

**Iranian Foreign Ministry
Spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh
Categorically Dismissed Reports
Attributing a Rocket Attack
On a U.S. Airbase in Erbil in the
Iraqi Kurdistan to Iran**

IRAN NEWS

**Health Ministry Spokeswoman
Sima Sadat Lari Said on Tuesday
Some 89 More Iranians Died From the
COVID-19 Over the Past 24 Hours
Bringing the Total Deaths to 59,117**

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Japan Urged to Release Iran Assets, Persuade U.S. To Lift Bans

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's foreign minister has called on Japan to unfreeze Iran's assets blocked in Japanese banks due to the U.S. sanctions, and also persuade newly inaugurated US President Joe Biden to lift the bans imposed on Iran.

Speaking in an interview with Kyodo News, Mohammad Javad Zarif called Japan an old friend of Iran and noted its good relations with the United States.

"We expect Japan to act as a friend, particularly when it comes to international law," Zarif said, referring to the illegal nature of the U.S. sanctions.

"Since the United States is violating international law, the best role that Japan can play is to show Americans that Japan will not implement their illegal decisions," he said.

Zarif specifically called on Japan to unfreeze Iranian assets frozen in Japanese banks due to US sanctions, as a gesture to Iran by the new government of Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, who came to power last September.

According to Zarif, frozen assets in Japan and South Korea total close to \$10 billion. Japan's share -- mainly revenue from crude oil exports to Japan -- is estimated to be just under \$3 billion.

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Enemies Failed To Make Shortage of Essential Goods

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - President Hassan Rouhani says the sinister goals of the enemy to create famine in the supply of essential goods and chaos in the country completely failed.

In the 244th meeting of the Government Economic Coordination Headquarters chaired by Hassan Rouhani, a report was presented on the situation of supply and distribution of basic and essential goods in the last months of the current Iranian and the next plan.

In this report, the activities and actions of the Central Bank, the Ministries of Agriculture Jihad and Industry, Mines and Trade in creating intelligent ordering systems, credit allocation, clearance and distribution cycle of basic goods, and necessary arrangements to supply basic goods in the last months of the Iranian and next year (starting on March 21) were outlined.

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Iran, Russia Launch Joint Naval Drill in Indian Ocean



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The joint Russia-Iran naval exercise started on Monday in the northern area of the Indian Ocean, the Russian Embassy in Tehran told Sputnik.

Earlier in the day, Iran's regular army announced that the joint exercise, named Maritime Safety Belt, would begin this Tuesday.

"They [the drill] have already begun today," embassy spokesman Maxim Suslov said, commenting on the matter.

The drill's goal is to boost the security in the northern segment of the Indian Ocean and expand cooperation between the two countries.

Meanwhile a Russian flotilla, comprising the Stoiky corvette and KoLa refueling ship, entered Iran's territorial waters for the 2021 combined naval exercise.

The flotilla was welcomed on Tuesday by two vessels belonging to the navies of the Iranian Army and the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC).

After the welcoming ceremony, Russian commanders were transferred to Shahid Beheshti Port in Chabahar, southeast Iran, where they attended a briefing and coordination meeting.

Admiral Gholamreza Tahani, the spokesman for the naval drill, said during a joint press conference with the commander of the Russian flotilla that the maneuver will be held in an area of 17,000 square kilometers north of the Indian Ocean.

One of the goals of the exercise is to increase the skills of the personnel in naval aid and rescue operations, he added.

During the drill, Tahani further said, the navies of the Iranian Army and the IRGC will interact with each other on the establishment of maritime trade security in international seas and practice command and control operations.

"The most important message of this exercise is peace and friendship for neighboring countries and those in the region," he said. "Iran, in the 43rd year after the [1979 Islamic] Revolution's glorious victory, has reached a level of maturity in maritime science and technology that it is hosting world powers a second time for a combined drill."

Referring to the strategic importance of the North Indian Ocean region, he added, "The North Indian Ocean is one of the most important and strategic waterways in the world and plays an important role in world trade and shipping."

He cited the security of sea lanes in the northern Indian Ocean as one of the most important goals of the combined exercise, saying, "The security of shipping lines in this region, especially in the area between the Strait of Hormuz, the Malacca Strait and the Bab al-Mandab Strait, guarantees the preservation of economic interests on the world stage, which requires the cooperation and convergence of different navies."

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Trhran Informs IAEA of Decision to Halt Voluntary Implementation of Nuclear Protocols

TEHRAN (IFP) -Iran has informed the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) of its decision to stop actions it has been implementing voluntarily, so far, as of February 23, 2021.

Iran's Ambassador to International Organizations in Vienna Kazem Gharibabadi said Iran has submitted to the IAEA's director general a letter announcing the country will stop implementing voluntary actions on February 23, 2021.

"The move is in line with the enforcement of legislation passed by the Iranian parliament to lift sanctions and safeguard the interests of the Iranian nation, and is also in keeping with the rights of the Islamic Republic of Iran stipulated in paragraphs 26 and 36 of the Iran nuclear deal," said Gharibabadi.

He said Iran is stopping the implementation of certain voluntary actions because the other signatories to the nuclear agreement have failed to live up to their commitments with regards to the lifting of illegal sanctions on Iran.

"In this letter, we asked the IAEA to immediately take the necessary measures to meet Iran's demand that it stop the implementation of different voluntary actions, including the implementation of the Additional Protocol," the ambassador noted. Meanwhile on Monday, German Foreign Minister Heiko Mass. exchanged views with his French counterpart, Jean-Yves Le Drian, on ways to preserve the 2015 nuclear deal between Tehran and major world states as the deadline set by Iran for the removal of unilateral US sanctions draws near.

In a post on its Twitter account on Monday, the German Foreign Office said the two top diplomats held a "trustful discussion" over phone about a range of issues, among them the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

On Sunday, British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said that he had discussed "the nuclear issue around Iran" with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken. The developments come ahead of February 21, when Iran, under a legislation passed last December by the Parliament (Majlis), is set to end the voluntary implementation of the Additional Protocol to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty's Safeguards Agreements unless the US lifts illegal sanctions against the Islamic Republic.

The Additional Protocol allows snap visits by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) of Iran's nuclear facilities.

ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian



Turkey, an Opportunist Neighbor

The town of Sinjar in northern Iraq has become subject to pretexts both by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) members and Turkish Army, and there is no possibility for the return of the displaced people of this town to their homes. This issue goes back to the era of occupation of Sinjar in the Nineveh Governorate by the terrorist group of Daesh in August 2014 when it led to the massacre of Yazidi minority in this area and their displacement.

At that time hundreds of forces of the Syrian branch of PKK, namely People's Protection Units (YPG), as well as some of key members of this group under the pretext of defending Yazidi Kurd people entered this town. These forces are known as the brigade of Sinjar Resistance Units (YBS). After destroying the Daesh Group and restoration of relative peace in this area, the Iraqi Government, Iraqi Kurdistan and Turkey's officials called for the exit of these forces from Sinjar and handing over the town to the Iraqi security forces but despite three years have passed since that decision and some verbal and written agreements have been reached between the two parties, these forces commanded by the central headquarters of PKK have refrained from handing over the town.

Continuation of this condition and presence of PKK members in this area and continuation of warlike situation of the area as well as entrenching and digging massive tunnels and creating mass insecurity has caused Yazidi displaced people not to dare to return to their homes, and this issue is not tolerable at all for Iraqi government and society. Meanwhile Iraq popular forces believe that the issue of Sinjar should be resolved by Iraq Army and Iraq's Popular Mobilization, and presence of Turkish troops in this area can have heavier consequences than the presence of just few hundreds of militiamen in the north of Nineveh.

As per reports, since last week a new round of operation by the Turkish Army has been launched with the support of Turkish jet fighters and planes and their heavy bombardment on the secret hide-outs of PKK groups in northern Iraq as operation has been codenamed "Claw-Eagle2" or under the title of "Claw-Tiger2." Indeed, this operation is the follow-up to a massive operation with the same codename which was conducted against the PKK in this summer in Iraq's Duhok Governorate realm.

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Iran Wants to Have Safe Cyberspace Not Restricting It

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Chairman of the Foundation for Preservation of Sacred Defense Values said that cyberspace must be safe and clean, and Islamic Iran seeks to protect cyberspace, not restrict it.

IRGC Brigadier General Bahman Kargar said that to introduce the Sacred Defense to the youth in cyberspace, techniques are required along with providing concise and useful content.

Speaking at the 2nd edition of national honoring Sacred Defense activists at cyberspace ceremony, the selected nominees of the first memorial Kargar said that Iran is equipped with advanced sciences in all areas. The enemies are seeking to limit Iran's weapons, but Sacred Defense has created opportunities not only in the military but also in the fields of culture, art, and science.

Cyberspace is a base for many businesses, even surgeries which perform online, so equipping ourselves in terms of content is necessary, but in terms of security issues, not only Iran but the world must operate with limitation, Chairman of the Foundation for Preservation of Sacred Defense Values underlined.

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Talks on Regional Security Only With Regional States

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Abbas Araqchi said on Tuesday that Iran will negotiate on the security of the Persian Gulf only with regional states.

Speaking in a meeting with Special Representative of the Qatari Foreign Minister for Regional Affairs Ali Bin Fahad Al-Hajri, Araqchi said that Iran and Qatar enjoy excellent relations and that regular consultations are useful to advance bilateral and regional issues.

He noted that regional security and stability will be only materialized by collective resolve of the regional states in the framework of regular consultations on regional issues without intervention of foreign countries.

Iran Welcomes Talks with Persian Gulf Countries

TEHRAN (IFP) - President Hassan Rouhani says Tehran welcomes talks with all Persian Gulf littoral states, as peace and stability in the region will not be achieved except through cooperation and dialogue between the countries of the region.

President Rouhani said on Monday that the progress of any regional country will be achieved through establishment of peace and stability in the region.

Speaking in a meeting with Qatar's Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani in Tehran, Rouhani said Iran welcomes dialogue and cooperation with the countries of the Persian Gulf.

"We remain committed to the Hormuz Peace Endeavour (HOPE) initiative and believe that peace and stability in the region will not be achieved except through cooperation and dialogue between the countries of the region, and it is the countries of the region that must decide for their own."

Rouhani referred to the recent developments in the region and underlined the need to develop joint cooperation between Tehran and Doha.

"Relations between the two countries have been very good and developing in recent years, and with the new international conditions, opportunities should be tapped to develop and deepen relations and cooperation," he added.

The Iranian president also referred to the agreements reached during the Qatari emir's visit to Iran last year and the agreements of the Joint Economic Commission of the two countries, and emphasized the need to accelerate the implementation and operation of these agreements.

"Iran and Qatar can develop relations in various fields, including economic, commercial, cultural, scientific and tourism, and cooperation between the private sectors of the two countries can play an important role in this direction," he added.

Referring to the recent developments in the United States and the end of Trumpism in the country and the announcement of different policies by the new U.S. administration, including the desire to return to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Rouhani said, "Today, it has been proven to the world that the policy of maximum pressure has failed and the



new US administration has no choice but to make up for the mistakes of the previous administration and fulfil its legal obligations."

Emphasizing the need for the United States to lift its anti-Iran sanctions and return to UN Security Council Resolution 2231, the President said, "Whenever the United States lifts illegal sanctions and returns to law, Iran will immediately fulfil all its obligations under the deal."

For his part, the Qatari Foreign Minister described Iran as a friendly country in the region and stressed the development and deepening of bilateral relations in all fields, especially commercial and economic cooperation.

He referred to the Islamic Republic of Iran as a powerful and influential country in the region and stressed the need for cooperation and consensus in the region and the Persian Gulf.

"We have always believed in maintaining peace and stability and dialogue between the countries of the region, and we also call for regional dialogue to resolve the issues between regional countries following the HOPE initiative," he added.

Appreciating Iran's support and cooperation in the period of sanctions against Qatar, the Qatari Foreign Minister said, "We hope that with the return of the United States to the JCPOA, the problems and sanctions within the framework of this agreement will be resolved as soon as possible, and Qatar will not hesitate over any kind of assistance in this regard."

Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani also delivered a written message from the Emir of Qatar to President Rouhani.

Tehran Rejects Claims of Plot to Attack UAE Embassy in Ethiopia

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iranian Embassy in Ethiopia has rejected allegations by the New York Times that Iran planned to attack the UAE Embassy in Addis Ababa.

Rejecting the allegations by the New York Times that Iran planned to attack the UAE Embassy in Addis Ababa, Iranian Embassy said, "These baseless accusations are made and processed by the Zionist media."

"Neither Ethiopia nor the United Arab Emirates have spoken about Iran's involvement in these issues," it added. The New York Times accused Iran of plotting to attack the UAE embassy in Ethiopia.

According to the report, Ethiopia announced on February 4 that 15 people had been arrested on charges of plotting to attack the UAE embassy in Addis Ababa, and that the country's intelligence services said the men were operating under foreign direction. It did not elaborate on which foreign country was involved in the plot, but the New York Times claimed in the report that Iran was behind the incident.

Tehran, Tokyo Emphasize Strengthening Defense Cooperation

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iranian and Japanese ministers of defense stressed enhancing and strengthening bilateral cooperation in the field of defense.

Speaking in a videoconference meeting on Tuesday, Japanese Minister of Defense Kishi Nobuo and his Iranian counterpart Brigadier General Amir Hatami emphasized boosting defense cooperation between Tehran and Tokyo as well as maintaining contacts between military officials of the two countries.

Iranian Defense Minister Brigadier General congratulated Kishi Nobuo for his appointment as Japanese Defense Minister.

During the virtual talk, the Japanese Minister of Defense expounded on the expansion of activities in collecting relevant information to ensure safe navigation of Japanese vessels in the West Asia

region and called on the Islamic Republic of Iran to cooperate to ensure the safety of navigation of vessels including Japanese vessels.

In addition, Iranian and Japanese defense ministers exchanged their views on the current situation in the Middle East and agreed to continue communications between defense officials of the two countries.

The Japanese Ministry of Defense also in a statement announced that peace and stability in the Middle East region are extremely important for the peace and well-being in the whole world including Japan.

Ensuring the safe transit of Japanese ships in West Asia, as the world's main source of energy, is very important, the statement is read.

Japan is heavily dependent on about 90 percent of its oil imports to West Asia.

World Recognizes Iran's Logic, Rights

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The World recognizes Iran's logic and rights, Iranian Government spokesman Ali Rabie said on Tuesday citing the government's logical and correct foreign policy in line with the country's independence.

In his weekly press briefing on Tuesday, Rabie said that the Iranian government has stood against insurgency and the growing foreign influence to materialize the real meaning of independence and to avoid considering independence as isolation.

Iran has followed up this goal not by isolation policies but through policies dealing with constructive interaction in the international arena, he said.

Today, Iran is not affected by any country and the world knows Iran as a logical state, he added.

Referring to U.S. administration failures in the UNSC, ICJ and IAEA, Rabie said despite sanctions and cruel economic war, Iran resisted against pressures and even faced economic growth.

Tehran, Jakarta Ink Contract in Medical Equipment Worth 5m Euros

TEHRAN (IP) - Iran and Indonesia have signed a medical equipment contract worth of five million Euros.

On the sidelines of the 3rd Technology Investment Meeting (TIM 2021), a contract for the sale of 700 hemodialysis machines was signed between Aria Teb Firouz (ATF), the only manufacturer of hemodialysis machine in Iran and the Middle East, and Barakah Medica Unsantira from Indonesia in the presence of the Indonesian Ambassador to Iran Ronny Prasetyo Yuliantoro and representatives of the contracting companies.

"We have good capacities in Iran in the fields of medicine, nanotechnology, biotechnology, and engineering. The D8 countries have also made good progress in

these areas, which is a good basis for developing cooperation between these countries," President of Pardis Technology Park Mahdi Saffarnia said at the 3rd Technology Investment Meeting (TIM 2021).

The 3rd Technology Investment Meeting (TIM 2021) started on Tuesday, which aims at introducing the investment potentials in Islamic developing countries, especially Iran. Forty foreign investment companies from 21 countries are present at the TIM 2021 of the D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation.

D8 includes major Muslim developing countries, including Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Turkey.

Iran's Economy Thriving Despite Sanctions

TEHRAN (IFP) - Iran's first vice president says the country's economy is up and running, and the production and procurement of commodities are well underway thanks to efforts by importers and exporters.

Eshaq Jahangiri said the most important program for the nation's economy in the post-sanctions era should be to enhance exports.

"Chairpersons of joint commissions of Iran and neighboring countries should remove problems with the infrastructure of foreign trade as soon as possible," the vice president said.

Jahangiri also noted that small vessels should be produced to replace old launches as soon as possible.

He also stressed the need to boost the country's transit potential and enhance transportation corridors.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Jahangiri touched upon the recent huge fire which broke out at a customs post on Iran-Afghanistan border.

"Afghanistan and Iraq are among the largest markets for Iran's exports, and Iran sends most of its exports to these countries," he said.

Jahangiri added all resources should be mobilized to rebuild and retrofit the Islam Qala border crossing in order to maintain the trend of foreign trade between Iran and Afghanistan.

Majlis Approves Next Fiscal's Budget Bill Outlines

TEHRAN (MNA) – The Iranian lawmakers have approved the general outlines of the amended version of the budget bill proposed for the upcoming fiscal year (starts March 19).

During the Parliament's open session on Tuesday, the legislators cast 211 votes for and 28 votes against the bill, while 6 abstained from voting.

The amendment to the new fiscal year was handed to the Parliament on Monday.

Earlier in February, the Parliament rejected the general outlines of the budget bill and the legislators said the government needed to reform the bill and submit it to Parliament again.

In the fiscal 2021-22 budget, the operating budget (including revenues derived mainly from taxation and exports at the disposal of the government) was projected to stand at 8,413 trillion rials (\$32.35 billion at the market exchange rate of 260,000 rials per dollar).

Moreover, revenues earmarked for ministries and governmental institutions worth 884 trillion rials (around \$3.8 billion) take the total sum of the general budget to 9,298 trillion rials (around \$36 billion).

The budget of state companies, banks and for-profit organizations was put at 15,619 trillion rials (around \$66 billion).

All in all, the ceiling set for the government's total budget was set at 24,357 trillion rials (around \$105 billion).

The details of the amended version are not available yet.

Tehran, Doha Keen on Cooperation On Transport Industry

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Minister of Roads and Urban Development of Iran Mohammad Eslami and Qatari Minister of Transport and Communications Jassim Seif Ahmed al-Sulaiti on Monday emphasized the need for cooperation on transport industry.

Eslami met and held talks with Ahmed al-Sulaiti on Monday.

The two sides stressed the need for cooperation on transportation.

Eslami said that Iran welcomes any mutual understanding and cooperation with the Qatari government in the field of transportation and believes that this cooperation can be fruitful and constructive for both sides and for all countries in the region.

Int'l Developments Not to Affect Strategic Iran-China Ties

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has hailed Iran's "strategic partnership" with China, saying developments on the world stage cannot affect the friendship



between the two partners, whose bilateral ties have seen a significant boost over the past five decades.

Zarif wrote an article for The People's Daily on Tuesday to mark the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between Iran and the People's Republic of China. "Tehran-Beijing relations have developed significantly in the past half a century, with bilateral ties being constantly on the rise and cooperation in various fields turning Iran and China into reliable partners [for one another]," he wrote.

Zarif also noted that exchanges between Iran and China have a long history and that the two states maintain their trade and cultural ties through the ancient Silk Road.

Both countries, he added, are committed to a politically independent foreign policy, pursue economic cooperation and support each other in different international issues.

"In January 2016, Iran-China relations were upgraded to the level of strategic partnership. The leaders of the two countries have repeatedly stressed that changes on the international scene will not affect friendly relations between them," the top Iranian diplomat wrote. "Iran-China relations have withstood the test of time, especially in the difficult time of the coronavirus pandemic... The two countries have unconditionally backed each other in various fields and achieved useful results," he added.

Zarif further expressed hope that Iran would play a greater role in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a global infrastructure development strategy to link Asia, Europe and beyond. "Undoubtedly, the development of Iran-China relations — which is based on mutual respect for [mutual] sovereignty and independence as well as their different social systems — is a win-win cooperation. It will also turn into a huge source of power for mutual trust and cooperation between the two countries in the future," he emphasized.

Over the past 50 years, Zarif wrote, China has become an important power in the global economy and the international political arena, while Iran has emerged as a significant power in West Asia. "Iran and China need more than ever to strengthen bilateral relations to create a new kind of partnership," he added. "Although there are opportunities and challenges in the development process, we will never forget the friends who supported us in difficult times."

Winning the title of” Leading Company “among the top 100 companies

Proud of Tehran FST Co. in the Ranking Conference of the Top Companies in Iran

Tehran Fakorsanat Company has played a significant role in national projects, including the transfer of water from the Persian Gulf. In the 23rd year of the ranking of Iran's top companies (IMI-100), (this company succeeded in being ranked 99th out of 500 large and influential companies in the country's economy. International sanctions and internal sanctions are now accompanied by emerging phenomena such as the corona. We see that Iran's top companies have not only not left the production cycle, but also play the role of anchor in the economy. Studies show that although the Iranian economy experienced a negative growth of 6.8 percent in 2019, the real sales growth of Iran's top 500 economic companies was 8.1 percent. This shows that the burden of the country's economy these days is on the shoulders of companies that perform well even in difficult conditions. More interestingly, in the surveys conducted, 100 companies out of the top 500 companies in the country have 89% of value added, 84% of employment and 94% of exports. In terms of productivity index, we can mention the pride of Fakorsanat Tehran in the field of design and implementation of mining and industrial projects, which operates by design and construction. In the 23rd year of ranking the top companies in Iran, this company succeeded in gaining the rank of 99 out of 500 large and influential companies in the country's economy.



necessary for the government to open the way for the development of industry and economy by helping private sector activists and top Iranian companies. Economic growth and development is tied to the power and potential of these economic companies in the country. Accordingly, Saeed Zarandi, Deputy Minister of Planning and Programs of the Ministry of SAMT, said: "Our studies show that the way to develop and improve the country's economy is to help develop large companies".

"Companies can be recognized in international rankings, but we should not forget the small industries associated with these locomotives", he said. All global studies have shown that innovation must be pursued in large companies. Only a few companies have already announced their readiness for the fourth industrial revolution, and this needs more attention. Zarandi said: "Although more employment is created in small sectors, but stable employment, business development and technology development lies in large companies". Large



economies are based on large corporations. The more well-known large companies are in the world, the more they will represent Iran in the global economy. We have less than 4,000 companies with more than 100 people, which make up about 3.9% of the country's economy. We have not really created companies on a global scale, and that should be what we want in communication policies. According to him, multi-billion dollar companies should be included in the program in order to gain a better position in the international rankings.

Commitment of the Ministry of SAMT to solve the problems of the top 100 companies

The model we are considering for industrial development is the development of a corporate-based economy, Zarandi said. Last week, we were in the service of the Minister of SAMT, and 11 companies related to this ministry were inspected, which occupy one-fourth of the Iranian stock market. With such companies, we definitely need to be able to grow and prosper the economy. On the one hand, we have limited the public sector in the development of production, and on the other hand, it diverts the profits of parallel private markets from investment.

The Deputy Minister of Planning and Planning of the Ministry of SAMT said that we selected the top 100 companies and announced investment opportunities for the production of 1,200 items of imported goods, and asked them to introduce their production plans. In just a few days, several projects were sent to us so that we

can say that these 100 companies can do great things. The Ministry of SAMT will also be committed to these measures and to solving the problems. The research center said years ago that it would take six years to invest, but investing in large companies could shorten that time, he said. Big companies need to get bigger so that the whole economy can grow. Zarandi continued: "Forming large holdings is very effective and currently six companies have been considered and its founding board has been formed". These 3,000 companies with more than 100 employees must be present in a transparent capital market that will benefit themselves and the Iranian economy. For the top 100 companies, we need to consider exemptions and concessions to have better competition.

Need 50,000 troops in the field of artificial intelligence

A member of the Expediency Discernment Council also announced at the conference: Today in Iran, we need at least 50,000 personnel in the field of artificial intelligence. In many industries, however, we have problems with technicians. Ali Aghamohammadi also emphasized that big character and small character are different, saying: If people grow up with small character, they will be a threat to the people. Today, no one can sit in a corner and imagine making the best decisions. There are 100 selected companies in the country, each of which can become the locomotive of the Iranian economy in its group. In some countries, intangible capital accounts for 75% of the country's capital, but we have not yet paid attention to it. Information and experiences are not transferred enough and are lost. Staff training should be given more attention than before. He said: "Today in Iran we need at least 50,000 forces in the field of artificial intelligence. In many industries, our problems are with technicians, not high-level workers. Employing people is the most important thing that should be done by us, but it has received less attention. The team sport that eventually leads to the championship starts at a specialized school. We have to see the collections together. Agham Mohammadi stated: Today's product ID is more important than anything. This is while the anonymous official has no meaning anywhere in the world. A member of the Expediency Council stated: "According to research by the World Bank, Iran can achieve a growth rate of eight percent over eight years without making any new investments". The Deputy Minister of Science and the Central Bank are preparing and moving in the right direction. Keeping the chain, meanwhile, will require at least a 50 percent reduction in liquidity.

The need to move towards the fourth industrial revolution

At the conference of Iran's top companies, the CEO of the Industrial Management Organization also stated: In the past, it was believed that industry and academia should be related, while in developed countries, the government intertwines academia and industry. Abolfazl Kiani-Bakhtiari, referring to the importance of improving the business environment, said: "The important point now is the future of digital businesses". Large companies must move towards

digital transformation and the fourth industrial revolution. The mind of most of us focuses on IT and ICT, while it will not be a change in technology, but a change in digital thinking. Kiani said: In the classification of the top 10 industrial companies of petroleum products, there are four companies, two companies, auto and auto parts, and two companies. The selection of four oil companies came at a time when we had negative growth in oil sales, and there is ample evidence that we are moving away from fossil fuels.

Turn the Corona threat into an opportunity

Referring to the entry of financial businesses in the competition for ranking, the CEO of the Industrial Management Organization said: "The success factors of the top companies in this list are the voluntary end of the life of a product and a service". Dealing properly with an old product or service after the peak period or maturity either keeps companies out of business or sets a new peak period for the company. Many companies have been able to use the Corona pandemic to turn a threat into an opportunity and make the most of it, he said. Many of the world's largest companies, including Amazon, have taken full advantage of this by defining new methods and solutions. There are two types of innovation, one radical and the other gradual. Today, traditional products have become a new product and service by combining innovation and have defined a new type of innovation globally. Kiani explained: Merger and acquisition were among the factors influencing the selection. Collaboration during competition is one of the important measures that has become a science today to cooperate with each other despite maintaining competitive advantages and applying technical knowledge.

The importance of getting out of the old ways

The CEO of the Industrial Management Organization, referring to the importance of leaving the old routes and creating new routes, said: "Certainly, if companies do not choose the right route, they will be out of production for about 10 years". The Fourth Industrial Revolution will include blockchain, the Internet of Things, data mining, cloud computing, virtual reality, transportation, and the smart industries. Companies that do not move towards the Fourth Industrial Revolution will be excluded from the industrial cycle. In recent years, we have changed the indicators



in proportion to the naming of the year. Today, information is a way to create value. Referring to the rankings in different countries, he said: "Surveys have shown that 100 of the top 500 companies in the country have 89% value added, 84% employment and 94% exports, and this shows that having a large company leads to industrial development". It becomes. It is worth mentioning that the growth rate index (of sales of the top 500 companies in 2018 was 36.9%, which in 2019, reached 45.8%, but the growth rate index) real (sales of the top 500 companies using inflation The calculated share, in 2018, was negative 3.2 percent, which in 2019, has reached 8.1 percent. Fakoor Sanat Tehran Company with three decades of brilliant and purposeful activity in the development and completion of upstream and downstream industries of iron and steel value chain, a significant role in the realization of crude steel production of 55 million tons in 2025, through the transfer of technical knowledge and Localization of modern science has played a role.

Government focus on corporate development

The pride of Fakorsanat Tehran Company, along with other top companies in Iran's economy, was achieved while, according to the officials of the Ministry of SAMT, we have not yet been able to establish international companies in the global scale. For this reason, in the current situation, compared to Turkey and India, sales of large Iranian companies have been much lower. Therefore, on a large and small scale, there is a need to pay attention to and improve the governance conditions and performance of enterprises. However, even in the developed countries of the world, there is a risk of elimination or reduction of some prominent companies in the economy. Therefore, not only should the development of industry and economy be focused on the creation of large companies, but also the conditions should be created for the top companies to improve their position. It is estimated that 40% of the current Fortune 500 companies will not be on the list in the next 10 years due to the emergence of emerging technology companies. Therefore, if companies want to stay competitive, they must update their business model with industry technologies 0.4 or the Fourth Industrial Revolution) digital transformation of the industry. (Among the technologies considered in the Fourth Industrial Revolution are IoT, blockchain, 3D printing, and artificial intelligence. These technologies include industry and smart cities. Accordingly, it is necessary for Iranian companies to pay more serious attention to the digital evolution of the industry. In the meantime, it is

Russia in Prisoner Swap Talks With U.S.

MOSCOW (Reuters) - Russia and the United States are in talks on a possible prisoner swap that could secure the release of Paul Whelan, a former U.S. marine jailed for spying, within two to three months, his lawyer told Reuters on Monday.

Russia convicted Whelan, who holds U.S., British, Canadian and Irish passports, of spying last June and sentenced him to 16 years in jail. He denied spying and said he was set up in a sting operation. Washington demanded his release.

Moscow said that Whelan had been caught red-handed with classified information in a Moscow hotel room where agents from the Federal Security Service detained him on Dec. 28, 2018.



Slovenian Center-Right Gov't Survives No-Confidence Vote

ZAGREB (Reuters) - The Slovenian centre-right government of Prime Minister Janez Jansa survived a no-confidence vote on Monday as 40 deputies in the 90-seat parliament, six short of a majority, supported the motion submitted by the leftist opposition.

Five opposition parties submitted the no-confidence motion last week saying the government was inefficient in fighting the COVID-19 epidemic and being undemocratic, including by jeopardising media freedom.

The regular general election in Slovenia is due next year.



Iraq Rocket Attack Kills Contractor, Wounds U.S. Service Member



ERBIL (Reuters) - A rocket attack at a U.S.-led military base in Kurdish northern Iraq on Monday killed a civilian contractor and wounded five other people, including a U.S. service member, according to initial reports, the U.S. coalition in Iraq said.

It was the most deadly attack to hit U.S.-led forces in almost a year in Iraq, where tensions have escalated between U.S. forces, their Iraqi and Kurdish allies on one side and Iran-aligned militias on the other.

A coalition spokesman said on Twitter the attack hit coalition forces in the Kurdish regional capital of Erbil, and that more details would follow.

Kurdish security sources said at least three rockets landed near Erbil International Airport in the autonomous region late at night. Reuters reporters heard several loud explosions and saw a fire break out near the airport.

U.S. troops occupy a military base adjacent to the civilian airport.

A statement from the Kurdish interior ministry said a number of rockets were fired towards Erbil and its outskirts around 9:30 p.m. local time and some people were wounded, but it offered no further details.

A group calling itself Saraya Awliya al-Dam claimed responsibility for the attack on the U.S.-led base, saying it targeted the "American occupation" in Iraq. It provided no evidence for its claim.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said late Monday the United States was "outraged" by the attack.

In a statement, Blinken said he had reached out to Kurdistan Regional Government Prime Minister Masrour Barzani "to discuss the incident and to pledge our support for all efforts to investigate and hold accountable those responsible."

Groups that some Iraqi officials say have links with Iran have claimed a series of rocket and roadside bomb attacks against coalition forces, contractors working for the coalition and U.S. installations - including the embassy in Baghdad - in recent months.

The last deadly attack to target the coalition killed one British and two American personnel in March last year.

Tension between the United States and Iran sent the Middle East to the edge of a full-scale confrontation in January 2020 after a U.S. drone strike martyred Iranian military mastermind Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad.

NATO Will Leave Afghanistan When Time Is Right

KABUL (Dispatches) - NATO will not withdraw its troops from Afghanistan "before the time is right", Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg has said, adding that the Taliban must do more to meet the terms of a 2020 peace agreement with the United States first.

Stoltenberg's remarks came on Monday, days before the defense ministers of the 30 NATO member states discuss the deployment on Wednesday and Thursday.

The meeting is their highest-level talks since U.S. President Joe Biden took office promising to work closely with allies after four years of tensions under Donald Trump.

Top of the agenda for the virtual conference will be the fate of the alliance's 9,600-strong support mission in Afghanistan after Trump struck a deal with the Taliban to withdraw troops.

The deployment's future hinges on whether Biden agrees to stick to a May deadline to pull out foreign forces or risks a bloody backlash from the armed fighters by staying put.



Harris Speaks With Macron, Seeks to Strengthen Ties

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - U.S. Vice-President Kamala Harris spoke to French President Emmanuel Macron on Monday, expressing her commitment to strengthening bilateral ties between the two countries, her office said in a statement.

President Joe Biden, a former vice president himself under Barack Obama, has had Harris at his side for multiple events during his early White House tenure, indicating he wants her to have a key role in implementing his political and policy agenda.

The call with Macron, leader of a G7 nation, shows Harris is taking a role in foreign policy as well, an area in which the former U.S. senator from California has significantly less experience than Biden.

"Vice President Harris and President Macron agreed on the need for close bilateral and multilateral cooperation to address COVID-19, climate change, and support democracy at home and around the world," the vice president's office said in a statement.

"They also discussed numerous regional challenges, including those in the Middle East and Africa, and the need to confront them together," the statement said.

Harris also spoke to Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau earlier this month in her first call as vice president with a foreign leader.

Biden, a Democrat who took over from Republican former President Donald Trump on Jan. 20, has sought to re-engage with allies and with global institutions after four years of his predecessor's "America First" mantra.

Trump withdrew the United States from the World Health Organization and the Paris climate accord and largely scoffed at multilateral organizations and groups. Biden had previously spoken with both Trudeau and Macron in January.

UN Warns Myanmar Against Harsh Response to Protesters

NEW YORK (Reuters) - The United Nations special envoy has warned Myanmar's army of "severe consequences" for any harsh response to protesters demonstrating against this month's coup in a call with the military leadership, a U.N. spokesman said.

Despite the deployment of armored vehicles and soldiers to some major cities at the weekend, protesters have kept up demonstrations to denounce the Feb. 1 takeover and demand the release of detained leader Aung San Suu Kyi and others.

Protests on Monday were smaller than the hundreds of thousands who had joined earlier demonstrations but broke out in many parts of the Southeast Asian country, where the coup has halted a decade of uneasy transition to democracy.

A small crowd began gathering outside the central bank early on Tuesday to press staff there to join a civil disobedience movement.

The army cut off the internet for a second consecutive night early on Tuesday though it was again restored at about 9 a.m. (0230 GMT)

The internet suspensions have raised concern among coup opponents, particularly after the army suspended legal constraints on its search and detention powers.

"There is suspicion this blackout was to commit

unjust activities, including arbitrary arrests," said the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners group, which has recorded 426 arrests between the coup and Monday.

U.N. Special Envoy Christine Schraner Burgener spoke on Monday to the deputy head of the junta in what has become a rare channel of communication between Myanmar's army and the outside world.

"Ms Schraner Burgener has reinforced that the right of peaceful assembly must fully be respected and that demonstrators are not subjected to reprisals," U.N. spokesman Farhan Haq said at the United Nations.

"She has conveyed to the Myanmar military that the world is watching closely, and any form of heavy-handed response is likely to have severe consequences."

In an account of the meeting, Myanmar's army said junta Number Two, Soe Win, had discussed the administration's plans and information on "the true situation of what's happening in Myanmar".

The unrest has revived memories of bloody outbreaks of opposition to almost half a century of direct army rule that ended in 2011 when the military began a process of withdrawing from civilian politics.

The army said late on Monday that protests were harming stability and had left people in fear.



Vaccine Nationalism Will Hurt All Countries



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The World Trade Organization's (WTO) incoming chief has warned against "vaccine nationalism" that would slow progress in ending the COVID-19 pandemic and could erode economic growth for all countries - rich and poor.

Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala told the Reuters news agency that her top priority is to ensure the WTO does more to address the pandemic, saying members should accelerate efforts to lift export restrictions slowing trade in needed medicines and supplies.

The former Nigerian finance minister and senior World Bank executive was appointed on Monday in a consensus process and starts her new job on March 1.

"The WTO can contribute so much more to helping stop the pandemic," Okonjo-Iweala said in an interview at her home in a suburb of Washington, DC. "No one is safe until everyone is safe. Vaccine nationalism at this time just will not pay, because the variants are coming. If other countries are not immunised, it will just be a blowback," she said. "It's unconscionable that people will be dying elsewhere, waiting in a queue, when we have the technology."

Okonjo-Iweala said studies showed that the global economy would lose \$9 trillion in potential output if poor countries were unable to get their populations vaccinated quickly and about half of the effect would be borne by rich countries.

"Both on a human health basis, as well as an economic basis, being nationalistic at this time is very costly to the international community," she said.

"A very top priority for me would be to make sure that prior to the very important ministerial conference ... that we come to solutions as to how the WTO can make vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics accessible in an equitable and affordable fashion to all countries, particularly to poor countries."

Okonjo-Iweala said she was heartened by the administration of US President Joe contribution to the World Health Organization effort to ensure broader distribution of vaccines, and what she called a "fantastic" conversation with trade advisers in the US Trade Representative's office.

"I think our interests and priorities are aligned. They want to bring the WTO back to [its] purpose," she said. "It's about people. It's about inclusivity. It's about decent work for ordinary people," she said.



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L.balcony
fireplace
Fully Furn

Shanon (adviser)

Niavaran Villa (\$6000)
1500sq.m
7bdrs, S/p
J, L.balcony
green garden
Fully Furn

Parsian

Farmanieh (\$2400) 300sq.m, 4bdrs, S/p, S, J, pkg, & F.F
Zaferanieh (\$3000) 320sq.m, 4bdrs, S/p, S, J, pkg, & F.F
Sa'adat abad (\$1900) 200sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, S, J, pkg, & F.F

Darrous Apt (\$1800)
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Novak Says Oil Market on Recovery Path

MOSCOW (Reuters) - The global oil market is on a recovery path and the oil price this year could average \$45-\$60 per barrel, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak was quoted as saying on Sunday.

Novak, quoted by Russian news agencies, also said the Nord Stream 2 undersea gas pipeline from Russia to Germany was 95% complete and would be completed despite attempts by the United States "to block it". "We've seen low volatility in the past few months. This means the market is balanced and the prices we are seeing today are in line with the market situation," Novak told Rossiya 1 TV channel, according to RIA news agency.



Japan Economy Shrinks For First Time Since 2009

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japan's economy shrank in 2020 for the first time in more than a decade as it was battered by the coronavirus but the contraction was less than expected and it ended the year on a strong note thanks to a pick-up in exports and huge government support.

Still, analysts warned the near-term outlook could be bumpy as fresh virus restrictions dampen domestic consumption and with borders still closed to tourists six months before the postponed Olympics are due to begin.

The world's third-largest economy shrank 4.8 percent last year, its first annual contraction since 2009 at the height of the global financial crisis.

However, the figure was better than forecast in a Bloomberg survey of analysts thanks to a strong October-December performance, which saw the economy expand 12.7 percent from the previous quarter on an annualized basis.

Government stimulus measures of about \$3 trillion since the coronavirus pandemic began provided crucial support.

The news helped send Tokyo's Nikkei 225 index rallying more than one percent to break 30,000 for the first time in more than three decades.

Like the rest of the world, Japan was plunged into a steep recession at the start of the year -- suffering its worst second quarter on record -- as strict virus containment measures throttled economic activity, while a 2019 consumption tax added to the weakness.

A slowdown in new cases allowed business to bounce back in the second half, with domestic demand and net exports contributing to the improvement, the cabinet office said, adding that spending on housing and corporate investment rebounded.

However, infections began surging to new records in late December, prompting the government to impose a fresh virus state of emergency in much of the country including Tokyo and Osaka -- and analysts sounded a warning for the start of 2021.

"A decline in GDP appears unavoidable in Q1 2021 due to the state of emergency declared by the government in a number of Japanese prefectures," said Naoya Oshikubo, senior economist at SuMi Trust, in a note published ahead of Monday's figure.

Japan's virus measures are limited, with bars and restaurants requested but not obliged to close by 8pm while working from home is strongly recommended. There are no blanket stay-at-home orders.

Oshikubo said the relative leniency of these emergency measures could help mitigate the expected contraction in the first quarter.

But observers said the economy will not likely receive the much-needed boost from the summer's postponed 2020 Olympics, even as organisers insist the event will go ahead even if the pandemic is not fully under control.

With doubts over whether foreign spectators will be allowed to attend, and plans for athletes and officials to stay isolated during the Games, there will not be much chance for spending, said Anwita Basu, head of country risk for Asia at Fitch Solutions. "The growth outcome of zero spectators and Games not being held would be roughly the same," she told AFP.

Anti-virus measures and other delay-related costs have added 294 billion yen (\$2.8 billion) to the event's price tag, which has ballooned to at least 1.64 trillion yen -- making Tokyo 2020 potentially the most expensive Summer Olympics in history.

But with people's everyday financial priority to "get over the Covid hump and normalise their day-to-day living... I'm not sure psychologically the Games are going to be welcomed (in Japan)", Basu added.

Thailand Ratifies Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Treaty

BANGKOK (NNT) -- Members of Parliament have resolved to approve the Ministry of Commerce's proposal for the ratification of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), allowing the treaty to take effect as early as mid-year this year.

Director-General of the Department of Trade Negotiations, Auramon Supthaweeethum shared that on February 9, 2021, the Ministry passed through the country's parliamentary ratification process, allowing Thailand to deposit the instrument of ratification.

The treaty will take effect 60 days after at least six ASEAN member states and three non-ASEAN signatories have deposited their instruments of ratification.

On November 15, 2020, ASEAN member nations and its dialogue partners, namely Australia, China, Japan, South Korea, and New Zealand, came together for a virtual meeting on the occasion of the 4th RCEP Summit. The session concluded with the signing of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), an agreement that has been deliberated and fine-tuned for the past eight years, or since 2013. After the Summit, all countries went on to undertake their internal procedures to pave the way for the change.

With the signing of the RCEP, the agreement once put into effect, will become the world's largest free trade agreement, covering a market of 2.2 billion people or 30.2% of the world's population, with a combined GDP of US\$262 billion (more than 8.17 trillion baht).

German, Most Other Euro Zone Bond Yields Hit Multi-Month Highs

LONDON (Reuters) - Most euro zone bond yields rose to multi-month highs on Monday with investors betting on a brighter economic outlook and a pick-up in inflation as oil prices rose to their highest level in over a year.

Ten-year bond yields in Germany, France and the Netherlands all rose to their highest since early September, while Germany's 30-year bond yield rose to an eight-month high.

A selloff in major bond markets has gathered pace in recent sessions, as coronavirus vaccine rollouts and U.S. fiscal stimulus boosts expectations of a strong economic recovery.

Benchmark U.S. Treasury yields rose to their highest levels since March on Friday, pushing prices down. This selloff, along with a rise in Brent crude oil prices to highs above \$63 a barrel weighed on euro zone debt markets on Monday.

Germany's benchmark 10-year Bund yield rose 4 basis points to a 5-1/2 month high at -0.387%.

Its 30-year bond yield, up 20 bps so far this month, rose to an eight-month high at almost 0.13% - having traded in negative yield territory just over a week ago.

Across the euro area, long-dated bond yields in higher-rated markets such as the Netherlands and France were 4-5 bps points higher on the day.

"The reflation sentiment remains alive and kicking, although with chances for near-term consolidation in Bunds following the latest sell-off," said Commerzbank strategist Rainer Guntermann.

With U.S. bond markets closed for a holiday and parts of Asia closed for the Lunar New Year, trade across financial markets was generally subdued.

Italian bonds continue to outperform euro zone peers but their yields also edged higher on Monday, with Italy's 10-year bond yield up 2 bps on the day at 0.51% - still keeping last week's record lows in sight.

Mario Draghi, the former head of the European Central Bank, was sworn in as Italian prime minister on Saturday to lead a unity government that has to steer the country out of the coronavirus crisis and an economic slump.

Politics was also in focus in Spain, where separatist parties looked set to jointly win a majority of seats in Catalonia's regional parliament. The election was viewed as a test of the strength of the region's pro-independence movement in an era now dominated by the pandemic.

S. Korea's Property Tax-to-GDP 3rd Highest Among OECD Nations

SEOUL (Dispatches) - South Korea's property tax rate compared with its gross domestic product was the third highest among 37 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development members in 2018, data showed Monday.

The data compiled by Rep. Yoo Gyeong-joon of the main opposition People Power Party came amid growing concerns that the Moon Jae-in administration's set of real estate measures -- focused on tightening loan regulations and levying heavier taxes on multiple homeowners -- failed to cool down the real estate market.

In 2018, property taxes levied by the government stood at 4.05 percent of GDP, which was \$1.7 trillion at the time. The figure was nearly double the OECD average of 1.96 percent. The figure took the nation's comprehensive real estate holding tax, which was levied from 2005, inheritance tax and taxes levied in property transactions into account.

The OECD member nations with higher tax rates compared with Korea at the time included the UK with 4.48 percent and France with 4.43 percent. The United States came at No. 4, behind Korea, with 3.97 percent, while Japan came at No.11 with 2.59 percent. Other countries with relatively high rates Canada with 3.45 percent, Australia with 2.78 percent and Spain with 2.27 percent.

The data refutes President Moon's remarks in August last year, delivered during a Cheong Wa Dae meeting that despite its decision to increase the property holding tax, the rate remains "lower compared with other economies."

The property tax-to-GDP rate is projected to rise further with the planned increase of capital gains tax and comprehensive real estate tax on multiple homeowners to take effect on June 1.

Under the revised rules, the comprehensive real estate tax rate on the owner of two or more properties in areas designated by the government as speculative will be raised from between 0.6 to 3.2 percent to 1.2 percent to 6 percent. The capital gains tax on houses will be raised as well.

Also, for owners selling a 2.5 billion-won (\$2.3 million) house and gaining 1 billion won from the sale, the capital gains tax will be 110 million won higher from June 1.

Seoul's apartment prices surged 58 percent after Moon took office, which is 4.5 times the increase rate of the combined period of the preceding Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye governments, Citizens' Coalition for Economic Justice, a local civic group here said in November.

Singapore Sees 2021 Economic Rebound



SINGAPORE (Dispatches) - Singapore reaffirmed its forecast for a rebound in economic growth this year after its worst annual contraction since independence, signaling the recovery is on track while more stimulus expected in this week's annual budget presentation will provide further support.

The Ministry of Trade & Industry on Monday maintained its projection for growth in a range of 4% to 6% for 2021, seeing a faster rollout of the vaccine in advanced economies while the U.S. and Europe could achieve population immunity in the second half of the year. Those gains could be offset by a bleaker regional outlook with the resurgence of the virus in some countries.

"The Singapore economy is projected to see a gradual recovery in 2021," with gross domestic product not expected to return to pre-Covid levels until the second half of the year, Gabriel Lim, permanent secretary at the ministry, told reporters Monday. "The pace of recovery is also expected to remain uneven across sectors."

The Singapore dollar was steady at 1.3248 per U.S. dollar as of 8:37 a.m. local time.

Trade-reliant Singapore took a beating last year, shrinking 5.4%, the MTI said, revising its preliminary estimate from last month for a 5.8% contraction. The aviation, transport and hospitality sectors have suffered from the tourism standstill and mobility restrictions -- and are expected to remain weak this year, Lim said -- while financial and professional services were more resilient during lockdown and the aftermath.

"There were upward revisions to all sectors, notably in construction and services," Khoo Goh, head of Asia research at Australia & New Zealand Banking Group in Singapore, said of the GDP report. However, he noted, the data have "little implication for monetary policy," and he expects the Monetary Authority of Singapore to remain on hold all year.

Indonesia Lifts Economic Recovery Budget Again to Over \$49b

JAKARTA (Reuters) - Indonesia has again raised the budget for its National Economic Recovery (PEN) program, which includes its mass vaccination campaign, to now reach 688.33 trillion rupiah (\$49.48 billion) its finance minister said on Monday.

Initially earmarked at 372.3 trillion rupiah, Finance Minister Sri Mulyani Indrawati has gradually lifted the program's budget several times. Earlier this month, she put the value at 619 trillion rupiah.

The new increase came after Southeast Asia's largest economy last year recorded a full-year gross domestic product contraction of 2.1%, it's first since 1998, which the central bank said was softer than expected.

"Our PEN budget for 2021 will reach 688.3 trillion rupiah, which if you compare with 2020's 579 trillion rupiah, shows a significant increase, especially in healthcare spending," she said in a presentation to security forces.

Healthcare's share would reach 173.3 trillion rupiah for 2021, up from 63.5 trillion rupiah last year, including for the vaccination campaign, Sri Mulyani said.

The budget for social assistance would be 150.21 trillion rupiah, below last year's 220.4 trillion.

Indonesia launched its vaccination drive last month and aims to inoculate more than 180 million people. It has among Asia's highest number of coronavirus cases.

Sri Mulyani did not mention the impact of the increase on the government's budget deficit plan.

Her presentation showed that under the assumption the PEN program had a total budget of 627.9 trillion rupiah, the budget deficit estimate would remain at 5.7% of GDP, below last year's 6.1%.

A finance ministry official separately said the PEN budget could change as the government was still working on more detailed spending plans.

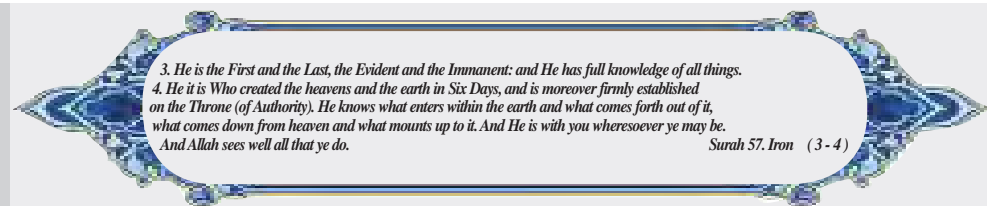
Meanwhile, the central bank is this week expected to cut interest rates for the first time this year, on top of 2020's five rate cuts, to boost recovery from the impact of the pandemic, according to a majority of analysts in a Reuters poll.





PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:18
■ Evening (Maghreb)	18:06
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:23
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:47



Pakistan Ready to Cooperate With Friendly Nations to Promote Blue Economy

KARACHI (Dispatches) – Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi on Monday said recognizing the importance of world's oceans as global public commodity, Pakistan was committed to promote the prudent use of marine resources for socio-economic development, while ensuring environmental sustainability.

"We are ready to cooperate and collaborate with other friendly nations and partners around the world, to realize this goal for mutual benefit of the entire humanity," the Foreign Minister said addressing at the International Maritime Conference titled 'Development of Blue Economy under a Secure and Sustainable Environment.

The Foreign Minister said to bring blue economy to the center of national economic development paradigm, there was need to create awareness among all stakeholders about its potential economic, social and environmental benefits, and to create an enabling ecosystem to help attract investments in related sectors.

He said as part of economic diplomacy initiatives, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Pakistan's Missions abroad, in collaboration with the concerned ministries, had been actively engaged in attracting investments to the maritime sector. He stressed the need for concerted efforts to strengthen partnerships and collaboration among businesses, academia, research institutions, and social and environmental organizations to unlock new opportunities.

The Foreign Minister said the idea of blue economy recognized the seas and oceans as drivers of socio-economic development and encompassed diverse fields from renewable energy to fisheries, coastal tourism, waste management, maritime transport, ocean engineering and climate change. He termed the sustainable blue economy as critical for reaping the socio-economic benefits for current and future generations with its global value estimated to be over US\$ 24 trillion.

Qureshi said the Indian Ocean was the world's third-largest water body, while retaining its significance for global security, it represented an increasingly important avenue for global trade. He said the Indian Ocean hosted international maritime traffic that included half of the world's containerized cargo, one-third of its bulk cargo, and two-thirds of its oil shipments. He said the Indian Ocean offered promising potential for mutual cooperation and collaboration, however pointed that geo-strategic competition and the pursuit of military dominance by some States had gravely jeopardized that potential.

"In particular, India's belligerent and aggressive policies – currently driven by an extremist Hindutva ideology – pose an immediate and pervasive threat to international and regional peace and security," he said. Qureshi said in pursuance of

its hegemonic designs, India had nuclearized the Indian Ocean and continued to induct advanced weapons systems and naval delivery platforms. "Pakistan will continue to take all necessary measures to ensure its security and to maintain credible minimum deterrence," he said.

He stressed that the international community needed be cognizant of the fact that any military conflict in South Asia could endanger stability in a region that is critical for global trade flows and security. He said blessed with an over 1000-kilometer-long coastline, and a vast exclusive economic zone, Pakistan was an important maritime state with its maritime sovereignty spanned over an area of 290,000 square kilometers, around 36.4 percent of its mainland.

He mentioned that Pakistan was an important stakeholder in the Indian Ocean security framework, which included counter-piracy as well as human trafficking and narcotics smuggling. He said Pakistan Navy had also provided valuable assistance at the high seas to vessels in distress, including during anti-piracy operations, and had extended humanitarian assistance to regional countries on several occasions.

Qureshi said the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and development of the Gwadar Port were game-changing projects that had further enhanced the geo-economic significance of Pakistan. The Gwadar Port, which occupies a strategic location overlooking the Strait of Hormuz and the North Arabian Sea, has the potential to develop into a full-fledged regional hub and a trans-shipment port, he said.

The Foreign Minister said it placed Pakistan at a point of convergence, linking active sea-lanes to landlocked Central Asian Republics for shipment of oil, coal and agricultural products. He said Gwadar Port provided new vistas for businesses, adding that extraction of life-saving medicines, coastal tourism, and the development of coastal real estate were industries that were attracting investment, both local and foreign.

Qureshi said Pakistan's Liner Shipping Connectivity Index was reasonably high (comparable to Australia), however said maritime sector required substantial investment for building, operating and enhancing its profitability. He recalled that the government had declared 2020 as the 'Year of Blue Economy' to highlight the significance of its massive potential of contributing to the country's sustainable economic growth and development.

About the potential that currently remains untapped, he said fisheries sector only contributed 0.4 percent to the country's GDP and the mangrove area, sixth largest in the world, could earn US\$ 20 million annually. According to one estimate, coastal tourism in Pakistan can contribute US\$ 4 billion to the economy, he said.

Turkey, an Opportunist...

FROM PAGE 1

Political speculations based on the existing analyses in this regards believe that PKK group members will not leave this area because if they leave the area, they will provide pretexts to Turkey which seeks any pretext to keep its army in the area.

Although return of the displaced Iraqi people to their homes is a positive and favorable move in this regards, the danger which exists here is the possible long term presence of Turkish troops on Iraq's soil under the pretext of continuing fight with PKK.

The past experience from Turkey's scenario buildings in northern Syria also under the pretext of fight with Daesh group and YPG militiamen shows that Turkish Army after the end of operation and clearing the region does not intend to leave this geography and it will set up official bases for long term presence. If we skip this issue, the permanent presence of Turkish troops in northern Iraq due to the existing differences between the central government and Iraqi Kurdistan over its independence can be a big threat for the future of this country and repetition of experienced past scenarios in Syria and Libya by Turkey for creating a backyard and supporting a subordinate government on Iraqi soil.

Turkey with this belief of Ottomanization in the region has painted a picture of itself for the neighbors in a way that they consider the country under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan an opportunist neighbor. Neighbors of Turkey have witnessed that since February this year, Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar by visiting Erbil and meeting with Iraqi Kurdistan officials like Masoud and Nechirvan Barzani won their approval for a joint operation against militiamen in Sinjar. Meanwhile in the meeting between Erdogan and Iraq Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi, Iraqi government announced its agreement for putting an end to the security crisis in Sinjar.

But it seems Turkey everyday finds more justified pretext for its presence in the area. The public concerns in northern Iraq are growing day by day because they have witnessed continuation of occupation of Iraq soil, and the transfer of over 10,000 members of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) or al-Hashd al-Shaabi and presence of the group's leader Abu Fadak al-Mohammedawi at suburb of Sinjar in recent days has stepped up the possibility for long term conflicts.

Regardless of this issue, Turkey has started heavy bombardments in these areas for days and every moment it is expected Turkish troops to start their ground attack at Sinjar with the green light of Iraqi Kurdistan officials. This point that a pretext for staying for longer time and creating dominance in those areas is considered a goal for Turkey will, of course, not remain hidden from the eyes of the neighbors and above all Iraqi people themselves, and day by day the concealed hypocrisy for making opportunity by Turkey will be more unfolded for the people of the region.

Iran, Russia...

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Stating that the 2021 Iran-Russia combined naval exercise is of special importance, Tahani said, "Many countries navigate the Oman Sea and the Indian Ocean, which are key areas of world trade, and therefore maintaining maritime security is crucial."

The spokesperson highlighted that improving combat readiness, achieving collective security and exchanging experience in the field of counter-terrorism and piracy are important goals of this exercise.

"The training of information and security exchange at sea and rescuing the hijacked ship are among the most important operations which will be carried out in this exercise," he noted. Also speaking on Tuesday, Iran's Navy Commander Rear Admiral Hossein Khanzadi said the drill is aimed at achieving collective security in the region which will help sustain security in the northern Indian Ocean.

"Since last year, a series of combined maritime security exercises have been held with the participation of regional and world countries In the drill, which began today, the Russian Navy has joined the exercise site and the Indian Navy will also participate," he added.

Iranian-Russian 'Marine Security Belt' drills are underway with the slogan "Collective Cooperation at Sea for the Security of Maritime Trade" in a 17,000-kilometer area with a message of peace and friendship.



Japan Urged to...

FROM PAGE 1

Zarif said the unfrozen funds could be used to procure medicines and food, including vaccines for the novel coronavirus.

On the role of the European Union, Zarif stressed EU Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell's responsibility to sequence a restoration of compliance with the nuclear accord by Washington and Tehran.

However, Zarif ruled out direct negotiations with the Biden administration to that end.

"Mr. Borrell can specify the time frame in consultation with Iran and the United States. It is clear the United States has to take steps first," Zarif said.

"When Washington takes its steps, and we see the outcome, we can immediately take (steps) ourselves, and it is up to Borrell to choreograph these steps," he said.

While the U.S. wants Iran to comply with its commitments under the 2015 nuclear deal before the removal of its sanctions, Tehran says it was the US that left the JCPOA and thus it is the party that must act first.

In his interview with Kyodo News, Zarif warned the window of opportunity to resolve the impasse will soon close as Iran's parliament has set Feb. 21 as the day to end nuclear watchdog inspections beyond the country's obligations under its safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency.

"A law has been passed by parliament. That law has to be implemented," he said while pressing Biden's team to decide soon whether to return to the nuclear deal with Iran or continue Trump's legacy by not quickly lifting sanctions. Zarif said once that window closes, Iran will produce more enriched uranium and further promote its nuclear development.

He also Zarif called that a natural outcome of Trump's failed "maximum pressure" policy on Iran and added, "If President Biden wants to continue the same legacy, he will not be able to produce miracles."

The JCPOA was unilaterally ditched by 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."

Enemies Failed...

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Emphasizing the implementation of the programs and components mentioned in the report, the President said: "Great success and victory in neutralizing the enemy's sinister and main goal based on creating famine and unbearable pressure and shortage in providing essential goods and thus creating chaos in the country was achieved and the enemy's targeting was completely unsuccessful.

Regarding the next year's plan for the supply of basic goods, the President said: "The government will continue its livelihood measures and policies with vigor, and wherever the rights of the people are concerned, the full extent of the people's livelihood and the supply of basic goods will be defended so that people will not face problems in obtaining their goods next year.

Approaches to COVID-19 Vaccine Discussed in Mustafa Prize Meeting

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – During the fourth round of the Mustafa (PBUH) Prize Science Promotion Meeting held on Monday, different approaches of Coronavirus vaccine development were examined.

Amid COVID-19 vaccine discussion, Mustafa (PBUH) Science and Technology Foundation held the 4th round of Science Promotion Meeting on the different approaches

to Coronavirus vaccine development with the presence of professional experts in this area, as reported by the foundation's official website.

Mostafa Ghanei, head of the scientific committee of Iran's National Headquarter against COVID-19, addressed the development of Coronavirus vaccine in Iran which, according to him, began last year in March and is followed up in 4 or 5 different.

He also said that for each vaccine approach, a new technology is being developed, pointing to the various utilizations of mRNA platform.

Vaccines entered into the 3rd phase, he said, require the production infrastructure which needs to be supported financially. Therefore, the government purchases them in advance. Ghanei also referred to some new approaches adopted in Iran, like edible vaccines, which might be proved to be useful later.

Iranian government decision not to by Pfizer vaccine was made firstly because it wasn't cost-effective, and secondly the country lacked equipment necessary for keeping the vaccine in very cold temperature, he said.

The moderator said "the vaccines developed in our country before COVID-19 pandemic were all for bacterial diseases, not viral diseases."

Kayhan Azadmanesh, professor of Virology Department and head of Rapid Response Team for Infectious Diseases at Pasteur Institute of Iran, talked about their approach in developing Coronavirus vaccine in which "the virus works as a tool for delivering the gene." Known as the adenovirus vaccine, this approach uses adenovirus in order to deliver one or two genes of the virus to the cells.

"We have used both the spike protein and N-protein," Azadmanesh said, adding that this approach is cost-effective compared to other approaches of vaccine development.

Asked if using adenovirus poses danger, he replied "it is



proved that almost all the adenoviruses are safe."

Roohollah Dorostkar, CEO of Kian Gene Azma company, stated that their inactivated vaccine they are working on does not work on some viruses such as HIV, but seems promising on Coronavirus.

"We are in the challenge phase. In this phase the animal must be infected with the virus. It is a very sensitive phase," he said. Director of the project of developing mRNA-based COVID-19 vaccine, Vahid Khoddami, underlined that the vaccine developed by this method does not make genetic problems.

He said these messengers work based on a hit-and-run programming which indeed renders them very transient, adding, "We are not dealing with permanent genetic codes; they are not stable and do not enter the genome. That's why the vaccines developed by this approach are needed to be kept in very cool temperatures."

On the numerous advantages of this method, he said "enough doses can be manufactured rapidly and it is a very flexible technology which can be applied on other areas as well."

"In autumn we did the animal test, and in few months we will enter the human phase," Khoddami announced.

The next speaker, Seyed Reza Banihashemi, director of central lab and head of Immunology Department at Razi Vaccine and Serum Research Institute (RVSRI), pointed to safety as an important factor, saying that their approach is that the vaccine "is tested and developed in bioreactor outside the body, its safety is high, it does not have interactions with other vaccines, and all age groups can use it."

He stated that 2 doses of this vaccine are administered at first, boosting the central immune system. However, he added, although this might develop a strong immunity against the virus, the subject might still transmit the virus to others.

Therefore, after the 2 injections, a nasal dose is received by the subjects to reduce the viral shedding.

"This is the first instance of nasal COVID-19 vaccine dose developed in the world," he maintained.

He said the vaccine can be kept in 2 to 8 degrees Celsius, underlining that the vaccine, still in the first phase of clinical test, has developed 8 to 9 months of immunity in monkeys so far.

Iran Wants to...

FROM PAGE 1

"In the past, there was a lot of concern on how to export the values of the Islamic Revolution, but this is done in cyberspace easily. If we do not use cyberspace properly, it becomes a threat," he added.

"Imam Khomeini has turned the threat into an opportunity. Before the revolution, we were not even able to build a bridge. Still, now we are active in Iran, and all over the world, Chairman of the Foundation for Preservation of

Sacred Defense Values," Karegar stated.

The honoring ceremony of 'Sacred Defense' activists at cyberspace was held at Sacred Defense Museum in Tehran on Tuesday, 16th Feb 2021 via videoconferencing. Around 1153 products have been introduced at the 2nd edition of Sacred Defense in cyberspace across the country, and the winners were honored.

West Azarbaijan will host the 3rd round next year.

McDowell Wins Crash-Filled Daytona 500

LONDON (Dispatches) - Michael McDowell emerged from an ugly final-lap wreck to take the lead and went on to win Sunday's weather- and crash-delayed running of the Daytona 500 at Daytona International Speedway.

The victory was McDowell's first in the NASCAR Cup Series in 357 starts. "I just can't believe it," McDowell, 36, said. "So many years just grinding it out hoping for an opportunity like this."

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Cuadrado out But Dybala, Ramsey Back

TURIN (Dispatches) - Colombian midfielder Juan Cuadrado will miss Juventus's midweek Champions League last 16, first leg trip to Porto, the Italian team said Monday.

Cuadrado picked up "a low-grade lesion of the hamstring of the right thigh (and) will be reevaluated again in 10 days," the club said.

The 32-year-old came off during Juventus's 1-0 defeat at Napoli on Saturday which put the brakes on the champions' push for a 10th consecutive league title.

Nadal, Barty Into Australian Open Quarters

MELBOURNE (Dispatches) - One week into the Australian Open, Rafael Nadal has experienced as many injury-related emotions as some tennis players do in an entire season. He has been through the frustration of arriving at the first grand slam tournament of the year injured and the tension of focusing so many of his on-court thoughts on not inflicting more damage as he waited for his prognosis to improve.

Finally, as he beat Fabio Fognini 6-3, 6-4, 6-2 on Monday to reach the quarter-finals, his focus shifted to the hope that he may well improve enough to truly compete in the week ahead.

"The preparation probably had been worse this year than the year before because I had that problem on the back for the last 19, 20 days," Nadal said. "But I found a way to be what I am today and the feelings are right there without a doubt. So yeah, I make a step forward today, something that I needed, and I need to make another one for Wednesday against [Stefanos] Tsitsipas."

Fognini has, at certain points in Nadal's career, been a true thorn in his side. The Italian has beaten him four times and he is one of the few players unmoved by the aura of the big three, which can sometimes produce comical results: he once spent a chunk of their 2015 match in Hamburg ceaselessly bickering with Nadal.

Meanwhile in women's competition, world number one Ashleigh Barty's defensive mastery flummoxed big-hitting Shelby Rogers on Monday (Feb 15) as she stormed into the Australian Open quarter-finals to heighten hopes of a first home winner in 43 years.

Beal Nets 35 to Lead Wizards Over Celtics

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - NBA scoring leader Bradley Beal poured in 35 points Sunday to spark the Washington Wizards over the Boston Celtics 104-91, delivering a rare home victory for what had been the league's second-worst squad.

Beal went 10-of-18 from the floor, 4-of-9 from 3-point range, and 11-of-11 from the free throw line while the Wizards grabbed a season-best 54 rebounds and kept Boston to 32-of-90 shooting.

Japanese forward Rui Hachimura scored 15 points while Russell Westbrook had 13 points, 11 assists and nine rebounds for the Wizards, who improved to 7-17 overall but remained the NBA's worst team at home at 3-9.

Jaylen Brown and Kemba Walker each scored 25 points to lead the Celtics, who fell to fifth in the East at 13-13. Jayson Tatum, a boyhood pal of Beal, had only six points on 3-of-14 shooting.

"It's always a battle. Jayson is a superstar," Beal said. "You always have to bring it. The mental has to be there. It always feels good to get a win."

Beal rested in a 109-91 loss Friday to New York. "For me it was just being able to be away from the game, unwind, be with the wife and kids," Beal said. "For once I actually listened to my mind and body and took a day off."

Westbrook will face his former club, the Houston Rockets, on Monday when former Wizards star John Wall returns to the US capital.

"We've got John coming in. You know they are going to be riled up," Beal said. "They got the best of us down there, so we've got to make sure that doesn't happen again."

Beal scored seven points in Washington's 15-8 run to start the game, with Boston opening 2-of-9 from the floor.

Beal, who began 5-of-5 then missed his next six shots from the floor, had 12 in the first quarter as the Wizards opened a 29-22 edge.

Washington seized a 55-43 halftime edge, matching the fewest first-half points the Wizards had allowed all season.

The Australian was ruthless in her 6-3, 6-4 victory over the in-form Rogers in one hour and 11 minutes in the fourth round at a crowd-less Rod Laver Arena.

Barty, who is aiming to become the



first Australian champion since Chris O'Neil in 1978, will play 25th seed Karolina Muchova in the quarter-finals after the Czech beat 18th seed Elise Mertens 7-6 (7-5), 7-5.

"I love playing at home and sharing this with my friends and family," said Barty, who hit 21 winners.

"She's a player that can take the game away from you very quickly, so I needed my running shoes on," she said of Rogers, the world number 57.

"I served well and I tried to be in control of as many points as I could."

The former French Open champion again appeared unfazed by the absence of home support in the stands, with fans barred until at least Thursday due to Melbourne's snap five-day COVID-19 lockdown.

Having been pushed to the brink by Rogers just last week in the Yarra Valley Classic quarter-finals, an aggressive Barty stepped up the intensity with strong serving and blunted the American's groundstrokes with a slew of brilliant retrievals.

Czech Karolina Muchova recovered from a shaky start to defeat Belgian Elise Mertens 7-6(7-5), 7-5 and reach the last eight.

Mertens, seeded 18th at Melbourne Park, had defeated Muchova in straight sets at the end of last year in Ostrava in their only previous meeting, and was cruising at 4-0 in the first set.

But 25th seed Muchova then found her range at the Margaret Court Arena and soon got back on level terms before taking the opener in the tie-breaker.

Alonso Leaves Hospital After Cycling Crash



PARIS (Dispatches) - Former Formula One champion Fernando Alonso has left hospital after having surgery on a jaw fracture suffered in a road accident while cycling last week, his team, Alpine, announced on Monday.

According to newspaper Gazzetta dello Sport and the BBC, veteran racer Alonso was hit by a car near his home on Thursday in Lugano in Switzerland, close to the Italian border.

"After a period of 48 hours observation at hospital in Switzerland, Fernando Alonso has now been discharged to continue his recovery at home," said the F1 outfit, re-branded from Renault.

"He will now have a short period of complete rest before progressively resuming

training to undertake preparation for the start of the season.

"As always, thank you for your best wishes for Fernando's recovery," they added.

Alonso, who won the F1 championship with Renault in 2005 and 2006, is set to make his return to motorsport's elite level at the season-opening Bahrain Grand Prix on March 28. He last raced in the sport three years ago.

Testing for the new season is taking place in Bahrain between March 12-14, and Alpine said the 39-year-old was expected to take part.

Alonso is set to be the second-oldest member of the F1 paddock, behind Alfa-Romeo's 41-year-old Finnish driver Kimi Raikkonen.

Alonso completed a number of tests in the closing months of 2020 to prepare for his F1 comeback, making his full official testing return at the end-of-season session in Abu Dhabi in December.

Shiffrin Wins Women's Combined

ROME (Reuters) - American Mikaela Shiffrin won a record-breaking ninth medal in world championships alpine skiing after an immaculate slalom run propelled her to gold in the women's combined event on Monday.

Shiffrin, who surpassed the record she had shared with compatriot Lindsey Vonn, won her sixth overall gold medal and the first in the 2021 championships after finishing 0.86 seconds ahead of Slovakian rival Petra Vlhova.

Michelle Gisin clocked third spot 0.89 seconds off the pace to underline Switzerland's prowess in Cortina D'Ampezzo, with her compatriots Corinne Suter and Lara Gut-Behrami already hauling in four medals between them including two golds.

Shiffrin gave herself a fighting chance of taking the combined honours after finishing the morning's super-G leg of the event in third place behind Italians Federica Brignone and Elena Curtoni.

But she still had it all to do on a hard and icy slalom course which saw Brignone suffer a heartbreaking exit almost straight out of the block, when she lost her balance at the second gate and then missed the third.

Next Curtoni completed the course with a smooth run before Shiffrin, who conceded last year's World Cup title to Brignone, stormed down the piste to leave the Italian and then the rest of her rivals trailing in her wake.

The 25-year old from Vail, Colorado, who claimed the bronze medal in Thursday's super-G, was elated after winning her first ever combined gold medal in the world championships.

"I am happy we decided to put the combined event in the plans for this world champs," she told Eurosport in a flash interview in the finish area.

"It was a really nice day, beautiful weather and really great tracks on both events. It's sometimes intimidating to go on that surface, it's like going into battle."



Salah Vows Liverpool Won't Give Up Title Fight

LONDON (Dispatches) - Mohamed Salah has warned Manchester City that Liverpool will "fight like champions" despite a miserable run that plunged his side's Premier League title defense into turmoil.

Jürgen Klopp's side are languishing 13 points behind leaders City after crashing to a 3-1 defeat at Leicester on Saturday.

Salah had given Liverpool the lead with his 17th league goal of the season, but the Reds collapsed in the closing stages.

Klopp conceded the title to City after Liverpool's third successive defeat.

It is a remarkable decline after Liverpool romped to their first title in 30 years last term. But, after 24 hours of painful fallout from the loss at the King Power Stadium, with Liverpool fans hanging a banner in support of the German boss on the railings outside the Kop reading 'Jurgen Klopp YNWA', Egypt forward Salah made a defiant statement of intent.

"It's been a tough period for many reasons. We are champions and we will fight like champions, until the very end," Salah wrote on Twitter.

"We will not allow this season to be defined by the recent results we've had. That is my promise to all of you."

While retaining the title may now be beyond Liverpool, they are still in the Champions League.

Klopp's team face the Bundesliga's second-placed side Leipzig in a last-16 first-leg clash on Tuesday.

The match, which has been moved to the Puskas Arena in Hungary due to German government coronavirus regulations not allowing Liverpool to travel to the country, could be pivotal to the rest of the Reds' campaign.

