

**Health Ministry Spokeswoman
Sima Sadat Lari Said on Sunday That
Some 62 More Iranians Died From
The COVID-19 Over the Past 24 Hours
Bringing the Total Deaths to 58,945**

IRAN NEWS

**TEDPIX, the Main Index of the Tehran
Stock Exchange (TSE), Gained 2,083
Points to 1.264 Million on Sunday as
The First Market's Index Rose 6,095
Points, and the 2nd Market's Index
Climbed 11,741 Points**

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For Slams Record**



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Iran Counts on Purchasing Arms From Russia

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iran hopes it will be able to procure arms from Russia to ensure security in the region, Senior Assistant to Iranian Foreign Minister in Special Political Affairs Ali-Asghar Khaji told Sputnik.

“We have military cooperation with Russia. And when restrictions were lifted, Russia became one of the countries where we can buy weapons, and we can cooperate with it to protect our territory and the security of the region,” Khaji said. The diplomat noted while Iran had not had the right to procure weapons due to the UN arms embargo, its neighbors bought them for billions of dollars, turning the region into an arms warehouse.

Earlier this week, Russian Ambassador to Iran Levon Dzhagaryan said in an interview with Sputnik that Moscow received requests for Russian defense items from Iran after the UN embargo on arms trade expired on 18 October 2020.

The arms embargo on Iran expired in line with the 2015 nuclear deal that envisaged its lifting five years after the deal's adoption. This gave Tehran the right to both purchase and sell weapons.

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Iran Exports \$335m Mineral Products to Turkey

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran exported \$335 million worth mineral products to Turkey over the past 11 months.

Based on the data released by the Customs Administration, in the mentioned period (11 months of 2020), more than 132 million dollars of copper and its artifacts were exported to Turkey, which showed a 15 % decline in comparison to the corresponding period in 2019 .

Accordingly, foreign trade statistics in the 9 month period indicates exports of 80,000 tons of refined copper cathodes and cathode parts with the value of 512 million dollars and the average price of each ton of copper cathode is estimated at \$ 6,394. Copper cathode is produced through the refining process, which helps in the removal of impurities from copper ore. Based on refining process type, the copper cathode market can be segmented into smelting and electro-refining. Smelting is a type of refining process for extracting pure form of copper from its ore.

It uses heat and chemical reducing agent for decomposition of copper ore, elimination of unwanted slag, and other elements for obtaining pure copper cathode. Electro-refining is a process, wherein copper ore is carried out in the presence of using aqueous solution for extracting pure form of copper cathode.

Iran exported 65.5 million tons of non-oil commodities worth \$18.2 billion during the past seven months of the current Iranian year (March 20-October 21), registering a 17.5-percent fall in terms of weight, compared to the figure for the preceding period.

Tehran, Baghdad to Create Center For Endogenous Security in region



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN The secretary of Iran's High Council for Human rights says Iran and Iraq agree to create a kernel for endogenous security in the region.

Speaking on a TV program, Ali Bagheri Kani said during Judiciary Chief Hojjatoleslam Seyed Ebrahim Raisi's visit to Iraq, the case of the U.S. assassination of Lt. Gen. Qasem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis was pursued.

From the beginning, there were interactions between Iran and Iraq to exchange information and documents about the crime, Bagheri said and added that orders were issued in Iran and Iraq to arrest Trump and 46 other defendants.

Bagheri referred to the activation of committees investigating the dimensions of the crime between the two sides, in which the deputy prosecutors of Iran and Iraq are responsible.

He also pointed to creating the infrastructure for a common understanding of the concept of insecurity and noted that if Iran and Iraq cooperated to provide endogenous security, the aliens could no longer exploit the situation for their interest.

“The agreement between the two governments will strengthen the resistance in the region, and in the next steps we want the countries of the region to join this agreement so that there is no more room for Americans and foreigners in the region,” he said.

He went on to say that Hojjatoleslam Raisi's visit to Iraq thwarted plots and investment of enemies for creating rift between Iranian and Iraqi nations.

Bagheri further said that there is no certain definition for terrorism in the world and if the definition of terrorism which has been set by Ira and Iraq to be extended to other countries in the region, then the security of the region will be protected by the countries of the region and there will be no room for the aliens' presence in the region.

He noted that during this visit, some MoUs were signed which can ease the trade between the two countries over the legal disputes.

Bagheri noted that both countries agreed to cooperate in the international issues.

Iran Test-Fires New Smart Missile

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The commander of the Iranian Army's Ground Force has announced the test-firing of a medium-range smart missile that can fly as far as 300 kilometers (186 miles).

Brigadier General Kioumars Heydari made the announcement on Sunday, without specifying the location, where the missile was being tested by the Ground Force's missile unit.

“The missile is prepared for deployment in defense of our homeland,” he added, noting that the test-firing was gauging the missile's precision of strike and destruction power.

“We are trying for our armaments in the area to firstly be smart, secondly be capable of automatic control function, and thirdly be surgical in nature,” the commander noted.

The military is investing in such projectiles, which can be used in surgical strikes and easily yield to automation processes.

Iran engages in routine upgrading, testing, and meaningful display of its defensive might in line with regional and international developments.

In January, the Army and Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) staged around a dozen military maneuvers involving the full range of their forces and weaponry and covering huge swathes of the country's expanse.

Also on Sunday, Defense Minister Brigadier General Amir Hatami hailed that the Islamic Republic's defensive power, including its missile capability, was at its highest possible level.

All of Iran's missiles enjoy high strike precision, maneuverability, and explosive power, and are fully accommodated to preserve the country's deterrence capability, the defense minister said, speaking from the northwestern city of Zanzan.

“By God's grace, the Islamic Republic today is one of the world's talked-about missile powers,” he said, noting that all of Iran's defensive requirements are manufactured domestically.

ViewPoint By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

Hapless Europe Perforce To Scape Forward

France, UK and Germany on Friday in a joint statement accused Iran of breaching its 2015 nuclear deal agreement (JCPOA) commitments and undermining the diplomacy. This statement is so funny that makes one worry about dying of laughter.

Of course, this has happened in the past that European countries have resorted to practical pretext-seeking actions and cheating in the negotiations but that these three countries without implementing or taking any step after Iran's fulfilling its JCPOA duties, which caused Iranian government and the negotiating team to be branded inside the country as being mercenary and lackey of enemies because of shutting down major parts of nuclear industry and filling the Arak heavy water reactor with cement, have issued a funny statement where they have accused Iran of undermining the diplomacy, is undoubtedly like the script of a puppet-show.

This statement has got so bad and coming from imbecile minds that even Iran Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif who himself is a JCPOA culprit reacted in a tweet to the joint EU3 statement for accusing Iran of breaching its JCPOA commitments and undermining the diplomacy and wrote, “Have our E3 partners ever read para 36 of JCPOA & Iran's many letters on that basis? By what logic is the onus on IRAN to stop its remedial measures undertaken a full year after the US withdrew from—and continues to violate—the JCPOA? What have E3 done to fulfill their duties?”

With a simple and honest glance at expert opinions of three famous political analysts and experts of the time who used to describe the Europeans as a “dread” even before the U.S. presidential election was held, and claimed in views of Europeans, the nuclear deal with Iran has turned into a magnifier that Europeans can see clearly their lack of economic sovereignty against the U.S. They state that the rift between Europe and the U.S. will remain with re-election of Donald Trump.

The 35-page article of these authors at that time turned into the change in the position of the U.S. and current Europe. In this article which was compiled by David Jalilvand and Achim Vogt and edited by Sigmar Gabriel, the writers by taking for granted the victory of Joe Biden in the November 2020 election reviewed and analyzed the future of relation between Europe, the U.S. and Iran regarding the JCPOA. This article was published in October 2020.

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IAEA Oversight on JCPOA, Additional Protocol to Stop Feb. 21

TEHRAN (ILNA) - Chairman of Iran's Parliament National Security and Foreign Policy Commission Mojtaba Zonnour emphasized on Sunday that if no change in behavior of the other parties to the 2015 nuclear deal (JCPOA) is observed by February 21, all the oversights of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in the form of the NPT Additional Protocol and the JCPOA will be terminated.

Safeguards will remain within the framework of the NPT, and agency cameras are turned on offline at Iran's nuclear facilities, he added, saying, “We do not deal with all the cameras of the agency, which is under the NPT, but after this time, the additional protocol cameras are collected.”

Stating that the Iranian Parliament does not pay attention to the remarks of the U.S. and European officials and seeks to ensure the interests of the nation, Zonnour said, “The Europeans want to weaken our defensive and reactionary power with the JCPOA, so it has to pay the price. JCPOA was supposed to lift the sanctions, and if they are not lifted, we will not cooperate with them.”

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Iran Eyes Close Ties With Serbia in Various Fields

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – President Hassan Rouhani hoped for the promotion of political, economic and cultural cooperation with the Republic of Serbia.

In a Sunday message to his Serbian counterpart Aleksandar Vucic, Rouhani congratulated Serbia on its Statehood Day.

“I hope the bilateral relations would further grow and become stronger in all political, economic and cultural fields considering the two countries’ ample capacities and in light of joint efforts,” the Iranian president added.

President Says Delays In Approving Budget Harms Economy

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – President Hassan Rouhani said yesterday that any delay in approving the country’s budget by the parliament could harm the economy.

Speaking on Sunday at a meeting of the Government’s Economic Coordination Board, Iran’s President Hassan Rouhani said that important issues such as the country’s budget should not be allowed to be involved in fruitless disputes and discussions.

He added that any delay in approving the next year’s budget of the country could harm the economy as a whole and, more importantly, people’s livelihoods.

“The amendment to the budget bill has been prepared based on the current conditions and requirements of the country and with a convergence approach, as well as relying on the views of experts and specialists in the country, so any politicization can harm the country’s development process and people’s rights,” said Rouhani.

In this meeting, considering the international developments and possible changes in global interactions and their effects on the country’s economic situation, public expectations, especially in the capital market, were discussed.

Rouhani stated that non-economic shocks and tensions have affected the economy, elaborating: “It is worthwhile for all officials in different parts of the country to be extremely careful in their actions and statements so that conditions do not form contrary to public expectations that cause negative effects in society.”

He stressed: “The government considers the protection of people’s livelihood as its first duty until the last day of its service, and the provision of basic goods at



preferential rates will be the definitive policy of the government until the end.”

Meanwhile yesterday, Majlis Speaker said that the bill on transparency in MPs’ votes would be on the agenda again this week.

Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf in the open session stressed that the parliament had considered the issue of transparency in MPs’ votes.

Qalibaf stated that the bill required two-thirds of the votes cast, which dropped by only three votes.

According to Article 130 of the Parliament Rules of Procedure, which a bill could be considered earlier than 6 months, more than 50 signatures have been collected, according to which the bill on transparency in MPs’ votes could be on the agenda this week.

Iranian Parliament set preconditions for the annexation of prone lands to housing. Following the review of the plan to jump in the production and supply of housing, the members of Iran’s Parliament demanded the government that the required lands to build housing be leased for ninety-nine years in rent.

Accordingly, with 191 votes in favor, 12 against and 4 abstentions from a total of 228 MPs present in the parliament, the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development is obliged to implement support transfer programs for the transfer of land required for housing construction for 99 years in rent to act.

“Iranian Art” Exhibition Organized In Cooperation With UNESCO

TEHRAN (IP) - A group exhibition of paintings entitled “Iranian Art” has been set up in collaboration with UNESCO at the Niavaran Cultural Center in Tehran.

The group exhibition of paintings “Iranian Art” in cooperation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was opened on Friday at the Niavaran Cultural Center and is hosted by those interested in Iranian art and painting every day for two weeks from 2 to 6 p.m.

The works of about 50 Iranian artists and painters have been exhibited in the “Iranian Art” exhibition, and those interested can visit this exhibition in compliance with the special health protocols for the coronavirus.

Iran Sponge Iron Output Exceeds 25.5m Tons in 10 Months

TEHRAN (MNA) – Islamic Republic of Iran produced more than 25.5 million tons of sponge iron in the first 10 months of the current Iranian calendar year (from March 21, 2020 to Jan. 19, 2021).

Production of sponge iron by the large mining and mineral companies affiliated to the Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO) in the first 10 months of the current year hit 25,554,399 tons, showing an eight percent hike as compared to the last year’s corresponding period.

In this regard, 2,196,790 tons of sponge iron was produced in the Iranian month of Dey (from Dec. 20, 2020 to Jan. 19, 2021), registering a two percent decline as compared to the same period of last year.

The statistics showed that Islamic Republic of Iran produced 27,907,000 tons of sponge iron last year (ended March 20, 2020), standing at the second place in the world after India.

Islamic Republic of Iran produced 26,359,000 tons of sponge iron in 2018.

After India, Islamic Republic of Iran is second producer of sponge iron in the world.

IRGC Underscores Respect For Territorial Integrity of Iran’s Neighbors

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Following the release of two abducted Iranian Border Forces from Jeish-UI-Zolm Terrorist Group and the mischief of some foreign media, IRGC Public Relations Department Responded to some of those ambiguities in a statement.

“Following the statement issued by Quds Headquarter of The IRGC Land Force on February 3, 2021, regarding the release of two Iranian border forces from Jeish-UI-Zolm Terrorist Group and the misuse of some foreign media, hereby announce that the Islamic Republic of Iran has always adhered to the territorial integrity of its neighbors, especially the friendly and brotherly country of Pakistan and these two border forces have been released without any territorial violation or military operation into Pakistan territory,” the department said in its statement.

“The I.R. Iran strongly condemns the mischief of some foreign media and will never allow such actions to affect friendly relations with the Muslim country of Pakistan.”

There Is No Dead-End for IRGC

TEHRAN (IP) - The Chief Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC) has said that the art of the IRGC is to break the arrogant powers.

Major General Hossein Salami stated in a video conference with the commanders of the forces, the provincial corps, and the IRGC Information Protection Organization: “Due to the ideals of the Islamic Revolution, which included the rule of the oppressed and the eradication of arrogance, the world powers did their best to prevent the emergence of this new power and its modeling.”

He added: “Our great wars remain; The enemy is still there, and although it has withered, it is still dangerous and does not want to accept defeat.”

Stressing that the IRGC considers itself a servant of the Iranian nation and a pioneer in solving the people’s problems, Major General Salami said: “Our dear people did not leave the IRGC alone in all difficult scenes, and as long as the IRGC, the people and the leadership are in contact, no power can defeat us.”

In the end, the IRGC Commander described intelligence as the most vital asset of a powerful institution like the IRGC and said: “The enemy should not see the borders of our power; Ambiguity for the enemy is part of our power.”

Chabahar Port Development Raises Capacity To Handle 8.5m Tons Goods a Year

CHABAHAH (IRNA) - Development of Chabahar Port in southeastern Iran raised capacity to load and unload more than 8.5 million tons of goods a year, a local official said on Sunday.

Hossien Shahdadi, an official with Sistan-Baluchestan Province Department of Ports and Maritime Organization, said that with more than \$1.3 billion of investment, Chabahar Port is one of the most

strategically-important ports of the country.

The port enjoys modern equipment for loading and unloading of goods, the official said.

There are no docking limitations for ships arriving in the ports, Shahdadi said, adding that the port offers significant discount in a mutual manner to ships coming from Indian ports.

Iranian Women Shining in Higher Education Sector

TEHRAN (IFP) - Iran’s minister of science, research and technology says Iranian women have had a brilliant performance in the higher education domain.

Mansour Gholami said women have secured great achievements in this sector.

“With their considerable efforts, erudite women have managed to secure great progress and high rankings in the higher education domain which are unique in the region, in the world of Islam and even across the globe,” he added.

The minister said Iranian women have made their presence felt when it comes to gaining knowledge, offering educational services, conducting effective research, carrying out executive and managerial activities, and working in the domain of production within the framework of innovative and technological units.

He said figures and statistics bear witness to the effective presence of women, which can easily be observed in society as well.

JCPOA to Remain Alive Only With Lifting of Sanctions

TEHRAN (MNA) – Head of Iranian Parliament Research Center (IPRC) said that the JCPOA is a document that will not remain except with the lifting of sanctions.

If the U.S., France, Germany and the UK do not act timely, we will say goodbye to the Additional Protocol on February 21, said Alireza Zakani on Sunday in the open session of Iranian Parliament, adding, “We will witness a decrease in the number of IAEA inspectors compared to what Iran has promised in the NPT.”

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) is a document that will not remain except with the lifting of sanctions, he added.

Amid the Europeans’ lack of action, Iran took five steps to reduce its commitments to the deal while vowing that it will reverse the course as soon as the other parties live up to their commitments under the accord.

Iran to Open Cross-Border Customs Office With Iraqi Kurdistan

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iranian consul-general in Sulaymaniyah in a meeting with deputy interior minister of Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Chato Salih reviewed

opening Siranband cross-border customs office.

Both sides emphasized the need to regulate border trade at the cross-border customs offices aiming to develop economic relations. Earlier, Secretary of Iran-Iraq Chamber of Commerce Hamid Hosseini said that all of the Iran-Iraq border posts and

customs offices are open except the Siranband border crossing in Kordestan Province western Iran.

Iraq has been the second biggest importer of Iranian goods and services in the first half of the Iranian year (starting on March 20, 2017), Hamid Hosseini said in a press conference in Iraq.

Iran, Yemen Review Latest Developments in Region

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iranian Ambassador to Yemen Hassan Irlou and Yemeni Foreign Minister Hisham Sharaf on Saturday discussed the bilateral cooperation between Tehran and Sanaa and the latest regional developments.

Irlou and Sharaf met and held talks on Saturday, according to the foreign media. The two sides conferred on bilateral cooperation and the latest developments in the region

and the Persian Gulf.

During the meeting, the two officials also examined the results of the UN Special Envoy for Yemen Martin Griffith’s visit to Tehran.

Irlou said that the Islamic Republic of Iran supports a political solution, adding that there is no military solution for what has happened in Yemen.

Israelis to Face Tough Response If Cross Red Lines in Syria

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iranian foreign minister’s senior assistant on special political affairs, Ali-Asghar Khaji, warned the Israeli regime against crossing red lines in Syria, in a reference to the Zionists’ alleged air raids on Syrian soil.

The diplomat described “the nature of the Zionist entity” as “aggressive and hostile towards the region, the Palestinians, and neighboring countries.”

“While the Syrian government is fighting terrorists, the Israeli regime supports them. Our presence in Syria is aimed at combating ISIL and other terrorist groups, but if Israel wants to cross the ‘red lines’, it will face the toughest response, which will make them regret their actions,” Khaji told Sputnik during his visit to Damascus.

He also said Iranian presence in Syria is legitimate because it came at the request of the Syrian government and contributed to Syria’s efforts in the fight against terrorism.

The Iranian aide also said Tehran wants Syrian Constitutional Committee talks to succeed.

He said Iran does not believe that the political process in Syria has failed and expects the work of the Syrian Constitutional Committee to be successful.

The fifth round of the Syrian Constitutional Committee’s small body mediated by UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen was held in Geneva in late January. Pedersen called the talks a “disappointment,” as nothing was achieved on certain agenda issues the diplomat had defined before the start of the session.

“I do not agree ... that the political process in Syria has failed. We created the Constitutional Committee and we have a difficult road to go because there are 10 years of war between the parties, so the lack of trust was a very difficult moment. But this process has begun, and there is progress. We strive for the work of the constitutional committee to be completed successfully,” Khaji said.

The diplomat noted that during his visit to the Syrian capital, he discussed the latest round of the Constitutional Committee talks, with the country’s leadership. The upcoming Astana-format meeting in Russia’s Sochi, scheduled for February 16-17, was also addressed. Khaji said he expects the talks to be beneficial.



Hossein Sabouri, Acting CEO of Ofogh Kourosh Chain Stores

Transparency and Supervision, Salient & Main Feature of Chain Stores

this industry effective in the country's economy. But what is an important factor in the expansion of chain stores is the entry of the private sector in this business, which has made chain stores to perform better than previous in the field of distribution of goods. Not only privately-funded chain stores create competition and increase the quality of service and customer satisfaction, but also these chain stores have created transparency in the best possible way in the field of distribution of goods. High transparency



refers to the legal structure of these complexes and the requirements for their management and administration. Having a clear legal entity makes it mandatory to comply with financial and tax laws throughout the supply chain, while such requirements are not required for small, independent retailers. On the other hand, expansion of branches and high turnover of goods in these complexes (chain stores) make recording and monitoring of all events and transactions along supply chain and mechanization of all processes 'mandatory', so that this method of registering and monitoring allows accurate monitoring of external organizations. Although many recent media reports indicate a weakness due to inflation overshadowing the country, suitable condition has been paved for the possibility of recording and monitoring activity of chain stores. This transparency, along with supervision, is the main feature of chain stores and the key difference between private and

public sectors and the new system with the traditional market mechanism. Presence of private sector in chain stores and lack of cumbersome restrictions of government bureaucracy and/or small- and large expediences that public sector inevitably has to comply with it have increased the transparency of these stores as compared to the public sector, and this transparency has made the monitoring process easier with two concepts i.e. "Monitoring on" and "Supervising in". "Monitoring in" refers to the monitoring and inspection processes that chain stores, themselves, apply to input, output, inventory, as well as daily and periodic inspections of their branches consecutively. It should be noted that looking into the complaints and proposals of customers and clientele as well as responding to their questions are carried out within the framework of 'monitoring' process. "Monitoring on", however refers to the supervisory bodies outside the chain stores that, due to the high transparency that exists in these stores, can monitor all the processes of ordering, supplying, transferring, warehousing and selling in chain stores. Easy access



to all activities of chain stores such as amount of goods ordered, amount of purchases, process of transferring and entering the goods in the warehouse, storage time of goods and finally exit of goods from the warehouse and entering the store branches and even its final stage is selling goods can be controlled and monitored maximally due to the maximum

transparency of chain stores. It is not unreasonable to claim that popularity and welcome of citizens to chain stores in the last decade has been due to transparency on the one hand and supervision on the other hand. The two components of "transparency" and "supervision" at chain stores has created a sense of trust in customers that not only their right to choose is respected but also goods are provided to customers with fair, reasonable and logical price qualitatively and quantitatively. It goes without saying that price problems of chain stores are much more than other stores working with traditional system of supply and distribution of goods and this is due to the maximum transparency of these stores and also the maximum supervision exerted on these stores. Definitely, wherever there is more transparency and maximum monitoring is exerted, more flaws and problems will appear. Lack of appearance of problems and defects in the public sector or other similar sectors does not necessarily mean the absence of problems, rather, it can be attributed to a lack of transparency or a lack of oversight. Trust of customers as a social capital is a product an economic enterprise and owes to transparency and supervision, which is the necessary basis for future activities and also the basis of fight against corruption. Therefore, protection of this trust is a public duty, which depends on appreciating transparency and putting it at the forefront and observing ethics and law in all stages of supervision.



South Pars Gas;

From Increasing Production to the Need to Optimize Consumption

In recent weeks, due to the opposition of the Environmental Protection Agency to the use of diesel fuel in power plants, electricity production in the country has decreased and blackouts have occurred. The charge finger was pointed at the gas. In fact, the increase in gas consumption in the country was due to the cold weather as well as special conditions resulting from the outbreak of corona. These issues left doors and windows open, especially in offices, and increased energy consumption. Such problems caused the gas supply to some power plants to be cut off so as not to disrupt the supply of domestic gas. Power plants were forced to use fuel oil. After the Environment Organization opposed the use of fuel oil in power plants, we witnessed power outages and blackouts. Some people attributed this to the drop in gas pressure in the South Pars gas field as the most important source of gas production in the country. But this was without argument. In recent years, production from South Pars has increased sharply. From 2013 to 2019, we saw more than double the production of this gas field. The average production of 262 million cubic meters per day in 2013, in 1998 reached an average of 560 million cubic meters. Even a record production of 648 million cubic meters per day was recorded this year. In 2013, about 41% of the country's gas was produced from South Pars, but in 2019, the share of South Pars in gas production reached 64%. This growth trend also increased this year. The gas production capacity in South Pars reached 700 million cubic meters per day in 2020. Even a record production of 690 million cubic meters per day has been recorded in South Pars this year. The development trend in South Pars has experienced rapid growth in recent years. For example, from 2001 to 2004, six exploitation platforms were installed in South Pars. From 2005 to 2012, only 5 operating platforms were installed. From 2013 to 2019, ie during six years, 26 operation platforms were installed. The number of wells drilled in the years 2005 to 2012 was equal to the number of wells drilled in the years 2001 to 2004, ie 54 wells. But from 2013 to 2019, about 228 wells were drilled in South Pars. From 2005 to 2012, about 515 km of offshore pipelines were installed, which is 10 km less than in 2001-2004. But from 2013 to 2019, we witnessed the installation of 2160 km of offshore pipeline! From 2001 to 2004, ten rows of refineries in South Pars were completed. From 2005 to 2012, ie 8 years, another 10 rows of refineries were completed. But from 2013 to 2019, we saw the completion of 30 rows of refineries in South Pars. The statistics of increasing production capacity from South Pars is also interesting. In the years 2005 to 2012, ie in 8 years, about 141 million cubic meters per day of production capacity was added from South Pars, which is equal to 4 years - from 2001 to 2005; But the increase in production capacity of South Pars in the last six years - from 2013 to 2019 - has been equal to 419 million cubic meters per day. In a more general view, gas extraction from the South Pars field began with the production of 12 billion cubic meters of gas in 200 AH. At present, this figure has reached 220 billion cubic meters per year. The cumulative extraction of this common field is 1,861 billion cubic meters of rich gas. The value of this amount of gas extracted from South Pars is estimated at a total of 335 billion dollars. South Pars had a 10% share of the country's total gas production in 2002, at the same time as gas extraction began. With the development of the phases of this field, about 70% of the country's gas production is currently supplied from South Pars.



Consequences of development in South Pars

The consequences of the jump in gas production in South Pars should be seen in the two sectors of export and domestic gas supply. It was this increase in production capacity in South Pars that increased Iran's gas exports and made Iraq a buyer of Iranian gas. In 2013, Iran did not export to Iraq, but in 2019, gas exports to Iraq were 25.5 million cubic meters per day. Gas exports to Iraq continued even during the embargo, with Iraq obtaining permission from the United States. This has been one of the most important foreign exchange resources of the country during the embargo period and one of the important consequences of increasing gas production in South Pars. In the domestic sphere, gas supply had a high jump. For example, the number of villages with gas in 2013 increased from 14,000 to more than 30,000 in 2019, so that 81% of Iranian villages have gas. The number of gas-supplied cities also increased from 1,051 in 2013 to 1,192 in 2019. By the end of 2019, nearly 94% of the population across the country had benefited from gas. Increasing the share of natural gas in the fuel of power plants was another consequence of increasing the country's gas production capacity. The share of 57% in 2013 reached 80% in 2019. Of course, its effects on reducing air pollution are undeniable. This accelerated development process has increased gas consumption in the country. But the current problem is not consumption, but the lack of optimal gas consumption.

Countdown to the end of development in South Pars

The South Pars gas field is almost fully developed. Except for Phase 11, whose development has just begun, it will not add much to the production capacity of the South Pars gas field. Iran has surpassed Qatar in daily gas extraction from the South Pars joint reservoir. Currently, 27 South Pars gas blocks are in production and two phase 11 blocks are being developed. Therefore, there is not much capacity for the development of South Pars. Meanwhile, the growth of gas consumption in the country continues. This year, gas consumption in Tehran has increased by an average of 15% and gas consumption in the whole country by an average of 12%. This is a matter of great concern. Engineer Mohammad Meshkinfam, CEO of Pars Oil and Gas Company, stated the need to invest \$50 billion in the development and maintenance of production from offshore gas fields. He said that in order to meet the needs of consumed gas in the next twenty years, there are plans in two axes: concentration and maintenance of current production capacity «and» development of other gas fields. «The CEO of the largest gas producer in the country stated that the amount of gas reserves in the Iranian share of the South Pars joint field is close to 420 trillion cubic feet. To date, he said, 62 trillion cubic feet equivalent to 15 percent (of gas reserves have been extracted from the site. If we continue with the same trend, it is possible to harvest nearly 210 trillion cubic feet) equivalent to 50% of in-situ gas (in South Pars. To achieve 75% of the field's on-site reserves, we need \$ 30 billion in new investment to increase cumulative gas extraction from the South Pars reservoir to 310 trillion cubic feet. The first way to maintain the current gas

production capacity of the South Pars field is to build pressure boosting facilities in both the offshore and onshore sectors. It is predicted that in the next 3 to 4 years, we will face an annual decline in production as much as one phase of South Pars. Doubling pipelines to reduce pressure drop along the gas transmission route, developing areas outside the current boundaries of the South Pars field, and digging infill wells are other ways to maintain gas production. According to the CEO of Pars Oil and Gas Company, it is planned to drill 60 to 70 new wells around offshore platforms. In the next 20 years, there should be plans for the development of other gas fields in the country. The investment required for the development of these fields is estimated at \$ 20 billion to add a total of about 428 million cubic meters per day to the country's gas extraction capacity.

What should we do?

It seems that as the Minister of Oil, Engineer Bijan Zanganeh, has previously stated, the increase in production cannot be responsible for the rapid growth of gas consumption in the country. So the final solution is to optimize energy consumption in the country. To achieve this goal, one should not be content with just the last link in the chain, which is to persuade people to reduce domestic gas consumption through stereotyped and repetitive recommendations. Optimization of energy consumption, in which the share of gas is very prominent, should be considered comprehensively. The role of the government and parliament as executors and legislators is very important. The role of institutions and bodies such as the Fuel Consumption Optimization Company and the New Energy Organization is very important and influential. Energy efficiency should be considered comprehensively. Not only on paper, but also in implementation in various areas such as distribution and transmission, construction and insulation, as well as culture, we must see major changes in energy consumption. If this process is followed carefully, we will see an optimization of energy consumption and consequently a reduction in consumption, without people bothering us as consumers.



CAR to Hold Runoff Parliamentary Elections in March

PARIS (Dispatches) - The Central African Republic (CAR) will hold next month a second round of voting for legislative elections in some constituencies, as well as a first round where a December ballot was disrupted amid a fresh wave of unrest in the violence-hit country.

President Faustin Archange Touadera said in a decree on Saturday the second round will take place on March 14. The regions where the first round was disrupted by rebel violence and other factors will also vote on the same date.

The campaign for the first round will open on February 27 and for the second round on March 6.



Lebanon Receives First COVID Vaccines

BERUT (AFP) - Lebanon on Saturday received its first vaccines against the coronavirus, a day before an inoculation drive kicks off in the crisis-hit Mediterranean country.

A plane landed at the Beirut airport, an AFP correspondent reported, with authorities saying it was carrying 28,500 doses of Pfizer/BioNTech flown in from Belgium.

The shipment was the first after the World Bank allocated \$34 million to inoculate two million of Lebanon's six million inhabitants.



Clashes at Cyprus Protest Over Official Graft, Virus Measures



NICOSIA (Dispatches) - Cypriot police used water cannon and tear gas in rare clashes with protesters as hundreds demonstrated on Saturday against government corruption and coronavirus restrictions.

Protesters had gathered at a park in central Nicosia where they were surrounded by dozens of police in riot gear. Several groups including left-wing and anti-fascist activists and trade unions had used social media to call for the protest, citing "state authoritarianism" and corruption -- notably over a controversial "golden passport" scheme that was scrapped last year. Organisers and protesters also voiced anger over the government's response to the coronavirus pandemic, which has battered the Cypriot economy and triggered stringent lockdown restrictions.

Olivia Patsalou, a 37-year-old who is looking for work, said she was mainly protesting over the passport affair and "extreme" coronavirus restrictions that were making it harder for her to find a job.

She said she had hoped for "a peaceful demonstration to show our dissatisfaction with the government, with how it's handled every scandal and how it's handled the coronavirus situation". Some protesters beat drums or shouted in the face of the police, who moved in from several streets to block the demonstrators.

Those present at the start of the protest included people with young children and at least two people in wheelchairs, as well as young men and women in black hoodies and balaclavas.

"I wasn't expecting (the police) to be so eager to exert force and violence," said Patsalou.

One woman was seen lying on the ground suffering from the effects of tear gas, and a man in a wheelchair had to seek refuge in a block of flats.

Another protester was later treated by paramedics after being knocked to the ground by water cannon.

Police told AFP that eight people were arrested in the protest, which was held in defiance of coronavirus restrictions.

The Kathimerini local news website said people were fined for breaking Covid-19 restrictions.

Most protesters were wearing masks, an AFP journalist said.

Cyprus in January unveiled a series of measures to tackle corruption, several months after Al Jazeera aired a documentary exposing alleged abuses in the controversial "golden passports" scheme for foreign investors, sparking widespread public anger.

The Mediterranean island scrapped the scheme last year and two senior politicians resigned, although they denied any wrongdoing.

The scandal came on top of the economic pain caused by the coronavirus pandemic, which has infected over 35,000 people and killed over 230 across the divided island.

The Republic of Cyprus has begun cautiously easing its national lockdown following a decline in the spread infections that peaked after Christmas.

U.S. Senate Acquits Trump In Second Impeachment

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The U.S. Senate acquitted Donald Trump on Saturday in his second impeachment trial in a year, with fellow Republicans blocking conviction over the former president's role in the deadly assault by his supporters on the U.S. Capitol.

The Senate vote of 57-43 fell short of the two-thirds majority needed to convict Trump on a charge of incitement of insurrection after a five-day trial in the same building ransacked by his followers on Jan. 6 shortly after they heard him deliver an incendiary speech.

In the vote, seven of the 50 Senate Republicans joined the chamber's unified Democrats in favoring conviction.

Trump left office on Jan. 20, so impeachment could not be used to remove him from power. But Democrats had hoped to secure a conviction to hold him responsible for a siege that left five people including a police officer dead and to set the stage for a vote to bar him from ever serving in public office again.

Given the chance to hold office in the future, they argued, Trump would not hesitate to encourage political violence again.

Trump's attorneys argued that his words at the rally were protected by his constitutional right to free speech and said he was not given due process in the proceedings.

Republicans saved Trump in the Feb. 5, 2020, vote in his first impeachment trial, when only one senator from their ranks - Mitt Romney - voted to convict and remove him from office.

Romney voted for impeachment on Saturday along with fellow Republicans Richard Burr, Bill Cassidy, Susan Collins, Ben Sasse, Pat Toomey, and Lisa Murkowski.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, who voted "not guilty," offered scathing remarks about the former president after the verdict.

"There is no question that President Trump is practically and morally responsible for provoking the events of the day," he said. "The people who stormed this building believed they were acting on the wishes and instructions of their president."

Nigerian Police Beat, Arrest Protesters

LAGOS (Dispatches) - Nigerian police beat and arrested demonstrators on Saturday as a small group protested over the reopening of the site where activists denouncing police brutality were shot last year in the commercial capital, Lagos.

Rights group Amnesty International and witnesses said soldiers opened fire on protesters on October 20, killing at least 12 people at a toll gate in the city's affluent Lekki district and another area.

The military has denied shooting live rounds and police have denied involvement. There was a heavy presence of armed police officers on Saturday at the toll gate, where a group of about 15 protesters gathered despite calls by the government this week to scrap the demonstration, witnesses said.

At least six of the protesters were beaten with truncheons and arrested before being driven away in police vans. "They are already manhandling us, but we're not going to be deterred. We're not going to step down," said one man, who did not provide his name and spoke to the Reuters news agency as he was being arrested.

Police bundled about 13 protesters into a black truck at the toll gate where security forces had deployed since Friday evening, an AFP news agency reporter at the scene said. "Lekki toll gate should be made a museum of resistance and not a monument for money-making," said Damilare Adebola, 24, who spoke from the police van where he was being held.

A Lagos police spokesman said in a text message he was unaware of the arrests but would look into accusations that activists had been manhandled.

On Friday, one of the two youth members of a Lagos state panel investigating the October shootings resigned, citing "undue intimidation of peaceful protesters" and the panel's vote to reopen the toll gate - a source of revenue for the state government - before the probe had been finished.

Al Jazeera's Ahmed Idris, reporting from Lagos, said demonstrators were also angered by the failure of a commission of inquiry to submit its report into the killings.

White House Cites Deep Concerns About WHO COVID Report

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The White House on Saturday called on China to make available data from the earliest days of the COVID-19 outbreak, saying it has "deep concerns" about the way in which the findings of the World Health Organization's COVID-19 report were communicated.

White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan said in a statement that it is imperative that the report be independent and free from "alteration by the Chinese government", echoing concerns raised by the administration of former President Donald Trump, who also moved to quit the WHO over the issue.

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus on Friday said all hypotheses are still open about the origins of COVID-19, after Washington said it wanted to review data from a WHO-led mission to China, where the virus first emerged.

A WHO-led mission, which spent four weeks in China looking into the origins of the COVID-19 outbreak, said this week that it was not looking further into the question of whether the virus escaped from a lab, which it considered highly unlikely.

The Trump administration had said it suspected the virus may have escaped from a Chinese lab, which Beijing strongly denies. Sullivan noted that U.S. President Joe Biden had quickly reversed the decision to disengage from the WHO, but said it was

imperative to protect the organization's credibility.

"Re-engaging the WHO also means holding it to the highest standards," Sullivan said. "We have deep concerns about the way in which the early findings of the COVID-19 investigation were communicated and questions about the process used to reach them."

Biden, who is spending his first weekend at the Camp David presidential retreat in the mountains of western Maryland, will meet with his national security advisers on Saturday, a White House official said.

China refused to give raw data on early COVID-19 cases to the WHO-led team probing the origins of the pandemic, according to one of the team's investigators, potentially complicating efforts to understand how the outbreak began.

The team had requested raw patient data on 174 cases that China had identified from the early phase of the outbreak in the city of Wuhan in December 2019, as well as other cases, but were only provided with a summary, Dominic Dwyer, an Australian infectious diseases expert who is a member of the WHO team, told Reuters.

"It is imperative that this report be independent, with expert findings free from intervention or alteration by the Chinese government," Sullivan said.

"To better understand this pandemic and prepare for the next one, China must make available its data from the earliest days of the outbreak," he said.



Thai Protesters Scale Monument, Renew Calls for Royal Reforms

BANGKOK (Dispatches) - Pro-democracy activists in Thailand have scaled a massive monument in the capital, Bangkok, draping it in crimson cloth and calling for an end to the kingdom's draconian royal defamation laws.

The protesters on Saturday threw paint at police and several small bangs were heard during a standoff near a city shrine after the demonstration had moved from the Democracy Monument and the main leaders had called for it to disperse. Activists said the red cloth on the monument in Bangkok's historic quarter represented the blood of fighters for democracy.

Police deputy spokesman Kissana Pattanacharoen said more than 20 police officers were injured in the clashes and seven or eight people were detained for questioning. He also said at least one firecracker exploded at the scene.

Momentum for the youth-led protests movement calling for an overhaul to Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha's government has slowed in recent months, due to a fresh wave of coronavirus infections in Thailand.

But the recent detention of four prominent leaders under charges of insulting the monarchy in mass anti-government demonstrations last year spurred hundreds of protesters again into action.

The "lese majeste" law, contained in Article 112 of Thailand's criminal code, carries penalties of up to 15 years in prison. Student activists say the law has been abused for decades to crush political opposition to a military-royalist establishment.

"We want Article 112 to be revoked plus the release of four of our leaders and other political prisoners convicted by this law," said protester Chutima Kaenpetch, 24.

As night fell, hundreds marched to the Grand Palace but were met with police in full riot gear and barbed wire surrounding the area. Although protest leader Panusaya Sithijirawattanukul called an end to the rally, several protesters continued to stay on to face off against the authorities.

The government led by former military ruler Prayuth denies any abuse of the law, saying political opposition is allowed but breaking the law by insulting the king will be punished.



The question is on Article One

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L.balcony
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Fully Furn

Shanon (adviser)

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S, J, & pkg
green yard
Nicely Furn

Parsian
Mountain view

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G7 in "Full Alignment" on Stimulus, Vaccines

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - International Monetary Fund Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said on Friday that G7 finance leaders were in "full alignment" on a range of issues from fiscal stimulus to aid for poor countries.

Georgieva said in that the virtual meeting hosted by British finance minister Rishi Sunak was "substantive."

"Full alignment on access to vaccines, policy support until exit from the crisis, climate action, and comprehensive support for vulnerable countries," Georgieva tweeted.



Kuwait Faces 20-40% Loss of Revenues as Oil Demand Falters

PARIS (Dispatches) - Oil and gas producing nations face up to nine trillion dollars in lost income as the world accelerates the transition to renewable energy, saddling poorer but resource-rich nations with higher risk of stranded assets, an analysis showed yesterday. Over 400 million people live in the worst affected countries, where declining fossil fuel revenues could see government income fall by at least 20 percent, leading to cuts in public services and greater unemployment, according to an assessment by the Carbon Tracker industry watchdog.

Half of those set to be impacted live in Nigeria, where a 70-percent drop in oil revenues would cut state income by one third, it found. As renewable energy such as wind and solar becomes cheaper than fossil fuels, oil producing nations collectively risk a \$13 trillion loss by 2040, compared with industry expectations. The report warned that governments needed to act now to reduce dependence on oil and gas revenues or face the risk of wasted capital and obsolete infrastructure projects.

Andrew Grant, head of climate, energy and industry at Carbon Tracker, said recent net-zero announcements from global powerhouses such as China and Japan have added impetus to the shift away from highly polluting energy. "Clearly for certain places in the world there will be trade-offs," he told AFP. "Thinking about fossil fuel producing countries who are reliant on fossil fuel revenues to balance their budgets, they're going to have to face challenges. It really is a matter of when, rather than if," he added.

The analysis found that seven countries, including Angola and Azerbaijan, could lose at least 40 percent of total government revenues by 2040 if oil failed to hold its price at long-term OPEC forecast levels of \$60 a barrel. Nigeria, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Iraq were among 12 nations that could lose between 20-40 percent of government revenues, while Russia, Mexico and Iran were set to lose between 10-20 percent, the study said.

The 2015 Paris climate deal enjoins nations to work to limit temperature rises to "well below" two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels through sweeping cuts in greenhouse gas emissions. Under the framework ratified in that accord, richer nations and businesses are supposed to provide \$100 billion annually to countries most vulnerable to climate change.

Half of that money is meant to help those states adapt to the heating planet and to green their economies with new technology. The analysis said that countries could be helped to transition with funding for technical assistance, as well as regulatory and tax reform to ease the shock of weaning their economies off of fossil fuels.

Pointing to social unrest caused by government decisions to lower oil and gas subsidies - which increases the cost for the consumer - Grant said states needed to improve their messaging. "These things are always framed as an increase in price of a tax. But it's not like the money is disappearing, you can do other things with it," he said. "It's about making sure people are aware of the opportunities, not just the cost."

Oman Economy Shrinks 6.4% in 2020

MUSCAT (Dispatches) - Oman's economy likely shrank 6.4 percent in 2020, the International Monetary Fund said on Friday, due to the coronavirus crisis and low oil prices putting a strain on the state's coffers.

That would be a narrower contraction than the 10 percent fall the IMF forecast for Oman last year. But the sultanate's economy was still hit hard, with its non-hydrocarbon GDP estimated to have reduced by 10 percent.

The construction, hospitality, and wholesale and retail trade sectors experienced the heaviest toll, the fund said, while inflation turned slightly negative, owing to less demand.

The IMF forecast a 2020 global contraction of 4.4 percent in its last World Economic Outlook, an improvement over a 5.2 percent contraction predicted in June 2020, but said it was still the worst economic crisis since the 1930s Great Depression.

Countries in the oil-rich Persian Gulf suffered the double shock of the COVID-19 pandemic, which dampened demand in the non-oil economy, and low oil prices, which have been hurting revenue.

Oman's fiscal deficit widened to 17.3 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) and was financed by external bond issuance, drawdown of deposits and sovereign funds, and privatization proceeds, the Fund said.

"As a result, central government debt rose to 81 percent of GDP, from 60 percent in 2019," it said.

The IMF said a modest recovery of 1.8 percent was anticipated for 2021, with more growth expected over the medium term, despite continuing uncertainty. The vaccine roll-out campaign and the easing of social distancing restrictions meant a mild recovery of 1.5 percent was projected for non-oil GDP growth in 2021, rising to 4 percent by 2026.

The Fund said that a successful implementation of Oman's fiscal adjustment plans "is key to reinforcing fiscal sustainability and alleviating financing pressures".

Those plans include the introduction of a 5 percent value added tax this year and envisage a personal income tax on high-income earners, a first in the Persian Gulf.

The Fund also recommended the development of a sovereign asset and liability management framework, given eroding financial buffers and rising contingent liabilities.

As public debt rises and foreign assets decline, "it will be important to manage potential mismatches in the financial characteristics of sovereign assets and liabilities to safeguard the sovereign balance sheet from risks of interest rate and exchange rate fluctuations," the Fund said.



U.S. Recovery on Track, But Jobs Growth Needs Time

BENGALURU (Reuters) - The U.S. economy is expected to reach pre-COVID-19 levels within a year as President Joe Biden's planned fiscal package helps boost economic activity, but it's likely to take over a year for unemployment to fall to early 2020 levels, a Reuters poll showed.

After a pandemic-led 2020, confidence in this year's recovery has soared with the growth outlook upgraded in the Feb. 8-11 poll of nearly 120 economists, driven by the proposed \$1.9 trillion fiscal stimulus package.

Over 90%, or 51 of 56 economists in response to an additional question said the U.S. economy would reach pre-COVID-19 levels within a year, including 23 respondents expecting it within six months.

"Optimism towards the economic recovery has raised expectations for future growth and inflation. The success of the vaccine deployment and its efficacy will be huge in determining whether the economic forecasts become reality," said Beata Caranci, chief economist at TD Bank Group.

"Over the last few months, the changes to the forecast have favored a more rapid economic recovery. For the sake of the economy, we hope it continues to surpass our expectations."

The U.S. economy, which recovered at an annualized pace of 33.4% in the third quarter from a record slump of 31.4% in the second quarter, grew 4.0% in the fourth quarter, the poll found.

While the economy was forecast to slow and grow 2.8% this quarter, it was better than 2.3% predicted in January.

The economy was then expected to accelerate and grow 6.0%, 6.3% and 4.6% in the next three quarters, an upgrade from 4.3%, 5.1% and 4.0% predicted for those periods last month.

For the full year, growth was forecast to average 4.7% in 2021 and 3.5% next year, an upgrade from 4.0% and 3.3% expected previously.

"While there are obvious risks that virus mutations deliver setbacks or problems arise with the vaccination program, we think the positives outweigh the negative risks," said James Knightley, chief international economist at ING.

"Consequently 5% growth looks achievable this year and this is before we consider the potential boost from President Biden's Build Back Better infrastructure and energy plan."

Still, all but one of 54 economists with a view said it would take more than a year for the U.S. unemployment rate to reach pre-COVID-19 levels. That includes 33 economists who expected it to take more than two years.



Bank of Russia Keeps Key Rate at 4.25%

MOSCOW (TASS) - Russia's Central Bank kept its key rate again at 4.25% per annum at the first board meeting this year, the regulator said in a press release following the meeting on Friday.

"On 12 February 2021, the Bank of Russia Board of Directors decided to keep the key rate at 4.25% per annum. In December and January, prices continued to grow at an elevated pace. Demand is recovering faster and more sustainably than expected. At the same time, supply-side restrictions are still in place and continue to exert upward pressure on prices. Inflation expectations of households and businesses remain elevated," the Central Bank said.

The regulator added that it will determine the timeline and pace of a return to neutral monetary policy if the situation develops in line with the baseline forecast. Meanwhile, it will take into account the still high heterogeneity of current economic and price movement trends, actual and expected inflation dynamics relative to the target, economic developments over the forecast horizon, as well as risks posed by domestic and external conditions and the reaction of financial markets.

The Bank of Russia maintained its outlook on Russia's GDP growth for 2021 at 3-4% at Friday meeting. The regulator also expects GDP growth at 2.5-3.5% and 2-3% in 2022-2023, respectively.

Inflation forecast has been upgraded to 3.7-4.2% for this year. The Central Bank has also upgraded its outlook on the Urals oil price for 2021 and 2022 to \$50 from \$45 per barrel, whereas the Urals price outlook for 2023 remained unchanged at \$50 per barrel. The capital outflow forecast was kept at \$35b for 2021, \$20b for 2022, and \$15b for 2023.

The Bank of Russia Board of Directors will hold its next key rate review meeting on March 19, 2021.

S. Korea's Major Banks Likely to Keep Creditworthiness

SEOUL (Yonhap) -- South Korea's four major commercial banks appear likely to maintain their creditworthiness this year due to adequate capitalization and resilient asset quality, according to a recent report from S&P Global Ratings.

Kookmin Bank, Shinhan Bank, KEB Hana Bank and Woori Bank have emerged from a pandemic-scarred 2020 with asset quality intact.

Earnings for the whole of 2020, announced last week, show a decline in net interest margins and slightly higher credit costs from a very low base in 2019.

Average net interest margins fell by 16 basis points year-on-year to 1.39 percent in 2020, according to S&P.

"We expect the banks to slow loan growth, after some pick-up in 2020, and focus more on risk management this year, along with heightened regulatory oversight on household lending," S&P said in a recent report on the banks.

Household loans increased by about 8 percent in 2020 compared with about 5.5 percent annually in 2018-2019.

S&P said South Korea's major commercial banks should smoothly manage asset quality in 2021, on the back of both global and domestic economic recovery.

Last year, the South Korean economy shrank 1 percent -- the first contraction in over two decades -- as exports and domestic demand were dented by the fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Asia's fourth-largest economy is widely expected to rebound this year on the back of improving exports and a mild recovery in consumer spending.

Last month, the International Monetary Fund forecast the South Korean economy to grow 3.1 percent this year, compared with its October growth outlook of 2.9 percent.

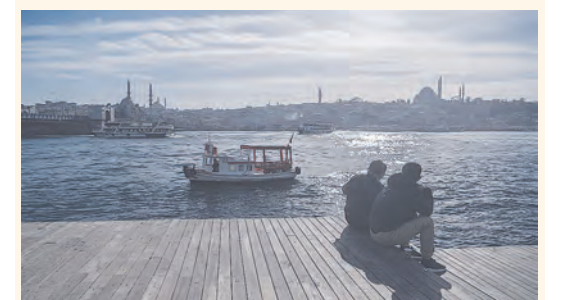
The IMF's projection is better than a 3 percent growth estimate by the Bank of Korea but lower than the 3.2 percent growth forecast made by South Korea's finance ministry.

S&P forecast that the South Korean economy could grow 3.6 percent in 2021.

The credit rating agency said it expects profitability at the major South Korean commercial banks to slightly improve in 2021.

"In our view, a reduction in credit costs will offset strains on net interest margins amid a persistent low interest rate environment," S&P said.

JP Morgan Raises Turkey's Growth Forecast



ANKARA (Dispatches) - JP Morgan raised its expectations Friday for Turkish economic growth for both 2020 and this year based on strong private-sector performance throughout the coronavirus pandemic, while the Turkish lira has cemented its position as the top-performing emerging market (EM) currency this year.

The Wall Street bank hiked its 2020 view to 1.9% from 1.1%, while it raised the forecast for this year to 4.6%, from 3.3% previously, according to its report.

"Turkey over-performed most of its peers during the pandemic," bank analysts said in a client note.

Despite containment measures such as lockdowns, domestic demand was quite resilient in the fourth quarter of 2020, the report said.

The Turkish economy's growth figures always "surprises to the upside," mirroring the robustness and flexibility of the Turkish private sector, it noted.

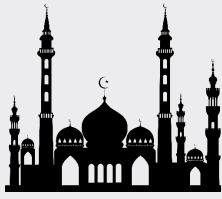
A burst of state bank-driven lending led to a strong rebound in the second half of 2020 as Turkey's gross domestic product (GDP) soared to a more-than-expected 6.7% growth rate in the third quarter.

It had contracted by 9.9% in the previous three months when lockdowns were imposed to curb the initial COVID-19 wave.

Central Bank of the Republic of Turkey's (CBRT) new Governor Naci Ağbal this week said the economy was expected to have grown by 7% to 8% in the last quarter of 2020.

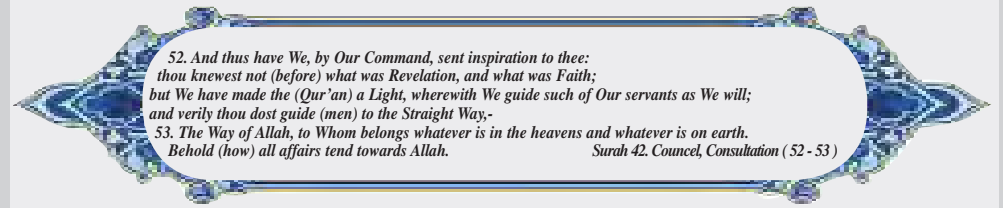
This could bring the overall 2020 growth to around 2.5%, he added. Ağbal also said the economy could grow up to 5% in the January-March period, given the economic activity in January and February.

A survey of business leaders and economists, also published Friday by the central bank, forecast the economy would log growth of 4.1% by the end of the year.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:18
■ Evening (Maghreb)	18:04
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:25
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:49



Textile Line of Baluch Factory to Be Launched Early Next Year

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Deputy Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade and Chairman of Board of Directors of Industrial Development and Renovation Organization of Iran (IDRO) says the textile unit of Iranshahr Baluch Textile Factory will be launched early next year.

On the sidelines of touring Iranshahr Baluch Textile Factory, Mr. Mohsen Salehi Nia said that the process of tender and purchasing textile machinery of the factory has begun and from the early next Iranian calendar year

(1400), the executive operation of this unit will kick off.

Salehi Nia went on to say that the textile unit of the factory with 90 percent of its capacity will produce 15 tons of thread per day, adding that by launching the textile unit and production of cotton in the region, we will see the completion of production chain of this textile unit.

IDRO will have rial and forex investment worth of 3,000b and it has earmarked some one million euros for investing in renovation and improving the dyeing and fabric printing unit.

Salehi Nia stipulated that to complete the chain of value



and production from cotton to fabric in the region, it is supposed that with cooperation of Agriculture Ministry some 700 to 1,000 hectares of land in the first stage to be allocated for cultivation of cotton.

Hapless Europe Performer...

FROM PAGE 1

In the introduction of this article even by taking conservative measures by these writers, we read, "Joe Biden has vowed in case of winning the election, he would return the United States to the deal, provided that for its part Iran is in full compliance to the JCPOA.

Biden, while vice president under Barack Obama, had important role in the nuclear deal with Iran." According to the authors of this article, following the return of the U.S. to the JCPOA, Iran will seek removal of sanctions and payment for the economic damages because of the U.S. pullout of the deal while Europe believes the JCPOA can simply be valid through joint cooperation between Europe and the U.S.

The authors believe that Europe should mend its relation with the U.S. immediately and instead of saving the JCPOA, it should help the U.S. at any cost to begin talks with Iran. They believe Iran and the U.S. should move to reduce tension step by step and leave the complicated issues for the later stages.

The writers believe that two issues of Trump's gradual pullout of the U.S. from the Middle East and from the JCPOA have caused a power vacuum in the region and it is misused by powers like Russia. In the meantime, European signatories of the JCPOA have strived to save it from full collapse. They also claim that European Union because of the U.S. has been unable to help Iran economically or have trade cooperation with it.

Now with issuance of this statement, it is observed that European has occupied the seat of Trump and now Biden plays the role of Europe. One should see that in which part of the history Europe has been so funny, irrational, rude and cheater. According to the political analysts in Iran, the JCPOA is moving in direction of its death and burial unless Europeans and Americans have reached this conclusion to return to the diplomatic logic and to compensate their shortcomings and to resume its delayed actions and pay damages of Iran, and continue the genuine measures of verification that the Supreme Leader of Iran has defined it as a protocol for the country in order that perhaps a semi-life is blown into the body of this dying patient (JCPOA) and its revival in a repentance climate of the West regarding its deceiving and cheating performance.



MAPNA Among First Oil Operators of Non-Government Sector

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Concurrent with the beginning of 42nd anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Revolution, the drilling operation of well no.12 of Danan Oil Field was completed and it came on stream on February 9.

This is the second well of the total 11 wells in the EPD project of Danan Oil Field that all phases of its design, engineering and implementation have been carried out by hardworking engineering group and personnel of MAPNA Group and has been handed over to Iranian Central Oil Fields Company.

The final depth of this well is 3653 meters and its oil production will start from the Sarvak Formation whose flowing operation is underway.

MAPNA GROU is to hand over wells No. 13 and 14 of this field in the next 10 to 15 days.



Deputy Minister Honors Manager of KSC

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Deputy Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade and Head of Iranian Mines, Mining Industries Development and Renovation (IMIDRO) Mr. Vajjollah Jafari by writing a letter to the CEO of Khorasan Steel Complex Company (KSC) hailed him and the company for the company's support for indigenization and using capabilities of domestic capacities.

Jafari in a letter to the CEO of Khorasan Steel Complex Company Mr. Kasra Ghafoori as well as to CEOs of Mobarakeh Steel Company, Esfahan Steel Company, ESCO and Hormuzgan Steel Company hailed the full support of the companies and their efforts for indigenizing the parts and equipment as well as reinforcing the capabilities of the domestic manufacturers, and praised significant assistance of KSC for launching the indigenization system of steel industry chain.

Reacting to this letter, Mr. Ghafoori said Khorasan Steel Complex Company (KSC) as the biggest steel production pole in the eastern country has set up a special department for indigenization in recent years. He further said the movement and slogan of "We Can" is not merely inspired by the outside pressures to ground the industries in the country but it is for strengthening national economy and saving forex in production.

Ghafoori noted that regardless of strengthening part-makers and domestic suppliers of equipment, the company has signed several MoUs with knowledge-based



National Steel Industry Inspired by ESCO's Specialty, Idea and Experience

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

ISFAHAN – The CEO of Esfahan Steel Company Mr. Mansour Yazdizadeh says ESCO is considered as a source of national pride for offering some part of technical and engineering services to the country and also for creating jobs and observing social responsibility and one can say national steel industry has been inspired by the experience, idea and specialty of ESCO.

Speaking at a presser, Mr. Yazdizadeh said more than 50 years passes since the birth of ESCO and today steel export in the country has surpassed 30m tons. He added that this mother industry has faced several woes during its existence that he wants to point to some of them.

He said Saba project belonged to ESCO and when ESCO was a state-run company and it has not been privatized, the project was separated from the company, adding that even Khorasan Steel belonged to ESCO that it was also separated. He reiterated if these two mega projects have not been separated from ESCO, today steel production of ESCO would have definitely been over \$5m.

Yazdizadeh went on to say that despite these challenges, ESCO is currently on good track and all honors that we see it today at ESCO are indebted to efforts and endeavors of any single personnel of the company in different sectors as well as the support of board of directors and Sadr Holding.

He went on to say that ESCO is the only rail producer of West Asia and due to God's blessing and efforts of the staff, the company received certificate for this strategic product and the contract for its exports to Afghanistan was signed.

Yazdizadeh also said that the company has achieved good success in indigenization of some products and it has put behind the losses and has turned into a profit-making company in the first half of the year.



FAO, Iran Start Joint Program to Reinvigorate Agricultural Innovation

TEHRAN (FAO)- To strengthen Iranian national capacity in addressing emerging challenges in food and nutrition security, agricultural productivity, and environmental conservation, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), in close collaboration with the Agricultural Research, Education and Extension Organization (AREEO), take the first step to establish an Agricultural Innovation Lab (i-Lab) Program in the country.

The FAO-Iran i-Lab initiative would bring researchers, technologists, young people, public and private sectors and start-ups together to construct and implement capacity development plans for agricultural innovations.

According to the FAO Representation in Iran, as the first step, FAO and AREEO hold a joint stakeholders engagement and validation workshop, congregating experts from the Ministry of Agriculture Jihad, the FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, AREEO and international experts to discuss the requisite procedures, frameworks, priority working areas and guidelines for an open call of proposals.

"The initiative, modelled by FAO in nine pilot countries in Africa, Asia and Central America, would provide an enabling environment for innovative procedures to harness the untapped power of existing and frontier technologies; design, pilot, accelerate and scale-up innovative ideas, services, and tools; and transform new solutions into public goods," said Mr Gerold Bödeker, FAO Representative to the Islamic Republic of Iran in his opening remarks at the event. "This joint program is expected to enhance the productivity, effectiveness, competitiveness, and resilience of the country's agriculture and food system."

Mr Bödeker added, "The i-Lab will provide a platform for FAO to utilize the knowledge, experiences and new ideas of Iranian experts, scholars and entrepreneurs for achieving innovative solutions in addressing challenges pertaining to the climate change, soil erosion, desertification, deforestation and the food and nutrition security and safety."

"The establishment of FAO-Iran i-Lab would also develop an intra-organizational model of innovation; promote an entrepreneurial culture; help to identify owners of innovative ideas among the private sector, academia, governmental agencies and entrepreneurs; and assist in evaluating the potential capacities of the proposed ideas," underscored the FAO Representative.

Based in the AREEO campus in Karaj, this initiative will provide the space to mentor start-up teams, provide funds, expand communication networks, and advocate for agro-innovation proposals.

The program will provide capacity-building opportunities, including workshops, training and entrepreneurship events for governmental staff and catalyze effective interaction between research institutes and industries. This initiative would establish a solid platform to gather the most recent and novel ideas in areas of agriculture, natural resources and environmental management.

Being the lead UN agency in promoting sustainable climate-smart agro-rural development, FAO extends its support to member countries to adopt a system-wide approach to unlock the potential of innovation, linking network of actors together with supporting policies and institutions to harness new technologies, products, processes, and forms of organization in responding to the emerging needs and challenges.



All Hypotheses Remain Open on COVID Origins

GENEVA (Dispatches) - The head of the World Health Organization has said that all hypotheses on the origins of COVID-19 remained on the table, following an investigative mission in China.

The WHO's mission to Wuhan, where the first coronavirus infections were identified in December 2019, failed to identify the source of the virus but poured cold water on the theory that it leaked from the city's virology laboratory.

At a press conference in Geneva on Friday alongside mission head Peter Ben Embarek, WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said the team had conducted a "very important scientific exercise in very difficult circumstances".

"Some questions have been raised as to whether some hypotheses have been discarded. Having spoken with some members of the team, I wish to confirm that all hypotheses remain open and require further analysis and studies.

"Some of that work may lie outside the remit and scope of this mission. We have always said that this mission would not find all the answers, but it has added important information that takes us closer to understanding the origins of the virus.

Tedros said a summary report of the mission's findings could emerge as early as next week, followed by a final report "in the coming weeks". Both would be made public.

The mission has said its main hypotheses are that the virus originated in a bat, although there are several possible scenarios for how it passed to humans, possibly first by infecting another species of animal. At a press conference in Wuhan on Tuesday, Ben Embarek quashed the theory that a leak from a virology lab in Wuhan could have caused the pandemic.

"The laboratory incident hypothesis is extremely unlikely," he said. It "is not in the hypotheses that we will suggest for future studies". The previous U.S. administration of President Donald Trump, which left office last month, said it believed the virus may have escaped from a lab in the Chinese city of Wuhan. China has strongly denied this, and says the Wuhan Institute of Virology was not studying related viruses.

When pressed on why the mission did not believe a lab could have been the source, Ben Embarek told Friday's briefing that scientists from labs in Wuhan had told his team they did not have it. If they had been studying it before the outbreak, he said, it would not have been a secret. "Usually laboratory researchers who work and discover new viruses would immediately publish their findings. That's a common practice around the world, particularly with new, interesting viruses," he said. Experts also say there was no substantial spread of SARS-COV-2 in Wuhan before the late 2019 outbreak.

Iran Counts...

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Meanwhile referring to Russian and Iranian naval drill, the Deputy Coordinator of the Islamic Republic of Iran's Army said that the joint naval drill with Russia demonstrates the naval authority of Iran's Armed Forces.

"When the powerful Russian navy conducts exercises with the navies of the Islamic Republic Army and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, it sends a clear message," said Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari on Sunday.

"Iran's Navy is at the level of the world naval powers in terms of equipment, manpower, technique and tactics, command and control, communication and access to new equipment," he added.

According to Admiral Sayyari, the joint exercise is aimed at establishing security in the North Indian Ocean.

Referring to the various threats of extra-regional countries from the beginning of the Islamic Revolution until today, he said, "Our country has been facing many threats since the first days of the victory of the Islamic Revolution, and the enemies have put forward various plans in this regard, all of which have failed."

IAEA...

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He emphasized that nuclear weapons have no place in the defense doctrine of the Islamic Republic of Iran, adding, "Our doctrinal principles do not allow weapons of mass destruction, and the fatwa of these activities by Leader of the Islamic Revolution is decisive for the people and the government."

"We have not and will not seek nuclear weapons, and leaving the NPT is not in our interest," he noted.

Referring to the statements of some countries for being a participant in the JCPOA, Zonnour said, "The countries of the region that have claimed that they should be present in the forthcoming negotiations are claiming nonsense and the JCPOA has nothing to do with them and they have no right to interfere in this matter."

"The JCPOA is a contract between 4+1, no one will be added to it, nor will our obligations be added," he stressed.

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

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info@irannewsdaily.com
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Durant Will Return for Nets

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Brooklyn Nets star Kevin Durant returned to practice Friday after missing three games under Covid-19 safety protocols and will play on Saturday against his former club, the Golden State Warriors. Durant will be "a full go" for his first NBA game back in the Bay Area since leaving Golden State in the opener of a five-game Brooklyn road trip, Nets coach Steve Nash said. The All-Star forward was forced to sit out as a close contact of someone with the coronavirus, with the Nets going 1-2 in his absence.

Greek Tennis Player Tests Positive for COVID-19

MELBOURNE (Dispatches) - Greek player Michail Pervolarakis has said he tested positive for the coronavirus after leaving Melbourne, where he played last week's ATP Cup, a warm-up for the Australian Open. Pervolarakis, who played singles and doubles for Greece at the team event, said he tested positive on arrival in South Africa. "After a 24-plus hour travel day from Australia to South Africa I've been diagnosed positive to Covid-19," he wrote on Instagram.

Nadal Stays on Track For Slams Record



MELBOURNE (Dispatches) - World number two Rafael Nadal said his minor back injury was improving by the day as he accelerated his pursuit of a record 21st Grand Slam title with victory over Cameron Norrie at the Australian Open Saturday.

The Spanish second seed has altered his service motion due to lower-back tightness that has plagued him all tournament, although it didn't stop him emphatically demolishing his first two opponents in straight sets.

Britain's 69th-ranked Norrie proved a tougher assignment, with Nadal pressed much harder before emerging a 7-5, 6-2, 7-5 winner in an empty Rod Laver Arena as Melbourne went into a five-day coronavirus lockdown.

It put him into a Slam last 16 for the 49th time, behind only Roger Federer (67) and Novak Djokovic (53).

"Today is better. First day I feel an improvement, and that's the most important thing for me today, more than any other thing," he said of his back.

"Today is the first day that I started to serve again my normal serve. It was an important victory for me. The biggest victory is the back is better for the first day."

Nadal next faces fiery Italian Fabio Fognini, who beat Australian Alex de Minaur in straight sets.

The Spaniard is bidding to win his 21st major title and claim sole ownership of the men's record, which he currently shares with Federer.

His victory keeps him on course to meet Djokovic in the final, although the defending champion is under an injury cloud after suffering what he called an abdominal "muscle tear" in the third round on Friday.

Meanwhile Stefanos Tsitsipas put friendship aside to crush Mikael Ymer and race into the Australian Open fourth round Saturday, saying that playing in front of empty stands reminded him of when they hit together during quarantine.

The pair were born within weeks of each other and were often pitted

together as juniors, but Greek fifth seed Tsitsipas swatted the Swede 6-4, 6-1, 6-1 on John Cain Arena.

He will now play either big-hitting ninth seed Matteo Berrettini or 19th-seeded Russian Karen Khachanov for a place in the last eight as he targets a maiden Grand Slam title.

"It took some time to get used to conditions on John Cain. But I'm very happy with my game. I showed good quality of tennis today," said Tsitsipas.

"Mikael is someone I've known for a long time and it's quite important for me to have battles like this against him, and for the next generation of tennis as well," he added.

"All of have been working very hard to get where we are today."

Tsitsipas said before the match that he had known Ymer "like, since a baby" and the 22-year-olds were quarantine training partners when they arrived in Australia for the year's opening Grand Slam.

He said playing without spectators, after Melbourne went into a five-day coronavirus lockdown, reminded him of their hitting sessions in quarantine.

"I was practicing with Mikael during our quarantine we had to undergo for 14 days, so it kind of reminded me of the same conditions as the quarantine. It wasn't much different," he said.

"The crowd, I don't know if the crowd would make it any different. My game was there, and that's the most important thing for me."

Bayern Munich Win Race to Sign Upamecano



BERLIN (Dispatches) - France defender Dayot Upamecano will join Bayern Munich from Bundesliga rivals RB Leipzig next season, according to reports Friday.

Both magazine Kicker and daily Bild say Bayern will pay 43 million euros (\$52 million) to activate the buy-out clause in Upamecano's Leipzig contract, which runs until 2023.

European champions Bayern appear to have fought off competition from Liverpool and Chelsea, who also wanted to sign the centre-back.

Upamecano will replace David Alaba, 28, who is set to leave Bayern when his contract expires in June after repeatedly turning down extension offers.

Bayern sports director Hasan Salihamidzic told Bild he could confirm the transfer of the 22-year-old Upamecano.

"I can and we at FC Bayern are very happy about it," said Salihamidzic.

"We had very good, intensive and professional talks with Dayot and his agent Volker Struth over many months.

"We knew that we had very strong competition. "We presented him with our vision of his career at FC Bayern."

Doncic Scores 46 In Mavs' Win

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Luka Doncic scored a career-high 46 points and Kristaps Porzingis added 36 as the host Dallas Mavericks won their fourth straight game, beating the New Orleans Pelicans 143-130 on Friday night.

Doncic made 17 of 30 field-goal attempts, including 5 of 8 from 3-point range, and Porzingis was 13 of 21, including 8 of 13 from beyond the arc. Dorian Finney-Smith added 14, Jalen Brunson had 13 and Josh Richardson 11 as the Mavericks won a shootout with the Pelicans' Zion Williamson and Brandon Ingram.

Williamson scored a career-high 36 points on 14-of-15 shooting, Ingram added 30 points, Eric Bledsoe scored 16, Lonzo Ball had 12, JJ Redick had 11 and Willy Hernangomez 10.

Dallas made 25 of 45 3-point tries two nights after New Orleans allowed Chicago to make a franchise-record 25 3-pointers in beating the Pelicans 129-116. New Orleans has allowed 18 or more 3-pointers in nine games this season.

Meanwhile four players for NBA-leading Utah Jazz scored at least 25 points as the Jazz beat Milwaukee Bucks 129-115 in Salt Lake City for their sixth straight win and their 17th victory in 18 games.

Rudy Gobert and Joe Ingles each scored 27 points to lead the Jazz. Donovan Mitchell finished with 26 despite 6-of-20 shooting from the field, and Jordan Clarkson continued his stellar play off the bench with 25.

Giannis Antetokounmpo tallied 29 points, 15 rebounds, six assists, two blocks and two steals, but the Bucks dropped their second game in a row. Brook Lopez added 23 points, Kris Middleton had 18, Bobby Portis 15 and D.J. Augustin 12.

Kawhi Leonard scored 33 points on 14-for-21 shooting, Marcus Morris Sr. added 20 points off the bench, and Los Angeles Clippers cruised past host Chicago Bulls 125-106.

Lou Williams (17 points), Ivica Zubac (12 points) and Reggie Jackson (11) also scored in double digits for Los Angeles, which won its second game in a row after losing three of the previous four.

Rashford Urges Social Media Firms to Tackle Abuse



LONDON (AFP) - Marcus Rashford has urged social media companies to do more in the fight against online abuse, saying the problem should be "easy to stop" for the technology giants.

The Manchester United and England forward has been one of several players to have been targeted during a spate of incidents in recent weeks.

These attacks have prompted football chiefs in England to write an open letter to the bosses of Twitter and Facebook calling for action to tackle "havens of abuse".

"Online abuse should be easy to stop," Rashford told Sky Sports on Friday.

"You just deactivate the accounts.

"It's very easy to make four or five accounts but if you've got to block them out

you block them out.

"I feel that's on the actual social media companies themselves -- Instagram, Twitter. "If they see anyone that's being racially abused or abused in any way their accounts should be deleted straight away."

He added: "That's one way of getting rid of most of it, if not all of it." Rashford's United colleagues Axel Tuanzebe and Anthony Martial have also been targeted on social media in recent weeks.

"I spoke to Axel when it happened to him," Rashford said. "Axel is a tough lad and it's not nice to hear those things.

"But he's bounced back, he always turns up to training happy and smiling and works hard, and that's what we're here to do.

"Wherever you are in the world you can be targeted by this kind of abuse...That's where you have to show strength and that you're mentally capable to deal with such things, even though you shouldn't have to because it shouldn't be happening."

Leicester Blitz Rocks Liverpool



LONDON (Dispatches) - Liverpool crashed to a dismal 3-1 defeat at Leicester to leave their top four hopes in jeopardy after Alisson Becker's latest blunder sparked a stunning collapse from the troubled Premier League champions on Saturday.

Jurgen Klopp's side endured a third successive defeat which would appear to end any chance of retaining the title. The calamitous nature of Liverpool's late meltdown raises serious questions about their bid to qualify for next season's Champions League.

Mohamed Salah had given the Reds the lead in the second half at the King Power Stadium. But James Maddison's VAR-assisted equaliser was followed by a howler from away keeper Alisson, whose miscued clearance was converted by Jamie Vardy.

It was another miserable afternoon for Alisson following his two costly mistakes in last weekend's 4-1 defeat against Manchester City.

"The first goal for me is offside. The difference is we think it's an objective thing but it's not. That's something that has to change (with VAR)," Klopp said. "The second goal is a misunderstanding obviously. It is a situation where we should shout and I didn't hear anyone shout. It is not that cool."

Harvey Barnes put the seal on Leicester's superb comeback, leaving fourth-placed Liverpool languishing 10 points behind leaders City, who have two games in hand including one against Tottenham later on Saturday.

"The third goal I really don't like. We are so open. I cannot accept," Klopp said.

"The performance for 75 minutes or so was outstanding then we lost 3-1. That shows what a tricky situation we are in." While Klopp would privately concede that Liverpool won't win the title, it is their top four place that he will be more worried about after the Reds were left with just two wins from their last 10 league games.

They could be as low as sixth place by Monday if Chelsea and West Ham win their games in hand.

Kyrgios in No Rush to Play Again This Year



MELBOURNE (AFP) - Big-ticket Australian Nick Kyrgios cast doubt over how much he will play this year, maintaining he doesn't miss tennis and will not "force myself around the world" while coronavirus continues to rage.

The volatile 25-year-old missed virtually the entire 2020 season through injury and Covid-19 fears but returned for the opening Grand Slam of the year in Melbourne and lit up the tournament.

He played two epic five-setters in heaving arenas before a heartbreaking loss to third-seed Dominic Thiem on Friday evening, throwing away a two-set lead as the ice-cool Austrian pounced on poor shot choices from the 25-year-old.

"I don't know, man. I can change like the wind," Kyrgios said about his plans.

"Depending on what happens with Covid in Australia, you know. "For me personally, I'm used to playing in front of packed stadiums.

"I'm not gonna force myself around the world when the time is not right where I have to quarantine for a week and then play."

He added: "I don't particularly care, either."

Any Kyrgios absence will be blow for the ATP Tour, with the polarising Australian showman a major drawcard, despite only being ranked 47.

He ignited the pandemic-hit Australian Open when saving match points in his five-set epic against Frenchman Ugo Humbert on the third day, with the tournament until then bereft of its usual buzz due to Covid restrictions and a three-week delay.

He again pulled in the punters on Friday to create a rollicking party atmosphere against Thiem, one of the last matches before fans were shut out after Melbourne went into new five-day lockdown.

Kyrgios said he was amazed his body had held up so well and was proud of himself.