

Health Ministry Spokeswoman  
Sima Sadat Lari Said on  
Wednesday That Some 67 More  
Iranians Died From the COVID-19  
Over the Past 24 Hours Bringing  
The Total Deaths to 59,184

# IRAN NEWS

The U.N. Nuclear Watchdog's  
Director General, Rafael Grossi,  
Will Visit Tehran on Saturday to  
Discuss How to Work With Iran  
In Light of Its Plan to Scaleback  
Cooperation as of Tuesday

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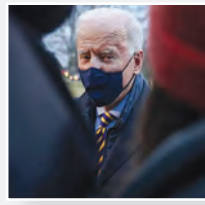


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## Tehran Has Right To Access Peaceful Nuclear Tech

TEHRAN (PressTV) - President Hassan Rouhani has reiterated that Iran does not seek to develop nuclear weapons or a secretive nuclear program, but reserves the right to use peaceful nuclear technologies.

Speaking at a cabinet meeting in Tehran on Wednesday, Rouhani said Iran is a member of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and has been implementing the Safeguards Agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

"As we have repeatedly said, there is no place for weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), including nuclear weapons, in the country's defense program, and this is the definitive view of the Islamic establishment," he added.

The remarks came ahead of Iran's new steps away from the 2015 nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), in response to the US's withdrawal and the other parties' non-compliance with the accord.

Tehran is expected to cease the voluntary implementation of the Additional Protocol to the NPT Safeguards Agreement, which allows the IAEA to carry out short-notice inspections at non-declared locations.

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## Iranian, Russian Navies Practice Anti-Piracy Operations

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iranian and Russian naval forces have practiced anti-piracy operations, during which they rescued two hijacked merchant vessels, on the second day of their joint naval maneuvers in the Sea of Oman and the northern part of the Indian Ocean.

According to the maneuvers' spokesman, Rear Admiral Gholamreza Tahani, the commercial ships sent distress signals to the Chabahar port's Maritime Rescue Coordination Center (MRCC), before a Sikorsky SH-3D Sea King helicopter of the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy flew over the area and surveyed it.

Tahani added Iran's fully-indigenous Jamaran destroyer was then deployed to the area, and the participating warships were assigned with the liberation operation in two groups of Iranian and Russian units.

He said commandos with the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy and the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) as well as their Russian counterparts rappelled down onto the deck of the hijacked ship, captured pirates and liberated the vessel as outlined in the scenario.

**See Page 7**

## Tehran Not to Accept Words But Action on JCPOA



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei says Iran will not accept mere verbal promises in the case of the 2015 nuclear agreement this time around and needs to see action on the part of the co-signatories, given the many instances of counterparty non-compliance the country has faced.

Ayatollah Khamenei made the remarks during a virtual meeting on Wednesday with a group of people from Tabriz, the provincial capital of Iran's northwestern East Azerbaijan Province, on the anniversary of the city's uprising against the tyrannical rule of the former US-backed Pahlavi regime a year before the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

"Concerning the JCPOA, I should just say one word. We have heard many nice words and promises that have been violated and have not been fulfilled in action," Ayatollah Khamenei said. "But this time around, [we accept] only actions!"

The Leader was referring by abbreviation to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the official name of the landmark nuclear agreement that Iran signed in 2015 with the P5+1 group of states — the U.S., the UK, France, Russia, and China plus Germany. "If we see action on the part of the other side, we will take action as well. The Islamic Republic will not be satisfied with mere words and promises this time around," the Leader said.

Elsewhere, the Leader said the country should try to neither conceal nor deny the areas, in which it is lagging behind. Nevertheless, "all in all, the situation now is very different from what it used to be before the Revolution, and we have made numerous advancements today," Ayatollah Khamenei noted.

However, the enemy projects the instances of frustration many times bigger, and does not reflect the advancements at all, the Leader said.

The adversaries, Ayatollah Khamenei added, are doing so in order to frustrate the youths and make the Iranian people grow pessimistic about the future.

The country, in turn, is duty-bound to use its advancements to make up for its shortcomings, despite the adversaries' malign attempts.

Meanwhile, Ayatollah Khamenei urged a lively popular participation in the country's upcoming presidential elections that is slated to be held in June.

The Leader considered a high electoral turnout and the election of the right person for the position to be the "cure for the country's chronic pains" and what "guarantees its future."

Ayatollah Khamenei described the polls as a "very great opportunity" for the country, where the public contribution would push back against hostilities.

"This opportunity should, therefore, not be lost," the Leader said, noting, "The livelier the election, the greater the popular reception of it, and the broader effects and benefits for the country," Ayatollah Khamenei said.

In contrast with the pre-Revolution era, it is now the Iranian people that govern the country and decide its fate, the Leader said.

Ayatollah Khamenei said enemies will try to exercise their enmity towards the country under various guises, including by accusing it of violating human rights or finding fault with its nuclear energy program, missile activities, and regional influence.

"One, however, should pay note that these are all pretexts," the Leader cautioned and urged "reinforcement of national identity" and "increasing internal power" as the two vehicles through which the nation could triumph against all adversarial plots.

## Iran, Russia, Turkey Resume Syria Peace Talks

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran, Russia and Turkey have launched a new round of negotiations in the Astana format between Syrian government delegates and representatives of foreign-sponsored opposition groups, months after the intra-Syrian peace talks were called off amid the coronavirus pandemic.

The 15th meeting of senior experts from the three guarantor nations of the Syrian peace process kicked off in Russia's Black Sea resort city of Sochi on Tuesday, with a UN delegation in attendance.

The two-day international meeting will reportedly discuss issues such as Syria's Constitutional Committee, the Damascus government's sovereignty over the entire Syrian territories, reconstruction of war-ravaged areas, return of Syrian refugees, exchange of prisoners as well as ways to counter US and Western sanctions. The talks are known as the Astana process, because Kazakhstan's capital, Nur-Sultan, formerly called Astana, originally hosted the meetings.

The Astana talks resulted in two agreements.

A first deal was signed in Kazakhstan's capital, arranging for the creation of de-escalation zones across Syria, including in parts of Idlib. The second one that came about in Sochi allowed Ankara to bring in a small number of forces to man the observation posts to reinforce de-escalation.

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## Iran Exports Down by 19% In Month to Late January

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's non-oil exports dropped by 19% in the calendar month to January 19, the country's customs office (IRICA) says, as the value of shipments sent to China fell by nearly a quarter of a billion U.S. dollars.

IRICA spokesman Rouhollah Latifi said on Tuesday that the total value of non-oil export shipments sent from Iran to other countries between December 20 and January 19 had reached \$2.951 billion, down from \$3.644 recorded at the end of the previous calendar month.

Shipments to China, the top customer of Iranian goods, declined by \$249 compared to the previous month to stand at \$827 million, IRICA figures showed.

The value of shipments sent to Iraq, the United Arab Emirates, Turkey and Afghanistan had amounted to \$1.29 billion or nearly 44 percent of all export revenues gained over the period.

Iran had a trade deficit of \$830 million in the 10th month of the current calendar year as the total value of trade reached \$6.732 billion, up from \$6.302 seen at the end of the previous month.

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## IAEA Confirms Iran Notification Of Plan to End Additional Protocol Inspections

GENEVA (Dispatches) - The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) says Iran has informed the UN nuclear watchdog of its plan to cease the voluntary implementation of Additional Protocol to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty's Safeguards Agreements.

"Iran informed the IAEA on 15 February that the country will stop implementing voluntary transparency measures under the JCPOA as of 23 February, including the Additional Protocol," an IAEA statement said on Tuesday, using the abbreviation for the official title of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal — the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

Under the JCPOA, Iran is applying the Additional Protocol, which grants the IAEA the power to carry out short-notice inspections at locations not declared to it.

However, a law passed last December by the Iranian Parliament (Majlis) requires that the government stop the voluntary implementation of the Additional Protocol unless the other parties to the nuclear deal meet their obligations.

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## Nasrallah Warns Israel Not Play With Fire

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Hezbollah's secretary-general has warned the Israeli regime not to play with fire, saying any Israeli act of aggression against Lebanon will be met by a strong response from the resistance movement.

Sayed Hassan Nasrallah made the remarks in a televised speech on Tuesday in commemoration of the martyrdom anniversary of a number of top Hezbollah commanders, including Imad Mughniyeh, who was assassinated in Syria in February 2008.

Nasrallah insisted that Hezbollah does not seek a military confrontation but it will display a resistance much stronger than ever before if it is pushed into one.

"Israel has never committed itself to international law, [the regime has] destroyed cities and killed civilians in all its wars," the Hezbollah chief said in the televised speech.

"We are not looking for a confrontation but we do not forget the blood of our martyrs," he underlined. "If a confrontation happens we will respond to it; if you attack our cities we will attack yours; if you target our villages, we will bomb your settlements."

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# 3 Intelligence Forces Martyred in Sistan and Baluchestan

TEHRAN (IP) - The Public Relations and Information Center of Iran's Ministry of Intelligence announced in a statement that three intelligence forces were martyred in Sistan and Baluchestan province. According to a report on Wednesday from the Public Relations and Information Center of the Ministry of Intelligence, following the intelligence operations on one of the organized crime gangs in Sistan and Baluchestan province, three intelligence forces were martyred.

## Ball Is Now In U.S. Court

**TEHRAN (IFP) - President Hassan Rouhani says the ball is now in the U.S. court, as its return to compliance with the 2015 nuclear deal will lead to Iran's return to fulfilling its obligations under the JCPOA.**

Speaking in a Tuesday phone call with President of the Swiss Confederation Guy Parmelin, President Rouhani said, "Now the ball is in America's court, and whenever it effectively lifts illegal sanctions, everything will get back on track."

He said resolving problems through threats, pressure and coercion against the Iranian people has certainly failed.

"The U.S.' policy of maximum pressure has completely failed with the resistance of the Iranian people, and it is only through methods based on rationality and mutual respect that problems can be overcome," he added.

President Rouhani further hailed good relations between Tehran and Bern and described them as historical and deep.

"It is necessary to develop and deepen these good relations more than before and within the framework of the joint cooperation roadmap, considering the high capacities in both countries. Tehran-Bern relations can be promoted to an appropriate level," he added.

"Fortunately, Iran-Switzerland relations are in a good state thanks to a roadmap drawn for relations in various political, cultural and economic fields, such as transportation, health, medicine, agriculture and science and technology, even during the tough U.S. sanctions," he said.

"We are seeking to further facilitate the activities of important Swiss companies that have continued to operate in Iran despite sanctions," Rouhani added.

He also called for the necessary measures to be taken effectively for the Swiss financial channel and the implementation of those joint agreements that have been suspended due to the policies of the previous U.S. administration, and a step towards the use of capacities.



Rouhani also described the Hormuz Peace Endeavour (HOPE) initiative as a step to encourage collective security in the region and welcomed any constructive and operational initiative by countries such as Switzerland.

"Undoubtedly, in an insecure environment, everyone in the region and in Europe will be harmed, and Iran is ready to take confidence-building measures if the other countries in the region show the necessary will," he added.

Referring to the sad situation of the Yemeni people, the President called for an immediate ceasefire, the sending of aid, the prevention of arms transfers to some countries in the region, and finally the start of Yemeni-Yemeni talks as the final solution to return peace to the country.

In turn, the President of the Swiss Confederation congratulated the government and people of Iran on the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution and said, "Bern is willing to develop relations with Iran in areas of mutual interest and will make every effort in this regard."

He expressed satisfaction with the activities of Swiss companies in Iran despite the US sanctions, and referred to the Swiss financial channel and its role, saying Switzerland is committed to transferring Iranian assets in some countries to this channel.

The Swiss president also described the current situation in the international field as another opportunity for all parties to return to fulfil their obligations, and said that Switzerland was ready to make efforts in this direction.

Parmelin also stressed the importance of returning security to Yemen and strengthening regional cooperation, saying that Iran, given its effective role in the region, could help restore peace to Yemen with the help of other parties, including the European Union.

## Tehran, Baku Review Ways to Expand Parliamentary Ties

BAKU (IRNA) - Chairman of the Iranian Parliament (Majlis) National Security and Foreign Policy Commission Mojtaba Zonnouri in Baku on Wednesday reviewed ways to expand parliamentary ties with First vice-speaker of Azerbaijan Parliament, Ziyafat Asgarov.

First vice-speaker of Azerbaijan Parliament, chairman of the committee on defense, security and fight against corruption said that the Iranian and Azeri Governments are willing to develop diplomatic ties in different aspects.

He said that the agreements already signed between the two countries are very important law for the development of relations. Ziyafat Asgarov said that parliamentary ties serve as confidence-building for relations in the post-coronavirus era.

Zonnouri said for his part that there are great capacities for economic cooperation and that the parliaments can help in this regard. Zonnouri highlighted the joint efforts for development of the north-south and south-west international transport corridors and Iran's readiness to expand cooperation with the Republic of Azerbaijan in various fields.

Referring to the potentials of Iranian companies, he said that Iranian companies are ready to work for carrying out development projects in Azerbaijan. Iranian parliamentary delegation also held talks with Head of the National delegation to the PACE Samad Seyidov.

## Brussels Urged Not to Follow the Western World Hype

**IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK**

TEHRAN – Head of Iran-Belgium Parliamentary Friendship Group Mahmoud Ahmadi Bighash in meeting with Ambassador of Belgium to Tehran Ms. Veronique Petit urged Belgium not to follow the Western world hype especially the U.S.

In the meeting, Ahmadi Bighash referred to the 130-year-old friendly relations between Tehran and Brussels and their historic interactions in different fields, adding that the bright horizon between countries depends on history of cooperation and interactions and bilateral relations have made important the climate for strengthening interactions.

He noted that formation of friendship groups in this term of Majlis is a serious demand for boosting the level of interactions and called for strengthening relation in broader level with Belgium.

He announced Majlis readiness for cooperation with Belgium parliament in different levels, adding, he would welcome any move for bolstering the relation.



He then pointed to the arrest and trial of Iranian diplomat Mr. Assadi in Brussels, saying that Iran's old relation with Belgium considers a certain level of expectation and it is expected Brussels not to follow the western world hype especially with the U.S.

Ms. Petit, for her part, pointed to the historic cooperation between Iran and Belgium in customs and tax sector and expressed her satisfaction over meeting with Ahmadi Bighash. She further said boosting interactions in different fields of political, economic and trade with cooperation of parliaments have always witnessed growing trend and both countries can accelerate their bilateral exchanges.

She expressed hope the joint economic commission of Iran and Belgium could bolster these relations. She also emphasized her country's support of diplomacy, adding that settling the misunderstanding of Iran about Belgium can be resolvable and called the appeal for the verdict of Iranian diplomat Mr. Assadi a good opportunity for settling the dispute.

## Iran to Be Hub of Science, Technology If Sanctions Lifted



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said in a meeting here on Wednesday that if sanctions were lifted, Iran would become the hub of science and technology.

He told heads of science and technology parks in the meeting that sci-tech parks can increase effective forces in the country and prevent brain drain.

Zarif said that sci-tech parks can provide Iranian students, who are well attracted by reputable foreign universities, with an opportunity to be active in their own country.

Science and technology parks can prepare the ground for the Iranian students to enter production field beyond the theory, Zarif said.

He further highlighted the great capacities of the knowledge-based companies which can be effective in increasing country's exports.

He said that the Foreign Ministry and all Iranian embassies across the world are ready to help knowledge-based companies to export their products.

Meanwhile, an official at Ministry of Science, Research and Technology, said in the meeting that 45 science and technology parks are now active in the country.

Gholam-Hossein Rahimi said Iranian scholars recorded over 6,000 scientific documents on valid global bases in 2020.

## Iran, Tunisia to Set Up Joint Council to Resolve Economic Problems

**IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK**

TEHRAN – Head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mine and Agriculture (ICCIMA) Gholamhossein Shaei in meeting with Ambassador of Tunisia to Tehran Mr. Samir Al-Mansar explored ways for improving bilateral economic relations.

In the meeting, Shafei pointed to cultural commonalities between Iran and Tunisia and economic and political background of both countries and said good geographical position of both countries play important role in developing relations of Iran and Tunisia as Tunisia is the gateway for Iran to enter European states.

He went on to say unfortunately despite huge economic capacities between the two countries, the volume of their economic relations is insignificant therefore a question is raised why their economic relation is not appropriate despite these capacities and good political relation.

Shafei pointed to technical and engineering services, SMEs and oil and gas as important fields for joint cooperation and exchange of information.

Tunisian Ambassador Mr. Al-Mansar, for his part, said the current economic relation of the two countries is not satisfactory, emphasizing that due to geographical position, Tunis can be a gateway for arrival of Iranian goods in

Europe and its services into Africa.

He also called for reinforcing relation between chambers of commerce of Iran and Tunisia. He admitted that negative propagation against Iran in the media has been the main fact behind failure in boosting economic cooperation of Iran and Tunisia despite

Al-Mansar also said long distance between Tehran and Tunisia as well as financial problems resulted by sanctions are the other factors behind decline in economic relation of Iran and Tunisia. He went on to say that for reconstruction of Libya and arrival of Iran into this country via Tunis is one of the important grounds for joint cooperation between Iran and Tunisia.

Then Shafei said setting up joint companies is one of the solutions for operationalizing this goal and called for establishing a joint commercial council between Iran and Tunisia for resolving existing problems which was welcomed by Al-Mansar and it was decided both countries to introduce their representatives to this council as soon as possible.



## Volume of Investment a Proof to Developmental Approach in Free Zones



**IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK**

TEHRAN - Secretary of the Supreme Council of Iran's Free Trade, Industrial and Special Economic Zones says the amount of investment shows that the developmental approach in the free zones is on the right track.

Addressing the administrative council of Sistan and Baluchestan during his visit to Chabahar Port for inaugurating some projects, Mr. Morteza Bank said Chabahar Free Zone in recent years has had successful performance and with required credit and endeavors of its managers, it is completing its infrastructures.

He noted that trust of investors in free zones has caused economic pick-up and surge in production.

Mr. Bank went on to say that most of problems in the zone have resolved and planning by the council of the town should be adopted based on the free zone policies.

He went on to say that with providing infrastructures, the zones can do economic activities and create jobs and production and investors can be active in seven free zones.

Mr. Bank reiterated that all national and international capabilities should be employed for offering better services and to attract more investment.

He also criticized unnecessary interference and regulation as well as bureaucracies which slow down investment and speed of investment.

Mr. Bank reiterated that the only way for presence in the international markets and attracting foreign investment is ease of doing business, adding that the relative superiority of free zones and special economic zones comparing to other sectors in the country is very crystal clear.

## Iran, Afghanistan to Boost Bilateral Relations

TEHRAN (IP) - Iran and Afghanistan's political deputy foreign ministers discussed the latest developments in bilateral issues via video conference.

Abbas Araqchi expressed the sympathy of the Iranian nation with Afghanistan's people for the recent blaze and said: "We are by your side."

Political Deputy Foreign Minister of Afghanistan, Mirwais Nab, also thanked the Iranian government and organizations for their timely and effective assistance in the Islam Qala incident.

Iran-Afghanistan issues of interest in the development of bilateral relations and regional cooperation were also discussed at the meeting.

A massive fire broke out by the explosion of a gas tank at Afghanistan's Islam-Qala customs post near the Iran-Afghanistan border on February 13, 2021.

## Solving Environmental Problems Is Gov't Priority

TEHRAN (Baku (Dispatches) - Iranian government's priority is to find effective solutions for environmental issues, said Iran's First Vice President Eshaq Jahangiri.

"Development and economic issues are important but obtaining sustainable development requires that we protect the country's environment," said Jahangiri.

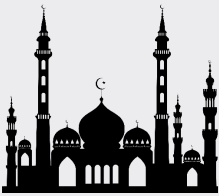
"The country's officials and people should consider necessity to solve environmental issues and use all capacities to prevent endangering human lives," he said. "The international treaty of Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, was signed fifty years ago and now 171 countries joined the treaty," he reminded.

Jahangiri also said that wetlands in Iran 'have been damaged and destroyed despite the convention treaties'.

"Transforming agriculture lands for housing construction without permits, land speculation on sea sides and mountain side and air pollution are the issues of most concern," he said, adding that these issues require international help.

"Iran's wetlands are facing serious dangers due to lack of attention for sustainable development policy, increase of water consumption and climate change," he said.





PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)

■ Evening (Maghreb)

■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)

■ Tomorrow's Sunrise

12:18

18:07

05:22

06:46

5. To Him belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth; and all affairs are referred back to Allah.

6. He merges Night into Day, and He merges Day into Night; and He has full knowledge of the secrets of (all) hearts.

Surah 57. Iron (5-6)

Bratislava Calls for Filling the Gap in Economic Ties With Tehran

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN – Ambassador of Slovakia to Tehran Mr. Ladislav Ballek in meeting with head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mine and Agriculture (ICCIMA) Mr. Gholamhossein Shafei said Slovakia is the gateway for Iran’s entering Europe and the current gap between economic and political relations of both countries should be filled immediately.**

Ballek in the meeting announced readiness of Slovak officials for expanding ties with Iran, saying that in 2018 the best record in Slovakia’s trade with Tehran was set, adding that although in years after the JCPOA the trade between the two countries was not materialized in the satisfactory level, he hopes with strong determination and eager which exists among officials of Iran, the bilateral trade would improve.

He blamed the U.S. sanctions against Iran as the main factor behind the decline in economic relations between Tehran and Bratislava in the past years, saying that Slovakia will be one of the first countries which will expand its relations with Iran immediately after sanctions are lifted.

Ballek also pointed to the restrictions due to the coronavirus pandemic and the slump in the prices of some industries like tourism, noting that the outbreak of the virus can be considered as an opportunity for investment in those industries.

He then added that Tehran would change the world political condition and with its materialization, it is expected trade diplomacy to be the priority of countries like Iran and Slovakia.

Ballek then said Slovakia is the gateway for Iran’s presence in Europe, reiterating that

the gap between economic and political relations should be filled as soon as possible.

Meanwhile Shafei, for his part, said despite good economic capacities in both countries for developing ties, the trade volume and developing relations are not satisfactory and up to the expectations and economic growth between both countries has not grown along with political ties.

He went on to say that there are several good fields for cooperation like auto industries that Slovakia can have effective role, adding that Iran due to its geographical position has prioritized expansion of its transportation and rail network that it can cooperate with Slovakia considerably in this regards.

Shafei also pointed to establishing the Iran-Slovakia Joint Commerce Committee in ICCIMA and expressed hope that the committee would lead to developing bilateral trade. He noted that despite sanctions, if economic activists are connected to each other, they can find ways for expansion of ties. He also called barter trade as one of these ways which will boost Iran-Slovakia relations.

He also said that as Slovakia is the gateway to Europe, this country can have an access to a 400-million people market via Iran and therefore with a regional approach on the agenda, both countries can expand economic relations

Shafei then announced readiness of ICCIMA for taking step on course to boost the relations of both countries and it is expected both states to shape a constructive relation for developing ties.

Tehran Mayor Welcomes Danish Renewable Energies Technology

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Mayor of Tehran Pirouz Hanachi said in a meeting with Ambassador of Denmark to Iran Jasper Vahr that the Municipality of Tehran welcomes plans of renewable energies proposed by the Danish companies.

Hanchi said that Denmark’s activities in civil issued are usable for Iran and Tehran welcomes cooperation with Copenhagen in civil fields.

In the meeting held in the Municipality of Tehran, Hanachi referred to Vahr’s suggestion about reducing energy use in buildings in Tehran, adding that using renewable energies use is among the serious programs of Tehran.

Using electric motorcycles, taxis, and buses is on the agenda, he said, and added that some municipality buildings have been equipped with solar cells. LRT is also among the ideas to be used in Tehran and if Danish companies incline, Tehran is ready to negotiate with them, Hanachi said.

Expressing happiness over the meeting with the mayor of Tehran, the Danish ambassador said that Tehran has changed a lot since he had last been to the city.

Vahr also said that Denmark has never supported the U.S. sanctions on Iran and announced that Danish companies are ready to cooperate with Tehran in different fields, including reduction of renewable energies and innovative ideas.

On the Occasion of Inauguration of Pelletizing Plant of Goharzamin Iron Ore Company

Goharzamin; A Precious Gem in Southeastern Iran Mines

**Biography of Gohar Zamin Iron Ore Company:**

Iran Barit Company started iron ore exploration and exploration operations in an area in the southwest of Sirjan) Kerman province (in 1969 .Then ,Aeroservice Company performed aerial geophysical) magnetometric (surveys in an area of 45,000 square kilometers between Abadeh Fars and Jazmourian and identified several anomalies that had high potentials of iron ore .It was also found that the largest anomalies are located in Gol Gohar area .Aerial geophysical studies were carried out in collaboration with the Yugoslav Geological Survey from March to June 1975 in an area of 74 square kilometers ,including ground geophysics ,including magnetometry and gravimetry .The operation was reported in September of that year .The result of these studies was the emergence of six anomalies of iron ore in the vicinity of each other with iron ore reserves of 1100 million tons .Anomaly No .3 has the largest iron ore reserves among the six anomalies .Detailed studies in Anomaly No .3 have been completed with more than 46265 meters of drilling in the form of 147 boreholes .Based on the studies of the Canadian company ADC and the initial design in the open pit section of the mine ,which was carried out by Koosha Mining Engineering C ompany with the participation of WGM companies from Canada and SRK from England ,it has been determined that Gohar Zamin iron ore mine has geological reserves amounting to 610 million tons .Based on the designs, about one third of the mentioned reserve is designed and is being extracted openly. The rest of the storage is also being designed .According to the plans ,15 million tons of iron ore and 75 million tons of tailings and alluvium will be extracted annually with a 5 :1 waste removal ratio .Also ,after launching ,118 boreholes with an area of 380,000 meters have been drilled.

**Company activities :**

- Exploration ,extraction and exploitation of iron ore mines and production of concentrate and pell ets ,installation ,repair ,maintenance ,inspection ,service of equipment and machinery required by the company.
- Purchasing and preparing all kinds of equipment needed to do the subject of the company ,has been done.
- Also ,engineering services ,consulting ,management and providing technical knowledge from inside or outside to realize the company's theme.
- Participation and investment in other companies and mining and industrial projects ,concluding contracting contracts to provide technical and engineering services
- Undertaking all business affairs such as sales and purchases ,exports and imports and all affairs and operations that are directly or indirectly necessary for the implementation of the company's subject matter.
- Exploration ,extraction and exploitation of iron ore mines ,concentrate production and pellet production in two operational and study phases are underway.

**What is «pelletizing»?**

Pellets are spheres produced from natural iron concentrates and minerals with different mineralogical and chemical compositions.Pellets are pellets made from fine iron ore and other additives that are first raw and then cooked and hardened ,and are used for reduction by the traditional method of iron production in a blast furnace or by various direct reduction methods .Since the concentrate ,which is the product of the ores factory ,is in the form of granulated iron ores .These materials are not physically usable in this way ,and these fines reduce the gas permeability in the load of the blast furnace unevenly and disrupt the operation of the blast furnace .There are also problems with the direct resuscitation plant .Therefore, iron ingots are pellets ,which are considered as intermediate products from mines to iron and steel production furnaces .Since pellets are the raw material ,they must have desirable mechanical ,chemical and thermal properties in reduction furnaces. Pellets are spheres produced from natural iron concentrates and ores that differ in mineralogical and chemical composition.

**In fact, the purpose of the pelletizing unit is to convert iron concentrate into iron pellets with geometry and porosity. It is uniform.**

**Pellets have the following properties:**

- Uniform distribution of dimensions mainly from 9 to 16 mm
- High and uniform porosity 25 to 30%
- Uniform mineral composition in the form of hematite or regenerative hematite compounds
- High and uniform mechanical strength
- Abrasion resistance
- Sufficient mechanical strength even against heat stress in regenerative environments
- Have low adhesion
- The components of the pelletizing system are:
- Raw material transfer system
- Raw material crushing and crushing system
- Raw material mixing unit
- Production of raw pellets
- Pellet baking oven
- Dust collector system
- Cooling water supply system
- Final product transfer system
- Water purification system
- Compressed air production system
- Laboratory

**What are the steps of making pellets?**

First ,iron ore is extracted from the mine and after crushing and reaching the desired dimensions to remove iron ore impurities from the process of upgrading and flotation ,in the next stage ,iron ore with additives ,mixed and then in disks Pelletizing turns into raw pellets and after baking in the oven ,the final pellets will be produced.

**What is the purpose of pellet production?**

The purpose of pellet production is to increase the iron content of the concentrate to about 70% for direct reduction and about 67% for blast furnaces ,which converts the concentrate into pellets.

- Reduce energy and transportation costs
- Reducing environmental pollution due to more use of pellets in the steel cycle

- Reducing the amount of slag produced per ton
- Increasing the efficiency of blast furnaces and various methods of reducing iron oxide with .... and dubbing it in ... electric furnaces
- Easy storage and storage of iron ore pellets in open space for a long time without changing the properties and quality of iron
- Prevent the sale of raw materials
- More added value than concentrate
- Complete the steel cycle
- Employment boom Brings with it.

**The place of pelletizing in the country's steel cycle**

One of the completion rings of the country's steel chain is pelletizing .In this way ,first iron ore is extracted from the mine and then it is converted into iron concentrate and then it is converted into pellets and then sponge iron and then it is converted into steel ,which is called the sum of these stages of steelmaking and by production Annually 5 million tons of pellets by Goharzamin Company will definitely increase the country's steel capacity significantly.

**What effect did the sanctions and the outbreak of Corona disease have on the process of the Goharzamin pelletizing project?**

This project was the result of German technology and at the time of the commissioning ,most of the equipment had to be commissioned with the presence of foreign supervisors .In fact ,due to the outbreak of the infamous Crohn's disease ,Germany imposed restrictions on foreign supervisors to come to Iran .In this situation ,capable domestic engineers were able to install and operate all the equipment in a short time .Undoubtedly ,the construction and operation of the Goharzamin pelletizing production unit can be described as a great leap in production .At a time when the world is facing an adjustment and rising unemployment rate due to the outbreak of covid19 ,the inauguration of this project could lead to economic prosperity in the region.

**he effect of the pelletizing plant on the realization of the naming of the year of production leap by the Supreme Leader (Modzaleh Al-Aali):**

By setting up a pelletizing plant and adding it to the country's production cycle, it will be a great help to the steel industry ,which will play a significant role in fulfilling the orders of the Supreme Leader .In fact ,the launch of this factory will be another golden leaf for the honors of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

**The amount of credit and job creation of this project:**

The amount of credit of this project is 120 million Euros in the foreign exchange sector ,equivalent to 650 billion Tomans .Also ,with the launch of this project, about 500 people will be directly employed and 1200 people will be indirectly employed.

**Phase 2 pelletizing project of Gohar Zamin Company:**

Phase 2 of the pelletizing project has been located and will be constructed exactly parallel to phase 1 of the project. The design of this project is ready to be implemented and the preparations have been made.The Phase 2 of the pelletizing project is to be inaugurated today (Thursday) by President Hassan Rouhani.

**Empathy and harmony of a set to achieve a common goal**

In order to launch the pelletizing project and achieve this common goal, the sympathy of the CEO, members of the board of directors and all the hardworking employees and workers of Gohar Zamin Iron Ore Company deserves appreciation and thanks. With the final production of this product in Gohar Zamin Company, another step was taken towards the leap of national production and another golden leaf was added to the office of industrial honors of Sirjan province.



## Japan's Ruling Party Wants More Women at Meetings

TOKYO (Reuters) - After a sexism row sparked by Tokyo Olympics chief's saying women talked too much at meetings, Japan's ruling party wants women at key meetings - but only if they don't talk.

The ruling Liberal Democratic Party has proposed a new plan that allows five female lawmakers to join the party's key meetings as observers.

Toshihiro Nikai, the party's 82-year-old secretary general, said on Tuesday that he heard criticism that the party's board is male-dominated, but added that the board members are elected.



## New Covid-19 Cases Down 16% Last Week

GENEVA (AFP) - The number of new cases of Covid-19 reported worldwide fell by 16 percent last week to 2.7 million, the World Health Organization said.

The number of new deaths reported also fell 10 percent week-on-week, to 81,000, the WHO said late Tuesday in its weekly epidemiological update, using figures up to Sunday.

Five of the six WHO regions of the world reported a double-digit percentage decline in new cases, with only the Eastern Mediterranean showing a rise, of seven percent.



## Biden Plans to Recalibrate Relations With Saudi Arabia



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - President Joe Biden plans to shift U.S. relations with Saudi Arabia and will conduct diplomacy through Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz rather than his powerful son, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the White House said on Tuesday.

The announcement by White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki was an abrupt reversal in U.S. policy from Biden's Republican predecessor, President Donald Trump, whose son-in-law and senior adviser Jared Kushner maintained steady contact with the crown prince.

"We've made clear from the beginning that we are going to recalibrate our relationship with Saudi Arabia," Psaki told reporters. While her comments about the crown prince were likely to be seen as a snub, Psaki moved to clear the air on another controversy in the region, saying Biden would soon have his first phone conversation with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The crown prince, widely referred to as MbS, is considered by many to be the de facto leader of Saudi Arabia and next in line to the throne held by the 85-year-old King Salman.

His prestige suffered a blow after the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in 2018 at the hands of Saudi security personnel seen as close to the crown prince.

The Biden White House has been pressuring Saudi Arabia to improve its record on human rights, including the release of political prisoners such as women's rights advocates from jails.

The Trump White House had found MbS the leader to deal with in Saudi Arabia and worked with him on a variety of areas, such as resolving a rift between Qatar and other Gulf nations.

As for questions about whether Biden would speak to the crown prince, Psaki said Biden is returning to "counterpart to counterpart" engagement.

"The president's counterpart is King Salman and I expect at an appropriate time he will have a conversation with him. I don't have a prediction on the timeline for that," she said.

Psaki said Saudi Arabia has critical self-defense needs and the United States will work with the Saudis on this "even as we make clear areas where we have disagreements and where we have concerns. And that certainly is a shift from the prior administration."

Trump was a close ally of Netanyahu and moved U.S. relations to a strong pro-Israel position with little to no contact with the Palestinians.

Psaki said Biden's first call with a leader in the region will be with Netanyahu and it will be soon. Critics had accused Biden, a Democrat, of snubbing Netanyahu by not having spoken to the leader of the top U.S. ally in the Middle East.

## UN Alarmed at Military escalation In Yemen's Marib

SANAA (Dispatches) - The United Nations' humanitarian chief has said he is "very alarmed" by a Houthi rebel advance on the Yemeni government's last northern stronghold.

Mark Lowcock, the UN undersecretary-general for humanitarian affairs, tweeted on Tuesday that an assault on Marib would endanger two million civilians and could cause hundreds of thousands to flee the city, which would have "unimaginable humanitarian consequences".

The Houthis have this month resumed an offensive to seize Marib, some 120km (75 miles) east of Yemen's rebel-held capital, Sanaa.

The city's loss would be a major blow for Yemen's internationally recognized government, which is backed by a Saudi-led military coalition.

"Now is the time to de-escalate, not to add even more to the misery of the Yemeni people," Lowcock said in his tweet.

An assault on the city would put two million civilians at risk, with hundreds of thousands potentially forced to flee - with unimaginable humanitarian consequences. Now is the time to de-escalate, not to add even more to the misery of the Yemeni people.

Military officials from the Yemeni government told AFP news agency that the rebels had advanced towards the city on two fronts overnight after heavy fighting with government forces.

Dozens from both sides have been killed in the past 24 hours alone, they said. The total casualty toll from the battle for Marib is unknown but reports indicate it is now in the hundreds.

"The rebels have advanced north and west of the city after seizing al-Zor [in Sirwah district] up to the western sides of Marib dam, and tightened their grip on hills overlooking supply lines for several fronts," one of the officials said.

The Saudi-led coalition, which intervened militarily in Yemen six years ago, has been pounding rebel positions.



### Turkish Opposition Presses Gov't for Answers Over Iraq Killings

ANKARA (Reuters) - Turkish opposition parties pressed President Tayyip Erdogan's government on Tuesday for answers over what they called a failed cross-border mission to rescue 13 captive Turks who were killed by PKK militants in northern Iraq.

In a fierce parliamentary debate two days after Ankara broke news of the killings in a cave in Iraq's Gara region, Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu rejected opposition criticism and said Turkey "did everything we could to bring our martyrs back alive".

The captives, including police and military personnel, were mostly seized by outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) militants in 2015 and 2016. Ankara said they were executed during an offensive against the PKK in the area that Erdogan later indicated also aimed to rescue them.

On Wednesday, the day the offensive was launched, Erdogan promised he would soon announce some unspecified "good news".

Kemal Kilicdaroglu, leader of the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), demanded the government declare who should take responsibility "for the failure of the operation launched to rescue our 13 citizens", and he criticised Erdogan for undermining the secrecy of the offensive.

"The blood of our 13 brothers is on the ground. They could have been brought back to Turkey," he said. The military "carried out an offensive with drums and trumpets. Tayyip Erdogan is responsible for our 13 martyrs," Kilicdaroglu added.

Relying mostly on air and drone strikes, Turkey has in recent years carried out several operations in northern Iraq against the PKK, designated a terrorist group by Turkey, the United States and European Union.

Aytun Ciray, a lawmaker from the opposition Iyi Party, asked Akar on Tuesday why the rescue mission was treated like other offensives, saying air strikes would have alerted militants.

## Macron Rules out Immediate Troop Drawdown From Sahel

PARIS (Dispatches) - President Emmanuel Macron has ruled out an immediate drawdown in France's 5,100-strong Barkhane forces battling armed groups in the Sahel region of West Africa, describing a rushed exit as a mistake.

Macron said he was pushing back a decision on a troop reduction after a virtual summit of the so-called G5 Sahel countries - Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger - and their allies to discuss the future of their military campaign in the region.

"Changes that are likely to be significant will be made to our military deployment in the Sahel when the time comes, but they will not be made immediately," Macron told reporters in Paris.

"They will result first of all from a collective discussion with our Sahel partners and with the partners who have accepted to help us, and they will be based on the results obtained and the degree of engagement from our partners," he said.

Armed groups affiliated to al-Qaeda and ISIL (ISIS), once confined to lawless areas of northern Mali, have in recent years spread across the arid scrublands of the Sahel, into Burkina Faso and Niger, stoking ethnic tensions while jockeying for power and attacking security forces, which have also faced accusations of grave abuses.

The conflict in the western portion of the Sahel largely between state forces and armed groups linked to ISIL (ISIS) and al-Qaeda has ravaged the semi-arid strip south of the Sahara Desert for much of the past 10 years, killing thousands of people and forcing millions from their homes.

The deteriorating security situation has created an enormous humanitarian crisis, destroying fragile agricultural economies and hobbling aid efforts.

France, the region's former colonial power, is searching for an exit strategy eight years after it sent troops to intervene in Mali against rebel groups who had occupied the north of the country.

It has dispersed the rebels from northern Mali but its operation in the Sahel has cost billions of dollars and 55 French soldiers have been killed, sparking domestic calls for a strategy review.

Last year, Paris boosted its Operation Barkhane numbers by 600 to 5,100 soldiers, stationed in the Sahel alongside United Nations, American and European partners.

"In the coming months, we will not change our presence. We will launch other important operations, and we will above all be reinforced by the Chadian battalion, by the Malian mobilization, and by contributions from Mauritania," Macron said.



## Trump Lashes out at McConnell as Republican Rift Deepens

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - In the latest example of a growing rift in the United States Republican Party following the impeachment of Donald Trump, the former U.S. president on Tuesday lashed out at Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell.

"Mitch is a dour, sullen, and unsmiling political hack, and if Republican Senators are going to stay with him, they will not win again," Trump said in a statement.

McConnell on February 13 voted to acquit the former president in a U.S. Senate impeachment trial in which Trump was accused of inciting a mob of his supporters that stormed the U.S. Capitol on January 6.

The Senate ultimately did not have enough votes to convict Trump of "incitement of insurrection".

But in a speech after the vote, McConnell, once a solid backer of the former president, made an unequivocal rebuke of Trump, blaming him for the insurrection that left five dead.

"There is no question that President Trump is practically and morally responsible for provoking the events of that day," McConnell said from the Senate floor.

"The people who stormed this building believed they were acting on the wishes and instructions of their president."

McConnell's speech, along with the fact that seven Republican senators voted to convict Trump, has highlighted that some Republican legislators want the party to begin distancing itself from Trump.

But the former Republican president still maintains a hold on the party and his supporters - including several Republican legislators in Congress - remain firmly behind him. "The Republican Party can never again be respected or strong with political 'leaders' like Sen. Mitch McConnell at its helm," Trump said in his statement on Tuesday.

He also said he would back Republican "primary rivals who espouse Making America Great Again and our policy of America First".

Al Jazeera's John Hendren, reporting from Wisconsin, said Trump's statement was "a blistering declaration of civil war within the Republican Party".

Trump is not taking McConnell's critical speech after the Senate impeachment trial lightly, said Hendren.







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## Bitcoin Value Surges Above \$50,000 for First Time

LONDON (Dispatches) - Bitcoin rose above \$50,000 on Tuesday to a new record high, building on a rally fuelled by signs that the world's biggest cryptocurrency is gaining acceptance amongst mainstream investors.

Bitcoin hit a new high of \$50,602, and was last up 5% at \$50,300. It has risen around 72% so far this year, with most of the gains coming after electric carmaker Tesla said it had bought \$1.5 billion in bitcoin.

It also said it would accept the currency as payment.

But Tesla was only the latest in a string of large investments that have vaulted bitcoin from the fringes of finance to company balance sheets and Wall Street dealing desks, as U.S. firms and traditional money managers have started to buy a lot of it.



## China Overtakes U.S. as Europe's Main Trading Partner for the First Time

LONDON (Dispatches) - China dethroned the U.S. last year to become Europe's top trading partner for the first time, data from the European statistics office has shown.

European Union exports to China grew by 2.2% last year and imports rose by 5.6%. In comparison, exports to the U.S. dropped by 8.2% and imports fell by 13.2%. The latest figures, released Monday by Eurostat, showed that China now has an even bigger role in how European economies perform.

"The reason behind it is clearly the fact that China/Asia is the only region going through a nice V-shaped recovery," ING Germany economist Carsten Brzeski told CNBC on Tuesday.

China, where the first Covid-19 cases were reported, has not gone through severe social restrictions for a second time as has been the case in many European nations.

The current crisis gives us no other option but to work hand in hand with our global partners, including China.

As a result, the Chinese economy is performing slightly closer to pre-Covid levels in comparison with other parts of the world, where restrictions are still taking a toll on activity. China is expected to register the second-highest growth rate globally in 2021, according to forecasts from the International Monetary Fund.

"Looking ahead, the importance China has for European trade is also a clear dilemma," Brzeski said, adding that "Europe will have a hard time making choices" between trading with China and helping the U.S. on the technology front.

The U.S. and EU have clashed with Beijing over 5G and technology transfers — when a government asks foreign firms to share their tech in exchange for market access. At the same time, Washington and Brussels also have concerns over human rights in China.

The "risk is that compromising and balancing between the two will hamper future growth," Brzeski said.

However, the European Union seems willing to strengthen economic ties with China. The two reached a new investment agreement in December aimed at making it easier for European firms to operate in China.

The deal, which seemed to have been rushed through before Joe Biden's inauguration in late January, prohibits China from stopping access or introducing new discriminatory practices on manufacturing and some service sectors.

At the time of the announcement, European trade chief Valdis Dombrovskis said: "The current crisis gives us no other option but to work hand in hand with our global partners, including China."

"By pulling together we can recover more quickly economically, and make progress on areas of mutual interest such as trade and investment relations," he said in a statement.

The agreement has yet to be approved by European lawmakers, some of whom are critical of the Chinese government and are reluctant to sign it off.

## Gates Warns That Manufacturing Could Challenge Climate Goals

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Bill Gates exudes optimism in discussing the world's ability to tackle climate change—until he hits on manufacturing. About that, he is worried.

There is currently no way to make steel or cement without releasing climate-warming emissions. Yet, neither governments nor investors are looking hard to solve that problem, Gates said.

"That's the sector that bothers me the most," Gates said in a video interview with Reuters ahead of the publication this week of his book, "How to Avoid a Climate Disaster."

The software-developer-turned-philanthropist has invested some \$2 billion toward the development of clean technologies. But those investments are mostly in electricity generation and storage.

Manufacturing — especially in the cheap construction staples steel and cement — accounts for roughly a third of global greenhouse gas emissions. That makes manufacturing more polluting than the power or transportation sectors, which receive far more attention in policies and investments. And the manufacturing sector is set to grow, as the global population climbs and countries further develop.

"People still need basic shelter, certainly in developing countries," said Gates, co-founder of Microsoft Corp. "It's unlikely we'll stop building buildings."

Gates plans to push for more research and innovation at the U.N. climate conference in Glasgow in November. "The idea is to get innovation, including R&D, onto the agenda ... not just looking at the easy stuff."



## Saudi Arabia Pushes Companies to Move Headquarters to Kingdom

RIYADH (AFP) - Saudi Arabia will stop doing business with foreign companies with regional headquarters outside the kingdom starting in 2024, state media said, in a move aimed at boosting investment as unemployment soars.

The bold announcement could intensify competition between the kingdom and other Persian Gulf petro-states, including its principle ally the United Arab Emirates, for foreign capital as they reel from an economic downturn.

"Saudi Arabia intends to cease contracting with companies and commercial institutions with regional headquarters not located in the kingdom," the official Saudi Press Agency (SPA) reported, citing an unnamed official source.

"The cessation will include agencies, institutions and funds owned by the government and will take effect January 1, 2024."

The decision seeks to "create more jobs, limit economic leakage, increase spending efficiency and guarantee that the main goods and services purchased by the different government agencies are made in the kingdom", it added.

Saudi Arabia, the biggest Arab economy, has been struggling to attract foreign capital, a key pillar of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's "Vision 2030" economic diversification plan to boost non-oil revenue.

Under a previous government initiative known as "Programme HQ", Saudi Arabia had offered multi-national companies tax breaks and incentives to relocate their Middle East headquarters to the kingdom.

Many multinationals doing business in the conservative kingdom prefer to have their headquarters in the neighboring United Arab Emirates and other Persian Gulf capitals that offer a relatively more liberal lifestyle and permit alcohol.

SPA said "24 international companies announced their intent to move their regional headquarters to Riyadh" at last month's Davos-style Future Investment Initiative forum in the capital.

"Pressing multinationals to establish headquarters in Saudi Arabia centres upon the belief that foreign companies benefitting from the Saudi market should bolster their physical presence in the country," Robert Mogielnicki, a resident scholar at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, told AFP.

"This is ultimately a reevaluation of the sustainability of Saudi Arabia's economic development model and not an intentional commercial challenge to the UAE. If done successfully though, it is likely to have a commercial impact on the UAE."

Monday's announcement comes as the petro-state battles high unemployment and a sharp coronavirus-triggered economic downturn.

Joblessness in Saudi Arabia touched 14.9 percent in the third quarter of 2020, dipping slightly from an all-time high of 15.4 percent in the previous quarter, official data showed last month.

"The impact of COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect the Saudi labour market and the economy," Saudi Arabia's General Authority for Statistics said in a statement last month.

## Romania's Economy Outshines Rest of EU

BUCHAREST (Dispatches) - Romania's economy outperformed the rest of the European Union last quarter as the

government opted not to impose the kind of harsh lockdown that shuttered most of the continent.

Output not only grew from the previous three months, but surged more than 10 times what analysts had expected. The expansion of 5.3% puts it ahead of all other EU members to have reported data so far.

The fourth quarter was good for other parts of eastern Europe too: Hungary and Bulgaria both unexpectedly recorded growth from the previous three months, according to numbers published Tuesday. Lithuania looks set to be the EU's best performer last year.

Romania has officially dodged a recession during the pandemic by only notching one quarter of economic contraction, between April and June. Despite struggling with one of the bloc's widest budget shortfalls, it's managed to boost public investments to the highest in a decade, buoying construction while IT remained strong.

Prime Minister Florin Citu hailed the fastest rebound in his country's history.

"Everyone will need to revise 2021 GDP forecasts to the upside," said Ciprian Dascalu, an economist at Erste Group Bank in Bucharest.

## South Korea Expects Modest Recovery in Job Market

SEOUL (Dispatches) - South Korea's job market is expected to recover modestly from the pandemic as it will take more time for the number of workers employed to recover to a pre-crisis level, highlights a recent report by the Bank of Korea (BOK).

"Even when COVID-19 subsides and the economy returns to its pre-crisis level in the future, the employment slump is not expected to be resolved quickly," stated the report.

"The employment recovery could be slow, as new hiring is reduced and delayed until most workers on temporary absence and in unemployment return to work," it added.

During the global financial crisis in 2008, the job market took another six months to recover to pre-crisis levels, after the economy recovered, noted the central bank.

Unless vaccines for COVID-19 are made widely available, social distancing rules will continue to be adhered to, leading to a slump in service industries for a considerable time, it said, noting that in past crises, sectors that required physical interactions experienced a slower recovery compared to other industries.

So far, the government has disbursed some 280 trillion won (US\$254 billion) worth of stimulus to cushion the impact of Covid-19 on the economy, but businesses have hired fewer workers amid the economic uncertainty, reports Yonhap.



## India's Economy Could Recover, Grow 10% in Fiscal 2022



NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - Ratings agency S&P Global Ratings said Tuesday that India is on track to recover from a pandemic-led economic contraction by next year.

South Asia's largest economy could grow 10% in fiscal 2022, the ratings agency predicted in a report. India's fiscal year begins on April 1 and ends on March 31 in the following year.

"The Indian economy is on track to recover in fiscal 2022," the report said. "Consistently good agriculture performance, a flattening of the Covid-19 infection curve, and a pickup in government spending are all supporting the economy."

In 2020, India slipped into a technical recession due to the economic fallout from a lengthy lockdown to slow the spread of the coronavirus outbreak — in aggregate, the country has reported the second-highest number of cases, with over 10.9 million infections.

For the full fiscal 2021, which ends on March 31, India's economy is expected to shrink 7.7%.

The speed with which the Indian economy recovers from the coronavirus crisis will have "important implications" for the country's sovereign credit rating, according to S&P. "This includes the sustainability of the government's strained fiscal position," the report said.

In this month's budget announcement for fiscal 2022, the Indian government focused on spending measures that it said were designed to spur demand and get the economy back on a growth trajectory.

India's fiscal deficit target for the next fiscal year is around 6.8% of GDP, which is comparatively higher than levels before the pandemic.

While the budget will support recovery due to greater fiscal spending, India's improving growth prospects are going to be critical for its ability to sustain the higher levels of deficit, according to the S&P report.

The ratings agency estimated that India faces a permanent loss of about 10% of GDP output compared to its pre-pandemic path.



# CAO Extends Iran-UK Flight Ban to March 10

TEHRAN (MNA) – The Civil Organization of Iran (CAO) has extended the flight bans to and from the UK to March 10.

Abolghasem Jalali, the deputy head of CAO said that that the flights to and from the UK will remain suspended as the new Covid-19 strain is still spreading rapidly in that country.

He added that the connecting flights via other countries, especially European countries, have been completely restricted and controlled, and these restrictions continue until further notice.



# Shipping Is the Next Big Industry to Go Net-Zero

LONDON (Dispatches) - When the International Maritime Organisation announced plans to significantly reduce the amount of sulfur ships were allowed to emit, the industry adjusted relatively quickly. After all, it was all about the fuel. Now, the EU has set its sights on adding shipping to its Emissions Trading System. Meanwhile, a new kind of ship may be coming to the oceans of the world: zero-emission ships.

According to the European Commission, the shipping industry generates some 2.5 percent of the world’s greenhouse gas emissions or 940 million tons of carbon dioxide annually. As such, it is a ripe target for more emission regulation, especially as it falls in the category of hard-to-decarbonize industries. Alternatives to vessels fueled by diesel or liquefied natural gas have only had limited success so far, which means that for the observable future, shipping will continue to rely on fossil fuels.

The EU first unveiled plans to make shippers pay for their emissions last year, and the industry understandably took a stand against these plans. It argued that extending the ETS to the shipping sector went against international law. Unfortunately for the industry, the EU Court of Justice ruled against it.

This means that shipping will likely become more expensive once the process of extending the ETS to cover the industry is completed. It also means that chaos could ensue amid rivaling emission-reduction schemes—the IMO also has an emission-reduction scheme for the industry—different industry interests, and heightened political tensions.

This is what BIMCO, the world’s largest shipping association, warned earlier this month, ahead of the EU’s deadline for proposals on how to most effectively extend the ETS to the shipping industry.

“If the EU implements a regional ETS, shipping risks getting hit by multiple emission trading systems which will make a global market-based measure much more difficult to achieve,” said BIMCO’s Secretary General, David Loosley, as quoted by Seatrade Maritime News.

What’s more, Loosley doubted if the extension of the ETS to the shipping segment would motivate ship owners to invest in low-carbon technology. He noted that when a company orders a ship to be built, it has no idea how many times this ship will call at EU ports. This means the company cannot calculate in advance how much it would have to pay for the gases it emits under the ETS.

Another worry related to the EU’s plans is that it would make maritime cargo transport more expensive and lead to shifts to cheaper but more polluting alternatives such as trucks. Cargo shipping is currently the cheapest way of transporting massive amounts of goods and commodities internationally. If it stops being the cheapest, many traders would go to the next cheapest form of transport, even if it is not the cleanest.

What about developing cleaner ships? It can be done, the industry has said, but it will take a lot of time and money. There is already research going on in this direction, and it has produced some early results: solar and wind are being used to power vessels, and hydrogen is on the agenda, too.

Last year, for instance, a company called Eco Marine Power showcased a ship powered by a system that combines solar and wind power, complete with a storage installation. The system was referred to as a supplementary energy source for ships, which suggests it would be used on diesel-powered vessels, perhaps in a way similar to plug-in hybrid passenger cars.

This year, a British company, Windship Technology, unveiled a ship design called True Zero Emission that incorporates wind and solar power, as well as carbon capture



technology for the emissions from the ship’s fuel engine. According to Windship Technology, its design is the only one that is viable for bulk carriers and oil tankers.

And there is the battery-powered tanker dubbed e5, which Japanese Asahi Tanker will own and operate in Tokyo Bay, where the vessel will, somewhat ironically, deliver diesel fuel to other vessels. The tanker will be powered by a 3.5-MWh battery system that, according to the battery supplier, Corvus Energy, could last “for many hours” before it needs charging.

Hydrogen, especially green hydrogen, is also being considered as a shipping fuel, in fuel cell technology similar to the one deployed in hydrogen cars. ABB, for example, is working on a fuel cell-based propulsion system for passenger and cargo vessels. According to the company, the technology is most viable for short-haul vessels.

The one thing most of these news reports about zero-emission vessels don’t mention is the cost. This is perhaps because it is likely to be high, as is the cost of all new technology before it scales. Scalability would be a key consideration for any new energy system for ships, again, just as it is in any other sector.

How many of the alternative ships currently in development will prove viable remains to be seen. One thing is for sure, though. The pressure on the shipping industry is just beginning. The IMO has set a target for reducing emissions from the industry by half by 2050. The EU is just one of the regulatory bodies pressing the industry to reduce its carbon footprint. And this footprint is increasingly turning into the difference between a competitive advantage and a competitive disadvantage.

“This represents a whole new ball game for the industry. Optimisation of ship operations has traditionally been dictated by the efficiency of delivery around the globe that has typically meant being able to sail at full speed, thereby burning more fuel, to minimise costs for the charterer. It has been driven by money, not emissions,” said the Performance Advisory head of Norwegian DNV, Bjorn Berger, as quoted by Hellenic Shipping News.

“But the new green regime dictates that shipowners must minimise emissions from their operations and efficiency will be defined by their ability to reduce their environmental footprint, which will be a key differentiating factor in future competition for charter contracts,” Berger said.

The game is changing for the shipping industry, and it is changing fast. One report even suggested maritime transport should be phased out by 2050 because of its carbon footprint. While this is too radical, the pressure on ship owners and operators to reduce emissions as much as possible is only going to continue rising in the coming years.

Tehran Has Right...

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The measure is required under the Strategic Action Plan to Counter Sanctions, a law passed last December by the Iranian Parliament (Majlis).

“The Islamic Republic does not want to have or store nuclear weapons and, above all, it never wants to use nuclear weapons,” Rouhani said. “The common view has always been that we will not seek nuclear weapons, but rather seek peaceful nuclear technology, which is our right.”

Iran showed to the world the peaceful nature of its nuclear program by signing the JCPOA with six world states — namely the US, Germany, France, Britain, Russia and China — in 2015. The nuclear deal was also ratified in the form of a UN Security Council Resolution 2231.

The Iranian chief executive stressed that Iran has never been and will never be seeking to develop a secretive nuclear program.

“Whether the United States, Europe and the United Nations like it or not, if the whole world tells us that it is very good for Iran to have a nuclear weapon, our opinion will not change. Our view is the one announced by Leader [of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei] in a fatwa, and it is the same promise we made by signing the NPT and the Safeguards Agreement,” he added, referring to Ayatollah Khamenei’s religious decree that bans the production, possession and stockpiling of nuclear weapons and other WMDs.

“The Islamic Republic has always shown that if it signs and accepts any treaty and agreement, it will stand by it to the end, and that is the case with the nuclear issue.”

Iran, Russia, Turkey...

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While the two deals have helped significantly reduce fighting in Syria, the conflict has not entirely ended, due in large part to Turkish failure to separate terrorists from what it calls “moderate” opposition groups in Idlib and Ankara’s dispatch of thousands of troops and heavy military hardware into the Syrian province to back the militants.

“Iran, Russia and Turkey are determined to strengthen cooperation within the Astana format in order to establish and preserve peace and stability in Syria,” Iran’s Ambassador to Moscow Kazem Jalali said.

Russia’s special envoy on Syria, Alexander Lavrentiev, also said participants in Syria peace talks in Sochi are considering ways to counter the adverse consequences of unilateral US and Western sanctions against Syria.

“Syria is currently experiencing severe political and economic isolation, which makes it difficult for

the negotiation process to proceed on an equal footing. Therefore, we are discussing mechanisms to confront US and Western states’ sanctions against Syria,” he said.

Meanwhile, the United States has declined Russia’s invitation to send a representative to the meeting.

“Russia sent an invitation to the United States to participate in the Sochi talks, but Washington rejected the offer,” Lavrentiev noted.

Russia emphasizes Tehran-Moscow cooperation to resolve the Syrian crisis

Separately, the Iranian delegation to the Sochi meeting, led by Ali Asghar Khaji, the Iranian foreign minister’s senior assistant for political affairs, held meetings with a number of delegations on the sidelines of the Syria peace talks.

During a meeting with Russian delegates, Khaji briefed them on his recent visit to Damascus, and stressed the need to fight terrorism in Syria, and to help advance the country’s political process within the framework of the Constitutional Committee.

Lavrentiev, for his part, stressed the need for greater cooperation and coordination between Tehran and Moscow to resolve the Syrian conflict.

The Iranian delegation also met with UN

Iranian, Russian Navies...

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Tahani went on to say that the scenarios included capture of pirates, extinguishing the fire caused by the pirates to delay the rescue operation, treatment of wounded and injured sailors on board, and finally the successful berthing of the merchant vessel with the help of a tugboat.

Two-day Maritime Security Belt naval drills bear a message of “peace and friendship” for the regional nations, with the slogan of “collective cooperation at sea towards securing naval trade.”

The event covers a 17,000-kilometer-wide maritime expanse. It enlists naval units from Iran’s Navy and the IRGC Navy together with their backup squadrons as well as a Russian flotilla comprising the Stoiky corvette, the KoLa refueling ship, and a support helicopter gunship.

On the first day, Iranian and Russian naval forces put their firepower on display. They unleashed fire on designated targets and practiced squaring up in offensive formations in light of regional threats.

Iran’s Army and the IRGC have conducted several drills in the past two months, in a show of power amid tensions with the United States.

These exercises saw a variety of locally manufactured long-range missiles, drones, tanks, warships, submarines and helicopters tested on land, sea and air targets.

Nasrallah...

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Referring to Israeli combat drills that took place along the Lebanese border earlier this month, Nasrallah warned the occupying regime against intimidation and said the combat drills would be a dangerous game for the Israelis and would bring about undesirable consequences.

“Should war erupt, Israelis will see events they haven’t witness since 1948. So, stop playing with fire. We are in the Resistance era,” Nasrallah said, in reference to the illegal creation of the regime on occupied Palestinian territory in 1948.

During the televised speech, the secretary general of the Lebanese Hezbollah resistance movement hailed as a “positive step” Washington’s announcement to stop its support for the Saudi-led aggression against Yemen. Nasrallah said the U.S. decision came as a result of the “steadfastness of the Yemenis” as the Yemeni forces and allied fighters from Popular Committees are in an advanced position on all fronts.

The Hezbollah chief also stressed that the announcement was a cause for concern for the Saudi and Israeli regime.

IAEA...

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Iran’s permanent representative to Vienna-based international organizations, Kazem Gharibabadi, has listed the measures that Iran would stop implementing as of February 23.

Those measures consist of the transparency measures related to yellow cake, enrichment and the manufacture of centrifuge parts, he said.

They also include the provisions of the Additional Protocol, Code 3.1 Amendment to the Safeguards Agreement (for early declaration of nuclear sites to the IAEA), the use of modern technologies and long-term presence of the IAEA in Iran, accesses under the provisions of the JCPOA, and the verification of the implementation of voluntary actions, he added.

“Given the serious impact of the above-mentioned measures being implemented,” IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi reminded Iran of an offer to visit to “find a mutually agreeable solution for the agency to continue essential verification activities,” the agency said in a report to its member states seen by Reuters.

In an interview with the Persian service of Euronews television news network, Iran’s UN Ambassador Majid Takht-Ravanchi stressed that Tehran has always said Washington must rejoin the JCPOA, i.e. return to fulfilling its obligations and

remove the sanctions mentioned in the accord.

“The sanctions that were passed during Trump’s times in office under various titles, and of course the new ones ... must be lifted [as well]. As a result, it is clear what the United States should do,” he noted.

Elsewhere in his interview, Takht-Ravanchi said the U.S. must decide whether it wants to continue its failed policy of “maximum pressure” or acknowledge the policy is wrong and adopt a new approach. “The United States is already violating [UNSC] Resolution 2231 and the JCPOA. The same policy that was pursued under Trump is still going on and we have not seen any change,” he said.

“Our policy regarding the peaceful use of nuclear energy is clear. We have repeatedly stated that we are a member of the NPT and Leader [of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei]’s fatwa (religious decree) in this regard is obvious. Nuclear weapons have no place in our defense doctrine... we are neither interested in building nuclear weapons nor moving towards them,” the envoy said.

He was referring to Ayatollah Khamenei’s religious decree that bans the production, possession and stockpiling of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction.



## Dean to Return to Premier League Action

LONDON (AFP) - Premier League referee Mike Dean will take charge of Burnley's game with West Brom on Saturday after excusing himself from last weekend's action following death threats made against him.

The 52-year-old and his family received the threats last week on social media after he was involved in two controversial red card incidents.

Both were subsequently rescinded on appeal.

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## Greenwood Commits to Manchester United With New Deal

LONDON (Dispatches) - Mason Greenwood committed himself to Manchester United till 2025 on Tuesday with the club's manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer saying it is his responsibility to ensure the winger "reaches his phenomenal potential".

The 19-year-old's new and improved deal which includes a one-year extension option comes after a series of impressive performances since he broke into the first team.

## Mbappe Destroys Barca, Liverpool Defeat Leipzig

BARCELONA (Dispatches) - Kylian Mbappe had already won the World Cup and scored in the final, but he had not yet produced a Champions League performance on the level of his devastating display that blew away Lionel Messi and Barcelona on Tuesday.

His hat-trick, capped by the emphatic finish at the end of an 85th-minute counter-attack, secured a stunning 4-1 win for Paris Saint-Germain -- without Neymar -- in their last 16 first leg that leaves the French club on the brink of the quarter-finals.

The 22-year-old terrorised Barcelona right-back Sergino Dest all evening long and led PSG's fightback after they fell behind to Messi's first-half penalty.

"When Kylian shines in the big matches it makes the difference," captain Marquinhos told French broadcaster RMC Sport after a result that should help exorcise some old demons for the Qatar-owned club.

Much of the talk coming into Tuesday's match was about what happened the last time these sides met in Catalonia.

Four years ago, at the same stage of the competition, PSG arrived at the Camp Nou having won the first leg 4-0 and departed on the end of a historic, humiliating 6-1 hammering.

Yet that game has turned out to be devastating for Barcelona.

PSG responded to the embarrassment of the infamous "remontada" (Spanish for "comeback") by buying the architect of their downfall that night, paying a world record fee of 222 million euros (\$264m at the time) to activate Neymar's release clause.

Barcelona squandered the money received and now find themselves in possibly ruinous debt while also having squandered the last years of Messi at his peak.

If last season's 8-2 quarter-final demolition at the hands of Bayern Munich was not to be the end for the Argentine with Barcelona in the Champions League, then Mbappe's devastating display surely is.



Meanwhile Liverpool rediscovered lost form and seized the initiative against RB Leipzig in the first leg of their Champions League last-16 clash by cruising to a 2-0 win in a chilly Budapest on Tuesday.

Clinical early second-half strikes from Mohamed Salah and Sadio Mane, both courtesy of dreadful defensive errors, proved decisive and leave the German side facing a formidable task in the return leg on March 10.

The win moves Jurgen Klopp's men to the brink of the Champions League quarter-finals and also ends a run of three straight defeats that has left the English champions 13 points behind leaders Manchester City in the Premier League.

"It was a game we wanted it was a game we needed tonight," Klopp told BT Sport afterwards.

"Leipzig can be a real monster. The way they play in the Bundesliga they overrun teams, they can be really physical in everything and tonight we controlled them in an exceptional way.

"They had their moments because of the quality they have but we controlled the game so tonight I think we got the result we deserved," he said.

The first leg was moved from Leipzig to the Hungarian capital due to Germany's strict Covid-19 travel restrictions. Despite the enforced relocation, Julian Nagelsmann's side, on a four-game winning streak at home where they are second behind Bayern Munich in the Bundesliga, started briskly and almost went ahead on four minutes.

## Alaba Confirms Bayern Munich Exit At End of Season



BERLIN (AFP) - Defender David Alaba confirmed Tuesday he will leave Bayern Munich after 13 years at the club when his contract expires at the end of the season, but refused to name his next destination.

"I made the decision to do something new after this season and leave the club," the 28-year-old Austrian international said in a press conference in Munich.

"That wasn't an easy decision. I've been here for 13 years and the club is very close to my heart," he said.

Alaba joined Bayern's academy in 2008, made his Bundesliga debut in March 2010 and has so far won 26 trophies with the club.

However, he refused to confirm rumors he will join Spanish giants Barcelona. He has also been linked to Real Madrid and Manchester City.

"It's no secret that my management is in contact with some clubs. The rest will be decided in the future," he said.

Alaba was a key member of the side which won the Club World Cup final in Qatar last week as Bayern became only the second club after Barcelona to win all six titles available in the previous 12 months.

## Serena Comes Through Halep Test to Reach Semis

MELBOURNE (Reuters) - Serena Williams came through a huge test of her Australian Open title credentials to reach the last four at Melbourne Park for the ninth time with a 6-3 6-3 victory over Simona Halep in a high quality quarter-final on Tuesday.

The 39-year-old went toe-to-toe with the Romanian second seed over 80 minutes on Rod Laver Arena before she was finally able to move to within two victories of a record-equaling 24th Grand Slam title.

Williams hit some ferocious forehands and moved around the court with a freedom that she has not enjoyed for a good while to set up a semi-final meeting against in-form Japanese third seed Naomi Osaka.

"I think this was the best match I have played at this tournament, for sure," Williams said after celebrating her win to the accompaniment of canned applause as Melbourne's coronavirus lockdown kept the fans away for a fourth day.

"I knew it had to be going up against the number two in the world. I had to be better and I was, so I'm excited."

If any match at this year's tournament deserved a crowd, it was this. There were nine breaks of serve as two great competitors punched and counter-punched over lengthy rallies.

Williams was always in front in the first set but needed to dig deep to wrestle back the momentum after Halep took a 3-1 lead in the second.

The match turned decisively when Williams broke for 4-3 after a 13-shot rally where she showed incredible athleticism to get to a couple of shots that would have defied most players.

Seven minutes later, she wrapped up the contest with a huge forehand, her 24th winner.

"My feeling after this match is that I was not that far (away) but she was stronger in the important moments," said Halep.

"I'm not that disappointed with myself."

PSG did not even need Neymar, who is nursing a groin injury, to pull off a memorable result for recently-appointed coach Mauricio Pochettino.

Nor did they need Angel Di Maria, who is also sidelined.



## Federer Is Still the Best

LONDON (Dispatches) - Tennis great Rod Laver Tuesday said Roger Federer will always be "the champion of his era" and expects him to win more tournaments even though Rafael Nadal is just three matches away from overtaking his 20 Grand Slam title haul.

The 39-year-old Swiss has been out of action for a year and shelved plans to compete in the Australian Open as he continues his recovery from two knee operations, targeting a comeback at Doha next month.

He won the last of his 20 Slams at Melbourne Park in 2018 and Nadal will go one better if he lifts the title on Sunday. The Spaniard, 34, faces Stefanos Tsitsipas on Wednesday for a place in the final four of this year's Australian Open.

World number one Novak Djokovic, 33, is also in the last eight and takes on Alexander Zverev Tuesday as he chases an 18th Grand Slam crown.

Laver praised Nadal and Djokovic but said Federer was still in his eyes the best.

"For me, I think Roger is the champion of his era," he told Fox Sports from his home in California, with the 82-year-old unable to travel to the Australian Open, where the centre court is named after him, because of the coronavirus pandemic.

## Curry Carries Warriors in Rout of Cavaliers

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Stephen Curry had 36 points in 30 minutes and Draymond Green tied his career-high with 16 assists, lifting the Golden State Warriors to a 129-98 victory over the Cleveland Cavaliers in San Francisco.

In a matchup of the NBA finalists for four years in a row from 2015-18, Curry shot 13-for-19 from the field and 7-for-11 on 3-pointers en route to his game-high point total.

It was his 10th straight game with at least 27 points on 50 percent or better shooting as he became the first guard since Michael Jordan (1995-96) with at least 25 points and 50 percent shooting in 10 straight games.

Green assisted on nine of Curry's 13 hoops. The 16-assist effort was the fourth of his career, including one the last time the Warriors faced the Cavaliers last February in Cleveland.

Facing a team playing the second night of a back-to-back, the Warriors gradually pulled away from the road-weary visitors.

The difference was just 10 before Curry and Mychal Mulder hit 3-pointers to trigger an eight-point run midway through the third period that put Golden State in command at 90-72.

Golden State led 101-84 at period's end, and neither Curry nor Green played in the final quarter.

Green added six points and eight rebounds in 30 minutes. He had been considered questionable for the game after injuring his knee in the first half of Saturday's home loss to Brooklyn.

Andrew Wiggins added 15 points, Kelly Oubre Jr. and Eric Paschall 14 apiece, Juan Toscano-Anderson 13 and Mulder 12 for the Warriors, who improved to 9-4 this season in the game immediately following a loss.



## Racquet-Smashing Djokovic Into Australian Open Semis

MELBOURNE (Dispatches) - Eight-time winner Novak Djokovic smashed his racquet en route to a tense, four-set win over Germany's Alexander Zverev to reach his 39th Grand Slam semi-final at the Australian Open on Tuesday.

It was a patchy performance from the world number one, who is nursing an abdominal injury and drew deeply on his mental fortitude to win 6-7 (6/8), 6-2, 6-4, 7-6 (8/6) in three hours and 30 minutes.

"With this condition (injury), I need time to warm up and actually feel like I can rotate well," said Djokovic, who started sluggishly but finished with 23 aces and 48 winners, along with 56 unforced errors.

"I started moving better and playing better. I served extremely well and I think I had slightly more aces than him, which for me is a miracle.

"There were a lot of nerves out there and I feel emotionally a bit drained.

"I kind of regained my focus after I broke that racquet and things started to shift to me in a positive direction."

Djokovic will be hot favourite to advance to Sunday's final when he plays Russian qualifier Aslan Karatsev, who continued his dream run with a 2-6, 6-4, 6-1, 6-2 win against injured Bulgarian Grigor Dimitrov.

"I hadn't seen him play before the Australian Open," he said of 114th ranked Karatsev.

"He's very physically strong and moves well. He has a lot of firepower from the back of the court.

"He's motivated and has nothing to lose."

The Serb remains on track for a record-extending ninth Australian Open title and 18th Grand Slam trophy, nipping at the heels of rivals Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal, who both have 20.

Djokovic and Zverev went the distance in a see-saw clash in the warm-up ATP Cup, foreshadowing what was ahead.

