order to maintain its place as the largest producer of gasoline in the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

Deputy Oil Minister Alireza Sadeqabadi said Iran is currently the largest exporter of gasoline in the region and the biggest gasoline producer among the OPEC member states.

“This is a great capacity for the country. We must maintain such capacity, and the most important thing to do is to prevent the unrestrained consumption of gasoline at home,” he added. The deputy minister also stressed the need to promote the CNG solutions for lowering the rate of domestic gasoline consumption in order to keep up the exports.

“Iran is currently the biggest gasoline exporter across the region. We are the major supplier of gasoline to Iraqi Kurdistan, export gasoline to Afghanistan and Pakistan, and have recently begun to export gasoline to (the Republic of) Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia,” he noted.

The deputy oil minister also pointed to the steady process of Iranian gasoline exports to many regional countries by sea freight.

In August 2019, Iran started to offer gasoline for sale in the international ring of the Iran Energy Exchange (IRENEX).



South Pars Development Nearly Completed

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The managing director of Pars Oil and Gas Company (POGC), which is in charge of developing Iran’s giant South Pars gas field, has said that the development of the mentioned field is nearly completed and all phases of the field will be fully operational in near future.

“This [Iranian calendar] year (ends on March 20), the development of the large gas field will be nearly completed and we will not have any work left except for phase 11 in the offshore sector and the refinery of phase 14 in the onshore sector; which will be operational early next year,” Mohammad Meshkinfam told IRIB on Thursday.

South Pars, which Iran shares with Qatar in the Persian Gulf waters, is currently divided into 24 standard offshore phases, the output of which is processed by 14 gas refineries on land.

According to Meshkinfam, the first train of the South Pars phase 14 Refinery is going to go operational early next Iranian calendar year (begins on March 21), after which every three months another train will be inaugurated, and by the end of the next Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2022) this refinery will be fully operational.

Underlining the reliance of domestic capacities and capabilities for the development of the mentioned field,



Meshkinfam noted: “In the beginning, only 33 percent of the required equipment in this field was produced in Iran, but today 75 percent of the necessary equipment has been indigenized.”

Initially, the first two projects of the field, namely phase two and three and phase four and five, were carried out with the participation of France’s Total and Italy’s Eni, but after that, the remaining phases were developed by Iranian companies, he explained.

The POGC head further mentioned the construction of the platforms for the development of the mentioned field, saying: “at the beginning of the work we built five offshore platforms abroad, but after that, we designed and built the remaining 35 platforms entirely inside the country.”

Stating that today Iran has reached complete self-sufficiency in all aspects of gas production from South Pars field, Meshkinfam added: “In the fields of drilling, platform building, pipeline construction, and onshore refineries, which are our four main sectors in extracting gas from South Pars field, all equipment and machinery have become indigenized and the operators are also domestic companies.”

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

ICJ...

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“This power and grandeur is for the great nation of Iran against a superpower. In the political war, hundreds of thousands of experts and specialists accompany them (the Americans), but we are going to the war with a limited number of diplomats,” said Rouhani, hailing the diplomatic achievement as “beautiful and very brilliant.”

Iran brought the case in 2018 after Trump reinstated anti-Iran sanctions following his unilateral withdrawal from the 2015 nuclear deal, also known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). The United States tried to argue that Iran could not base claims at the ICJ on the 1955 Treaty of Amity, Economic Relations, and Consular Rights between the two countries. However, a majority of a panel of 16 judges found the treaty could be used as a basis for the ICJ’s jurisdiction.

“The court unanimously rejects the preliminary objections to its jurisdiction raised by the United States of America according to which the subject matter of the dispute does not relate to the interpretation or application of the Treaty of Amity,” presiding judge Abdulqawi Yusuf said on Wednesday.

The Iranian chief executive hailed the ruling as “a great legal success for the Islamic Republic.” “At the International Court of Justice, we got a very successful verdict, despite the mobilization of thousands of great lawyers [on the side of the US]. The tribunal approved an interim order that the United States should immediately lift all sanctions on humanitarian goods, but America did not honor [the ruling,]” he added.

“It was a great success for our nation, but the Americans said that the court has no jurisdiction at all to consider Iran’s complaint,” Rouhani said.

The new U.S. administration said it is “disappointed” by the ruling, despite President Joe Biden’s criticism of his predecessor for reinstating the bans on the Islamic Republic after leaving the JCPOA.

US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said, “We have great respect for the International Court of Justice. At the same time, we are disappointed that the court did not accept our well-founded legal arguments, that the case Iran brought is outside the court’s jurisdiction, and the court should not hear it.”

EU...

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He was referring by abbreviation to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the official name of the nuclear agreement that came about between Iran and the P5+1 group of states -- the US, the UK, France, Russia, and China plus Germany -- in Vienna that year. By the Joint Commission, the EU official, meant a mechanism that is joined by the signatories’ representatives and monitors the deal’s implementation.

Under his signature “maximum pressure” policy against Iran, former U.S. president Donald Trump withdrew Washington from the landmark deal and restored the economic sanctions that it had removed. The U.S. also began threatening third countries with “secondary sanctions” if they violated the American bans. Trump abandoned the deal despite its multilateral nature and the fact that it has been endorsed as United Nations Security Council Resolution 2231.

“U.S. withdrawal from the JCPOA and ‘maximum pressure’ policy, including secondary

sanctions, had a negative impact,” the European official acknowledged. “The JCPOA could not reach its full potential - including in the economic field,” he added.

Trump’s course of action has to be set aside in order “to try and build a new positive momentum and to ensure once again full implementation of the agreement, including by Iran,” he added.

Borrel, meanwhile, reminded how Trump successor Joe Biden has voiced a willingness to return the US to the JCPOA, saying, “The new U.S. administration has clearly indicated a new approach and all JCPOA participants are ready to engage.”

Iran says the United States’ potential return to the JCPOA could only be meaningful if Washington removed all of the oppressive sanctions it has imposed on the Iranian nation.

Even the supposed expression of interest in rejoining the JCPOA has, meanwhile, not been followed by a favorable gesture on the part of Washington.

England to Play Austria And Romania Friendlies

LONDON (Dispatches) - England will play home warm-up games against Austria and Romania in June ahead of the delayed 2020 European Championships, the Football Association announced.

Both countries were meant to take part in friendly internationals against England last year before those fixtures were shelved when the coronavirus pandemic led to the postponement of Euro 2020.

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Yastremska Out of Australian Open

KIEV (Dispatches) - Ukrainian tennis player Dayana Yastremska failed to have her provisional suspension for a failed dope test lifted on Wednesday, ruling her out of the Australian Open.

The decision means that Yastremska, who is ranked 29 in the world, will not be able to play in the season-opening Grand Slam event in Melbourne from Monday.

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SPORTS

SATURDAY FEBRUARY 6, 2021

Liverpool Stunned by Brighton, Man City Move 3 Points Clear

LONDON (Dispatches) - Liverpool's Premier League title defence suffered a damaging blow as Brighton earned a shock 1-0 win at Anfield, while Manchester City moved three points clear at the top with a 2-0 victory against Burnley.

Jurgen Klopp's side paid the price for a sloppy display as Steven Alzate's second half strike gave struggling Brighton a memorable success at the expense of the injury-hit champions.

Brighton's first away league win against Liverpool since 1982 was secured in the 56th minute when Dan Burn headed a cross towards Alzate and the Colombia midfielder flicked his shot inside the far post.

Liverpool are languishing in fourth place and trail Manchester City by seven points, with the leaders holding a game in hand.

The Reds' dismal defeat leaves them in desperate need of three points when in-form City visit Anfield for a crucial clash on Sunday.

Klopp's men had looked back on track after wins at Tottenham and West Ham last week. But Liverpool have now lost successive home league games for the first time since 2012 and haven't won a top-flight match at Anfield in four attempts.

Their sudden collapse on home turf is remarkable given they hadn't lost a home league game since 2017 before Burnley won at Anfield on January 21.

Pep Guardiola's side had watched Manchester United draw level on points with them on Tuesday after their bitter rivals crushed Southampton 9-0.

But City underlined their determination to hold onto top spot with a composed, mature display at Turf Moor.

Gabriel Jesus opened the scoring after a mistake from Burnley keeper Nick Pope and Raheem Sterling grabbed the second before half-time.

After a spluttering start to the season that threatened to derail their title hopes, City, who have a game in hand on second placed United, are in pole position to dethrone Liverpool.

Australia Puts 500

Tennis Players, Staff Into Coronavirus Isolation

SYDNEY (Reuters) - More than 500 tennis players and officials were ordered into isolation in the Australian city of Melbourne on Thursday as authorities reintroduced coronavirus restrictions after a worker at a quarantine hotel tested positive for the virus.

The city reimposed an order for masks indoors and a limit on gatherings of 15 people after the state's run of 28 days with no new local cases came to an end.

Melbourne, Australia's second-biggest city, is preparing to host the Australian Open tennis tournament from Monday but play at six warm-up events was heavily disrupted by the new infection with organizers Tennis Australia calling off all matches for Thursday.

The case of the infected Grand Hyatt worker was announced late on Wednesday and Victoria state Premier Daniel Andrews told reporters an initial round of tests had found no new cases.

The Australian Open was likely to go ahead though "there were no guarantees", he said.

"At this stage, the tennis shouldn't be impacted by this. These things can change. Every Victorian knows these are uncertain times," Andrews told a news conference.

The Grand Hyatt was one of three main quarantine hotels used by players and officials arriving in Melbourne for the Grand Slam event.

About 1,200 players, coaching staff and officials arrived in Australia in the middle of last month and went into a mandatory 14-day isolation. Most players were released from quarantine last month.

Australia has ranked among the world's most successful countries in handling the novel coronavirus, largely because of decisive lockdowns and borders sealed to all but a trickle of travellers.

Western Australia state, which is on a five-day lockdown after one positive case was detected on Sunday, has since found no new local cases. The states of New South Wales and Queensland also reported no new cases on Thursday.

In all, Australia has had 22,000 local cases and 909 deaths.



City head into the Liverpool showdown on a club record run of 13 successive victories in all competitions, including nine in the league.

With Sergio Aguero and Kevin De Bruyne still sidelined by injuries, City's surge to the top is even more remarkable.

Last crowned champions in 2019, they are unbeaten in 20 matches in all competitions stretching back to November and have conceded just four goals during that run.

Their latest rock-solid effort at the back equalled the club league record of six consecutive clean-sheets.

Leicester beat struggling Fulham 2-0 to improve their superb away league record.

Despite the absence of injured leading scorer Jamie Vardy, Kelechi Iheanacho opened the scoring for Brendan Rodgers' men and James Justin doubled their lead on the stroke of half-time.

Leicester now have eight wins out of 11 on the road.

Jesse Lingard scored twice on his West Ham debut to clinch a 3-1 victory at Aston Villa. Tomas Soucek opened the scoring after 51 minutes when he latched into Said Benrahma's pass and drilled into the corner.

Lingard, who signed on loan from Manchester United last week, struck in the 56th minute.

Villa's Ollie Watkins scored in the 81st minute, but Lingard bagged his second two minutes later as fifth placed West Ham won for the fifth time in their last six league games.

Dominic Calvert-Lewin and Gylfi Sigurdsson scored in Everton's 2-1 victory at Leeds, the first time the Toffees have won four successive away league games since 1985.

Hazard Suffers Yet Another Injury Blow



MADRID (Dispatches) - Eden Hazard has suffered yet another injury blow after damaging his left thigh muscle, Real Madrid announced.

Hazard is expected to be out for around a month, meaning he would miss Madrid's first leg away at Atalanta in the Champions League on February 24.

The Belgian is also likely to sit out the Madrid derby against La Liga leaders Atletico Madrid, scheduled for March 7.

"After the tests performed today on Eden Hazard by Real Madrid Medical Services, he has been diagnosed with a muscle injury in the left thigh," the club confirmed.

Hazard's latest set-back continues his nightmare 18 months in Spain, which has been ravaged by injury problems.

The 30-year-old was signed for 100 million euros from Chelsea in July 2019 but admitted he arrived overweight and missed the start of his first season with a thigh injury.

Hazard then broke a bone in his foot, for which he eventually underwent surgery last March but the injury continued to cause him problems through to the end of the campaign as Madrid won the La Liga title.

It was hoped a new season could offer Hazard a fresh start but he was out for most of September and October, as well as December, with muscle problems the club would not specify. He also missed one game in November after testing positive for Covid-19.

Kane Expected to Return for Spurs Next Week



LONDON (Dispatches) - Tottenham boss Jose Mourinho expects Harry Kane to return next week after a speedy recovery from his ankle injury.

The England captain suffered injuries to both ankles during the 3-1 defeat to Liverpool last week and Spurs feared he would face an extended spell on the sidelines.

But the 27-year-old has made good progress and Mourinho expects him to be fit to face either Everton in the FA Cup or for the Premier League trip to Manchester City next week.

Kane has scored or assisted 23 of Tottenham's 34 Premier League goals this season.

"Good progress, he's happy with the progress and of course we're happy too," Mourinho said.

"I think it's not a very optimistic thing to say next week he should be playing, it will be just a consequence of his good evolution.

"So we're happy. We were scared when it happened but next week we play Everton and City at the weekend. I believe for one of these matches he should be back."

Griezmann Double Inspires Barca Cup Comeback

BARCELONA (Dispatches) - Antoine Griezmann (right) scored twice as Barcelona beat Granada in the Copa del Rey quarter-finals.

Antoine Griezmann led Barcelona back from the brink on Wednesday as the Catalans beat Granada 5-3 after extra-time to win a riveting cup tie and reach the Copa del Rey semi-finals.

Barca looked set to crash out at Los Carmenes when Granada led 2-0 with two minutes of normal time remaining but Griezmann scored one goal in the 88th minute and then set up Jordi Alba for a dramatic equalizer in the 92nd.

Griezmann headed his team in front in extra-time only for Granada's Fede Vico to make it 3-3 with a penalty.

Yet Frenkie de Jong's finish and a thumping volley from Alba, also set up by Griezmann, sent a relieved Barcelona through.

"It was a brilliant, beautiful cup tie," said Griezmann.

Ronald Koeman admitted the Copa del Rey is his team's "shortest route" to a trophy this season and with Atletico Madrid 10 points clear in La Liga and Paris Saint-Germain to come in the Champions League, it may prove their only route too.

Granada, though, came within a whisker of another huge upset as goals from Robert Kenedy and Roberto Soldado put them in sight of the last four.

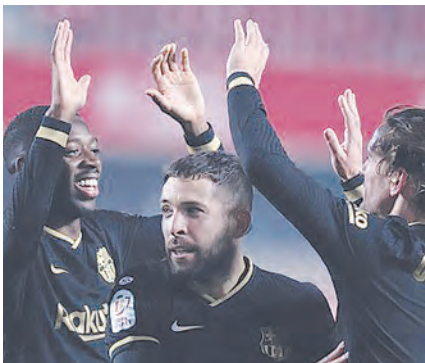
Instead, Koeman's side rallied, with Lionel Messi the architect and Griezmann delivering surely his best performance since he joined Barcelona from Atletico 18 months ago.

It is the kind of performance that could prove a starting point for Koeman's team.

"A match and a result like this will feed our spirit and our strength," said Koeman.

"These are moments that can be very important in a season."

Griezmann now has six goals and seven assists in his last nine games.



Zion Williamson Pours in 28 as Pelicans Rout Suns

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Zion Williamson scored 28 points as the host New Orleans Pelicans defeated the Phoenix Suns 123-101.

Williamson made 12 of 14 field-goal attempts while contributing seven rebounds and six assists. New Orleans' Brandon Ingram scored 23, Lonzo Ball added 18 and Steven Adams returned from a one-game absence caused by a sore calf to score 11 points and grab 13 rebounds.

Eric Bledsoe scored 11, JJ Redick came off the bench after three games as a healthy scratch to score 10 and reserve Josh Hart also had 10 as the Pelicans ended a two-game skid.

Devin Booker scored 25, Deandre Ayton added 13 points and 11 rebounds, Abdel Nader had 11 points and Chris Paul scored 10 to lead Phoenix. The Suns saw their three-game winning streak end as they head back to the desert for a seven-game homestand.

The Pelicans improved to 6-11 during a stretch that began with a 111-86 loss at Phoenix on Dec. 29. Ayton's dunk started the third-quarter scoring and pulled the Suns even at 48 before the Pelicans went on a 14-5 run. Ball's 3-pointer increased New Orleans' lead to 72-61 before the Suns closed within six twice.

Redick made a 3-pointer and two free throws to conclude the third-quarter scoring and leave the Pelicans with an 88-74 lead.

Williamson drove in for a layup and fed Hart for a 3-pointer before Hart made another basket to start the fourth-quarter scoring and give New Orleans a 95-74 lead.

Baskets by Paul, Booker and Ayton pulled Phoenix within 95-80.

Redick, Bledsoe and Ingram hit consecutive 3-pointers before Adams and Williamson added consecutive dunks to put the Pelicans in command with a 108-82 lead midway through the final quarter. Williamson made 6 of 7 shots and scored 15 points as New Orleans built a 28-25 lead by the end of the first quarter. The Pelicans increased the gap to seven early in the second quarter before the Suns scored eight consecutive points. Phoenix led by three before Ingram, who scored seven in the second quarter, helped New Orleans grab a 48-46 lead heading into halftime.

