

**Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei Will Deliver a Speech on Wednesday On the Occasion of the Uprising of The People of Tabriz on Feb. 18, 1978, Against the Pahlavi Regime.**

# IRAN NEWS

**Health Ministry Spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari Said on Monday That Some 83 More Iranians Have Died From the COVID-19 Over the Past 24 Hours Bringing The Total Deaths to 59,028**

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## Envoy Informs IAEA of Iran Concerns About Confidentiality of Information

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's ambassador to international organizations in Vienna, including the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), says the Iranian mission has informed the IAEA of Tehran's concerns and observations on the protection of confidential information related to its nuclear program.

Speaking to reporters, Kazem Gharibabadi said, "Iran's considerations and concerns with regard to protection of confidential information have been communicated to the International Atomic Energy Agency in an official letter" dated February 4, 2021, which was circulated on February 9.

He added that despite the existence of relevant regulations, the issue of leaking or unauthorized access to confidential information of the agency has been always a major sticking point in the Islamic Republic of Iran's relations with the IAEA.

"Iran's concerns about non-implementation of [IAEA's] commitments regarding confidentiality of information have been brought up frequently during the past two decades, but have not been addressed in a suitable way yet," Iran's IAEA ambassador said.

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## Iran, Russia Set to Stage Joint Naval Drill

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran and Russia will begin a joint naval exercise today (Tuesday) in the northern part of the Indian Ocean with the aim of bolstering maritime trade security in the region, said the Iranian Navy's spokesman for the drill.

Flotilla Admiral Gholamreza Tahani said the surface and aviation units of the navies of the Iranian Army and the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), as well as the Russian Navy's floating units consisting of a Stoiky corvette, a KoLa logistics ship and a helicopter, will take part in the exercise, the Army's media wing reported.

"The 2021 Joint Maritime Security Belt Exercise of Iran and Russia will be held over an area of 17,000 square kilometers, with a message of peace and friendship," Tahani said.

He explained that a variety of tactical exercises are scheduled for the drill, such as rescuing vessels from fire and assault, shooting at specific targets, shooting at air targets at night, among others.

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## Tehran to Halt Additional Protocol Unless JCPOA Terms Fully Met



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran will end its voluntary implementation of the Additional Protocol to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Safeguards Agreement should the other parties to the 2015 Iran nuclear agreement fail to honor their commitments by the deadline of February 21.

"This measure means an end to inspections beyond the Safeguards Agreement, but does not mean an end to all inspections. In fact, Iran is a member of the Safeguards Agreement and the NPT, but the implementation of the Additional Protocol will be halted," Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said at a weekly press conference on Monday.

Khatibzadeh emphasized that Iran will nonetheless continue to cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and report its new nuclear undertakings to the IAEA beforehand, as has always been the case.

He reiterated Tehran's position that all of its measures are "easily reversible" provided that the other parties to the nuclear deal, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), return to fulfilling their abandoned commitments. The JCPOA was unilaterally ditched by former US President Donald Trump in May 2018, in pursuit of what he called the "maximum pressure" policy against the Islamic Republic through unilateral sanctions. Iran has denounced the policy as an act of "economic terrorism".

Khatibzadeh's announcement comes more than two months after the Iranian Parliament passed a law to further accelerate the development of the country's nuclear program.

The law, among other things, tasked the Iranian administration to stop allowing inspections beyond the Safeguards Agreement, including the voluntary implementation of the Additional Protocol, if the other parties to the JCPOA failed to deliver on their commitments, normalize Iran's banking relations and remove obstacles to Iran's oil export.

"According to this law, the inspections beyond the Safeguards Agreement will be halted, which we had voluntarily accepted within the framework of the Additional Protocol," Khatibzadeh reiterated.

Asked to offer his take on the new US administration of Joe Biden's Iran policy almost a month into his presidency, the spokesman said the Biden administration, unfortunately, treads in the footsteps of the Trump administration.

"What is happening today is not different from what was happening before January 20 ... The same maximum pressure and crime, committed through the cruel sanctions against the Iranian people, continues today," he said.

"This should actually bring a stain of disgrace to those who based their election campaign on distancing themselves from the bullying policies of the Trump administration," Khatibzadeh said, referring to Biden, who prior to the November presidential election promised to rejoin the deal but has so far reneged on his promise.

Elsewhere in his presser, Khatibzadeh said the Islamic Republic's stance on the use of nuclear weapons has not changed. Iran underlines the peaceful nature of its nuclear activities and this stance has not changed, he said.

"The fatwa (religious decree) issued by the Leader of the Islamic Revolution on the prohibition of the use of weapons of mass destruction and nuclear weapons remains in place," he added.

## Iran Has Won as a Power in West Asia

TEHRAN (MNA) - Top Military Aide to the Leader of the Islamic Revolution said that Iran has succeeded as a power in West Asia, and a clear sign of that in the near future is the withdrawal of the U.S. terrorist army from the region.

Referring to the decline of the American empire on a global scale in the third decade of the 21st century, Major General Yahya Rahim Safavi said, "The United States has failed to form the world's only superpower or American hegemonic power for economic supremacy, military capability, and world leadership and political management, even on world ideological and cultural issues."

"The signs of the decline of the American Empire are rooted in the internal changes of American society and politicians," he added, saying, "In the recent election, this decline was revealed to all political scientists, economists and sociologists. The former arrogant and terrorist president, who lacked political, international consciousness, struck the last ax at the corrupt roots of this empire."

"The military presence and occupation of the two oppressed Muslim countries of Afghanistan and Iraq and spending 20 years of US and NATO economic and human resources in these two countries and the use of US strategic rivals, namely China, in the economic dimension and Russia, to maintain itself and even increase its military power from this situation are another reason for the decline of American power," he noted. Referring to the failure of the US and the Zionist regime's strategies in the West Asian region and the provision of the process of expelling the United States from this region, Rahim Safavi said, "The strategic policies of the Islamic Republic and its international partners and some neighboring countries have defeated the strategy of the American and the Zionists intelligence agencies in the region."

"Their policies have failed, and the political power and influence of the Resistance Front in the West Asian region are increasing, and Iran has succeeded as a power in West Asia, and you will see a clear sign of that in the near future as the U.S. terrorist army withdraws from the West Asian region," he added.

## Iran to Soon Become One of World Largest Vaccine Makers

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The Minister of Health, Treatment, and Medical Education said that Iran would be one of the world's largest vaccine makers against Corona for the next three months.

Saeed Namaki said on Monday at the Corona Task Force headquarters in Qazvin province: "We will vaccinate most vulnerable groups within the next three months, and three months later 70% of high-risk groups will be vaccinated."

"Unlike some neighboring countries, we will not allow the vaccine to be used until it is fully approved and has the slightest side effects," he said.

Namaki said that the United States imposed the cruelest sanctions on Iran in history, which were not imposed on any nation after the Ashura incident, adding: "Following these sanctions, at the height of the corona outbreak, we could not import any medicine into the country. They were waiting for the Islamic Republic of Iran to surrender and thought that this was the only pressure that would be put into operation, but their calculations fell apart."

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## Afghan-Iran Border Blaze Under Control

HERAT (IRNA)- A massive fire that erupted when a fuel tanker exploded over the weekend at a major crossing in Afghanistan's western Herat province on the Iranian border was brought under control on Monday, after three days of efforts by firefighters from both countries, Afghan officials said.

At least 20 people were injured when the explosion that set off a huge fire that engulfed many of the hundreds of trucks lined up at the Islam Qala crossing carrying natural gas and fuel on Saturday. The crossing, around 120 kilometers (75 miles) west of the city of Herat, the provincial capital, is a major transit route between Afghanistan and Iran.

The inferno involved two explosions at the border crossing — powerful enough to be spotted from space by NASA satellites — with about a half-hour between them. There has been no word so far as to what caused of the explosion of the fuel tanker or the subsequent blast. The explosions shut down the power grid in the region, leaving Herat in the dark.

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## Hunt for Mastermind Behind Scientist's Assassination

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's intelligence minister says the main perpetrator behind the November 2020 assassination of prominent Iranian nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhriadeh is being prosecuted.

"The main perpetrator behind the assassination who was a fired employee of the Armed Forces and had left the country before the operation is currently being prosecuted," Mahmoud Alavi told ISNA.

Fakhriadeh, a deputy defense minister and head of the Iranian Defense Ministry's Organization of Defensive Innovation and Research (SPND), was assassinated in the city of Absard, east of Tehran on November 27, 2020. Following the assassination, Iran vowed to take revenge, saying no act of terror would go unanswered.

Iran also blamed the Israeli regime, which has carried out assassination operations over the past decade against Iranian nuclear scientists, including Masoud Alimohammadi, Majid Shahriari, Darioush Rezaeinejad, and Mostafa Ahmadi Roshan.

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# Zionists to Receive Response to Their Wickedness

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The spokesman of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) said on Monday that the fake Zionist regime that abjectly assassinated the Iranian scientists and elite will most definitely receive the response to its wicked moves.

Brigadier-General Ramezan Sharif said that the enemy uses media for psychological war against the Islamic Revolution and the Islamic system, and to disrupt people's minds and beliefs.

He added that they try to implant in the youths' minds that the Shah and his American advisors were moving the country towards a big civilization and the Islamic Revolution stopped the progress.

## Swiss Envoy Calls for Bolstering Parliamentary Relations

*IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK*

**TEHRAN – Swiss Ambassador to Tehran Markus Leitner in the meeting with the Head of Red Crescent Fraction of Iran's Majlis Ali Asghar Baqerzadeh emphasized the role of parliaments in strengthening the ties and called for bolstering friendly relations with Iran.**

In the meeting, Baqerzadeh pointed to the record of good relations between Iran and Switzerland and said Iranian people have good mindset about Switzerland and they know Switzerland as an impartial and independent country in the scene of international affairs.

He then criticized the U.S. bullying and its violation of international laws and treaties like the JCPOA and imposing inhuman and cruel sanctions during the pandemic against the countries, added that the main concerns of lawmakers in Majlis are to help the government to find necessary mechanisms for purchase and easy access of the people to the COVID-19 vaccine.

He then pointed to good cooperation of both countries in humanitarian issues in the region, saying that this cooperation through the humanitarian capacities of Iran's Red Crescent Society and International Committee of the Red Cross has had positive results for the people in the region and in the decrease of conflicts and in helping the war-torn people in different countries, and it has been effective.



Then Leitner, for his part, pointed to the effective position of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the region, noting that expansion of relation between parliaments of the two countries has important role in knowing capacities and development of cooperation in different issues of mutual interest.

The Swiss diplomat also underscored that Switzerland has always pursued the policy of impartiality in its foreign policy and has tried to help expansion of peace and friendship among countries and for this reason it launched its financial mechanism for humanitarian trade to save the JCPOA.

Leitner then underscored the cooperation of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Iran and called for expansion of ties between Iran and Switzerland in the humanitarian affairs.

## Qatari Foreign Minister Meets Zarif in Tehran

TEHRAN (IFP) - Qatar's Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani has held talks with his Iranian counterpart Mohammad Javad Zarif in Tehran.

The meeting was held on Monday afternoon at the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in downtown Tehran.

The Qatari top diplomat's visit comes a few days before the deadline of February 21st, after which Iran has vowed to reduce the IAEA inspections if the US sanctions are not lifted.

He had announced a few days ago that Doha is ready to help de-escalate the Iran-US tension and facilitate Washington's return to the 2015 nuclear deal between Tehran and world powers.

The Qatari diplomat has long called for a summit between leaders of the six-member Persian Gulf Cooperation Council and the Islamic Republic. Speaking in a January interview with Bloomberg, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani said his government was "hopeful that this would happen and we still believe this should happen."

## Tehran, Havana Stress Expansion of Bilateral Ties

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iran and Cuba stressed the will to strengthen their amicable ties in different sectors.

The National Security and Foreign Policy Committee of the Iranian Parliament, Abolfazi Amouei, and Cuban Ambassador to Tehran Alexis Bandrich, met in Tehran on Monday.

During the meeting, the two sides expressed readiness of their respective countries to broaden the scope of bilateral ties in different sections, including the parliamentary and economic cooperation.

They also reviewed the main events of the international and regional developments and explored the avenues for boosting parliamentary cooperation in this regard.



Iran and Cuba have been developing their cooperation, specifically in the medical sector to contain the coronavirus pandemic.

The two countries plan to create the capacity for the mass production of doses of a vaccine to contain the coronavirus pandemic amid crippling sanctions imposed on the two countries by the administration of former U.S. President Donald Trump.

Iran and Cuba signed an agreement earlier this month to cooperate in the coronavirus vaccine project with the use of a technology that will be transferred to Iran by the Cuban government.

## Iranian Technicians Carry out Overhauls on 6 Mothballed Helicopters

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iranian technicians have successfully carried out repairs on engines of six French helicopters to bring them back to operation despite foreign sanctions that ban the imports of aircraft parts into the country.

Iran Helicopter Company (Heliran) said on Sunday that overhauls carried out on Turbomeca Artouste engines of Aérospatiale Alouette III helicopters made them airworthy again after years of downtime that had been caused by U.S. sanctions on Iran's aviation sector.

Iran's transportation minister Mohammad Eslami personally visited the repaired choppers in Heliran hangars in an area to the west of the capital Tehran, according to local media reports.

Eslami said the light utility helicopters would now be able return to service, including for ambulance operations, as they have obtained the required certificates from Iran's civil aviation authority.

Heliran CEO Soheil Qiassi said that the overhauls would extend the airworthiness of the choppers by 1,500 hours. Qiassi said the company finished the overhauls while it was unable to receive even a single spare part from foreign suppliers because of the sanctions.

He said the helicopters would enable rescue and emergency services in Iran to expand their operations to hard-to-reach regions of the country.

## Iran, Turkey Mull Over Boosting Tourism in Post-Corona Era

TEHRAN (MNA) – The fifth meeting of the Joint Technical Committee for Tourism Cooperation between Iran and Turkey was held through video conference.

The fifth meeting of the Joint Technical Committee for Tourism Cooperation between Iran and Turkey was held with the presence of the tourism deputies of the two countries.

The webinar was held to exchange views on tourism relations of these two neighboring countries amid the Covid pandemic and to plan for the promotion of tourism exchanges in the post-Corona era.

Referring to the good relations as well as historical and cultural similarities of the two countries, Vali Teymouri, the Iranian Deputy Minister of Tourism,

said, "In this webinar, Iranian and Turkish sides emphasized the importance of tourism as a tool to make the people of the two countries become more aware of the existing capacities and to deepen relations and cooperation."

One of the important issues raised by the Turkish side during this meeting was the possibility of tourists traveling to the two countries without passports in order to balance the tourist exchange, he said, adding that the issue was decided to be followed up through the relevant authorities in a special way.

In addition, Teymouri considered the cooperation and participation of the two sides in investing in and launching Silk Road tourism to be of special importance.

## Copenhagen Ready to Cooperate With Tehran In Earth Sciences



TEHRAN (IRNA) - New Denmark Ambassador to Iran, Jesper Vahr, said on Monday that Denmark has a strong incentive to cooperate with Iran in the field of earth sciences.

According to Geological Survey and Mineral Exploration of Iran, Jesper Vahr made the remarks in a meeting with the head of Geological Survey and Mineral Exploration of Iran Alireza Shahidi.

The fields of development of mutual cooperation in Iran and Denmark were raised by the two officials, calling for enhanced scientific and research relations in the geological and exploratory sectors.

Geological Survey and Mineral Exploration of Iran prepares the geological maps of the Middle East in UNESCO, including tectonic map, Shahidi said.

He said that Geological Survey and Mineral Exploration of Iran has made extensive studies in the field of exploration of karstic waters in Iran, adding that the organization is capable of producing basic information for exploration of minerals, and now the methods of air geophysical, which were initially exclusively owned by Canadians.

Iran and Denmark have always had good and historical relations and there has been no negative points in the history of relations of the two states.

## Tehran, Baghdad Discuss Issues of Upcoming Hajj

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran and Iraq conferred on the issues of the upcoming Hajj via videoconference on Monday.

Head of Iran's Hajj and Pilgrimage Organization, Alireza Rashidian, and the Head of the Iraqi High Commission for Hajj and Umrah Sheikh Sami al-Massoudi were among the participants.

Both sides termed holding virtual meetings as ways for making the pilgrims united, adding that they are of prime importance.

Also, they called for the necessity of preparing the required health protocols for making the pilgrimage.

Tens of thousands of Muslims gather together from all across the world each year in the holy city of Mecca to perform the Hajj pilgrimage. Undoubtedly, this is a unique opportunity to enhance unity and solidarity within the Islamic Ummah.

## Iran-Zimbabwe Parliamentary Cooperation Expanding

TEHRAN (IP) - The head of the Parliamentary Friendship Group of the Islamic Republic of Iran-Zimbabwe and Zimbabwe's ambassador to Tehran held a meeting to discuss the parliamentary cooperation between the two countries.



Head of the Iran-Zimbabwe Parliamentary Friendship Group, Iqbal Shakeri said in a meeting with Zimbabwean Ambassador to Tehran, Christopher Mapanga referred to the existing capacities for improving relations between Iran and Zimbabwe, saying: "There are good capacities in various fields of industries and mines, agriculture, defense and security, marine and fisheries industries, health and education to improve relations between the two countries."

The head of the parliamentary friendship group of the Islamic Republic of Iran-Zimbabwe criticized the hostile policies of the United States and the imposition of cruel sanctions against the Iranian nation, adding: "Iran has faced hostile US policies since the victory of the Islamic Revolution, but these behaviors have had no effect on the will of the Iranian people to maintain the country's independence and development."

Referring to the fact that the Zimbabwean parliament and government welcome the strengthening of relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran, Zimbabwean Ambassador to Tehran said: "There are good capacities to improve the level of economic cooperation between the two countries, which should benefit the two nations."

## Navy Chief of Staff Meets Pakistani Navy Commander

KARACHI (IRNA) - Iranian military delegation led by Navy chief of staff has met with the Chief of Pakistan Navy on Monday at the 7th Aman-21 multinational exercise in Karachi.

Commodore Arya Shafaghat Rudsari, who led the delegation of General Staff of the Armed Forces of Iran at Aman-21 exercise met with Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Mohammad Amjad Khan Niazi in the port city of Karachi.

The two sides discussed the latest status of cooperation between Iran and Pakistan in the field of maritime security, the participation of the two neighboring countries in holding bilateral exercises and sending ships to each other's ports.

Pakistan Naval Chief during the meeting praised the presence of the military delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran at Aman-21 international exercise as an observer describing it a manifestation of deep friendship between the two countries and their common vision for maintaining security and stability at sea.

Referring to the cultural, historical and geographical similarities between Iran and Pakistan, Admiral Amjad Khan Niazi stressed the need to increase relations in the field of sea and exchange experiences between the navies of the two countries.

Commodore Arya Shafaghat Rudsari wished success to Pakistan Navy in its efforts to hold the Aman-21 multinational exercise.

Members of the Iranian military delegation also attended the concluding session of the International Maritime Conference today. Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi was the chief guest at the occasion.

## Tehran Ready to Provide Lab Equipment for Afghan Universities

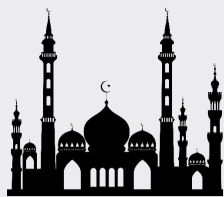
TEHRAN (IFP) - Vice-President Sorena Sattari says the country is prepared to provide laboratory equipment for the universities of Afghanistan.

The Iranian vice-president said currently the majority of lab equipment is being manufactured inside Iran.

Speaking in a Monday meeting with Abdul Zahir Shakib, the president of the Academy of Sciences of Afghanistan, Sattari said Tehran is prepared to cooperate with Afghanistan in supplying the lab equipment needed by Afghan universities.

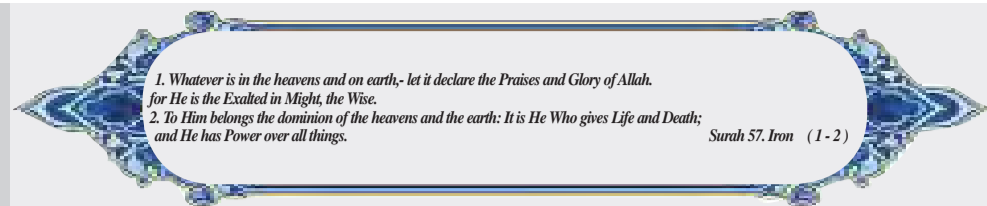
"Iran has this capability, and all this equipment can be supplied to Afghanistan with special conditions and reasonable prices," he noted.

In turn, the Afghan official said the two countries are neighbors and friends with lots of cultural, religious, and lingual commonalities, which should be used to develop their relations.



## PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:18
■ Evening (Maghreb)	18:05
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:24
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:48



## Tehran, Tokyo to Resume Trade After Revival of JCPOA

**IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK**

**TEHRAN – Chairman of Iran-Japan Joint Committee of Commerce Mr. Bahram Shakouri blames the U.S. sanctions for problems in way of Japan to purchase Iran crude oil, and reiterated that if the JCPOA is revived, Iran and Japan would resume trade.**

Speaking to ILNA, Shakouri said that all existing problems regarding Japan's purchase of Iran is because of the sanctions and of course the problem of money transfer is also important but before the latter emerges, problems for oil export existed.

On the trade exchanges between Iran and Japan, he said naturally sanctions have affected the relations between Tehran and Tokyo and trade relations have declined, adding that oil was one of the products that had received the U.S. waiver and the Japanese could purchase Iran oil but it also faced hurdles.

He went on to say that if the JCPOA is revived and the U.S. and Europeans return to it and the U.S. sanctions are eased, it is possible the trade ties between Iran and Japan to improve.

He noted there is a huge number of grounds for cooperation between Iran and Japan as Tehran can take advantage of Japan's knowledge and technology in mining industries or other sectors and in return Iran can export its food, agro and mining products to Japan.

Shakouri admitted that fortunately the scientific relation of Iran and Japan has not been disrupted but trade relations have faced hurdles due to banking and sanctions problems.

He said Japanese companies have cooperation with the U.S. and American companies and it is natural that they safeguard their own interests and not to harm it by cooperating with Iran.



Shakouri went on to say that since 2011 to 2017, some \$582m of non-oil exports has been added to Iran and Japan's trade volume but since 2017m Iran has been mostly importer as the trade balance was minus \$182m for Iran in 2019.

He stated the Japanese are interested in buying Iran crude oil because their refining system fits Iran oil and for this reason they tried to get the U.S. waiver but it was rejected by the U.S. and it caused problem for Iran's oil sales to Japan.

He pointed to Joe Biden's presidency in the U.S., saying that he hoped by taking office of Biden, the U.S. would return to the JCPOA and sanctions would be eased to have its positive impact on Iran's trade.

Shakouri added that Iran's relation with Japan is an old one and cultures of both countries are close and their nations respect each other, reiterating that even Japan government is very keen to boost exchanges with Iran but private sector companies decide based on their own interests and they are right to be worried about the U.S. reaction.

On the bartering trade with Japan, Shakouri said bartering trade with Japan is done but the amount of the trade is very insignificant and goods like shrimp, fruit juice and shrimp are barter traded.

## Poetry Can Illustrate Sufferings of COVID-19 Patients

TEHRAN (IFP) - A Persian calligraphy by Omid Rabbani which roughly means, "Empathy is more important than speaking the same language."

The Iranian minister of culture and Islamic guidance says the country will exchange its "poetic" experience of coronavirus with the world.

Seyed Abbas Salehi noted the COVID-19 pandemic is a common problem gripping all peoples.

"The coronavirus pandemic was a malady which affected all people around the world and which all poets across the globe wrote poems about, and we should use it as a path to connect to the world," he said.

"Poetry came to the aid of health protocols and prevention measures, and poets' experience with regards to coronavirus turned into a work of art," he added.

The minister underlined that poems have been written to illustrate the pain and sufferings of people afflicted with the disease.

He said the poems written about coronavirus serve as a linking route to the world as COVID-19 was a common illness of the entire human community

## Production of Copper Cathode Up 13% in 10 Months

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran's production of the copper cathode has increased 13 percent during the first ten months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2020 –January 19, 2021), as compared to the same period of time in the past year.

The country has produced 231,113 tons of copper cathode during the ten-month period of this year.

The periodical reports and statistics indicate that Iran's metals sector is progressing both in terms of production and export despite the limitations imposed by the U.S. sanctions.

The country's copper industry is moving

forward noticeably, as some outstanding projects are implemented.

Iran has seen its copper exports doubled in the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19, 2020) despite a series of bitter sanctions imposed by the United States aimed at hampering the Islamic Republic's trade of lucrative metals.

A senior official at Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO), Iran's largest metals and mining holding, has said that the value of exports for main copper products reached more than \$1 billion over the past year.

## Iraqi Airlines Resume Flights to Iran

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Iraqi airlines have resumed operating flights to Iran in compliance with the coronavirus protocols, an Iranian official said.

The spokesperson for the Civil Aviation Organization of Iran said Iraqi airlines have restarted flights from Najaf to Tehran and Mashhad after a hiatus due to the health restrictions.

Mohammad Hassan Zibakhsh also noted that there is no restriction on permissions for Iranian flights to Iraq. "Iranian airlines can carry passengers in those flight routes (to Iraq) after getting permission," he said, adding that two Iranian flights from Tehran and two from Mashhad are ready to take passengers to Najaf and Baghdad every week upon approval by Iraq.

Millions of Iranians normally go to Iraq each year to visit holy cities in the Arab country, especially the cities of Najaf and Karbala. Also, Iraqi pilgrims travel to Iran for pilgrimage to the holy cities of Mashhad and Qom.

## Active Presence of MSC at Iran METAFO Exhibition

**IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK**

ISFAHAN – Mobarakeh Steel Company will have active presence in the 17th international exhibition of metallurgy "Iran METAFO" which opened yesterday.

According to the head of public relations of Mobarakeh Steel Company (MSC), the company will have active presence in this three-day event which is underway at Tehran Permanent Fairground.

Hadi Nabatinejad said steel industry of Islamic Iran is a clear sign of reliance on the capabilities of the domestic experts and pointed to the improvement of Islamic Iran in the world rankings in terms of steel production as the country has scaled from 40th place in 1979 to the 10th place this year.

He went on to say that participation in the international exhibitions is a good opportunity for displaying the capabilities and capacities, for introducing production

technologies, exchange and reinforcing knowhow and boosting work interactions and signing deals for cooperation with companies and the scientific and research centers, and reiterated that indigenization and reliance on the domestic experts has been the major concern of MSC in recent years and currently indigenization of thousands of parts and equipment by the company is the biggest honor and achievement of the group.

Nabatinejad further said this exhibition in the year of surge in production is very effective in boosting domestic capabilities of steel companies in production, using knowhow and technology and ultimately in indigenization and self-reliance.

He added that this event can be a good opportunity for MSC for booting its relation with other steel companies or companies active in the field of mines, mineral industries, casting industrial furnace and thermal operation and metallurgy.



## CBI Studying Various Options on Official Digital Currency



TEHRAN (PressTV)- Central Bank of Iran (CBI) Governor Abdolnasser Hemmati says the bank is considering various options on how it can issue an official digital currency amid a global race to modernize payments systems and reduce the risks related to privately issued cryptocurrencies.

Hemmati said on his Instagram page on Sunday that experts at the CBI were working on laws and regulations needed to issue a digital currency in the country.

He said the bank had already compiled a draft of "Iran's Comprehensive Document on Cryptocurrency".

"Studying this new international trend and concentrating on various models, the CBI is searching for the best possible strategy in this field," said the chief banker.

Central banks around the world have been involved in efforts to issue digital currencies amid a surge in demand and popularity for cryptocurrencies in recent years.

The People's Bank of China's (PBOC) announced in October that it was issuing 10 million yuan (\$1.5 million) worth of digital currency to a total of 50,000 randomly selected consumers.

Similar moves in other countries have been aimed at enabling people to use the new currency in day-to-day banking activities and to test the capacities of cryptocurrencies to become a component of policy-making in the national banking systems.

Hemmati said the CBI would seek to use its new cryptocurrency to increase controls on credit transfers while it may even lead to some changes in the bank's way of regulating the monetary system in Iran.

He said the CBI would also try to promote the use of Iran's "National Cryptocurrency" in the international markets.

## 45k Wagons of Minerals Unloaded At PGMISEZ in 10 Months

**IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK**

TEHRAN – The CEO of Persian Gulf Mining and Metal Industries Special Economic Zone (PGMISEZ) says over 45,000 wagons of concentrate and pellet products have been unloaded in this big economic zone, adding that raw material sales, have been almost zeroed and most of loading and unloading operations are related to the domestic factories.



Hassan Khalaj Tehrani said this big economic zone has currently turned into one of the most influential poles of investment in the country, adding that significance of PGMISEZ is in its redefinition of macro investment facilities especially in the fields of land, energy and customs tariffs that with their expansion, the investment capacity in the country will increase more than ever.

He went on to say that exploitation in this zone is defined like loading and unloading of bulky minerals.

Khalaj Tehrani noted that in the past 10 months, the unloading operation of 45,000 wagons of concentrate and pellet products have been conducted for steel-making companies of Hormuzgan Steel Co., Kaveh Steel Co., Saba Foolad Co., and Makush Co. and some export operations have also been carried out for them.

He went on to say that since the second half of last year till now, with levying tariff for exports of minerals by the government to stop the sales of raw minerals, exports in this zone has been almost zeroed and most of loading and unloading operations are related to the local factories.

Khalaj Tehran reiterated that by improving and upgrading the machineries, the loading and unloading process has accelerated. He then pointed to some actions by the zone for accelerating the loading and unloading process.

He reiterated that some repair and overhauls have helped the process and stopped delays due to the fatigue or the problems in the machineries in the zone.

## 4.5m Tons Goods Unloaded In Shahid Rajaei Port

BANDAR ABBA (IRNA) - Managing Director of Ports and Maritime office of Hormuzgan said some 4,500,000 tons of goods have been unloaded in Shahid Rajaie port.

Speaking to reporters, Ali Reza Mohammadi Karajiran said on Monday that the products consisted of 3,500,000 tons of exports and 1 million tons of imports, container, palette, and oil transport.

He noted that railway transportation in Shahid Rajaie Port experienced 61 percent growth during five months.

Shahid Rajaei port having some 18 gantry cranes and 40 berths is the biggest and the most modernized container port in Iran.

## Next Year Budget Amendment Bill Submitted to Majlis

TEHRAN (IP) - A member of the Presiding Board of Iran's Parliament announced that the government had submitted a bill to amend the general budget for the next Iranian year's budget (starting on March 21) to the parliament.

Ahmad Amirabadi-Farahani said on Tuesday that this budget amendment will be on the Parliament's agenda.

At its meeting on Sunday, the Council of Ministers reviewed the amendment of the 1400 Iranian year budget bill. In this meeting, the cabinet reviewed and amended the whole country's budget bill for the year 1400 so that the parliament approves the bill.

## Peru FM Resigns Over Early Vaccination Scandal

LIMA (Dispatches) - Peru's foreign minister resigned Sunday in a growing scandal over the revelation that government officials received Covid-19 vaccinations well before the general public.

The South American nation has been badly hit by the pandemic, with its health system overwhelmed and a targeted vaccination program for health workers rolling out only from February 8.

Public resentment over officials receiving vaccinations -- despite there being no date for a wider immunization roll out -- has seen at least two government officials resign.



## South Korea Eases Coronavirus Curbs

SEOUL (Reuters) - South Korea eased some of its strictest social distancing rules for businesses on Monday, but kept limits on private gatherings as authorities prepared to unveil plans for the roll out of the first coronavirus vaccines later this month.

The decision comes after a subdued Lunar New Year holiday last week. Daily coronavirus infections rebounded to above 400 ahead of the break, but have dropped since then with the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency (KDCA) reporting 344 new infections as of midnight Sunday.



## Thousands of Haitians Protest, Alleging New Dictatorship



PORT-AU-PRINCE (AFP) - Several thousand people demonstrated Sunday in the Haitian capital Port-au-Prince, saying the government was trying to establish a new dictatorship and denouncing international support for President Jovenel Moise.

The protests were mostly peaceful, although a few clashes broke out between some demonstrators and police, who fired tear gas and rubber bullets.

Protesters waved the national flag and chanted, "Down with the dictatorship!"

Officials loyal to Moise claimed last Sunday they had foiled an attempt to murder him and overthrow the government. Police arrested 23 people, accusing them of an "attempted coup."

Moise has been ruling by decree for a year because there is no parliament right now. Legislative elections due in 2018 were delayed.

He also maintains that his term lasts until February 2022 -- but the opposition argues it should have ended last weekend, in a standoff over disputed elections.

The dispute stems from Moise's original election. He was voted into office in a poll subsequently canceled after allegations of fraud, and then elected again a year later, in 2016.

The issue has led to weeks of violent protests on the streets of the poor Caribbean country.

The United States has backed Moise's position, with State Department spokesman Ned Price saying on February 5 that "a new elected president should succeed President Moise when his term ends on February 7, 2022."

Sunday's protests questioned the legitimacy of Moise's term length and foreign backing for his holding office.

"Despite all the kidnappings, the massacres in poor neighborhoods, the United States continues to support him," said protester Sheila Pelicier.

"The money from the PetroCaribe fund has been squandered, we don't have good hospitals... and the United States continues to support this corrupt government," Pelicier said, referring to a loan program whose funds the Haitian government has been accused of mismanaging since 2008.

The notorious Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier and his son Jean Claude "Baby Doc" ruled Haiti from 1957 until 1986 with their ruthless Tontons Macoutes militia.

## Catalan Separatists Increase Majority

BARCELONA (Reuters) - Separatist parties won enough seats on Sunday in Catalonia's regional parliament to strengthen their majority, although a strong showing for the local branch of Spain's ruling Socialists pointed to a dialogue, rather than breakup, with Madrid.

With over 99% of ballots counted, separatists won 50.9% of the vote, surpassing the 50% threshold for the first time. The most likely scenario was for the two main separatist parties to extend their coalition government.

The final outcome is unlikely, however, to lead to any repeat of the chaotic, short-lived declaration of independence from Spain that took place in 2017. Tensions have ebbed and most voters were more concerned about the COVID-19 pandemic than independence.

Low turnout of 53% amid the pandemic, down from 79% in the previous election in 2017, may have favoured separatist parties, whose supporters were more mobilised.

Election monitors swapped face masks for full-body protective suits during the final hour of voting, "the zombie hour", which was reserved for people with confirmed or suspected COVID-19. Other precautions during the day included temperatures taken on arrival, hand gel and separate entries and exits.

Leftist separatist party Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC) said it would lead the regional government and seek the support of other parties for a referendum on independence. "The country starts a new era with (separatists) surpassing 50% of the vote for the first time. ... We have an immense strength to achieve a referendum and the Catalan republic," said acting regional chief Pere Aragonès, who led his party's slate of candidates.

He urged Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez to enter into talks to agree on a referendum. But the fragmented vote, which saw the Socialists win the highest percentage of votes, 23%, and the same number of seats as ERC - 33 in the in the 135-seat assembly - means they will also try to form a government.

President Muhammadu Buhari appealed on Twitter to religious and traditional leaders, as well as elected leaders, "to join hands with the federal government to ensure that communities in their domain are not splintered along ethnic and other primordial lines".

"We will not allow any ethnic or religious groups to stoke up hatred and violence against other groups," he wrote.

Oyo state police did not immediately respond to calls requesting comment.

"The attacks, which led to the loss of lives and properties, must be investigated and perpetrators brought to justice," rights group Amnesty International said in a statement, referring to the violence at Shasha market.

Nigeria's security forces are already stretched by armed gangs of kidnappers in the northwest and an Islamist militant insurgency in the northeast.

Clashes between traders from the Yoruba and Hausa ethnic groups broke out on Saturday at Shasha market in Ibadan, the capital of Oyo, the state governor's spokesman said. Most Yoruba live in southwestern Nigeria, while the Hausa are concentrated in northern states.

Tensions have increased in southwestern states in recent weeks amid claims by public figures that nomadic cattle herders from the mainly northern Fulani ethnic group are carrying out violent crimes, which the pastoralists have denied. Many of the herders have moved south in search of dwindling grazing land.

Usman Yako, chair of the Hausa traders association at Shasha market, told Reuters by telephone at least 11 people from his ethnic group were killed in clashes at the market on Friday and Saturday that followed an argument between Yoruba and Hausa traders.

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## Kosovo's Vetevendosje Poised to Win Election

PRISTINA (Dispatches) - Anti-establishment party Vetevendosje is set to win Kosovo's parliamentary election with 46.8% of the votes, preliminary results based on a partial count showed.

The opposition Vetevendosje (Self-determination) party took home around 48 percent of the vote, according to a tally of more than 90 percent of ballots cast in the Sunday vote.

The triumph nearly doubled the party's last electoral showing in 2019, reflecting a hunger for new leadership in troubled Kosovo.

"This great victory is an opportunity to start the changes we want," the party's firebrand leader Albin Kurti, long a thorn in the establishment's side, said in a victory speech.

"The election was indeed a referendum on justice and employment and against corruption and state capture," the 45-year-old added, while warning of "many obstacles" ahead.

The snap poll came after a tumultuous year in which the coronavirus pandemic deepened social and economic crises in the former Serbian province, which declared independence 13 years ago after a separatist war led by ethnic Albanian rebels.

Already one of Europe's poorest economies, Kosovo is now struggling through a pandemic-triggered downturn, with vaccinations yet to start.

But for Vetevendosje's supporters, Sunday's results sparked hope of better days, with fans honking horns, setting off fireworks and gathering in the main square in the capital Pristina to cheer their victory.

The next two largest parties trailed far behind, with around 13 and 17 percent respectively for the ruling centrist Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) and the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) -- a party of former rebels who have long dominated politics in the country.

Both camps admitted defeat, with the LDK's outgoing Prime Minister Avdullah Hoti pledging to be a "constructive opposition" in parliament.

Once known for provocative stunts such as unleashing tear gas in parliament, Vetevendosje began as a street movement in the 2000s protesting against local elites and international influence in Kosovo, which was a UN-protectorate after the war.

It entered electoral politics in 2011 and has tamped down its more radical antics in recent years.

The party ran on an anti-corruption platform, accusing past leaders of squandering Kosovo's first years of independence through graft and mismanagement while ordinary people suffered.

For most of the past decade, Kosovo has been run by the former commanders who led the late 1990s rebellion against Serb forces.



## Former Argentine Leader Menem Dies at Age 90

BUENOS AIRES (Reuters) - Flamboyant Argentine ex-President Carlos Menem died on Sunday at age 90 after battling long-term health problems, the country's current President Alberto Fernandez announced in a tweet.

Menem led a tabloid personal life while he pushed Argentina to an economic boom, but his two-term 1989-1999 presidency crumbled under the weight of corruption scandals and he spent years plotting an unlikely comeback.

With his black mane of hair and bushy gray sideburns, Menem at his peak entertained the Rolling Stones at his residence and put Argentina on the international stage, sending troops to the Gulf War and Bosnia.

"Above all, he leaves us with memories of a good person, whom I will remember with great affection," former President Mauricio Macri tweeted.

Menem died at 11:20 a.m. (1420 GMT) after several weeks in hospital for a urinary infection, heart problems and other health issues.

His body will lie in state at the capitol building before being buried in an Islamic cemetery in provincial Buenos Aires. Menem won re-election after he privatized creaky state enterprises in a massive transformation of Argentine institutions in the early 1990s and the economy flourished.

But he left office under a cloud -- charged with corruption and conducting illegal arms deals in 1991 and 1995 with Croatia and Ecuador.

Ten years later, he was cleared of the arms smuggling charges, but Menem could never shake off the widely held suspicion that he had been involved in shady dealings even if he was never convicted.

The lawyer son of Syrian immigrants in La Rioja province, 750 miles (1,200 km) west of Buenos Aires, Menem became active in the Peronist party in the 1950s and 1960s and visited party founder Juan Peron in exile in Spain in 1964.

He served as La Rioja's governor from 1973-1976.

After a 1976 military coup Menem was arrested and imprisoned for five years, a time he dedicated to planning his bid for the presidency.

After his release he was re-elected governor two more times.

A charismatic speaker who favored stylish silk and linen suits, Menem saw himself as the successor of his political mentor, Peron, who died in 1974 after returning from exile.





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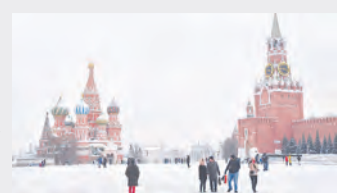
## Russian Economy May Recover to Pre-Pandemic Levels

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - The economic situation in Russia has “turned out to be better than expected,” according to the country’s central bank. The regulator has decided on Friday to keep its key rate at 4.25 percent per annum.

The bank’s governor Elvira Nabiullina said at the first board meeting this year that “the economy is bouncing back rather steadily” and that “given the current positive trends”

the bank has maintained its outlook on GDP growth for 2021 at three-to-four percent. The inflation forecast has been upgraded to 3.7-4.2 percent.

“Furthermore, the economy may reach its pre-pandemic levels already by late 2021, and not by mid-2022, as we’d assumed earlier,” Nabiullina said. “This will become possible primarily as a result of a less significant decline in 2020.”



## India Accounts for 11% of Global Death in Road Accidents

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - With only 1 per cent of the world’s vehicles, India accounts for 11 per cent of the global death in road accidents, the highest in the world, according to a report by the World Bank.

The country accounts for about 4.5 lakh road crashes per annum, in which 1.5 lakh people die.

“India tops the world in road crash deaths and injuries. It has 1 per cent of the world’s vehicles but accounts for 11 per cent of all road crash deaths, witnessing 53 road crashes every hour; killing 1 person every 4 minutes,” the report said.

In the last decade, 13 lakh people died and another 50 lakh got injured on Indian roads, it said.

“Considering the under reporting phenomenon and using the crash ratios for the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways crash numbers”, the report estimates the crash costs at Rs 5.96 lakh crore or 3.14 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP).

The 2019 World Bank report, titled ‘Guide for Road Safety Opportunities and Challenges: Low- and Middle-Income Countries Country Profiles’, puts the road crash and serious injury cost estimate at 7.5 per cent of India’s GDP or Rs 12.9 lakh crore for 2016. It is more than twice the figure cited by the government at 3 per cent of GDP or Rs 4.3 lakh crore, it added. A recent study commissioned by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) estimates the socio-economic costs of road crashes at Rs 1,47,114 crore in India, which is equivalent to 0.77 per cent of the country’s GDP.

“Considering the under reporting phenomenon and using the crash ratios for MoRTH crash numbers, the same study estimates the crash costs at Rs 5.96 lakh crores i.e. equivalent to 3.14 per cent,” it said. At the individual level, road crash injuries and deaths impose a severe financial burden and push entire (non-poor) households into poverty and the already poor into debt.

As per the Ministry, 76.2 per cent of people who are killed in road crashes are in their prime working-age, 18-45 years.

Globally, road traffic injuries (RTIs) are the eighth leading cause of death. According to the World Bank, the road crash fatality rate is three times higher in low-income countries compared to high-income countries, and statistics from India further reinforce this global trend.

There is a distinct correlation between socio-economic status and road use patterns in low- and middle-income countries like India and “poor people are more likely to be involved in a road traffic crash”, it said. In a country like India, where vulnerable road users are forced to share space with other less vulnerable road users, the income level of an individual has a direct bearing on the mode of transport used.

This in turn further determines the level of risk faced by a particular road user. The report said daily wage workers and workers employed as casual labourers in informal activities are more prone to be defined as vulnerable compared to workers engaged in regular activities.

“It is no coincidence, then, that it is often the poor, especially male road-users of working age, that constitute the category of vulnerable road users (VRUs) in India.

“VRUs bear a disproportionately large burden of road crashes and account for more than half of all road crash deaths and serious injuries in the country,” it said.

As the world navigates through the Covid-19 pandemic, the road crash pandemic continues to fester the socio-economic landscape in India, the report said.

## Brazil Economy Sputters With Stimulus Details Up in the Air

BRASILIA (Dispatches) – Brazil’s economic rebound lost steam at the end of last year the central bank reported on Friday, adding urgency to talks over a new round of stimulus aimed at reviving a beleaguered recovery.

The economy contracted by 4.05% in 2020 after expanding by 0.64% in December, according to the bank’s activity index, which is a proxy for gross domestic product. It was the third straight month of slowing growth, though the figure came in higher than the median forecast for a 0.4% increase from analysts in a Bloomberg survey.

The central bank data adds to evidence that growth in Latin America’s largest economy is sputtering. A stimulus-driven boom fizzled after the government ratcheted back stipends in September before eliminating them completely at year’s end. Lawmakers are now pushing for more aid, though depleted fiscal accounts limit how much money they have to spend.

Brazil’s economic team has little room to maneuver within the budget after billions of dollars in extra spending last year pushed the deficit to a record. Still, there’s broad agreement in congress on the need for a new round of financial aid, and talks will speed up in coming days, Senator Alessandro Vieira, a party leader, said in an interview this week.

A series of recent indicators show the extend of the slowdown. Brazil’s retail sales posted their worst plunge in history for the

month of December despite the holiday shopping season, the national statistics agency reported earlier this week.

On top of that, the nation’s services sector, which is already lagging other segments of the economy, also slipped on the month in volume terms. While unemployment dipped at the end of last year, it’s still near an all-time high of 14.6%.

Activity has been curbed in part by rising costs of staple goods such as food and fuels. The central bank has signaled it’s moving closing to raising its interest rate from a record low as annual inflation runs above target despite the uneven recovery.

Overall, the index showed economic activity grew 1.34% from the year prior. Brazil’s national statistics institute will publish the official fourth quarter and full year GDP data on March 3.



## Russia Slaps Sanctions on Nine Ukrainian Companies

MOSCOW (Reuters) - Russia has imposed economic sanctions against nine Ukrainian companies, expanding a list of firms that it targets with such penalties, according to a government decree.

Russia and Ukraine have been at loggerheads since 2014 when Moscow annexed Ukraine’s Crimean peninsula and backed pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine. Russia denies Kiev’s charges that its military was involved in the conflict.

Western countries have imposed a range of sanctions since then on Russia, which has retaliated with its own measures.

The companies targeted by “special economic measures” under the new Russian decree, which was published, include Ukrainian vessel maker Craneship, towage firm Donmar, cargo operator Transship and metal producer Maxima Metal.

The decree did not say why these nine companies had been targeted.

There was no immediate response from Ukraine to the move, which takes the number of its companies sanctioned by Russia to 84.

In a sign of further strains in Russia’s relations with the West, Moscow said on Friday it was ready to sever ties with the European Union if the bloc hit it with painful economic sanctions, a statement that Germany described as disconcerting and incomprehensible.

## Pakistan Urged to Promote Ease of Doing Business

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - German investors are keenly looking at Pakistan for joint ventures and investment, while German company - GIZ, was also working to promote technical training and skills development of its youth, said German Ambassador Bernhard Stephan Schlagheck.

During a visit to the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), he said that

the country’s private sector should engage such trainees to improve its productivity.

Responding to a proposal for potential opportunities of JVs and investment for German investors in CPEC, the German envoy said that investment by local investors in CPEC will give more confidence to foreign investors. He said that Pakistan’s economy of was improving, however, the country needed to focus on cohesive economic policies, improve tax regime to widen tax base and streamline lengthy litigation procedures to promote ease of doing business and attract more investment.

He said that SMEs were the backbone of the German economy and there was a need to develop close cooperation between the SMEs sector of both countries to strengthen bilateral business relations. He highlighted water and waste management, healthcare, industry, agro manufacturing and food security as potential areas of cooperation between the two countries. Schlagheck assured that he was working in tandem with the Pakistan ambassador in Germany to encourage more German investors towards Pakistan.

Also speaking at the occasion, ICCI President Sardar Yasir Ilyas Khan said that Germany was an important trading partner of Pakistan with bilateral trade of over \$3 billion, however, there was much more potential to increase trade volume given the size of both economies.

He said that the automobile was a growing sector in Pakistan and German auto companies should transfer technology and set up manufacturing plants in the country. “Pakistan has abundant human talent with cheap labor cost, which provides great advantage to German investors to explore JVs and investment.”

## Turkey Mulls Reopening Virus-Ravaged Restaurants, Cafes

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkey is looking into solutions to help the country’s struggling restaurants and cafes, whose operations have been disrupted by the lockdown measures enacted to stem the spread of the coronavirus.

Turkey’s Health Ministry is working on a formula that includes enabling eateries and cafes to open in provinces with a noteworthy decline in infections, according to a report in the Turkish language daily, Hürriyet.

Businesses have been disrupted for nearly four months and are limited to only serving takeouts. The working hours have been limited in line with measures that Ankara reimposed as of November to curb rising COVID-19 cases. Tradespeople have been asking lately for permission to open their doors to customers.

The country is currently imposing lockdowns on weekends and nighttime curfews on weekdays. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan last month announced that the country would provide financial support to the affected businesses.

The support can be claimed by businesses, such as restaurants and cafes, whose 2019 turnover was at TL 3 million (\$426,433) and below. Businesses, whose turnover has decreased by 50%, will be provided between TL 2,000 and TL 40,000 payment support for loss of turnover.

The government in January also announced it would be postponing income tax, withholding tax and sales tax payments of businesses that have seen activities temporarily suspended.

Cafes, cinemas, various sports facilities, tea gardens, internet cafes, amusement parks and Turkish baths that have been closed due to lockdowns will benefit from the move.

Health Minister Fahrettin Koca last week signaled the potential easing of the restrictions.

Koca said it could be possible to ease certain restrictions in provinces in accordance with the criteria that the advisory board will determine. But he underlined that the committee recommends not rushing to ease measures.

Sunday’s report suggested that lockdowns could be eased according to the province or district if they are to report lower numbers of fatalities and infections. These are said to be decided by provincial public health boards.

Restaurants and cafes are said to be the first in line to reopen. Businesses will be allowed to open their doors to customers if they comply with strict rules.

The government has taken a series of measures since spring last year to ease the burden and revive economic activity.

Erdoğan in December had announced a grant and rental support for businesses and promised to continue discounts for value-added taxes. The president said that the government would provide tradespeople with nearly TL 5 billion worth of support for three months.

Ankara had already extended financial support as part of the relief package announced in March 2020 to cushion the fallout from the outbreak. It had slashed taxes for hard-hit sectors and has been providing funding for workers.

## Saudi Arabia, Oman Most Exposed to Depletion of Sovereign Wealth Funds



RIYADH (Dispatches) - The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on oil demand and prices has significantly increased government funding requirements in all PGCC countries, which will be partially financed by sovereign wealth funds (SWFs), according to a Moody’s report issued on Wednesday, Al Sharq Business reported.

The stocks of SWFs in both Qatar and Abu Dhabi remain high enough to cover decades of fiscal deficits at current levels, according to the report. However, for Oman and Saudi Arabia, which possess more modest SWF assets, significant drawdowns will lead to substantial erosion of their SWF buffers over the medium term, reducing the increase in fiscal strength derived from these assets, and increasing external vulnerability risks in Oman.

In Kuwait, the huge fiscal deficits have largely depleted the liquid portion of the country’s smaller General Reserve Fund, increasing liquidity risks in the absence of a debt law, despite the large stock of assets held in the Future Generations Fund, which are currently ring fenced from the general budget, according to the report.

“While the recovery in equity market valuations last year reversed the paper losses facing PGCC SWFs, lower oil prices will keep transfers flowing out of most SWFs on a net basis,” Thaddeus Best, a Moody’s analyst who co-wrote the report, said, according to Asharq.

## Deputy FM: We Negotiated Based on Pessimism

TEHRAN (IP)- Iran's Deputy foreign minister for political affairs wrote on his Instagram page that the Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution was never optimistic about the JCPOA negotiations and the other parties' intentions.

Seyed Abbas Araqchi wrote on his Instagram page: "From the very first to the very last day, the Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei said he was not optimistic, and according to his remarks, we negotiated based on pessimism."

He added: "Of course, it became clear that he was right, and in all cases, this issue was clarified. According to the leader's remarks, we negotiated based on pessimism."



## Uzbekistan Expects Int'l Tourists to Return After Pandemic

TASHKENT (Xinhua) -- Located along the Silk Road and with plenty of cultural heritage and historical monuments, Uzbekistan has long depended on tourism as a pillar industry for economic growth.

The country this week introduced a ten-day visa free regime for tourists from China including its special administrative regions of Hong Kong and Macao, as well as Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait and Oman starting from March 1.

To be eligible, travelers from these countries and regions should provide a return air ticket or ticket to a third country.

Uzbekistan has also planned to open its largest gold-mining fields to foreign tourists, in a bid to develop geo-tourism in the resource-rich Central Asian nation.

Kholida Ablaeva, a tour guide with 20 years of experience from the ancient city of Samarkand, has been waiting for the reopening of borders to allow foreign tourists to return to her hometown as they did before COVID-19.

Ablaeva said that the country's tourism industry developed rapidly in 2019. At that time, her working day would begin at 5 a.m. and end after midnight. Money was good and the pace fast.

Over the past four years, the Uzbek government has taken a series of measures to boost tourism, with a goal of receiving more than 9 million foreign tourists by 2025, boosting the share of the tourism industry to 5 percent of gross domestic product, up from 2.3 percent in 2017, according to the Uzbek State Tourism Committee.

But the outbreak of COVID-19 has obstructed the plan, Uzbekistan announced lockdown restrictions beginning in March last year, forcing domestic travel agencies, hotels and transport companies to close.

Uncertainty remains. Those employed in tourism had little choice but to seek out other income alternatives and may not return to the travel industry, Ablaeva said.

In an effort to support the tourism sector during the pandemic, the government has allowed tourism within the country and granted tax privileges to tourist companies.

"This year, Uzbekistan plans to attract 1.7 million foreign tourists and 7.5 million local tourists. We look forward to foreign tourists returning to Uzbekistan after the epidemic," said Tursunali Kuziev, a professor at Uzbek University of Journalism and Mass Communications.

"In order to enable foreign tourists to better experience the culture here, the Uzbekistan government is increasing the training of tour guides, and improving



accommodation and tourist service facilities," the professor said.

Tourism largely depended on foreign visitors, Ablaeva said, adding that there were a lot of Chinese, Germans and Russians travelling to Samarkand before the pandemic.

To earn money, some guides have gone digital, conducting their excursions online, which Ablaeva believed is an interim solution.

"You have to see history with your own eyes. If there is a professional guide nearby, you can always look at familiar sights from a new angle, expand your knowledge and be inspired by architectural monuments and nature," she said.

Ablaeva and her colleagues continue to work despite their reduced earnings, yet she remains hopeful given her knowledge of five languages.

She has even worked free of charge as a guide to stay in tune and because she loves her work. "I really miss tourists and I believe that the tourism industry will be in full swing again in the near future."

## Half of Yemeni Children Under 5 Face Acute Malnutrition



GENEVA (Dispatches) - Nearly 2.3 million children under the age of five are projected to suffer from acute malnutrition this year in war-torn Yemen, UN agencies have warned, as the United States steps up efforts to end six years of devastating war.

Of these, 400,000 are projected to suffer from severe acute malnutrition and could die if they do not receive urgent treatment.

"These numbers are yet another cry for help from Yemen where each malnourished child also means a family struggling to survive," World Food Program chief David Beasley said in a joint statement on Friday.

The number of Yemeni children in danger of death from lack of food has increased to 400,000, an increase of 22 percent over 2020.

"More children will die with every day that passes without action, said Henrietta Fore, head of the United Nations children's agency UNICEF.

"Humanitarian organizations need urgent predictable resources and unhindered access to communities on the ground to be able to save lives."

The UN agencies warned that about 1.2 million pregnant or breastfeeding women are also expected to suffer from extreme malnutrition in 2021.

"Families in Yemen have been in the grip of conflict for too long, and more recent threats such as COVID-19 have only been adding to their relentless plight," said FAO Director-General QU Dongyu.

"Without security and stability across the country and improved access to farmers so that they are provided with the means to resume growing enough and nutritious food, Yemen's children and their families will continue to slip deeper into hunger and malnutrition."

Yemen is engulfed in a war that erupted in 2014 when Houthi rebels took control of the capital Sanaa and most of the country's north after overthrowing the internationally-backed government. Months later, a Saudi-led coalition launched a military offensive in support of President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi.

After nearly six years of war, millions of Yemenis are on the brink of famine with the economy destroyed, schools and hospitals barely functioning, and tens of thousands killed.

Last week, U.S. President Joe Biden's administration ended support for the Saudi-led war in Yemen and appointed Timothy Lenderking as the US envoy for Yemen.

## Biden Begins Dismantling Trump's 'Remain in Mexico' Asylum Policy

WASHINGTON (Dispatches)

- Asylum seekers forced to remain in Mexico while their cases are being resolved in the United States will begin to be admitted into the US as of next week, President Joe Biden's administration announced.

Biden instructed the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) earlier this month to take action to end the controversial "Remain in Mexico" program put in place by his predecessor Donald Trump.

It saw tens of thousands of non-Mexican asylum seekers -- mostly from Central America -- sent back over the border pending the outcome of their asylum applications, creating a humanitarian crisis in the area, exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

"Beginning on February 19, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) will begin phase one of a program to restore safe and orderly processing at the southwest border," the agency announced in a statement.

It said there are approximately 25,000 active cases still. Candidates will be tested first for the coronavirus, a senior DHS official who asked not to be identified told reporters.

At least 70,000 people were returned to Mexico under the agreement from January 2019, when the program began to be implemented, through December 2020, according to the NGO American Immigration Council.

U.S. authorities emphasized that they are working closely with the Mexican government and with international organizations and NGOs at the border.

DHS chief Alejandro Mayorkas, who is the first Latino and the first immigrant to head the department, stressed that Washington is committed to "rebuilding a safe, orderly and humane immigration system."

"This latest action is another step in our commitment to reform immigration policies that do not align with our nation's values," Mayorkas said in a statement.

The program was part of Trump's hardline plan to fight



illegal immigration, one of the hallmarks of his administration and which included efforts to build a border wall and the policy which separated children from thousands of migrant families.

After Biden took office on January 20, his administration announced that it would reverse the most controversial measures and created a task force to reunite families that

remain separated, a policy his administration has termed a "national shame."

On the day Biden was inaugurated, the DHS announced the suspension of new registrations in the "Remain in Mexico" program and asked all those enrolled to stay where they are while waiting to be informed about their cases.

Washington said Friday that those waiting "should not approach the border until instructed to do so."

In Mexico, President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, at his press briefing, welcomed Biden's move.

Lopez Obrador said he hoped to discuss with Biden a work visa program for Mexicans and Central Americans.

"Their presence as workers in the United States" is vital to the US economy, Lopez Obrador said.

Migrants in Mexico hoping to reach the U.S. welcomed the policy change in Washington.

"With this news our miracle is on the verge of becoming reality," said Nicol Bueso, a 19-year-old Honduran who has been living in a shelter in Ciudad Juarez on the US border for a year and a half.

"I am very happy because in all this time we have been here waiting we have had many unpleasant experiences," she said.

Jose Madrid, a 40-year-old Honduran, thanked the Biden administration.

"Life is very hard in Central America and we are grateful to the president for making that decision and helping Central America," said Madrid, who has been in Ciudad Juarez for nearly two years.

## Afghan-Iran...

FROM PAGE 1

Wahid Qatali, the Herat provincial governor, said more than 2,000 vehicles at the site of the blaze were saved, including 1,500 rushed across the border into Iran to keep them away from the fire.

At the time of the blaze, the crossing point — which has a capacity of up to 700 oil trucks — was overcrowded with more than 2,500 trucks, said Qatali.

Satellite photos taken on Sunday showed the fire still billowing black smoke on the Afghan side of the border. Typically, dozens upon dozens of fuel tankers park there while securing permissions to move between the two countries.

On Monday, only small fires were smoldering in just a few places and were expected to be finally extinguished by the end of the day, said Qatali, adding that an investigation would look into what caused the blaze and also "estimate losses for the government and the private sector."

Seven of the injured were taken to hospitals in Iran for further treatment, Qatali added.

## Envoy Informs IAEA...

FROM PAGE 1

Gharibabadi said although member countries are involved in leaking of confidential information, the IAEA is responsible for safeguarding such information and must come up with necessary policies and

Iran's permanent representative to Vienna-based international organizations calls on the IAEA to ensure confidentiality of safeguards information after a confidential report by the UN nuclear watchdog on the Natanz facility was leaked to the media.

He added that Iran's letter to the IAEA has touched on six issues, which make way for the leak of confidential information including:

- Inclusion of detailed information in the Director General's reports on matters related to Iran's nuclear program;
- Releasing and getting access s to the Director General's reports by media or other private entities, even before their official release;
- Making public the Director General's reports upon decisions by the Board of Governors; and
- Lack of necessary oversight covering the current and former staff of the Agency.

Gharibabadi said Iran's letter has also proposed 13 mechanisms to ensure confidentiality of information and eliminate concerns related to this issue.

## Iran, Russia...

FROM PAGE 1

The exercise's goal is to strengthen the security of the region and to expand bilateral cooperation, the admiral stressed, adding that the naval drill also aims to contribute to the security of international maritime trade and the fight against piracy.

In remarks on Sunday, Deputy Commander of the Iranian Army for Coordination Affairs Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari said the joint exercise "carries a clear message".

He said Iran has faced different threats by extra-regional countries since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, all of which have failed owing to the Iranian military's deterrent power.

Back in 2019, Iran, Russia and China staged a four-day joint maritime exercise in the Indian Ocean and the Sea of Oman, which also consisted of various tactical exercises such as target practicing and rescuing ships from assault and incidents such as fires.

## Iran to Soon...

FROM PAGE 1

"Unfortunately, the United States recorded more than 5,000 deaths, and in many big countries, more than a thousand deaths were reported," Namaki said, noting that international organizations calculated that the country's death toll would reach 1,200 in December. Still, the Islamic Republic is experiencing double-digit death, which is also a high number.

Meanwhile Director of Biotechnology Department of Razi Institute Central Laboratory said that Iran is trying to produce the safest and the most immune coronavirus vaccine.

Speaking at the fourth Mustafa Prize Science Promotion Meeting, which was held in Tehran on Monday, the Director of Biotechnology Department of Razi Institute Central Laboratory and Conductor of recombinant coronavirus vaccine, Reza Banihashemi, stated that the Iranian made vaccine will activate the immune system, and it is not harmful.

It is possible to inject the vaccine to all age groups, even pregnant women and children, he noted.

Coronavirus vaccine, which Razi institute produces, includes both injection and inhalation with the minimum injection dose, a new recombinant vaccine in the world, Banihashemi stated.

The conductor of coronavirus vaccine based on recombinant protein noted that in pre-clinical trials, Razi's vaccine has been tested for 9 to 10 months and has shown immunity in this period.

Razi's coronavirus vaccine enters its clinical trial from next week, Banihashemi concluded.

## Hunt for...

FROM PAGE 1

Alavi said the Israeli regime planned to commit various other acts of mischief in the country since Fakhrizadeh's assassination, but they were all detected and neutralized by Iranian intelligence forces.

He added that a number of other individuals have been also identified with regard to the assassination.

A Wednesday report by the Jewish Chronicle claimed that Fakhrizadeh was killed by a one-ton gun smuggled into Iran in pieces by the Israeli spy agency Mossad.

The British weekly, citing unnamed intelligence sources, said that "the bespoke weapon, operated remotely by agents on the ground as they observed the target, was so heavy because it included a bomb that destroyed the evidence after the killing."

The attack was carried out "by Israel alone, without American involvement" but US officials were notified beforehand, it added.

## Murray Falls in Final of Italian Challenger Event

ROME (Dispatches) - Former world number one Andy Murray, forced to miss the Australian Open by a positive Covid-19 test, lost the final of the Biella Challenger event in Italy on Sunday.

The Scot, now ranked 125th, lost 6-2, 6-4 to 33-year-old Ukrainian Illya Marchenko, who is ranked 212th, in the hard-court event.

The indoor event in the foothills of the Italian Alps carried a modest overall purse of just under 45,000 euros (\$54,000) compared to the \$2.1 million on offer to the winner at Melbourne Park, 16,000km (9,942 miles) away, where Murray had planned to play.

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## Spieth Holds on to Lead at Pebble Beach

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Despite finishing just 1-under on the day, Jordan Spieth managed to hold on to his lead and even separate himself slightly from the pack on Saturday at the AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am in Pebble Beach, Calif.

As the tournament moved exclusively to Pebble Beach Golf Links for the weekend, Spieth capitalized on his second hole-out eagle of the tournament – a 160-yard shot from the fairway on the par-5 No. 16 – to shoot 71 and move to 13 under, 203 total, and take a two-shot lead over a five-pack of players at 11 under that includes Nate Lashley (68), Tom Hoge (68), Patrick Cantlay (70), Daniel Berger (72) and Scotland’s Russell Knox (69).

# Djokovic Plays Through Pain to Win 300th Slam Match

MELBOURNE (Dispatches)- Novak Djokovic clocked his 300th Grand Slam win Sunday, playing through pain from an abdominal injury that nearly forced him to pull out of the Australian Open to oust Milos Raonic and make the quarter-finals.

The world number one took to the court despite suggesting his title defence might be over on Friday after sustaining the injury in a thrilling five-setter against Taylor Fritz.

He battled on against giant Canadian Raonic on a fan-less Rod Laver Arena, grinding through 7-6 (7/4), 4-6, 6-1, 6-4 to set up a clash with sixth seed Alexander Zverev.

But Djokovic said if it wasn’t a Grand Slam, he would have pulled out.

“No preparations, basically, for this match. I used every single hour I had since the last match against Taylor to recover and put myself in a position where I have a possibility to compete,” he said.

“If it was any other tournament than a Grand Slam I would retire and withdraw,” he added.

“I didn’t know before I finished my warm up today, three hours before, whether I would play or not.”

Djokovic’s win was his 300th at a Slam, only the second player in history to reach the mark after Roger Federer, on 362.

It kept him on track for an 18th Grand Slam title in his bid to close in on the 20 held by the Swiss great and Rafael Nadal.

He has already won a record eight times in Melbourne, the scene of his maiden Slam triumph in 2008, where he remains unbeaten since his shock loss to South Korea’s Hyeon Chung in the 2018 round of 16.

Despite his injury struggles, Djokovic was always the favourite, having won all 11 of his previous encounters with the big-serving Canadian, dropping just three sets in the process.

But 14th seed Raonic is also extremely experienced at this level, having reached five quarter-finals or better at Melbourne Park over the past six year.

Meanwhile Alexander Zverev totted up his 50th Grand Slam win when he beat Serbia’s Dusan Lajovic in straight sets to reach the Australian Open quarter-finals.



The German sixth seed was tested in the first two sets but found it easier in the third, sealing his 6-4, 7-6 (7/5), 6-3 victory with an ace.

“I’m happy with the three-sets win, especially in the beginning it could have gone both ways,” Zverev said.

“He was playing amazing tennis, I thought.”

Meanwhile a jubilant Simona Halep exacted revenge on French Open champion Iga Swiatek on Sunday, as she eyes replicating the “best day of my life” in a blockbuster quarter-final with Serena Williams at the Australian Open.

The world number two was thrashed by the 19-year-old at Roland Garros last year, winning just three games, but turned the tide 3-6, 6-1, 6-4 in one hour and 50 minutes at a crowd-less Rod Laver Arena.

Halep was aggressive early, but 15th seed Swiatek showed remarkable defensive skills, thwarting the attacks with sliding retrievals to claim her 21st consecutive set in a Grand Slam.

But Romania’s Halep lifted her intensity and relentlessly hit the lines to force a ragged Swiatek into errors and clinch her 100th Grand Slam victory.

Halep said she had put pressure on herself to respond to her French Open flameout, where as the top seed she was pummelled by Swiatek 6-1, 6-2 in 69 minutes in the fourth round.

## Chepkoech breaks 5km

## World Record in Monaco

MONACO (Reuters) - Kenya’s Beatrice Chepkoech broke the 5 kilometres world record on Sunday, finishing in a time of 14 minutes 43 seconds round the streets of Monaco to clip one second off the old mark.

The 29-year-old Chepkoech, who also holds the world record in the 3,000 metres steeplechase, battled windy conditions with assistance from her pacemaker Luuk Maas.

“I’m so happy. Even though there was a lot of wind, I managed to run right on pace,” Chepkoech said.

“In the end, my pacemaker told me ‘we can do it, let’s push it’. I’m really happy with this world record.”

Uganda’s Joshua Cheptegei, the 10,000 metres world champion, won the men’s race in a time of 13 minutes and 14 seconds.

## Durant Returns to Bay

## Area as Nets Rout Warriors

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Kevin Durant scored 20 points in his return to the San Francisco Bay Area and Brooklyn’s “Big Three” were firing on all cylinders as the Nets opened a Western Conference swing with a 134-117 victory over the host Golden State Warriors.

Kyrie Irving paced the Nets with 23 points, and James Harden complemented a game-high 16 assists with 19 points, helping Brooklyn complete a dominant season-series sweep from the Warriors.

Stephen Curry led all scorers with 27 points but shot just 2-for-9 from 3-point range as the Warriors misfired on 25 of their 34 3-point attempts. Andrew Wiggins and Kelly Oubre Jr. backed Curry with 17 points apiece as the Warriors saw a two-game winning streak end.

In the opener of a five-game trip, the Nets led by 15 at halftime, then busted the game open with a 42-point third quarter during which Irving had nine points and Durant eight while Harden assisted on six buckets and bombed in a pair of 3-pointers.

Meanwhile Aaron Holiday came off the bench to score a season-high 18 points and help visiting Indiana Pacers erase a nine-point, fourth-quarter deficit and defeat 1225-113 Atlanta Hawks .

# Pakistan End South Africa’s Unbeaten Asia Record



LAHORE (AFP) - Tail-ender Hasan Ali hit two sixes in the penultimate over to help Pakistan clinch the Twenty20 international series against South Africa with a four-wicket win in the third and final match in Lahore on Sunday.

Hasan finished with a seven-ball 20 not out as Pakistan overhauled a 165-run target in 18.4 overs to win the series 2-1, South Africa’s first T20I series defeat in Asia.

South Africa had previously won five and drawn one T20I series in Asia.

South Africa’s late blip meant David Miller’s robust 85 not out and spinner Tabraiz Shamsi’s four wickets, which seemed to have put the tourists on the road to victory, were in vain.

Miller smashed seven sixes and five fours off just 45 balls to lift South Africa from a tottering 48-6. He helped add 116 for the last four wickets, taking South Africa to 164-8.

Shamsi then picked up 4-25 in four incisive overs and Pakistan needed 53 off the last six overs and 28 off the last three.

With 16 needed off the final two overs, Andile Phehlukwayo bowled a waist-high no-ball which Hasan hit for six to ease the pressure. He then hit a four and a six to seal victory.

## Real Madrid Finding Rhythm After Strolling Past Valencia

MADRID (Dispatches) - Real Madrid appear to be gaining momentum ahead of the Champions League knockout stage, with a 2-0 win over Valencia on Sunday putting them back within sight of La Liga leaders Atletico Madrid.

Valencia were in the last 16 of Europe’s premier tournament last season too but their plummet from the elite was exposed by Zinedine Zidane’s team, who strolled to victory at the Alfredo di Stefano Stadium.

Karim Benzema and Toni Kroos had Madrid two up at half-time while left-back Ferland Mendy stabbed in a third that was ruled out for offside. Such was Madrid’s comfort, Zidane was able to withdraw key players in the second half.

There was certainly never any prospect of a comeback from Valencia, who were flat and almost accepting of a defeat that leaves them only three points above La Liga’s relegation zone.

In all likelihood, there will be three worse teams than Valencia come the end of the season but the dismantling of the squad under owner Peter Lim has made survival far from a guarantee.

Madrid’s own title ambitions looked to be over when they were beaten by Levante at the end of the last month but three wins on the bounce since then have raised some hope of a comeback.

Atletico remain five points clear of their city rivals, having played two games fewer, and it will take a significant dip from Diego Simeone’s side for the title race to open up.

At the very least, Real Madrid seem to be finding some rhythm and if La Liga proves a step too far, perhaps they will focus more on the Champions League, where they have so often delivered when it matters.

Atalanta will offer a much sterner test in the last 16 and Zidane will have been disappointed to see Dani Carvajal trudge off injured after just 25 minutes in his first game back following a groin strain.



## Man Utd’s Title Bid Damaged by West Brom Draw

LONDON (Dispatches) - Ole Gunnar Solskjaer insists Manchester United can still catch Premier League leaders Manchester City despite a damaging 1-1 draw at struggling West Brom on Sunday.

Solskjaer’s side were rocked by Mbaye Diagne’s second-minute opener for Albion at the Hawthorns.

Portugal midfielder Bruno Fernandes levelled just before half-time with his 19th goal of the season in all competitions.

United were unable to break down second-bottom Albion again and had to settle for a third damaging draw in their last four league matches.

They moved above Leicester into second place, but sit seven points behind City, who have a game in hand.

“We should play better but we gave ourselves a tough start. You have 90 minutes to make amends but we didn’t build that momentum until late in the first half,” Solskjaer said.

“They put a cross in and the boy finished well. We did get down the sides sometimes but didn’t have anybody to tap them in. One of these days we weren’t where we should have been.”

United have lost just once in 18 league games and are unbeaten in 19 away league matches, but they left the icy West Midlands well aware City are now firmly in pole position to win the title.

“It’s a compliment for the boys that we got into (the) position we are now. We won’t let them run away with it,” Solskjaer said.

“We’re playing them soon. We’re not giving it away early, no, we’re not!”

After the blistering form that carried them into the title race across December and January, United are stumbling while City have won their last 11 league games.

Aware of the physical threat posed by Sam Allardyce’s teams, Solskjaer had warned his players to put their “bodies on the line” to deal with Albion’s aerial assault.

