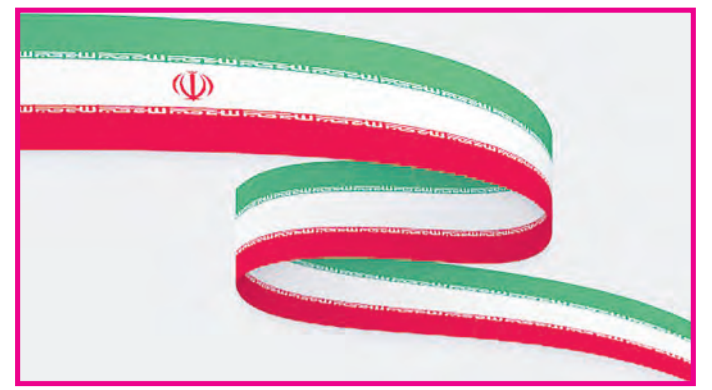


**A Group of Commanders and Personnel of the Air Force of the Islamic Republic of Iran Army Will Meet With Leader of Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Khamenei Today (Sunday)**

# IRAN NEWS



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## President Says COVID-19 Vaccination To Kick Off This Week

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – President Hassan Rouhani says that the vaccinations against COVID-19 are due to kick off in the coming days.

President Rouhani on Saturday and at a meeting of the National Task Force for Combating Coronavirus emphasized that production of Corona Vaccine is Iran's priority, noting that the first shipment of the vaccine has arrived in the country and vaccinations against COVID-19 are due to kick off in the coming days.

Rouhani referred to the approaching one-year anniversary of COVID-19 in Iran, said: "The last days of February of last year were the days when we noticed the virus entered the country."

"The virus may have entered the country a week before, but the day we found out and tested positive was at the end of February," the president added.

"We all know that the virus infects people, and the best way to avoid getting a virus is to prevent it," Rouhani said, noting that the pandemic has created special conditions around the world. **See Page 7**

## Shoulder-Fired Missiles Production Line, Solid Fuel Plants Inaugurated

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK



TEHRAN - Iran has inaugurated the mass production line of advanced shoulder-fired missiles and opened composite solid fuel plants capable of supplying fuel to all ground combat missiles, taking another step in line with boosting the country's military and defense might.

The inauguration was held with the presence of Chiefs of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Baqeri and Iranian Defense Minister Brigadier General Amir Hatami on Saturday, coinciding with the festivities that commemorate the 42nd anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, which overthrew the U.S.-backed Pahlavi regime.

Addressing the ceremony, Hatami said the shoulder-fired missiles were one of the most sophisticated and effective weapons against the enemy's forces and low-altitude targets, underlining that the missile was simple to use and operate by combat forces despite its high level of technology.

"Such missiles are equal to the most modern shoulder-fired missile in the world in terms of technology and tactical capability, and are even superior to foreign models in some components."

He said the systems used in the missiles are completely indigenized and the depth of its localization is such that it is possible to produce and supply various products from its production lines based on the type of threats and the needs of the Armed Forces.

Pointing to the opening of composite solid fuel production plants, Hatami said the plant was built to supply solid fuel to all surface-to-air missiles, adding that combined solid fuel can effectively increase low-altitude air defense owing to its higher energy, range and speed of surface-to-surface missiles and air defense.

Meanwhile, Baqeri hailed the new production line as one of the most unique production lines of short-range air defense missiles in the region, which can meet the operational needs of the Armed Forces by using advanced and new technologies in the fields of laser, optics, guidance and control.

He also described the weapon as valuable in the face of threats, and said it could be used in a variety of tactical combat situations.

"Only three or four countries in the world can produce such a weapon; but today, the Islamic Republic has fully acquired this technology and all its parts are fully produced and produced in high circulation and have been repeatedly hot-tested in various scenes that can be used in low to medium altitude air defense."

He also hailed the opening of composite solid fuel production plants as important in improving the ground combat power of the Armed Forces, and said increasing the range and speed of missiles used in ground combats was one of the needs of the Armed Forces, especially in the field of tactical surface-to-surface missiles, anti-tank armor and low-altitude air defense.

## Tehran Seeks Final Success in ICJ Ruling

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled out all U.S. arguments on the court's jurisdiction based on one vote, underlining that the World Court enjoys the credibility to investigate Iran's complaint against the United States.

Laya Joneidi, the presidential aide for legal affairs, in a note for the Tehran-based Iran newspaper on Saturday, said "it was predictable the International Court of Justice, also known as the court of the United Nations, to announce that the ICJ has the jurisdiction to handle a dispute between Iran and the United States."

Iran filed a case with the court in 2018 following the Trump administration's withdrawal from the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, arguing that Washington's sanctions against Tehran violate the 1955 Treaty of Amity, Economic Relations and Consular Rights between the two states, because the unilateral sanctions cause hardships and ruin lives of the Iranian people.

The Wednesday ruling of the ICJ is important, showing Iran's civilized and peaceful manner at the international arena, and it has also valuable details in it. **See Page 7**

## Qalibaf to Convey Message To Putin in Russia Trip

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Majlis Speaker Mohammad Qalibaf is to leave for Russia on February 7, 2021 on a three-day visit, where he is going to deliver a message to the Russian president.

During his trip, the top parliamentarian is to sit down with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Chairman of the Russian State Duma Vyacheslav Viktorovich Volodin, and the head of the Russian High Security Council.

In his meeting with Putin, the Iranian parliament speaker is expected to discuss Tehran's straightforward stances on the 2015 nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Tehran's economic ties with Moscow, oil sales, etc.

He will also present a message to the Russian president.

## India Engaged With Iran on Chabahar-Zahedan Railway Project

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India remained engaged with Iran on the modalities of executing the Chabahar-Zahedan railway project and also other developmental initiatives in the Persian Gulf nation.

Last week, the Modi government said it remained engaged with Iran on the modalities of executing the Chabahar-Zahedan railway project and also other developmental initiatives in the Persian Gulf nation. Minister of State for External Affairs V Muraleedharan, while replying to a question in Lok Sabha, also referred to an agreement signed between India and Iran on the Chabahar-Zahedan railway project during PM Modi's visit to that country in the year 2016. For the construction of the Chabahar-Zahedan Railway project, an MoU was signed between Indian Railways' IRCON and Iranian Railways' Construction and Development of Transportation Infrastructures Company (CDTIC) during the Prime Minister's visit to Iran, he was quoted saying in a PTI report. **See Page 7**

## Iran Begins Construction Work for Major Petrochemical Facility

TEHRAN (IFP) - Ground was broken on Saturday for the construction of a new petrochemical complex in the western Iranian province of Kermanshah with a total budget of \$550 million.

Present at the ceremony were Iranian First Vice President Es'haq Jahangiri, Petroleum Minister Bijan Namdar Zangeneh and a number of other top officials.

"This project is one of the most important petrochemical projects in the country and can activate several downstream industries and further boost industrial development in Kermanshah province," Jahangiri said in the ceremony.

The project is expected to cost \$545 million and create more than 5,000 jobs. The petrochemical facility will produce polypropylene from natural gas.

It has a capacity of producing 660 thousand tons of methanol, 120 thousand tons of propylene and 120 thousand tons of polypropylene annually.

Addressing the ceremony, Petroleum Minister Zangeneh described the event as a "memorable" day for him.

"For years I was trying to run this project in the country because we would gain the technology of turning natural gas into valuable forms of plastic," he said.

"The West Islamabad Petrochemical Complex is a major project worth around \$600 million," said the minister.

"It will create thousands of jobs and upgrade the technological level of the province tremendously," he noted.

"When the project becomes operations, Kermanshah province will get its fourth petrochemical facility and will rank third in the country as far as the capacity for the petrochemical products is concerned," he said.

## Blinken Discusses Iran Deal With E3 Ministers

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) – U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken has discussed Iran with his British, French and German counterparts as they seek to revive the Iran nuclear deal.

"We just had an in-depth and important conversation on Iran ... to handle together nuclear and regional security challenges," French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said on Twitter on Friday.

The new administration of President Joe Biden is trying to explore how to restore the nuclear deal, officially named the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

The JCPOA was signed in 2015 between Iran and six world states — namely the US, Germany, France, Britain, Russia and China — and ratified in the form of UN Security Council Resolution 2231.

However, the US under former president Donald Trump unilaterally pulled out of the JCPOA in May 2018, reinstated the anti-Iran sanctions, and targeted the Islamic nation with a brutal economic embargo which the Trump White House called "maximum pressure" campaign.

The fate of the JCPOA is now hanging in the balance after the European co-signatories — France, Britain and Germany — failed to counter the sanctions as required by the agreement, prompting Tehran to suspend parts of its commitments in retaliation.

Biden has pledged to rejoin the multilateral accord if Iran returns to compliance.

Iran, however, says it is Washington that should take the first step by lifting the sanctions and then Tehran will return to its commitments enshrined in the nuclear pact.

On Friday, U.S. State Department spokesman Ned Price declined to comment on the substance of Blinken's virtual meeting with his British, French and German counterparts but said Washington wanted "to make sure that we are working in lockstep with our European partners" on Iran. **See Page 7**

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# Iranian, Thai Foreign Ministers Hold Phone Talks

TEHRAN (IFP) - Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif had a phone conversation with Don Pramudwinai, the deputy prime minister and minister of foreign affairs of Thailand, on Friday.

During the phone call, the two sides conferred on the latest developments in bilateral relations, especially in the field of political and consular collaborations.

They also exchanged views on the two countries' preparedness for bilateral economic cooperation.

## Zarif Warns U.S. Over Dangerous Delay In Undoing Wrongs

**TEHRAN (PressTV)- Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has criticized President Joe Biden's administration for not moving fast to rectify wrong steps taken under former president Donald Trump.**

Despite Biden's pledge to return to the path of diplomacy, Iran is losing patience with his administration's recent signals to retain illegal sanctions on the Islamic Republic as a bargaining chip for now.

"The more they hesitate, the more the U.S. will lose," Zarif said in an interview with the Iranian daily Hamshahri published on Saturday.

Zarif said the delay will harm the Biden administration's image and that it will show that they do not want to save themselves from Trump's failed policy toward Iran.

"I don't think that's the image Mr. Biden wants to show of himself," he added.

The continuation of the pre-existing conditions will show to the world that the new US administration has not distanced itself from its predecessor "and that's dangerous for the US," the foreign minister said.

He called on Biden to immediately fix the wreck of a foreign policy that Trump left behind as he left office on January 20.

Biden, who was vice president when the JCPOA was clinched in 2015, has promised to re-enter the JCPOA. Iran, on the other side, insists on the immediate removal of sanctions, without which, it says, the US return to the deal would be meaningless.

Regarding the U.S. withdrawal, Zarif said the US failed in its JCPOA test but the deal is still in place.

"[The U.S.] can now get a ticket back to the JCPOA by honoring its commitments and coming to the JCPOA table and showing with an appropriate conduct that it is a worthy party for dialogue," he said.

Only then, he continued, Iran would be able to re-evaluate the matter.

Asked whether the U.S. and other parties to the deal can misuse the dispute resolution mechanism enshrined in the JCPOA once the U.S. returns to the deal, Zarif said the triggering of the mechanism is a two-way process that has not been exploited so far.

"In other words, Iran can revive its [nuclear] program - as it did - in the face of the other side's violation [of its JCPOA commitments], and the other side can also take us to the Security Council in case of a violation by Iran," the chief Iranian diplomat explained.



Late in August 2020, the Trump administration announced that it has triggered the dispute resolution mechanism against Iran in spite of the fact that it was no longer a party to the deal.

Zarif also emphasized that Iran's reduction of its nuclear commitments, which began in May 2019 was a reaction to the other parties' failure to honor their JCPOA commitments, and therefore, it cannot be used as a basis for triggering the dispute resolution mechanism.

"We are now taking compensatory measures," Zarif noted. "We did not sign the JCPOA only to break it. We will stop our compensatory measures as soon as they return to the JCPOA."

Zarif said in the event that the other side tries to exploit the dispute resolution mechanism and puts it forward in the Security Council, Iran for its part would use the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)'s provisions to withdraw from it.

"We have made it clear in the negotiations as well as in the agreement that Iran would abandon its commitments," he added.

Elsewhere in the interview, the Iranian foreign minister was asked to comment on recent remarks by his Saudi counterpart Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud, who said "our hands are outstretched for peace with Iran, but it does not commit itself to agreements."

Zarif stressed that Iran's hands have always been outstretched for peace. "Then, why aren't these two hands reaching one another?" Zarif asked.

He also said the Saudis have inflicted great harm on Iran on a number of occasions, including during the former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein's invasion of Iran in the 1980s when Riyadh propped up Saddam against the Islamic Republic, and recently when Riyadh resorted to the Israeli regime to counter Iran.

"That's a hollow [extension of] hands," he said, adding, however, that Iran is still open to peace efforts and has several proposals in this regard.

## Enemy Failed to Halt Iran's Economic Progress

TEHRAN (IFP) - An Iranian vice president says the enemies were seeking to put the brakes on the nation's economic progress, but to no avail.

Mohammad-Baqer Nobakht said the enemy failed to impede Iran's progress as a whole.

"The enemies put their knees on the neck of Iran's economy, and they wanted to exert so much pressure that the country's economy cannot breathe. However, ... the enemies failed to stop development and efforts in our country," he said.

"The country's policy is to cushion the blow from enemies' economic pressure," he said.

The vice president also touched upon attempts by superpowers to keep the Islamic Revolution of Iran from emerging victorious.

He underlined the enemies "imposed numerous domestic and foreign assassinations and wars on Iran."

"Hegemonic powers failed to achieve their objectives in the military domain; so, it put an economic blockade on its agenda," he said.

## Iran Extends UK Flight Bans to February 19



TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran has extended the flight bans to and from the UK to the end of the current Iranian month (Feb. 19), the Civil Aviation Organization of Iran announced.

According to a statement by CAO on Saturday, the flights to and from the UK will remain suspended for another month, due to the new Covid-19 strain that is spreading rapidly in that country.

The measure was initially enforced on Dec. 22, 2020, for a fortnight at the request of the Health Ministry and the National Coronavirus Headquarters.

The statement adds that in addition to the cancellations, the connection flights from other countries, especially European countries, have been completely restricted and controlled, and these restrictions continue until further notice.

It is also specified that countries such as Japan, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Angola, Mozambique, Malawi and several other countries where alarming mutant variants were reported as of Jan. 21 were also subject to strict health laws, and those visiting or residing in such countries within the past two weeks were also banned from entering Iran.

## Neutralizing Threats Goal of Passive Defense



TEHRAN (MNA) - Head of Iran's Passive Defense Organization Brigadier General Gholam Reza Jalali said the body's main goal is neutralizing threats to the country's vital infrastructure and capitals.

He explained that the capitals include both infrastructure and spiritual assets of the country.

Elsewhere in his remarks, he addressed the issue of 'women' in Iran noting that "Today, the issue of women, family, and hijab are fixed subjects on which the enemy has always focused in its conspiracies against the Iranian nation."

"Therefore, we need a strong strategy to fight hostilities and negative propaganda about the role of women in the Islamic system."

In his earlier remarks, he noted and stressed that the Islamic Republic will give a crushing response to any military aggression. "The enemy has used up all its power, and there is almost no option left but to use the weapon of direct and extensive military warfare."

Jalali added that Iran's military power has reached an 'active deterrence' in air defense.

## Good News on Sino-Iranian Ties

BEIJING (IP) - The Iranian ambassador to China emphasized that this year, the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution is associated with the Chinese spring festival and the beginning of the 50th year of establishing diplomatic relations between the two countries, and the good news is on the way in the relations between the two countries.

"Mohammad Keshavarzadeh", wrote on his Twitter account on Saturday: "In a webinar held today on the occasion of the 42nd anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Revolution, six Chinese thinkers spoke about the successful experience of the revolution in Iran."

The Iranian ambassador to China added: "One of the main teachings of the Islamic Revolution and one of the main axes of Imam Khomeini's thought is self-belief and self-reliance, teaching that made Iran, despite more than 40 years of brutal US sanctions, continue its progress every day so that today the world recognizes Iran as one of the scientific and industrial hubs of the region."

The Iranian ambassador to China stated: "Self-confidence can be used by all countries of the world and China has used it well; China has shown that it can overcome its problems, bring prosperity and security to its people, and even plays a constructive role in world peace and stability by relying on domestic capabilities."

Iran's ambassador to China said: "Just as China's progress is not a threat to others; the progress of the Islamic Republic of Iran is not a threat to any country in the world. As if Iran has not started a war in the last 200 years; Strengthening and stabilizing Iran plays an important role in regional stability."

Keshavarzadeh stated: "We have extended our hand of friendship and brotherhood to all countries of the world, especially the countries of the region, and we are ready to share the achievements of the Islamic Revolution with them."

## Iran Exported Most of Its Oil Products During Sanctions

TEHRAN (IP) - The chairman of the board of directors of Iran Petrochemical Industries Development Management Company said: "Not only did we not kneel down before the sanctions, but we also achieved the record for the largest export of Iranian petroleum products at the time of the sanctions."

Habibollah Bitaraf said: "In the period when we witnessed the most severe sanctions, especially against Iran's oil and petrochemical industry, refineries and petrochemicals operated at full capacity, and the largest export of petroleum products in history was achieved."

He added: "In 1998, Iran Petrochemical produced

\$15 billion worth of products and exported \$10 billion."

He emphasized that the enemy was seeking to reduce Iran's oil exports to zero and prevent petrochemical products' export but failed.

The Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Petrochemical Industries Development Company stated that Iran further developed the domestic production of goods and equipment for the oil, gas, and petrochemical industries in the face of heavy and severe sanctions. Petrochemicals are produced domestically.

"Today, more than 65% of the goods and equipment required by the oil and petrochemical industry are produced domestically," he added.

## DM Blames Hegemonic Powers for Insecurity in West Asia

TEHRAN (IFP) - Defense Minister Brigadier General Amir Hatami says hegemonic powers are the key contributors to terrorism and insecurity in West Asia.

General Hatami made the remarks in a meeting with his Madagascar counterpart in India.

"Unfortunately, the West Asia region is facing numerous instances of terrorism and insecurity, and foreign interference and hegemonic powers' intervention are the major reason behind that," said General Hatami. He noted Iran and Madagascar have many commonalities and can consider boosting mutual cooperation on different fronts. "Madagascar and countries in South Africa have a special place in Iran's foreign policy," he said.

"The situation of Iran and Madagascar in the Indian Ocean as well as in the two continents of Asia and Africa is of significance," the Iranian defense chief said.

"We hope relations between two countries will further expand, especially in the military field," said General Hatami. Iran's defense minister also called on the Madagascar government and Coast Guard to help Iranian fishermen which are struck by pirates in waters off the coast of Madagascar.

## Tehran Welcomes Formation of Executive Council in Libya

TEHRAN (IFP) - Iran's foreign ministry spokesman has welcomed the formation of a temporary executive council in Libya.

In a statement on Saturday, Saeed Khatibzadeh embraced the outcome of political talks between Libyan sides in Geneva, expressing hope the new government will set the stage for holding elections.

He also said he hopes the new government will prepare the ground for establishing stability, tranquility, growth and development in Libya based on national sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, and without any foreign interference.

The UN-led Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF) selected an interim Prime Minister and President of its new executive council, marking what the UN Special Representative called another "historic moment" on the road to unification of the war-torn country and national elections in December.

## Iran Imports Sputnik V Vaccine, AstraZeneca

LONDON (IRNA) - Iranian Ambassador to UK Hamid Baedinejad said on Friday that 4.2 million doses of the Anglo-Swedish AstraZeneca vaccines will be imported in the near future in the framework of an agreement with COVAX, an affiliate to WHO.

Baedinejad made the remarks in a post on his Twitter account.

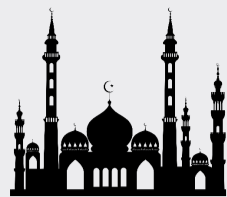
He said that up to now, a direct relationship between the start of vaccinations against COVID-19 has not stabilized with falls in number of patients and deaths caused by the virus.

In the UK, the number of those who have been vaccinated against COVID-19 has exceeded one million, but the number of those infected is still very high, the Ambassador said.

Baedinejad said: "The situation in the U.S. and other European countries is also like that, vaccination is the only way to deal effectively with the countries around the world and gradually abandoning this stage."

The first consignment of Sputnik V, the Russian-made vaccine for the coronavirus, was imported on Thursday.

By the next two weeks, the second cargo and by February 28, the third cargo of Sputnik V will be delivered to Iran, Iran's Ambassador to Moscow Kazem Jalali said adding that the process will continue every two weeks and every month.



## PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:18
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:56
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:33
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:58

42. The blame is only against those who oppress men and wrong-doing and insolently transgress beyond bounds through the land, defying right and justice: for such there will be a penalty grievous. 43. But indeed if any show patience and forgive, that would truly be an exercise of courageous will and resolution in the conduct of affairs.

Surah 42, Council, Consultation (42 - 43)

## Tehran, Islamabad Urged to Set Up a Joint Special Trade Zone

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN –** Pakistan Ambassador to Tehran Rahim Hayat Qureshi in meeting with Iranian lawmaker Fadahossein Maleki called for the establishment of a joint special industrial and trade zone by Iran and Pakistan.

In the meeting, Mr. Qureshi pointed to the significant role of parliaments in boosting the mutual relations and said the parliamentary relation does always have important role in reinforcing the bilateral cooperation and taking advantage of this capacity is necessary for enhancing the bilateral relations in the other fields.

He expressed hope that with progress of the relation in political and parliamentary fields, both countries would witness improvement in their economic relations.

He then pointed to holding the joint economic commission of the two states, saying that in the economic sphere, Pakistan strives to define the priorities for cooperation and investment in the Chabahar Free Zone by exchange of information and cooperation of private sectors of both countries.

Qureshi also expressed his satisfaction about the existing capacity of Chabahar project, saying that by easing solutions regarding the arrival of Pakistani tradesmen, abundant economic opportunities will be provided for Pakistan and Iranian as well as the Central Asian countries.

He then called for launching a joint special industrial and trade zone between Iran and Pakistan, adding that next month, he will visit the Mirjaveh border area and he will check issues related to Pakistan in this area.

The Pakistani diplomat also pointed to the efforts of his country for continuing cooperation and called for improving the bilateral cooperation in economic, trade, medical, scientific and technology fields as well as exchange of students.

He concluded his words by emphasizing the role of border markets of both countries for securing peace and trade.

Meanwhile representative of Zahedan constituency to Majlis Mr. Maleki, for his part, expressed his gratitude for inauguration of Rimdan border market, saying that he expects the next step to be the inauguration of Pishin-Mand market.

He then pointed to the historical, cultural and trade commonalities between the two



nations and the existing economic capacities of the two countries and stipulated that Iran and Pakistan have high capabilities for boosting cooperation in different fields like rail lines, launching the border markets, imports and exports of agro products, exchange of scientific and technology information and energy, and expressed hope due to this historical and cultural closeness, both countries would witness better and deep cooperation under the high political levels like Iran's Majlis cooperation.

Maleki also pointed to the positive approach of Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan during his recent visit to Tehran for signing MoU for cooperation, and termed this decision as the sign of determination of Pakistan government.

He also expressed his dissatisfaction on the low trade balance between the two countries and called for using all economic and trade levers as well as operationalization of the signed agreements during the recent meeting of the joint economic commission.

Maleki also said the cooperation between Iran and Pakistan in implementation of Chabahar Port is an exceptional opportunity for both countries and the regional states for improving the economic relations, and emphasized that due to abundant economic and economic capacities of Chabahar Port, the amount of joint investment in the region should enhance.

Then he pointed to Kuhak region (a village in Bam Pasht District, Saravan County, Sistan and Baluchestan Province of Iran) and said since Iran recognizes it, it is expected Pakistan government to recognize it officially, too.

Maleki then thanked Pakistan government over the release of two abducted Iranian border guards and called for boosting political and parliamentary ties.

## IME Posts Growth In Its Weekly Trade

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN –** Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) traded 718,572 tons of commodities with total trading value of more than \$424m last week, witnessing lift in its volume and value of trades by 4 and 42 percentage points respectively.

According to a report by the IME's international affairs and PR, the IME traded 400,688 tons of commodities on its mineral and industrial trading floor valued at almost \$260m

On this floor the IME sold 336,798 tons of steel products, 7,200 tons of copper, 6,555 tons of aluminum, 120 tons of molybdenum concentrate, 15 tons of precious metals concentrate, 50,000 tons of fine iron ore and 41 kg of gold bars.

Furthermore, the exchange played host to trading of 313,691 tons of commodities on both domestic and export rings of its oil and petrochemical trading floor with a trading value of nearly \$165m, which included 55,050 tons of vacuum bottom, 99,770 tons of bitumen, 84,843 tons of polymeric products, 35,006 tons of chemicals, 34,500 tons of lube cut, 3,162 tons of base oil, 50 tons of argon and 325 tons of sulfur.

It's worth noting that the IME's side market was also a platform to trading of 4,193 tons of various types of non-exchange-listed commodities.

## Chadormalu Receives Accolade for Innovation



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN –** In a ceremony which was held in Yazd to honor the best of industries in Yazd Province, Chadormalu Mining and Industrial Company (CMIC) was awarded with a prize for its innovation in dispatching system.

According to the reports, the CEO of the company Eng. Naser Taghizadeh received the award on behalf of the company. The award went to the company for its innovation in launching the smart control system (dispatching).

This system for the first time was designed and installed at Chadormalu Mining Complex and it is aimed at smart management of the mineral activities. This modern and smart system was designed and launched by creative educates of Yazd University.

With installation of the system, all activities of the company are done electronically and all activities are monitored electronically every second via computer devices.

## Tehran, Damascus Call for Establishing Joint Bank



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN -** Head of Iran-Syria Joint Chamber of Commerce Keyvan Kashefi during his visit to Damascus met with senior officials from the Syrian ministries of Finance, and Economy and Trade, in which the two sides stressed accelerating the process for establishing an Iran-Syria joint bank.

"In order to increase economic exchanges, it is proposed to establish a joint bank to support economic activities so that businessmen on both sides can interact with local currencies of lira and rial," Kashefi said in the meeting.

As reported by the portal of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA), implementation of a free trade agreement and the reduction and elimination of customs tariffs were also among the issues discussed by the two sides.

Speaking in the gathering, Kashefi pointed to the above mentioned issues as the requirements for the development of economic relations between Iran and Syria.

According to the official, promoting profitable trade and increasing economic exchanges between Iran and Syria are among the major goals of his visit to the Arab country.

Further in the meeting, Syrian economic and trade officials stressed their interest in increasing cooperation with the Islamic Republic of Iran and proposed ways to develop the two countries' trade relations.

Iran and Syria have been taking major steps for the expansion of their mutual trade ties. The two sides have exchanged numerous trade delegations and Iranian private companies are investing in various fields of the Syrian economy like providing construction materials especially cement and working on several reconstruction projects.

Back in 2020, Kashefi had said that the value of Iran's trade with Syria could reach \$1 billion by the next Iranian calendar year 1400 (starts on March 21).

## N95 Face Mask Full Automatic Production Line Opens With MSC Investment

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**ISFAHAN –** Concurrent with the auspicious birth anniversary of Hazrat Fatemeh (A), the full automatic production line of N95 face mask came into operation through investment and cooperation of Mobarakeh Steel Company and Isfahan University of Technology in a ceremony in the presence of the CEO of Mobarakeh Steel Company (MSC).

According to the reports, the project was inaugurated in a ceremony held at Isfahan University of Technology as the full automatic production line of N95 face mask came into operation with production capacity of 60,000 masks per day.

Addressing the ceremony, the CEO of Mobarakeh Steel Company Mr. Hamid Reza Azimian called this project an



auspicious action for continuation of scientific and technologic cooperation of MSC with Isfahan Industry University as well as with scientific centers.

He also highlighted goals of the company in collaboration and investment in this project, saying that MSC has put on its agenda support to the universities, knowledge-based companies as well as start-ups to observe its social responsibilities, adding that he believes by relying on the knowledge and indigenized

skill the country can attain valuable achievements that indigenization and production of advanced N95 mask is a clear example for this successful approach.

Azimian added that this project indicates the awareness of industry sector and universities of their social responsibilities, noting that he is very pleased that MSC and Isfahan University in a joint cooperation succeeded in a project whose outcome is the production of 60,000 high quality face masks per day.

He also pointed to the roles of MSC in combatting with coronavirus, saying that the company has spent over 100b tomans for equipping hospitals and medical centers as no company has offered such a financial aid yet.

## Isfahan Solar System Is Active

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**ISFAHAN –** Director of electricity market of Isfahan Province Electricity Distribution Company says the solar system for producing electricity in Isfahan is active and it has not come to a halt.

Speaking at a press conference, Ms. Sara Salehi said that currently some 161 solar system for producing electricity with production capacity over 2300 kilowatts are active in the city of Isfahan based on the guarantee purchase.

She added that the period for return of investment in the electricity energy production is 3 years, saying that currently the average rate for sale of electricity is 110 tomans per kilowatt while this year the average price for purchasing electricity from those solar electricity systems has been more than 1800 tomans per kilowatts.

She then highlighted some of the plans of the company for supplying electricity for people from different walks of the society as well as for the industries, adding that by the yearend, some tribe households in the towns will be supplied with solar systems.

She further said that out of 1.2m subscribers of the company, 900,000 are households, adding that 36 percent of the supplied electricity by the company is consumed by subscribers in the households.

Salehi went on to say that the Hope Electricity Project has started from November and 12 percent of Isfahani subscribers are households.

## Big Steps of BMI for Implementing Digital Banking

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN –** The CEO of Bank Melli Iran (BMI) in an article highlighted the goals of the bank regarding implementation of digital banking system in BMI and in the national banking system.

Dr. Mohammad Reza Hosseinzadeh in his article said today in the life of the human being, using technology is not a choice but an obligation and devices and tools like TV, car, plane, mobile and compute have turned into the inseparable part of his life and lack of each one can cause serious disruption in his daily affairs.

He added that these technologies are getting more advanced every day and as the result they provide new facilities for the users.

He went on to say that banking industry has also enjoyed this development and innovations happening in technologies, as for years people used to attend the banks in-person or stand in long lines for their banking affairs but these are gradually becoming as part of history because now almost 90 percent of banking affairs are done just by pushing a pushing-button via computer, mobile or banking electronic system.

Hosseinzadeh noted today new services and facilities are added to the online services for the clients. He reiterated that progress and innovation in the banking services has not come to an end, and to this end it needs required infrastructures for new services.

He underscored that BMI has always been pioneer in digitalized and electronic banking and it has presented diverse banking services to its clients and it has currently several popular e-banking services like BAM, Bale and Neshan Pardakht.

He concluded that in the near future, new services and e-banking systems will be unveiled and genuine digital banking will be implemented.



## U.S. to Revoke Terrorist Designation of Houthis

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The United States said on Friday it intends to revoke the terrorist designation for Yemen's Houthi movement in response to the country's humanitarian crisis, reversing one of the most criticized last-minute decisions of the Trump administration.

The reversal, confirmed by a State Department official, comes a day after President Joe Biden declared a halt to U.S. support for the Saudi Arabia-led military campaign in Yemen, widely seen as a proxy conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran.



## Venezuela Jails Officials For Giving U.S. Oil Data

CARACAS (AFP) - Venezuela jailed two officials from the state oil company PDVSA for five years for providing the U.S. with "strategic and sensitive" details of its sanctions-hit oil operations, prosecutors said Friday.

Alfredo Chirinos, the company's special operations chief, and Aryenis Torrealba, PDVSA's general manager of crude operations, were arrested last year.

They "were sentenced to five years in prison for the crime of disclosing, reserving or supplying information," said a statement signed by the attorney general, Tarek William Saab.

The court relied on witness testimony and "documentary" evidence.



## Pakistan Would Give Kashmiris Right to Independence



ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan has pledged to allow the people of Kashmir the right to independence if residents of the disputed Himalayan territory were to vote for joining Pakistan in a United Nations-mandated plebiscite that has been delayed for decades.

Since gaining independence from the British in 1947, Pakistan and India have fought two of their three wars over Kashmir, with both sides claiming the territory in full but administering separate portions of it that are divided by the Line of Control (LoC).

Addressing thousands at a Kashmir Solidarity Day rally in the Pakistan-administered Kashmir town of Kotli on Friday, Khan asserted he was willing to allow citizens of the territory the full right to self-determination.

"When you decide on your future, and when the people of Kashmir, God willing, decide in Pakistan's favor, I want to say that after that Pakistan will give Kashmiris the right that if you want to be independent or a part of Pakistan," said Khan. "This will be your right." In 1948, a UN Security Council resolution mandated the holding of a plebiscite in the territory, giving residents a choice between joining India or Pakistan.

Independence was not stated to be an option for that referendum.

India has rejected holding such a plebiscite until Pakistan withdraws its troops from the territory, including from Pakistan-administered Kashmir.

In 2019, New Delhi altered the constitutional status of Indian-administered Kashmir, removing a provision that allowed the region its autonomy and absorbing it into the country's administrative mainstream.

The move was rejected by Pakistan, which has demanded India reverse the decision as a precondition for any talks.

India's move was also met with anger within Kashmir, where a months-long curfew was enforced by hundreds of thousands of security forces.

If India demonstrates sincerity in seeking a just solution to the Kashmir issue, in accordance with UNSC resolutions, we are ready to take two steps forward for peace. But let no one mistake our desire for stability & peace as a sign of weakness.

Many restrictions on Kashmiris' movement and communication remain in place in Indian-administered Kashmir, where an armed separatist movement has been fighting Indian forces since the 1990s.

Rights groups have documented human rights abuses by Indian security forces, including the use of pellet guns to target protesters, extrajudicial killings and the intimidation of journalists.

Speaking on Friday, Khan reiterated that his government was prepared to engage in dialogue with India, but only if it revoked its removal of Kashmir's special constitutional status.

## Blinken Presses China on Uighurs, Hong Kong in First Call

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken pressed Beijing on its treatment of Uighurs, Tibetans and Hong Kong in the first conversation between top officials of the two powers since President Joe Biden took office.

"I made clear the U.S. will defend our national interests, stand up for our democratic values, and hold Beijing accountable for its abuses of the international system," Blinken said on Twitter of his call with senior Chinese official Yang Jiechi. Blinken told Yang that the United States "will continue to stand up for human rights and democratic values, including in Xinjiang, Tibet and Hong Kong," a State Department statement said of the call, which took place on Friday.

Blinken also "pressed China to join the international community in condemning the military coup in Burma", it said, using Myanmar's former name.

Following the coup in Myanmar, China appeared muted in its response, saying it had "noted" the military takeover, and hoped that all sides could properly manage their differences under the Constitution and uphold stability.



## U.S., EU Hail Belarus Democrats

WASHINGTON (AFP) - The United States and the European Union on Friday hailed demonstrators in Belarus six months after disputed elections, in a message sure to irritate President Vladimir Putin of neighboring Russia.

U.S. President Joe Biden's administration and the Europeans said they backed a "day of solidarity" called for Sunday by Belarusian opposition leader Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, who believes she defeated President Alexander Lukashenko, an authoritarian ally of Putin, in August.

"We continue to be amazed by the exceptional strength, resilience and courage of the Belarusian people in the face of unyielding repression," State Department spokesman Ned Price told reporters.

"They continue to demand freedom and democracy. The world has been inspired by the people of Belarus, especially Belarusian women peacefully demonstrating for the right to have a voice in Belarus' future," he said.

Price said the United States backed a "peaceful and inclusive dialogue" in Belarus, where demonstrators have kept taking to the streets.

The European Union issued a similar statement, saying that "many thousands" have been detained in Belarus and pointing to "hundreds of documented cases of torture."

"The European Union continues to stand firmly with the people of Belarus," said a statement by EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell and enlargement coordinator Oliver Varhelyi, promising economic support for a democratic Belarus.

In a recent interview with AFP, Tikhanovskaya said that the "regime will collapse from within" and drew a parallel to protests in Russia led by Alexei Navalny, who was allegedly poisoned last year and was arrested on his return to Moscow last month.

Tikhanovskaya ran for president after her husband was imprisoned after trying to register to run against Lukashenko, who has ruled the country since 1994.

## Thousands Protest Against Coup in Myanmar's Biggest City

YANGON (Reuters) - Thousands of people took to the streets of Yangon on Saturday to denounce this week's coup and demand the release of elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi, in the first such demonstration since the generals seized power.

"Military dictator, fail, fail; Democracy, win, win," protesters chanted, calling for the military to free Nobel Peace laureate Suu Kyi and other leaders of her National League for Democracy (NLD) who have been detained since the coup on Monday.

"Against military dictatorship" read the banner at the front of the march. Many protesters dressed in the NLD's red colour and some carried red flags.

Myanmar's junta has tried to silence dissent by temporarily blocking Facebook and extended the social media crackdown to Twitter and Instagram on Saturday in the face of the growing protest movement.

Authorities ordered internet providers to deny access to Twitter and Instagram "until further notice", said Norwegian mobile phone company Telenor Asa.

Demand for VPNs has soared in Myanmar, allowing some people to evade the ban, but users reported more general disruption to mobile data services, which most people in the country of 53 million rely on for news and communications.

"We lost freedom, justice and urgently need democracy,"

wrote one Twitter user. "Please hear the voice of Myanmar."

Army chief Min Aung Hlaing seized power alleging fraud in a Nov. 8 election that the NLD won in a landslide. The electoral commission dismissed the army's accusations.

The junta announced a one-year state of emergency and has promised to hand over power after new elections, without giving a timeframe.

The takeover drew international condemnation with a United Nations Security Council call for the release of all detainees and targeted sanctions under consideration by Washington. Suu Kyi, 75, has not been seen in public since the coup. She spent some 15 years under house arrest during a struggle against previous juntas before the troubled democratic transition began in 2011.

The lawyer for Suu Kyi and ousted President Win Myint said they were being held in their homes and that he was unable to meet them because they were still being questioned. Suu Kyi faces charges of importing six walkie-talkies illegally while Win Myint is accused of flouting coronavirus restrictions.

"Of course, we want unconditional release as they have not broken the law," said Khin Maung Zaw, the veteran lawyer who is representing both of them. Sean Tumell, an Australian economic adviser to Suu Kyi, said in message to Reuters on Saturday he was being detained.



## Russia Expels EU Diplomats, Ignores Bloc's Call to Free Navalny

MOSCOW (Reuters) - Russia on Friday expelled diplomats from three EU member states it accused of attending illegal protests in support of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny, and pointedly ignored a public call by the EU's top diplomat to free the opposition politician.

The expulsions, which affected diplomats from Germany, Poland and Sweden, appear to have wrecked an EU attempt to re-engage with Moscow being spearheaded by Josep Borrell, the EU's foreign policy chief, who was in Russia for talks on Friday.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel called the move unjustified and a further step away from the rule of law in Russia, while Poland summoned the Russian ambassador over the decision. Navalny, President Vladimir Putin's most prominent critic, was jailed this week for almost three years for parole violations he calls trumped up, a move the West condemned.

Russia announced the expulsions after Borrell used a joint news conference with Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov to call for Russia to free Navalny immediately.

Lavrov did not respond directly to the appeal but complained about what he described as human rights abuses in the EU and called the 27-nation bloc an unreliable partner.

Borrell had earlier said that the Navalny case was a low point for ties between Russia and the EU. He said there was not yet a formal proposal for new EU sanctions on Russia but that the 27-member bloc would have a discussion next month about relations with Moscow.

"I have conveyed to Minister Lavrov our deep concern and our appeal for his (Navalny's) release and for the launch of an investigation over his poisoning," Borrell told the news conference. "Over the last years our relationship has been marked by fundamental differences and a lack of trust."

Navalny was arrested on Jan. 17 on his return from treatment in Germany, where he was flown in August after falling ill from what German officials concluded was poisoning with a military-grade nerve agent. The Kremlin has questioned whether Navalny was poisoned and denied blame for his illness.



**Shanon**  
(adviser)

**Parsian**

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J, L.balcony  
marble fl  
Fully Furn

**Shariati Villa (\$3500)**  
1000sq.m  
5bdrs, S/p  
S, J, balcony  
marble floor  
Fully Furn

**Darrous (\$2800)**  
300sq.m, 3bdrs  
S/p, S, J, & F.F

**Farmanieh (\$2200)**  
3bdrs, S/p, S, J, & F.F

**Niavaran Villa (\$3500)**  
1000sq.m, 4bdrs  
S/p, yard, & F.F

**Zaferanieh (\$2600)**  
220sq.m, 3bdrs  
S/p, F.F

**Velenjak bldg (\$8000)**  
5storey, 15bdrs  
pkgs

**Jordan (\$1700)**  
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## U.S. Trade Deficit Jumps to 12-Year High in 2020

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The United States' trade deficit surged to its highest level in 12 years in 2020 as the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the flow of goods and services.

The Commerce Department said on Friday that the trade deficit jumped 17.7% to \$678.7 billion last year, the highest since 2008. Exports of goods and services tumbled 15.7% to their lowest level since 2010. Imports of goods and services dropped 9.5% to a four-year low.

The plunge in exports contributed to the economy shrinking 3.5% last year, the biggest drop in gross domestic product since 1946. Trade flows have been gradually improving. For December, the trade deficit narrowed 3.5% to \$66.6 billion.



## Turkish CB Chief Says No Rate Cuts for a Long Time This Year

ISTANBUL (Reuters) - New governor Naci Agbal does not expect Turkey's central bank to begin considering cutting interest rates from 17% until much later this year given upward pressure on already high inflation, and rate hikes are still a possibility, he told Reuters.

In his first interview since taking the reins three months ago, Agbal said the central bank intends to move ahead of the market, including swiftly hiking rates if there is any sign that inflation, now 15%, might drift higher than expected.

His comments, including the revelation that Turkey is no longer seeking currency swap lines with foreign counterparts, could reinforce a growing view among investors that the bank is in no rush to start easing policy despite calls for lower rates from Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan. "It does not seem possible to put interest rate cuts on the agenda for a long time this year," Agbal said, noting that consumer prices are set to edge higher for a few months before slowly declining to the bank's forecast of 9.4% by year-end.

"If any new data that we come across indicates a risk of deviating from the medium-term target path in inflation expectations and pricing behavior, we will tighten further in advance," he said at the bank's new headquarters in Istanbul.

Erdogan appointed Agbal as part of a shock leadership overhaul a day after the lira touched a record low in early November. The Turkish president also pledged a new market-friendly economic era.

The central bank has since hiked rates to 17% from 10.25% to battle inflation that has been stuck in double-digits for most of the last three years, giving Turkey the tightest monetary policy of any major developed or emerging market economy.

After years of avoiding Turkish assets, investors have begun edging back in, with some \$15 billion in foreign inflows since November driving the lira up 15% and dramatically cutting gauges of market risk.

Yet concerns remain over whether Agbal can repair the bank's tattered credibility and rebuild its FX reserves, seen as a country's buffer against financial crises, which on a net basis fell last month to a quarter of their levels at the start of 2020 due to costly state interventions in currency markets.

Erdogan, who fired the last two central bank chiefs over policy disagreements, has repeated in recent weeks his long-held, unorthodox view that tight high interest rates cause inflation.

Some analysts doubt Agbal will be able to keep his hawkish pledge. They generally expect the bank to start cutting borrowing costs from mid-year and say its inflation forecasts are too optimistic.

Agbal, a former finance minister who is close to Erdogan, said past cycles -- including in 2019, when rates came down from 24% after a currency crisis -- lay bare the economic costs of easing policy too early.

This time, he said, a "strong disinflationary bias" will guide the bank's approach. It will manage expectations by "moving ahead of the markets", he added.

"As the market confirms this determination of ours, inflation expectations" will dip, Agbal told Reuters. "We expect capital inflows ... to continue" especially with longer-term portfolio investments, he added.

Agbal said the bank would patiently rebuild its depleted FX reserves using auctions and has called off a hunt for foreign swap lines that saw it reach out to Washington, London, Tokyo and other capitals last year.

"Our strategy to raise reserves does not include swap agreements with other countries' central banks," he said.

## Japan's December Household Spending Falls as Recovery Stalls

TOKYO (Reuters) - Japan's household spending fell for the first time in three months in December, in a sign consumer sentiment was weakening even before the government called a state of emergency to control a new wave of the coronavirus in the country.

The government on Tuesday extended the state of emergency in 10 areas, including Tokyo and neighboring prefectures as well as Osaka and Kyoto in western Japan.

Household spending fell 0.6% in December compared with the same month a year earlier, official data showed on Friday. It was a slower decline than the 2.4% median forecast but the first year-on-year spending drop in three months.

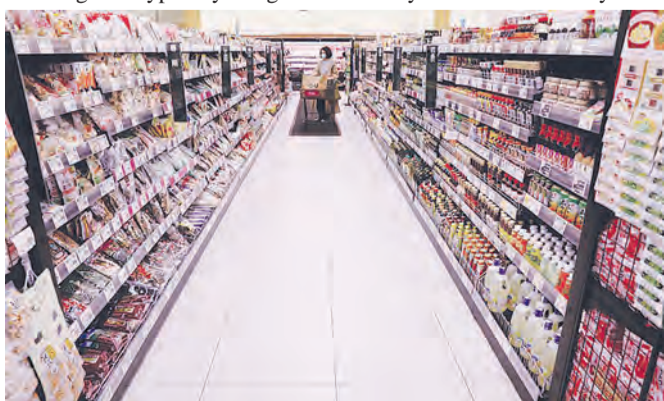
For all of 2020, spending by households with at least two people fell 5.3% due to the hit from the pandemic. It was down 6.5% for all households, the worst drop since comparable data became available in 2001.

"A decline in the incomes of working people, including in bonus payments, is putting pressure on spending," said Takeshi Minami, chief economist at Norinchukin Research Institute.

"But spending by people living off pensions, who haven't suffered from income falls, was solid in the year-end even as coronavirus infections were spreading," he said, adding that consumption was holding up better than he expected.

The world's third-largest economy has rebounded from its biggest postwar slump last year, but its third and most lethal wave of coronavirus infections is raising the spectre of a prolonged period of below-par growth.

Household spending rose 0.9% in December from the previous month, although demand for transportation, clothing and festive goods typically bought before the year-end was hurt by the COVID-19 crisis.



## \$43b Deal for World's Biggest Offshore Wind Farm in South Korea

SEOUL (Dispatches) - A \$43 billion deal was signed Friday to build what the South Korean government said will be the world's biggest offshore wind power complex, as it seeks to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050.

South Korea has few energy resources of its own and relies on imported coal -- a cheap but dirty fuel -- for around 40 percent of its electricity. President Moon Jae-in declared the carbon neutrality goal last year but at the same time is looking to phase out nuclear power, leaving the country depending on renewables to square the circle.

Moon oversaw the signing of the 48 trillion won (\$43 billion) agreement to build the complex off Sinan in the country's southwest, which he said would be seven times bigger than the world's current largest offshore wind farm. With a maximum capacity of 8.2 gigawatts, the government is banking on it being the equivalent of six nuclear power stations.

Moon said that the country's position on the Korean peninsula gave it a geographical advantage.

"We have the infinite potential of offshore wind power to the sea on three sides, and we have the world's best technology in related fields," he added.

The agreement involves 33 different entities, among them regional governments, the electricity generator KEPCO, and major private firms including Doosan Heavy Industries & Construction and SK E&S.

Moon warned it could take more than five years to start construction, although the government will try to accelerate the process. Seoul last year announced a target of becoming one of the world's top five offshore wind energy powerhouses by 2030.

## India Warns Rising Oil Prices May Dampen Global Economic Recovery

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India's oil minister Dharmendra Pradhan warned that rising oil prices could hurt global economic recovery in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic that caused most economies to shrink last year.

Global crude oil prices rose to their highest in about a year this week as production cuts by

the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and their allies including Russia tilted the market balance towards a deficit.

That has propelled gasoline prices to record levels in the world's third biggest oil consuming and importing nation.

"Efforts at artificially distorting prices will have a dampening effect on the fragile global economic recovery that is underway," Indian oil minister Dharmendra Pradhan said at the South Asia Commodities Forum of S&P Global Platts. Last month also, the minister blamed OPEC+ for high oil prices.

"While we do not favor too low prices, we also do not support high prices, which deny energy access to millions in India," he said.

India imports about 85% of its oil needs and half of gas demand.

"If the world has to grow as a whole, there has to be a mutually supportive relationship between producers and consumers. It is in the interests of producers that oil-dependent economies keep growing steadily," Pradhan said.

India has been diversifying its energy sources to cut dependence on Middle Eastern producers, he said, adding the nation sees 'enormous potential' to strengthen its relations with the U.S., mainly on imports of liquefied natural gas (LNG).

The U.S. is one of the top ten oil suppliers to India, he said.

To meet its growing energy needs India is also investing \$143 billion in domestic projects to boost local outputs and build oil and gas infrastructure including an 80% jump in refining capacity to 9 million barrels per day, he said.

Pradhan said the country is adopting cleaner energy sources to fuel its economic expansion but baseload will continue to be met by oil and gas.

## U.S. Employment Growth Likely Rebounded

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - U.S. job growth likely rebounded in January as authorities began easing COVID-19 restrictions on businesses with the ebbing pace of infections, which could offer the strongest signal yet that the worst of the labor market turmoil was behind after the economy shed jobs in December.

The Labor Department's closely watched employment report on Friday will, however, not lessen the need for additional relief money from the government, with millions of people experiencing long bouts of unemployment and others having permanently lost their jobs, and given up the search for work.

The economy would still be about 10 million jobs short from the labor market's peak in February 2020. President Joe Biden is pushing the U.S. Congress to pass a \$1.9 trillion recovery plan, which has been met with resistance from mostly Republican lawmakers, now worried about the swelling national debt.

Biden's fellow Democrats in the Senate were on Thursday set to take a first step toward the ultimate passage of the proposed stimulus package.

"The stimulus has to pass," said Jason Reed, finance professor at the University of Notre Dame's Mendoza College of Business. "Whatever the payrolls number is, we shouldn't forget we are significantly under the amount of jobs needed to get back to where we were a year ago."

The survey of establishments is likely to show that nonfarm payrolls increased by 50,000 jobs last month after declining by 140,000 in December, according to a Reuters survey of economists. December's drop was the first in eight months and came amid renewed restrictions on businesses like restaurant and bars to slow a resurgence in coronavirus infections.

The pace of COVID-19 infections appears to have peaked in early January, a trend that could also give a lift to hiring in the months ahead, should it hold. Infections hit a one-day record of roughly 300,000 in early January but by month's end were averaging closer to 100,000 a day, with most of the country seeing a downward trend, according to a Reuters tally.

The economy has recouped 12.5 million of the 22.2 million jobs lost in March and April.

The Congressional Budget Office estimated on Monday that employment would not return to its pre-pandemic level before 2024. Payrolls could surprise on the upside as the Reuters survey was conducted before a string of reports this week showing rebounds in private payrolls and services industry employment in January. Manufacturers also hired more workers in January.

Those fairly upbeat reports prompted Goldman Sachs to boost its payrolls forecast by 75,000 to 200,000.

The pandemic has also disrupted normal seasonal labor market patterns, especially in retail and transportation industries, which could exaggerate job growth in January.

## Oil Hits Highest in a Year on Growth Hopes, OPEC+ Cuts



NEW YORK (Reuters) - Oil prices hit its highest in a year on Friday, closing in on \$60 a barrel, supported by economic revival hopes and supply curbs by producer group OPEC and its allies.

Oil was also supported as U.S. stock markets hit record highs on signs of progress towards more economic stimulus, while a closely watched jobs report confirmed the labor market was stabilizing.

U.S. employment growth rebounded moderately in January and job losses in the prior month were deeper than initially thought, underscoring an urgent need for additional relief money from the government. President Joe Biden's drive to enact a \$1.9 trillion coronavirus aid bill gained momentum on Friday.

Brent crude was up 72 cents, or 1.2%, at \$59.56 after hitting its highest since Feb. 20 at \$59.79. U.S. crude was up 76 cents, or 1.4%, at \$56.99, after reaching \$57.29, its highest since Jan. 22 last year.

"Brent is eyeing the \$60 level now that OPEC+ has successfully eased most supply side concerns and optimism on the COVID front improves globally," said Edward Moya, senior market analyst at OANDA in New York.

"The fundamentals remain solid for crude, but a consolidation seems likely given the recent runup."

Brent is on track to rise more than 6% this week. The last time it traded at \$60 a barrel, the pandemic had yet to take hold, economies were open and people were free to travel, meaning demand for gasoline, diesel and jet fuel was much higher.

The rollout of COVID-19 vaccines, however, is fuelling hopes of lockdowns being eased, boosting fuel demand. But even demand optimists such as OPEC do not expect oil consumption to return to pre-pandemic levels until 2022. "What is really helping the market today, and is a more valid reason for the price rise we see, once again comes from Saudi Arabia and its top firm, Aramco," said Rystad Energy's head of oil markets Bjornar Tonhaugen.

## Some 76 Deaths Caused by COVID-19

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Some 76 deaths were caused by COVID-19 in Iran over the past 24 hours, spokeswoman for Iran's Ministry of Health and Medical Education Sima Sadat Lari said on Saturday. Lari said that another 76 people have lost their lives due to the deadly virus during the past 24 hours in Iran. According to her report, the number of the total death toll reached 58,412. Elaborating on the latest situation of the coronavirus pandemic in Iran, Lari said that 6,983 new cases infected with the COVID-19 were found over the past 24 hours, some 498 of whom have been hospitalized.



## Vaccine Rollout Raises Real-World Questions

PARIS (Dispatches) - As several vaccines are rolled out across the world, questions already resolved in the lab are cropping up once again, as governments face the challenges of delivering the jabs to millions of people.

All three Covid-19 vaccines authorised for use in Europe and the United States are delivered in the form of two doses. Both mRNA vaccines, manufactured by Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna, were administered as shots three to four weeks apart in clinical trials, which showed above 90-percent efficacy against Covid-19.

But faced with a shortage of supply and public pressure to vaccinate the maximum number of people, certain countries such as Britain and Denmark have already lengthened the gap between two doses, to six or even 12 weeks.

These delays have divided disease experts.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the European Medicines Agency (EMA) have both advised against delaying second doses, since there is no evidence from trials that the vaccines retain their efficacy if administered so far apart.

There is also concern that longer gaps between doses could provide the ideal environment for the virus to mutate further.

With AstraZeneca's vaccine, which uses different technology to the others to bestow immunity, there may be room for longer dosage gaps.

The EMA, for example, has authorized doses to be given between four and 12 weeks apart, since those timeframes were studied in clinical trials.

A study published this week by AstraZeneca and co-developers at Oxford University found that the vaccine was most effective (82 percent) when doses were given 12 weeks apart.

Jean-Daniel Lelievre, a disease expert from France's public health authority, said that it was "absolutely possible" that mRNA vaccines would still be effective if delivered over a similar timeframe.

Russia's Sputnik V vaccine was shown in trial results released this week to be more than 91-percent effective versus Covid-19.

This is significantly more effective than AstraZeneca's, and involves delivering a different type of virus in the second dose.

Researchers said this method "may help create a more powerful immune response (compared with using the same vector twice)".

So could different vaccines be used in the same patient to bestow immunity?

A trial looking at precisely that is already under way in Britain, involving more than 800 volunteers aged over 50.

One group will receive the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine followed by AstraZeneca's. Another will be given the inverse, then results will be compared with individuals who received two doses of a single vaccine.



This approach, known as "heterologous boosting" has shown to work in the past. "Researchers developing some other vaccines — like a better TB vaccine — are looking into heterologous boosting to enhance immunity," said Peter English, a British public health expert.

"And heterologous boosting is sometimes used in hepatitis B for people who don't respond well to standard regimes."

Two recent U.S. studies suggest that a single vaccine dose may work in individuals who have already recovered from Covid-19.

One paper said that immunity in individuals who had had Covid-19 and then received a single vaccine dose "is equal to or even exceeds" that of people who have not had Covid-19 but received two vaccine doses.

Eleanor Riley, a professor at the University of Edinburgh, said the research was promising. "However, incorporating this into a mass vaccination program may be logistically complex and it may be safer, overall, to ensure that everyone gets two doses," she said.

The Russian researchers behind Sputnik V said they are conducting trials on a single-dose vaccine regimen.

And there may soon be another vaccine on the table.

Developed by Johnson & Johnson, it has yet to receive emergency use authorization from the FDA but only requires a single dose.

## Denmark to Create World's First Energy Island in the North Sea



COPENHAGEN (Reuters) - Denmark approved a plan to build the world's first energy island in the North Sea that will produce and store enough green energy to cover the electricity needs of 3 million European households.

The artificial island, which in its initial phase will be the size of 18 football fields, will be linked to hundreds of offshore wind turbines and will supply both power to households and green hydrogen for use in shipping, aviation, industry and heavy transport.

The move came as the European Union unveiled plans to transform its electricity system to rely mostly on renewable energy within a decade and increase its offshore wind energy capacity 25-fold by 2050.

"This is truly a great moment for Denmark and for the global green transition," Energy Minister Dan Jorgensen told a press briefing.

"(The island) will make a big contribution to the realisation of the enormous potential for European offshore wind," he said.

The energy island, which will cost around 210 billion Danish crowns (\$33.9 billion) to build, is an important part of Denmark's legally binding target to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 70% by 2030 from 1990 levels, one of the world's most ambitious.

The Nordic country, home to wind turbine maker Vestas and offshore wind farm developer Orsted, was with its favorable wind speeds a pioneer in both onshore and offshore wind, building the world's first offshore wind farm almost 30 years ago.

In December, it decided to halt the search for oil and gas in the Danish part of the North Sea and hopes instead to make it a hub for renewable energy and carbon storage.

The island, to be located 80 kilometers off Denmark's west coast, and its surrounding wind turbines will have an initial capacity of 3 gigawatt and be operational around 2033.

Denmark also has plans for an energy island in the Baltic Sea. The state will hold a controlling stake in both islands.

## Russia Risks Repeating Argentina's Mistakes With Grain Export Tax

MOSCOW (Reuters) - Russia's plan to control food inflation by curbing grain exports is following a potentially damaging path trod by rival producer Argentina, threatening valuable sales to major customers such as Egypt, traders and analysts said.

With global food prices at their highest in more than 6 years as economies battle fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic, some governments have already taken action to tackle surging domestic prices.

Such moves reduce supplies for international markets, and the consequence is already evident with grain prices hitting multi-year highs.

Russia, the major wheat exporter, will begin taxing exports from Feb. 15, initially by applying a fixed tariff before switching to a formula-based system from June 2, which may make it difficult for traders to secure forward sales.

"The introduction of a new permanent grain export tax will mean that Russia has taken a sharp turn towards Argentina, a country which for many years has restricted agricultural exports under the slogan of protecting domestic consumers," Andrey Sizov at Sovecon agriculture consultancy said.

Argentina, the world's number three corn exporter and top supplier of soymeal, has repeatedly imposed export restrictions after booming shipments of soy and grains pushed up local prices.

The South American country has been in recession since 2018 and had inflation of 36.1% in 2020.

"The Russian government is serious about reducing



wheat and other grain exports to reduce domestic prices," one trader said, noting the potential benefits of keeping retail prices low must be weighed against the economic damage to its exports.

"Argentina has taken this course many times but then suffered the economic damage of lost exports," he added.

The formula used to calculate the tax will also make it difficult to determine when traders are seeking to secure sales where shipment may not take place for several weeks.

This prevents traders from being able to calculate the price at which they can make a profitable sale, covering both the price they pay to the farmer and the export tax.

"It will stop forward sales," another trader said.

Egypt, the second largest buyer of Russian wheat after Turkey, purchases via state GASC tenders with supply happening at a later date.

"As of today this mechanism is set up in such a way that when you sign a forward contract or when you win at a GASC tender, you do not know how much tax you will have to pay when you physically ship the grain," Dmitry Rylko at IKAR consultancy said.

"And an exporter either discounts a farmer, or plays Russian roulette," he added.

He hopes that the authorities and market players will find "a reasonable compromise" by the time the system is launched.

## Blinken...

FROM PAGE 1

An American official also said the meeting between Blinken, Le Drian, Britain's Dominic Raab and Germany's Heiko Maas would also cover the coronavirus pandemic, Russia, China, Myanmar and climate.

The National Security Council convened a meeting on Friday which was attended by top US officials. "The meeting today is part of an ongoing policy review. It is not decisional," White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki said on Twitter.

Robert Malley, new U.S. special envoy for Iran, said on Tuesday that Washington seeks to remove the so-called "maximum pressure" campaign against the Islamic Republic.

Malley told the Italian daily newspaper Corriere della Sera that conferring on a broader agreement would be on the agenda only after returning to JCPOA.

The U.S. envoy also claimed that the Biden government will remove the maximum pressure on Iran and strives to put pressure on Tehran through diplomacy.

## President...

FROM PAGE 1

He cited social distancing, reduced commute, gatherings, and regular adherence to health protocols as preventative measures, adding: "Almost everyone in the world agrees on this issue, and we should try to move forward in this area."

Rouhani also went on to stress observing the health protocols by the Iranian nation advised the people to observe the protocols in the coming weeks so that "we have good Nowroz days ahead. If we take into account all the observations, both businesses will prosper, and people's travels will be established, but if we do not observe, we may not have good conditions ahead."

He added: "Of course, we in Iran sought to make all the famous drugs, and it has been made and is available to all our hospitals. If we all work together, we can succeed and stop Corona; If people all work together, something can be done because we saw two of our famous athletes, Mr. Minavand and Ansarian, passed away as a result of this pandemic, and this is a warning to all our people to take more precise and more care in this regard. Referring to the issue of treatment of COVID 19 disease, the President said: "This disease has no effective and definitive treatment. In some cases, prescriptions may be issued. To date, we have no specific treatment for this virus. Of course, the drugs that are famous and are said to be effective in the world, we sought to make it, and the country is doing its best in this field."

Rouhani also stated about vaccination in the country: "One of the ways to immunize is vaccination, which creates collective safety. If this were to be the norm, we would have to wait one or two years, but because the disease was causing so many casualties and causing so much trouble to countries, the World Health Organization issued an emergency permit."

"Vaccines are generally two-stage, with their own problems," he said. "We have a population of 84 million in Iran. Here, too, we need to produce a significant number of vaccines. Vaccine production is our priority. If conditions are available, it is not easy to get vaccinated, and it can take five or six months for people to be vaccinated. All devices are ready to be vaccinated in Iran, and fortunately, the first shipment of the vaccine has arrived in the country."

## Tehran Seeks...

FROM PAGE 1

The ICJ ruled out all U.S. claims against the jurisdiction of the tribunal, accepting the case with only one opponent vote, which came from a judge from the U.S.. The American judge dismissed some of defects proposed by the United States.

First, the U.S. has problem with the jurisdiction of the ICJ and in other word, the formation of a tribunal on the bilateral treaty. The U.S. thinks the issue of the complaint concerns the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which is in the eyes of the American authorities a non-binding and multilateral political accord, while the Iranian side sees the complaint in respect of the aforementioned treaty.

Second, the U.S. questions the jurisdiction of the ICJ to push forward such a tribunal, noting that Iran put forward issues such as Iranians' trade ties with third parties, which are not mentioned in the 1955 treaty; so, the Americans think the court is not entitled to hold trial in this regard. The ICJ says if it accepts the second objection, other objections are not acceptable; thus, the hearing will continue. The court is not going to stop reviewing US secondary sanctions on Iran.

The issue is very important for Iran. The success can be compared with the triumph by late Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh, when Britain filed a lawsuit against nationalization of oil industry in Iran in 1951."

## India Engaged...

FROM PAGE 1

In the recently announced Union Budget for the financial year 2021-22, the Finance Ministry has made Rs 100 crore allocation for the development of the Chabahar Port. Situated in the Sistan-Balochistan province on the southern coast of energy-rich Iran, the Chabahar port is being established by India, Iran and Afghanistan in order to boost trade ties. As both sides reviewed their overall cooperation in developing the transit hub, India on Sunday, handed over two 140-tonne mobile harbour cranes to the authorities of the Chabahar Port in Iran.

The railway project is being said to be in consonance with New Delhi's interest in creating an alternate trade route to Afghanistan as well as Central Asia bypassing a hostile Pakistan. IRCON, an arm of Indian Railways, had promised to provide all services, superstructure work as well as financing for the railway project under the MoU. Earlier it was reported that the entire assistance was to be worth \$1.6 billion.

The Modi government's deal with Iran was then cited as a strategic victory by New Delhi for India over China, which has been interested to have a major stake in the infrastructure sector of Iran, to further its economic as well as strategic interests.

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## Porto's Nanu Seriously Hurt in Sickening Collision

LISBON (Dispatches) - Porto defender Nanu was knocked unconscious and "suffered a spinal cord injury" in a sickening collision in a Portuguese top-flight match on Thursday. An ambulance had to come onto the pitch at Belenenses to rush the player to hospital after an accidental clash with home goalkeeper Stanislav Kritsyuk. The incident happened in the 85th minute of the 0-0 draw as Guinea-Bissau international Nanu chased a cross into the penalty area.

## Ajax Goalkeeper Onana Suspended One Year for Doping

AMSTERDAM (Dispatches) - Ajax's Cameroonian international goalkeeper Andre Onana has been suspended for one year for doping, the Dutch club said on Friday. The club said in a statement Onana had "mistakenly" taken his wife's medicine which had led to the banned diuretic Furosemide appearing in his urine. Onana posted on social media said that "everything was the result of a human mistake."

# Djokovic Beats Zverev as Nadal Sidelined by Injury



MELBOURNE (Dispatches) - Novak Djokovic fought past Alexander Zverev but it wasn't enough to stave off defeat for Serbia in the ATP Cup Friday, with Germany making the semi-finals alongside a Spanish team missing injured Rafael Nadal.

The world number one, who is ramping up preparations to defend his Australian Open crown, was tested in his singles rubber before outlasting Zverev 6-7 (3/7), 6-2, 7-5.

But the German got revenge in the deciding doubles, teaming with Jan-Lennard Struff to edge Djokovic and Nikola Cacic 7-6 (7/4), 5-7, 10-7 and ensure they made a last four clash against Daniil Medvedev's Russia.

Struff earlier beat Dusan Lajovic in the other singles tie.

"It was so difficult to play against (Zverev) today. Missiles from the other side of the court, both first and second serve," said Djokovic, who led his country to the inaugural title last year.

"He was going for it, not too many double faults. You've got to give him credit for being courageous and trying his best."

Meanwhile, Nadal was once again missing from the Spanish team as they lost 2-1 to Greece.

He watched from the team box as Pablo Carreno Busta and Roberto Bautista Agut led the challenge against Michail Pervolarakis and Stefanos Tsitsipas.

Carreno Busta, ranked 16th, had few problems in thrashing Pervolarakis 6-3, 6-4 to guarantee their spot in the playoff rounds against Italy.

Australia was already eliminated from their group heading into Friday's match, while Greece needed to win the tie 3-0 to advance.

"With this victory, we are into the semi-finals, so it was very important to us," Carreno Busta said. "I tried to be focussed on myself, to try to play my best game."

Bautista Agut couldn't match the exploits, crashing 7-5, 7-5 to world number six Tsitsipas, who boasts two wins from two in a promising start to his season.

"I think I played very solid throughout the whole match and showed aggression,"

said the Greek. "My forehand was on fire, my serve was working really well for me."

The Dominic Thiem-led Austria meet France later Friday with the final group tie between Argentina and Japan.

The results mean 17-time Grand Slam champion Djokovic has four tough matches under his belt -- two singles and two doubles -- as he targets a record-extending ninth Australian Open title.

In contrast, Nadal hasn't played a competitive game since the semi-finals of the ATP Finals in London on November 21.

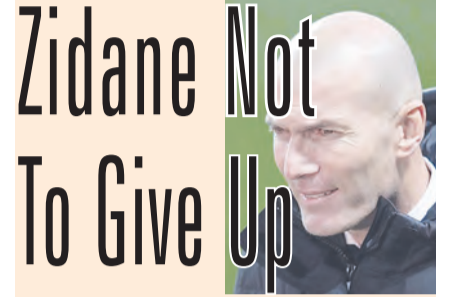
His only appearance since was an exhibition against Thiem in Adelaide last week, with a back injury casting a shadow over his hopes of a record-setting 21st Grand Slam title in Melbourne.

He pulled out of Spain's opening ATP Cup tie at short notice as well as missing the Greece game on Friday.

"I'm not well enough to play. I'm improving bit by bit, but I'm not ready to play a match with maximum intensity," Nadal told Spanish broadcaster Vamos.

The Australian Open gets underway on Monday with Nadal, the 2009 champion, looking to edge ahead of Roger Federer who also has 20 Slam titles to his name.

The injured Swiss great is not playing and will only return to the tour in Doha in March.



## Zidane Not To Give Up

MADRID (Dispatches) - Zinedine Zidane said he was angry and asked for respect for himself and his struggling team on Friday in the face of continued speculation about his future, insisting he was not going to leave.

Real lost at home to Levante last weekend and travel to last-place Huesca third in the table and 10 points behind leaders Atletico Madrid.

The normally guarded Real Madrid coach became visibly angry as he spoke at his first press conference since returning following a positive Covid-19 test.

He said he was upset by renewed media reports that he is on the way out.

"I'm not happy, I'm angry, yes, because I don't think I deserve this," said Zidane.

"One day I'm out or a bit in, then the next day, if we draw or lose, I'm out," he said.

"I'm very fortunate to be here and I'm going to make the most of it until my final day. Just because people want me to give up, it doesn't mean I will, and the players won't either," he said.

"There's talk about a difficult situation and we haven't been fantastic lately but we're eager to turn our fortunes around."

## LeBron James' Triple-Double Leads Lakers' Romp

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - LeBron James had 27 points, 10 rebounds and 10 assists, and the Los Angeles Lakers used a second-half turnaround to defeat the visiting Denver Nuggets 114-93.

Dennis Schroder scored 21 points as seven Lakers reached double figures. Talen Horton-Tucker contributed 17 points, Anthony Davis and Montrezl Harrell added 13 apiece and Kyle Kuzma chipped in 11. Kentavious Caldwell-Pope had 10 points.

Jamal Murray scored 20 points and Monte Morris had 16 for the Nuggets. JaMychal Green scored 12 of his 14 points in the first half.

Denver's Nikola Jokic had a subpar performance, scoring 13 points on 6-of-16 shooting while adding 10 rebounds and six assists.

## Golden State Warriors 147 - Dallas Mavericks 116

Kelly Oubre Jr. exploded for a career-high 40 points and size-challenged Golden State used a small-ball approach to outgun host Dallas in the opener of a two-game set.

Oubre hit 14 of 21 shots and seven of 10 from 3-point range en route to topping the 39 points he had for the Phoenix Suns against the Houston Rockets last February. Stephen Curry chipped in with 28 points and six assists in 30 minutes for the Warriors, who suited up only nine players.

Kristaps Porzingis, who at 7-feet-3 stood eight inches taller than any Warrior in uniform, had 25 points for Dallas. Luka Doncic paced the Mavericks with 27.

## Utah Jazz 112 - Atlanta Hawks 91

Jordan Clarkson came off the bench to score 23 points and visiting Utah whipped short-handed Atlanta for its 13th win in the past 14 games.

Clarkson matched his season high with five 3-pointers and had seven rebounds. Four of his teammates also scored in double figures -- Bojan Bogdanovic with 21 points, Donovan Mitchell with 18, Rudy Gobert with 11 points and 12 rebounds and Mike Conley with 11.

## Juventus Reportedly Eyeing CR7 Contract Extension



TURIN (Dispatches) - Cristiano Ronaldo and Juventus are discussing a contract extension to keep the superstar in Serie A through the 2022-23 season, according to Tuttosport.

Ronaldo, who turned 36 on Friday, currently has a deal through next season but the club and player are said to be open to adding a year to the deal.

He has 22 goals and three assists in 23 matches this season, four coming in the Champions League and a league-best 15 in Serie A play. Only seven of those are penalties.

Ronaldo's 4.8 shots per game is the highest total in Serie A this season. His 1.9 dribbles completed is 13th in the division and his 1.4 key passes sits him 27th.

Any extension to a deal makes it less likely we'll see the Portuguese wonder in Major League Soccer before he retires, though there's hope in the form that he cares deeply about his worldwide brand and he is a Tom Brady-type fitness and health freak who plans to play until he's a septuagenarian.

## Halep, Kenin Crash; Serena Out of Barty Clash



MELBOURNE (Dispatches) - Serena Williams pulled out of a semi-final clash against world number one Ashleigh Barty with a shoulder injury Friday, days before the Australian Open, while Simona Halep and Sofia Kenin both crashed to defeat.

Williams, 39, had ousted fellow American Danielle Collins 6-2, 4-6, 10-6 in the Yarra Valley Classic but withdrew from the tournament hours later despite showing no ill effects during the match.

The American, who is aiming for a record-equalling 24th Grand Slam title at the Australian Open, has looked in ominous form in Melbourne thus far.

Barty now has a bye into the final where she will meet either two-time Grand Slam winner Garbine Muguruza or Marketa Vondrousova.

World number three Naomi Osaka recovered from a shaky start to power past Irina-Camelia Begu 7-5, 6-1 in 76 minutes in the Gippsland Trophy, and will face fifth-ranked Elina Svitolina or Elise Mertens in the last four.

"She was a tricky opponent... I'm really relieved not to have to play a super-tiebreaker," said Osaka, who smashed 23 winners.

World number two Halep, however, slumped out after being thrashed by Ekaterina Alexandrova 6-2, 6-1 in the Gippsland Trophy, where she appeared hampered by a lower back injury.

Halep strapped on a back brace after calling for medical attention after the first set in a lopsided contest lasting just one hour.

Six build-up tournaments for next week's Australian Open returned to action Friday after a coronavirus case at a designated tournament hotel halted play Thursday and forced hundreds of players and officials into isolation.

Intermittent rain increased the backlog Friday, but to ease the congestion WTA clashes were reduced to two sets and a 10-point super tiebreaker instead of the traditional three sets.

World number 15 Muguruza has been in aggressive form in Melbourne, dropping just four games in two matches prior, and impressively hit the lines to run Australian Open champion Kenin ragged 6-2, 6-2.

## Guardiola Upset By Klopp's Claim



LONDON (Dispatches) - Pep Guardiola said he expected more of Jurgen Klopp after the Liverpool boss suggested Manchester City had benefited from an enforced rest due to a coronavirus outbreak at the club in December.

Premier League leaders City hold a seven-point advantage over fourth-placed Liverpool, with a game in hand, ahead of a clash between the sides at Anfield on Sunday.

Klopp blamed a lack of physical and mental freshness for the Reds' 1-0 defeat to Brighton on Wednesday, which stretched their winless run at home to four games.

"We haven't had a break," Klopp said at his pre-match press conference on Friday.

"I think City had a two-week break for Covid reasons. It's really tough. It's a tough season for many teams."

City's scheduled Premier League match at Everton on December 28 was postponed after number of positive cases were identified within the squad's bubble.

That meant Guardiola's men did not play for a week between their win over Newcastle on December 26 and a 3-1 victory over Chelsea on January 3, when they were missing a clutch of first-team players.

Despite the disruption, City are on a club record 13-game winning run in all competitions. "Jurgen has to see the calendar again," said an irked Guardiola. "We had Covid, one week off, and played with 14 players in Stamford Bridge."

"When I see Jurgen, maybe I will ask. I'm surprised. I thought Jurgen wasn't that type of manager."

Despite growing animosity between the clubs as the two dominant forces in English football for the past four seasons, Klopp and Guardiola have maintained an amicable relationship.

"He knows it's not true, come on," added Guardiola. "Nobody in the Premier League had two weeks off. I thought he is not that type of guy."