

**Head of Iran Health Ministry Public Relations Office Kianoush Jahanpour On Saturday Announced the Loading And Shipment of 250,000 Doses of The COVID-19 Vaccine Donated by The Chinese Gov't to Iran**

# IRAN NEWS

**Iran Health Ministry Spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari Said on Saturday That Some 81 More Iranians Died From the Coronavirus Disease Over the Past 24 Hours Bringing The Total Deaths to 59,980**

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## Iran Able to Increase Uranium Enrichment To 60% in 24 Hours

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization of Iran Ali Akbar Salehi said the Islamic Republic has the capacity to increase its uranium enrichment up to 60% in 24 hours.

Referring to recent remarks by Leader of the Islamic Revolution in Iran Seyed Ali Khamenei, Salehi said the law has allowed the Islamic Republic raise uranium enrichment to this percent. "We halted the Additional Protocol implementation to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and restricted access to the country's nuclear sites within the framework of a counteractive law approved by the Iranian Parliament", said Salehi during a TV program.

The head of AEOI also called Parliament's law, dubbed the Strategic Action Plan to Counter Sanctions, as a golden opportunity, saying that were got the chance to launch 20% Uranium enrichment in 24 hours.

He went on to quote the Supreme Leader when he said that "Iran will not change its stance regarding its nuclear program, and that Tehran may initiate uranium enrichment up to 60% based on the domestic need of the country."

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## Release of Iran's Assets From South Korea At Final Stage

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Release of Iran's assets from South Korea is at final stage, according to Central Bank of Iran, saying that Seoul Government got green-light from Biden Administration for stage-by-stage release.

South Korea froze seven billion dollars Iranian assets with the Seoul banks following the U.S. sanctions on Iran reimposed since 2018 after former president Donald Trump withdrew from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

South Korean Foreign Ministry announced that it has reached an agreement with Washington to release part of the funds.

Officials from South Korean FM and Central Bank of Iran announced an agreement on the amount of money and its transfer mechanism after U.S. Treasury's approval.

Upon agreement, the release starts with \$1b according to CBI Governor Abdolnaser Hemmati, part of which would be paid to the United Nations to settle \$16m arrears of Iran's membership fee.

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## Tehran Not to Allow Resurgence Of Takfiri Terrorism in Region



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's Supreme National Security Council Rear Admiral Ali Shamkhani stressed that Iran and other counter-terrorism countries will not allow takfiri terrorism to be revived in the region.

He made the remarks in a Saturday meeting with the visiting Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein in Tehran.

In this meeting, Rear Admiral Ali Shamkhani considered any delay in implementing the law on the expelling of foreign troops from Iraq to the detriment of the region, increasing tensions and escalating the crisis.

He also stressed the need for the joint cooperation of the regional countries to reduce tensions and hold constructive talks to reduce the existing crises.

The peace and security of Iraq today is the result of the authority of the Iraqi government, the epic struggle of the armed forces and the popular Resistance groups, therefore it must be protected, Shamkhani added.

The recent U.S. actions to strengthen and expand the terrorist activities of ISIL and the brutal attack on the anti-terrorist forces of the Resistance, is the beginning of a new round of organized terrorism, he said and stressed that Iran and other counter-terrorism countries will not allow takfiri terrorism to be revived in the region.

Security and stability are the infrastructures of economic development and prosperity, the Iraqi Foreign Minister said, explaining, "Security is the first priority for a country like Iraq, which has been engaged in the fight against terrorism and insecurity for years."

Elsewhere in his remarks he said, "With the continuous efforts of the financial and banking sectors and the economic institutions of Iran and Iraq, some important obstacles have been removed and the debt repayment process will soon begin based on the model agreed between the two countries."

The Iraqi minister arrived in Tehran on Saturday for a one-day visit. This marks the Iraqi diplomat's second trip of the month to Tehran.

Later yesterday, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif hosted Fuad Hussein.

During the meeting, the two sides discussed a range of issues, including bilateral ties and regional and international developments.

The details of the meeting have not been published yet.

## Diplomatic Window of Opportunity Open to Bring JCPOA Back on Track

BRUSSELS (Dispatches)- The European Union's top foreign policy official has called for a concerted effort to use what he has referred to as a "diplomatic window of opportunity" in order to revive a 2015 nuclear agreement signed between Iran and major world powers.

"This is an occasion that we cannot miss," to reinvigorate the nuclear accord, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell told reporters on Friday via video-link.

The future of the JCPOA has been in doubt since May 2018, when the U.S. under ex-president Donald Trump pulled out of the agreement and imposed the "toughest ever" sanctions on Iran as part of his so-called "maximum pressure," which tried in vain to force Iran back to the negotiating table for talks on a "better deal."

Despite throwing verbal support behind the JCPOA, the European parties to the deal — France, Britain and Germany — ultimately succumbed to Washington's pressure and failed to fulfill their contractual commitments to Tehran, mainly by confronting the American sanctions.

That promoted Tehran to begin a set of retaliatory measures in several stages as part of its legal rights stipulated in Articles 26 and 36 of the JCPOA. The latest such measure was the halt in the implementation of the Additional Protocol, which was required by the parliament-adopted law.

"I am convinced as coordinator of the JCPOA that we do have diplomatic space, a diplomatic window of opportunity to dialogue," Borrell said.

The top EU diplomat added, "We need to use this opportunity and focus on solutions to bring the JCPOA back on track in order for everybody (to fulfill) their commitments."

Joe Biden, the current president of the United States, has repeatedly spoken of a willingness to rejoin the Iran deal, but, in practice, it has so far been sticking with Trump's futile pressure campaign. It says Tehran should return to full compliance with the deal before the US comes back.

Iran, however, says the U.S. should first lift all the sanctions put in place under the Trump administration before the Islamic Republic returns to full compliance. Tehran believes it was the White House that complicated the circumstances by the pullout, which in turn prompted Iran to take remedial measures.

## Iran-EU Trade Slumps to Its Lowest Level Possible

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – According to the latest report released by Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mine and Agriculture (TCCIMA), Iran's trade with EU countries has declined to its lowest level possible due to the sanctions and the outbreak of COVID-19 in 2019 and 2020.

The TCCIMA report has reviewed the trend of Iran's trade with Europe in 10 years. The reports claims Iran's trade of goods with Europe has faced ups and downs in the past ten years. As per report, in the early years of this decade, Iran's trade with Europe has been around 27b euros that Iran's exports have been around 17b euros while Europe's have been around 10b euros. In 2013, Iran's both exports to and imports from Europe have declined as the exports have faced more slumps comparing to its imports. The downturn has continued till 2014 as the trade balance with Europe has declined from plus \$6.6b in 2011 to minus \$5.2b in 2014 which shows the most negative trade balance in trade of Iran with EU.

In 2019 and 2020, Iran lost most of its export markets in Europe but its exports to Germany remained almost unchanged comparing to other European countries as Germany was Iran's major European export destination with the Netherlands and Italy trailing it.

## India to Send Four Cranes for Chabahar Port by June

NEW DELHI (Dispatches)- India will be sending four cranes to Iran for the Chabahar port by June, with two of them being sent in March and two later. India had already sent two cranes in the month of January. In total India would have sent six cranes for the port by June this year.

Sanjay Bandyopadhyay, Additional Secretary at India's Ministry of Shipping, said, "Recently, we sent two mobile harbour cranes to the Chabahar port. In March, two more cranes will be sent. They are ready to be loaded on the ship near Venice. Two more will reach by June-end."

He added, "There are plans to procure more rail-mounted gantry cranes/rail-mounted cranes, for which bidding is going on, and this infrastructure is presently sufficient for the operation of the port. As it picks up for products, cargos going to Afghanistan and beyond, we will add more infrastructure."

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## U.S. Could Lose 100-150 Personnel in Iran's Attack at Ain Asad Base

TEHRAN (MNA) – A top U.S. military commander says without the evacuation of Ain Al Asad Airbase in Iraq, the U.S. might have lost 20 or 30 airplanes and 100 to 150 personnel due to the IRGC attack in January 2020.

Iran launched the attack in retaliation for an American drone strike that martyred IRGC Lt. General Qassem Soleimani.

According to CBS News, recalling that night, the US General Frank McKenzie said: "Things are happening that could take us to war if we don't make the correct move here."

McKenzie says that then-President Trump ordered the strike on martyr Soleimani.

McKenzie says he had enough time to evacuate the base of 1,000 troops and 50 aircraft. McKenzie says without the evacuation, "I think we might have lost 20 or 30 airplanes and we'd have lost 100 to 150 US personnel."

Iran fired a total of 16 missiles – five missed and 11 struck Al Asad.

"It was an attack certainly like nothing I've ever seen or experienced... Their missiles are accurate," McKenzie says. "They hit pretty much where they wanted to hit."

There was reportedly no defense against the missiles for the troops who remained at the base except to take cover.

More than 100 of the troops who rode out the attack at Al Asad that night were diagnosed with Traumatic Brain Injury from the blasts, the same report confirmed.



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# Gov't Passes Plan to Save Gorgan Bay

GORGAN (IRNA) – The government has passed a seven-year plan for conservation of the Gulf of Gorgan, also known as Gorgan Bay, First Vice-President Eshaq Jahangiri said on Saturday.

Jahangiri made the remarks speaking to reporters upon arrival in the Northern Province of Gorgan. He said that the plan was passed in the government following a proposal by the Department of Environment. Jahangiri said that the government decided to launch Inchebron Free Zone.

## President Urges People to Observe Sanitary Protocols

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

**TEHRAN - President Hassan Rouhani said on Saturday that even if the country wasn't going to be hit by the fourth peak of the pandemic, people should observe the protocols as the Persian New Year eve is looming.**

In the national anti-coronavirus headquarters meeting on Saturday morning, Rouhani thanked all nurses and health workers, referring to the national nurse's day.

He also pointed to the elevated activities like cleaning houses and shopping by the people as New Year's eve is looming, and said that social distancing might be neglected in this condition and the nation would see its consequences two or three weeks later.

He asked people to practice New Year-related customs while observing health protocols even if the conditions were normal and the fourth peak didn't appear.

The President underlined that thanks to the beginning of vaccination, conditions would improve for healthcare workers, elderly people and those with underlying conditions, and the government was focused on buying vaccines.

Stating that the initial stage of vaccine development resembles the first days when people and governments had struggle providing masks, Rouhani underlined that wealthy countries want to have all the vaccines but their moral duty is to think of the



whole people of the world.

"This is a pandemic and that means that even if the whole residents of a country receive the vaccine, the nation is still vulnerable because of communications with other nations. Therefore, a global immunity is possible when the whole world is vaccinated," Rouhani said.

The President referred to the Khuzestan province which is the only region in Iran to experience the fourth peak of the pandemic and said that the only red-flagged cities are in that region.

He also stressed that even there were enough vaccines it could take months for all the people to receive, that's why people must observe protocols.

## Iran Denounces U.S. Illegal Airstrikes in Syria

TEHRAN (PressTV)- Iran has condemned as a flagrant violation of human rights and international law the illegal and aggressive attacks by American forces on areas in eastern Syria.

In a statement on Friday night, Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh stressed that such attacks against Syria were a continuation of Israel's unabated aggression on the Arab country's territories.

The statement came after U.S. warplanes earlier in the day conducted airstrikes on areas in Syria's eastern province of Dayr al-Zawr near the Syrian-Iraqi borders, the first of its kind under new American President Joe Biden.

"The attacks ... have taken place in a context in which US forces have illegally entered Syrian territory in recent years, occupying areas of the country and plundering its natural resources, including oil," which rightfully belong to the Syrian nation, Khatibzadeh said.

The airstrikes, which were carried out against facilities used by forces of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), have been met with a negative reaction, with many observers likening Biden's approach to that of his hawkish predecessor, Donald Trump.

The PMU - better known as Hashd al-Sha'abi - have been fighting remnants of the Takfiri Daesh terror group across border regions of Iraq and Syria in coordination with the governments in both Arab countries.

"Illegal U.S. bases on Syrian soil also train terrorist forces and use them as tools," Khatibzadeh further said.

Khatibzadeh also lambasted the US attacks as a clear violation of Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity that would exacerbate military conflicts and further destabilize the region.

## Tehran, Damascus Discuss Cultural, Media Cooperation in Damascus

TEHRAN (IFP) - Foreign Ministry Spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh has held talks with Syrian officials and attended meetings of think tanks, media outlets and elites in the Arab country.

The meetings were held in Damascus in line with Iran-Syria cooperation in public diplomacy, media and cultural arenas.

During his trip, Khatibzadeh held talks with Syrian Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad where the two sides discussed the latest situation of bilateral ties as well as cultural and media cooperation.

In the meeting, the top Syrian diplomat underlined the importance of boosting mutual cooperation in cultural and media arenas.

Khatibzadeh also held talks with the Syrian minister of information and culture, minister of science and Bouthaina Shaaban, the senior advisor the Syrian president.

In the meetings, the Iranian foreign ministry spokesman stressed the need to further expand cultural and media cooperation between the two sides.

He also expressed pleasure with Syrian people's resistance against terrorism and underlined Iran, like in the past, will stand by the Syrian government and nation in helping with the economic reconstruction of Syria and boosting cultural cooperation with that country.

In the meetings, the Syrian authorities also underscored that the Syrian nation will never forget Iran's support for Syrian people.

Khatibzadeh also delivered a speech at the Syrian Diplomatic Academy and took part in a meeting of the country's Institute for Strategic Studies.

He also attended a meeting with Syria media and answered journalists' questions.

Khatibzadeh also met the Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister Bashar Jaafari.

## UK Variant COVID Plagued All Europe

TEHRAN (IP) - The spokesman for the National Taskforce for Fighting Coronavirus said that the COVID situation in the world was not favorable, and the UK variant COVID wave had spread all over Europe.

In a press conference on Saturday, Alireza Raisi announced the state of coronavirus in the world and in Iran and noted that and 114 million people had been contracted COVID-19, and more than 2.5 million people had died.

Given that the UK and German medical systems were very advanced, but they knelt against the UK variant COVID, it could be said that the UK variant had replaced the Chinese Wuhan virus, he stated.

Regarding the coronavirus situation in Iran, Raisi also said: "Although the trend of this disease has almost stabilized, the provinces of Khuzestan and Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari are facing an increase in the number."

He added that the circulation of the UK variant virus in Khuzestan Province was still high, but good measures had been taken.

Raisi said: "The observance of health protocols in some cities of Khuzestan Province has improved. It seems that the increasing trend of coronavirus is somehow controlled, but it is a long way to reach the desired situation."

He pointed out that more than 12,000 COVID tests were performed daily in Khuzestan Province, and more than 100,000 tests were performed daily throughout the country, which could help diagnose coronavirus quickly.

"Currently, 11 cities in Khuzestan Province are red, 32 cities in Iran are orange, 251 cities yellow, and 154 cities are blue," he announced.

Raisi also stated that in the new round of the general vaccination plan for people living in nursing homes, over 50% of the people with physical disabilities and chemical warfare victims would be vaccinated.

He noted that 250,000 doses of the Chinese Sinopharm vaccine would arrive in Iran today (Saturday), and the arrival date of 4.2 million doses of the COVAX vaccine would be determined.

## Tehran, Moscow Emphasize Need to Cooperate in Agricultural Sector

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iranian and Russian officials underlined the need for expanding cooperation in the agricultural sector and ensuring food security.

In a meeting in Moscow on Friday, Sergey Lovich Levine Deputy Agriculture Minister of Russian Federation for International Affairs and Kazem Jalali Iran's Ambassador to Russia discussed ways to expand exchanges in the field of agricultural products and upgrade transportation infrastructure for transit of commodities.

Iranian envoy to the Russian Federation Kazem Jalali pointed to the increase of export of Iranian goods to Russia in 2020, noting that promoting volume of trade exchanges between the two countries has been emphasized by top Iranian and Russian officials.

Russia and Iran enjoy high capacities to develop cooperation in agricultural field, he said, adding that those Iranian companies are ready to collaborate in planting greenhouse products as well as beans and grains in Russia.

The two sides further discussed upgrading of transport infrastructure, investment and expansion of railroads and shipping fleet in order to pave the ground for transit of cargos to markets in the Persian Gulf littoral states. Despite the fact that Moscow and Tehran have developed political ties, their trade exchanges have not experienced a significant boom in recent years. The usage of existing capacities in markets of both countries can help them expand trade ties.

## Iran Reviewing Pakistani Media Reports About Border Clashes

TEHRAN (IFP)- Foreign Ministry Spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh says the country is studying certain reports published by Pakistani media regarding the initial clashes between fuel smugglers along the Iranian-Pakistani border.

"The issue is being studied by relevant officials and authorities in the Islamic Republic of Iran," Khatibzadeh said in a statement.

Considering the Pakistani side's delivery of the body of an Iranian national to the Iranian side, the issue is being studied by the two countries' top border guard officials, the spokesman added.

He said necessary measures will be taken by border forces at the common borders and by the Foreign Ministry based on the results of their reports.

## Jamaran Destroyer Fully Iranian-Built

TEHRAN (IP) - The head of the Marine Industries Organization of the Ministry of Defense said: "The Jamaran destroyer is completely Iranian-built and we have not received any help from any foreign element and all stages of its design and production were done by domestic experts."

Admiral Amir Rastegari said: "In 1997, an exhibition was set up in the strategic naval factories of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which was visited by the Commander-in-Chief. At the end of the visit, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution said: "Go and build a destroyer."

"Our navy could just build the system level at the time, and building this warship was not an easy task, and these remarks showed that the Leader is looking for a distant vision for the navy. So we started the command with all the difficulties. At that time, our equipment was all Western, and we were doing management and repairs, but all the equipment was imported," Admiral Amir Rastegari added.

Admiral Rastegari said: "The Leader also determined the characteristics of the proposed destroyer and asked us to build a destroyer capable of carrying helicopters and launching missiles, and the lack of a missile launch system in the destroyers of that time was a weakness for us."

He added: "Destroyers in high seas require helicopters and rocket launchers, and building the destroyer alone was a difficult task, but the leader commanded us to build a destroyer capable of carrying helicopters and launching missiles."

Admiral Rastegari said: The destroyer was built on February 10, 2010, and the Leader also attended the ceremony of joining the Navy. All those years are memories for us. The Supreme Leader of the Revolution said in his speech that many people believed that building a destroyer could not be done, but it was done, and in your opinion, this destroyer is not a big job."

The head of the Maritime Industries Organization of the Ministry of Defense emphasized: "We must put into practice the talent and strength that God has given us and we must not be afraid of the greatness of greatness. Spirit of self-confidence and will has brought the country to the point where we have the ability to build a destroyer. The destroyer of the Islamic Republic of Iran was a turning point in the history of Iran's military navigation, and this destroyer was not only important for the navy but also had great achievements for the country."

## Turkish Parties Want the Best Relations With Iran

TEHRAN (IP)- Iranian Ambassador to Turkey met with the Iran-Turkey Parliamentary Friendship Group in Ankara on Friday to discuss expanding cooperation between the two countries.

Attending at Iranian Embassy in Ankara, in a meeting with Iranian Ambassador to Turkey Mohammad Farazmand, the parliamentary friendship group stressed the will of the parties in the Turkish Parliament to have the best relations with the government, the Islamic Consultative Assembly, and the Iranian people.

The Iran-Turkey Parliamentary Friendship Group includes representatives from three major Turkish parties, the ruling Justice and Development Party, the Nationalist Movement Party as an ally of the government, and the Republican People's Party as an opposition party.

## Half of Planes Purchased Under Nuclear Deal Bugged Down

TEHRAN (FNA)- Managing Director of Iran's flag carrier (Homa) Captain Alireza Barkhor said that the airline is unable to run half of the planes that have been sold to Tehran after sanctions on Iran's aviation sector were suspended under the nuclear deal as manufacturing companies defy the terms to supply parts to the country.

"As the date for the payment of the first installment worth nearly \$8 million arrives next month, IranAir is unable to pay it," Barkhor said referring to the planes bought after the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action was clinched between Iran and 6 world countries in 2015 and further blamed sanctions as well as financial problems.

He noted that half of these post-JCPOA planes are not operating due to sanctions and lack of parts.

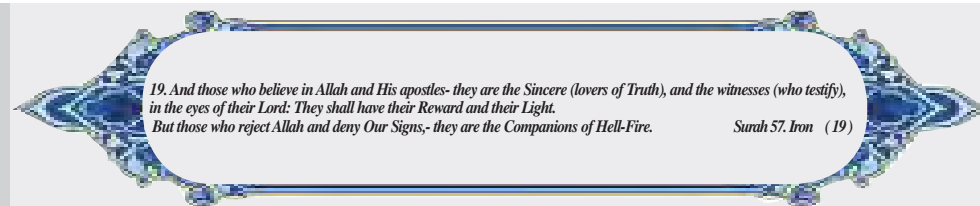
The official said that even the manufacturing factories do not abide by their commitments to supply Iran with the parts of the planes.





## PRAYER TIME

|                          |       |
|--------------------------|-------|
| ■ Noon (Zohr)            | 12:16 |
| ■ Evening (Maghreb)      | 18:16 |
| ■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr) | 05:10 |
| ■ Tomorrow's Sunrise     | 06:33 |



19. And those who believe in Allah and His apostles- they are the Sincere (lovers of Truth), and the witnesses (who testify), in the eyes of their Lord: They shall have their Reward and their Light.  
But those who reject Allah and deny Our Signs,- they are the Companions of Hell-Fire.

Surah 57, Iron (19)

## Tehran, Muscat Can Enhance Ties Via Cooperation in Mining, Fishery and Tourism

**IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK**

**TEHRAN – The ways for boosting trade between Iran and Oman were discussed and reviewed during a webinar which was held by Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mining and Agriculture (ICCIMA) in collaboration with Iran-Oman Joint Chamber of Commerce.**

Addressing the webinar, Head of the Iran-Oman Joint Chamber of Commerce Mohsen Zarrabi said that Iran and Oman can enhance their trade relation by focusing on cooperation in fishery, mining and tourism sectors regarding the Oman Five-Year Development Plan.

He added that he believes the ground for growth in the bilateral relation and investment of Iranians in Oman is ready.

He added that fishery, mining and tourism are of the sectors that both countries can engage in cooperation.

Zarrabi then elaborated the details and trade and investment capacities in Oman and said due to economic security and stability in Oman, and its favorable political relation with Iran and other countries has turned this Arab country into a strategic partner for Iran.

He also called for developing the infrastructures for the connection of these two countries which has started since 20015 based on the plans of the joint chamber.

Zarrabi noted that Oman has eased visa process for Iranians as Iranian nationals do not need visas for staying less than 14 days and for the longer stay, they can get visas upon their arrivals at airports.



He also said Oman has allocated to ports of Suwayq and Sultan Qaboos for Iranian ships and goods and Iranians can register their companies in the free zones and even in the mainland as shareholders.

He expressed hope with the new facilities provided by Oman, Iran's share of this country's total imports would increase up to 10 percent.

Zarrabi also said that several unnecessary directives and regulations have hindered Iranians from having strong presence in the target markets, adding that these overnight regulations have harmed the reputation of Iranian tradesmen.

Meanwhile Head of International Affairs of ICCIMA Mr. Mohammad Reza Karbasi, for his part, said that Oman is one of Iran's major trade partners and the trade volume of these two countries has not been affected under the sanctions or the COVID-19 pandemic and it has even enhanced. He added that fortunately the approaches of both governments regarding boosting cooperation have always been positive.

He then pointed to four properties of Oman for Iran. Karbasi also pointed to the direct flights between Iran and Oman, saying that fortunately, there are several direct flights from different cities of Iran like from Tehran, Isfahan, Shiraz, Mashhad, Bandar Abbas, Chabahar and Kish to Oman, and this has helped the level of ties between the two countries to increase considerably.

He also said easing the visa issuance for Iranians has been another positive development in the relation of both countries which will have effective role in enhancing the trade relations between Tehran and Muscat.

## Iranian Goods, Services Welcomed in Iraq

TEHRAN (MNA) - The chairman of Iran-Iraq Joint Economic Committee stated that Iranian products and services are highly welcomed in the Iraqi market.

Saying that Iraq has many social, cultural, religious, political, and economic commonalities with Iran, Mohammad-Vali Alaeddini expressed hope that the process of boosting export to the neighboring countries, especially Iraq, will be stable and will continue and increase due to Iran's very desirable capacities.

In mid-January, Iranian Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian, who is the head of the Iran-Iraq Joint Economic Committee, said that the two countries' annual trade is going to be increased to \$20 billion.

Ardakanian made the remarks in the opening ceremony of the two countries' fourth Joint Economic Committee meeting in Tehran, which he co-chaired with the Iraqi Trade Minister Alla Ahmed Al-Jubouri.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran is ready to support the export of Iranian engineering and technical services to Iraq by establishing a joint investment fund," he said, adding that new agreements are going to be signed between the two countries in the fields of water and energy.

He also underlined the development of transportation lines between the two countries as an important factor in the development of trade relations between the two countries and added: "We are ready to implement the previous agreements in the fields of electricity, gas, and water, and to formulate new agreements in this field in order to develop cooperation between the two countries."

The official further called for signing agreements for cooperation in other fields including double taxation, investment, preferential tariffs, and customs.

## Iran's Food Industry, Biggest After Petroleum



**IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK**

TEHRAN - The Vice President for Science and Technology said that after oil and gas, the food industry was the biggest.

Delivering speech in the inauguration ceremony of the second phase of the growth center of the National Nutrition and Food Technology Research Institute on Saturday morning in Tehran, Sorena Sattari said, "We are dependent on others in this field which has the least number of science-based companies."

Sattari added there were lots of potentials in food industry and "we need to establish companies based on indigenous design and system, not just following others."

"We cannot manage our county with the U.S. outlook and thought since their approach fits their country and needs. We need indigenized systems", he concluded.

Another speaker of this ceremony, the president of Shahid Beheshti University Alireza Zali called this growth center a link between the food industry and private sections.

Referring to the importance of food industry in the country's economy, Zali said that improving the quality and quantity of food industry could be beneficial especially during the period of sanctions and Coronavirus outbreak.

President of Shahid Beheshti University emphasized on the role of food industry in creating job opportunities and said that youth and creative generation must be employed in this growth center.

Iran has more potential in food industry which needs to be improved, since it is predicted that cereals and rice will be more expensive next year all over the world due to Covid19 outbreak.

The inauguration ceremony of the second phase of growth center of National Nutrition and Food Technology Research institute was held on Saturday morning in Tehran, with the presence of Vice President for Science and Technology Sorena Sattari and president of Shahid Beheshti University, Alireza Zali. They also paid a visit to the third phase of this center too.

## Semi-Finished Steel Exports top 5m Tons in 10 Months

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iranian steelmakers exported more than 5.13 million tons in the ten calendar months to February 18.

According to the latest data released by the Iranian Steel producers Association (ISPA), the exports of semi-finished steel products witnessed an 11.77% decline compared with the corresponding period of last year.

The exports of billet and bloom reached a total of 3.94 million tons, down 4% compared to the last year's similar span.

Iranian mills exported 1.21 million tons of slab during the period under review, indicating a 30% plunge year on year.

The country's exports of finished products reached 2.37 million tons in the 10-month period, down 20% year on year.

According to earlier reports, Iran's semi-finished steel output reached 18.75 million tons during the 10 calendar months to February 19, registering a 7% growth as compared to the same period of last year.

## Iran, Europe Cardiologists Hold Webinar

MASHHAD (IP)- The International Webinar of Iranian and European Cardiologists was held on Friday, hosted by Razavi Hospital in Mashhad, northeast of Iran.

The secretary of the first International Cardiology Webinar of Iran and Europe said on Friday that Razavi Hospital in Mashhad has been hosting cardiovascular diseases specialists in the world for the last three years, but this year, due to the coronavirus outbreak, the conference would be held virtually.

Mahmoud Shabestary said the webinar would be held

within two stages on February 26 and March 12.

"The latest information and methods related to the diagnosis and treatment of cardiovascular diseases are discussed in the webinar," Shabestari added.

"Performing 12 surgeries online, eight of which will be performed in Iran and four in Italy is another part of this webinar," he highlighted.

The webinar is attended by brilliant cardiovascular specialists from Iran, Italy, Germany, Belgium, India, Swiss, the USA, Spain, and Turkey.

## Tehran to Host 1st EAEU Int'l Expo in Mid-May

TEHRAN (MNA) - Tehran is planning to host an international exhibition for introducing the Eurasia Economic Union (EAEU)'s trade potentials during May 17-20, IRIB reported.

Five major members of the Eurasian union are going to have exclusive pavilions in this four-day exhibition, the Exhibition Organizer Alireza Jafari said.

According to Jafari, businessmen, traders, and powerful export companies from Iran are also going to participate in this exhibition along with the Eurasian countries so that the two sides would be able to have positive negotiations and expand their mutual cooperation in the future.

"We also invited representatives from Oman, Qatar, Turkey, China, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, India, and Pakistan to visit this exhibition, to hopefully ink tripartite memorandums of understanding with Iranian companies as well as the EAEU member nations," he added.

Jafari further noted that although only 862 commodity items are subject to the preferential trade agreement between Iran and the EAEU, the exhibition will not be limited to these commodity group, and in all areas where Iranian traders have export potentials, they can showcase their products and services in the exhibition.

Iran and Eurasian Economic Union reached a preferential trade agreement in October 2018 based on which about 862 commodity items were subjected to preferential tariffs.

## Iran Bracing for Self-Sufficiency in Urea, Ammonia Catalysts

TEHRAN (Shana) - The CEO of Hengam Petrochemical Company said the plant has signed deals with Iranian catalyst providers for the supply of the catalysts needed for production of urea and ammonia which will render the country self-sufficient in supply of the items.

According to National Petrochemical Company (NPC), Alireza Javanmardi said by implementing the deals, the country would no longer need to import the items.

Speaking to reporters, he said 8 catalysts are used for

production of urea and ammonia products, of which seven catalysts have been localized so far.

Announcing that a memorandum of understanding has been signed for production of the last catalyst for urea and ammonia units, he expressed hope that Iran would soon join the club of the producers of "ammonia synthesis" catalysts.

"By making this catalyst, the collection of catalysts used in the urea and ammonia chain will become Iranian and we will no longer need to import the catalysts used in this chain," he said.

## Employing Artistic Capacities in Culturalizing Efficient Water Consumption Is a Must



**IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK**

ISFAHAN – The CEO of Isfahan Province Water and Wastewater Company (ABFA of Isfahan Province) says employing the art capacities in culturalizing the efficient water consumption is very effective in the society and the company has taken advantage of this capacity very well in recent years.

Speaking in the unveiling ceremony of Water Tuesdays Plan, Educational Package of Consumption Management and Special Anthem of the company, Mr. Hashem Amini said that the outbreak of the coronavirus and its consequent restrictions has been unable to stop the company from culturalizing the proper water consumption in the society and with employing the virtual space and virtual networks in collaboration with the related bodies, the company has taken action for culturalizing the proper water consumption in the society.

He also hailed the cooperation and interaction of Center for the Intellectual Development of Child and Adolescent (known as Kanoon) in the issue of culturalizing efficient water consumption in the society, adding that the company in collaboration with the education ministry and Kanoon held the Water Family Festival, Educational Short Film Festival and the Question of Youthfulness virtually and made the most of the Shad Network.

Amini went on to say that due to Isfahan Province's geographical position and its arid climate, culturalization of proper water consumption in the society is a very crucial thing because due to the limited rainfall in the raining season, the reserved water at Zayandeh Roud Dam is currently around 199 million cubic meters.

Then head of Kanoon Mr. Ghalamkarian, for his part, said ABFA with utilizing the artistic and scientific capacities could provide the ground for culturalizing the efficient water consumption in the society in the form of different plans.

Then Mr. Amini awarded winners of the festivals with their prizes.



## Libya Speaker Calls for Representative Gov't

RABAT (AFP) - The head of Libya's parliament on Friday called on the country's interim prime minister to form a government that represents all factions in the crisis-hit North African nation to overcome "differences".

Interim prime minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibah on Thursday said he had submitted a "vision" for a cabinet line-up that would help steer Libya to elections in December.

Powerful parliament speaker Aguila Saleh said Dbeibah should choose "competent people with integrity, from across the country, in order to achieve (national) consensus" for his government.



## Haiti Prison Breakout Leaves 25 Dead

PORT AU PRINCE (Dispatches) - More than 200 prisoners were on the run in Haiti on Friday, a day after they escaped from jail in a violent breakout that left 25 people dead including the prison director, officials said.

About 400 inmates fled on Thursday, with AFP photographs showing at least three dead bodies lying outside the prison and some captured prisoners under armed guard in the back of a truck.

"Twenty-five people died including six prisoners and Divisional Inspector Paul Hector Joseph who was in charge of the prison," Secretary of Communication Frantz Exantus said of the mass escape from the jail in the suburbs of capital Port-au-Prince.



## Saudi MBS Approved Operation to Kill Khashoggi



WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler approved an operation to capture or kill murdered journalist Jamal Khashoggi in 2018, according to U.S. intelligence released on Friday as the United States imposed sanctions on some of those involved but spared the crown prince himself in an effort to preserve relations with the kingdom.

Khashoggi, a U.S. resident who wrote opinion columns for the Washington Post critical of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's policies, was killed and dismembered by a team of operatives linked to the prince in the kingdom's consulate in Istanbul.

The Saudi government, which has denied any involvement by the crown prince, issued a statement rejecting the U.S. report's findings and repeating its previous statements that Khashoggi's killing was a heinous crime by a rogue group.

U.S. President Joe Biden tried to make clear that killings of political opponents were not acceptable to the United States while preserving ties to the 35-year-old crown prince, who may rule one of the world's top oil exporters for against common foe Iran.

In a television interview on Friday, Biden said he told Saudi King Salman that Saudi Arabia has to tackle human rights abuses as a precondition to dealing with the United States.

"(I) made it clear to him that the rules are changing and we're going to be announcing significant changes today and on Monday," Biden said on Spanish language network Univision.

Among the punitive steps the United States took on Friday, it imposed a visa ban on some Saudis believed involved in the Khashoggi killing and placed sanctions on others, including a former deputy intelligence chief, that would freeze their U.S. assets and generally bar Americans from dealing with them.

U.S. officials also said they were considering cancelling arms sales to Saudi Arabia that pose human rights concerns and limiting future sales to "defensive" weapons, as it reassesses its relationship with the kingdom and its role in the Yemen war.

"We assess that Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman approved an operation in Istanbul, Turkey to capture or kill Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi," the U.S. Office of the Director of National Intelligence said in the four-page report.

The intelligence agency based its assessment on the crown prince's control of decision-making, the direct involvement of one of his key advisers and his own protective detail, and his "support for using violent measures to silence dissidents abroad, including Khashoggi," it added.

## 4 Killed in Clashes With Iraq Security Forces

NASIRIYAH (AFP) - Four anti-government protesters were killed Friday in clashes with Iraqi security forces in Nasiriyah, medics said, the deadliest day in a week of violence in the southern city.

Protesters have defied a second wave of coronavirus infections and renewed lockdown measures to vent their anger at the government over poor public services.

Similar protests, also over unemployment and corruption, erupted in late 2019 and morphed into an unprecedented anti-government movement across southern Iraq and Baghdad.

But while they faded elsewhere in the country, rallies have continued to grip Nasiriyah.

On Friday, four protesters were shot by security forces, medics in the city told AFP, adding that three died immediately while the fourth later died of gunshot wounds.

"Another 47 people were wounded but the hospitals are all full of coronavirus patients. We're struggling to find places to treat them," one medic said.

## UN, European States Call on Israel to Halt Demolitions

UNITED NATIONS (AFP) - The United Nations and European members of the Security Council on Friday called on Israel to stop demolitions of Bedouin settlements in the Jordan Valley, and for humanitarian access to the community living in Humsa Al-Baqia.

In a joint statement at the end of a monthly session of the Security Council on the conflict in the Middle East, Estonia, France, Ireland, Norway and Britain said they were "deeply concerned at the recent repeated demolitions and confiscation of items, including of EU and donor funded structures carried out by Israeli authorities at Humsa Al-Baqia in the Jordan Valley."

It said the concern was also focused on the 70 people or so living in the Bedouin community, including 41 children.

"We reiterate our call on Israel to halt demolitions and confiscations," the statement said. "We further call on Israel to allow full, sustained and unimpeded humanitarian access to the community in Humsa Al-Baqia."

Humsa al-Baqia sits in the Jordan Valley, a fertile and strategic patch of land that runs from Lake Tiberias to the Dead Sea, which has emerged as a flashpoint in the struggle over the West Bank.

It is in the West Bank's so-called Area C, occupied Palestinian territory that remains under full Israeli military control.

Under Israeli military law, Palestinians cannot build structures in the area without permits, which are typically refused, and demolitions are common.

The UN envoy for the region, Norwegian Tor Wennesland, also voiced his concerns over the demolitions and land confiscations.

He said Israel security forces had "demolished or confiscated 80 structures" in the Bedouin community "in an Israeli declared firing zone in the Jordan Valley."

He said that the actions had "displaced 63 people, including 36 children multiple times, and followed a similar demolition in November 2020."

## Myanmar Police Move to Stamp Out Protests

YANGON (Reuters) - Myanmar police moved decisively on Saturday in a bid to prevent opponents of military rule gathering after Myanmar's U.N. envoy urged the United Nations to use "any means necessary" to stop a Feb. 1 coup.

The Southeast Asian country has been in turmoil since the army seized power and detained elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi and much of her party leadership, alleging fraud in a November election her party had won in a landslide.

Uncertainty has grown over Suu Kyi's whereabouts, as the independent Myanmar Now website on Friday quoted officials of her National League for Democracy (NLD) party as saying she had been moved this week from house arrest to an undisclosed location.

The coup has brought hundreds of thousands of protesters to Myanmar's streets and drawn condemnation from Western countries, with some imposing limited sanctions.

More protests were planned for Saturday but police were out in force early in the main city of Yangon and elsewhere, deployed in numbers at usual protest sites and detaining people as they began to congregate, witnesses said.

At least two media workers were among those detained in Yangon, witnesses said.

"They also came to arrest me but I escaped and ran away," said another media worker who declined to be identified.

The police action came a day after police broke up protests in Yangon, the second city of Mandalay, Naypyitaw and other towns with rubber bullets, stun grenades and shots into the air. Several people were hurt.

At the U.N. General Assembly, Myanmar's Ambassador Kyaw Moe Tun said he was speaking on behalf of Suu Kyi's government and appealed to the body "to use any means necessary to take action against the Myanmar military and to provide safety and security for the people".

"We need further strongest possible action from the international community to immediately end the military coup, to stop oppressing the innocent people ... and to restore the democracy," he told the 193-member group, receiving applause as he finished.

Kyaw Moe Tun appeared emotional as he read the statement on behalf of a group of elected politicians that he said represented the legitimate government.

Delivering his final words in Burmese, the career diplomat raised the three-finger salute of pro-democracy protesters and announced "our cause will prevail".

Reuters was not immediately able to contact the army for comment.



## Armenian Army Urged to Rebel After PM's Coup Accusation

YEREVAN (Dispatches) - Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's grip on power appeared to be slipping on Friday, a day after the army called on him to quit.

Hundreds of demonstrators rallied in the capital Yerevan to demand his downfall, and a leading opposition figure called on the army to rebel against him. Two former presidents have already said he must step down.

Pashinyan, 45, accused the military of a coup attempt on Thursday and tried to sack the chief of staff, after the army issued a written statement calling for him to resign.

He has faced calls to quit since November from countrymen who blame him for a disastrous six-week war that saw ethnic Armenian forces lose swathes of territory in neighbouring Azerbaijan they had held for decades.

While crowds on Friday demanded he resign, thousands of others had gathered in the capital to rally behind him on Thursday.

Pashinyan told his supporters on Thursday he was firing Onik Gasparyan, the chief of the army's general staff. But by Friday the dismissal had not yet been approved by Armenia's president, a step needed for it to enter force.

President Armen Sarkissian held a meeting with Gasparyan, the president's office said, without releasing further details.

Vazgen Manukyan, a politician who has been touted by the opposition as a possible interim prime minister to replace Pashinyan, told hundreds of supporters at a rally that the army would never allow Gasparyan to be sacked.

"You think the army will easily agree that Pashinyan illegally removes their head? No. The army will rebel. I call on the army to rebel. The army shouldn't carry out illegal orders," Manukyan said.

The General Prosecutor's Office told Reuters on Friday that it was investigating whether the army's call for the prime minister to go constituted a crime.

"The general staff's statement and the possible risk of developments around it are the subject of our attention," Gor Abrahamyan, an aide to the prosecutor general, told Reuters by telephone. "If any elements of a crime outlined in the criminal code are revealed, a legal response will immediately follow."







**Shanon**  
(adviser)

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## Boeing Faces Much Bigger 787 Repair Bill

SEATTLE (Reuters) - Boeing Co will pay a \$6.6 million to U.S. regulators as part of a settlement over quality and safety-oversight lapses going back years, a setback that comes as Boeing wrestles with repairs to flawed 787 Dreamliner jets that could dwarf the cost of the federal penalty.

Boeing is beginning painstaking repairs and forensic inspections to fix structural integrity flaws embedded deep inside at least 88 parked 787s built over the last year or so, a third industry source said.

The inspections and retrofits could take weeks or even up to a month per plane and are likely to cost hundreds of millions - if not billions - of dollars, depending to a large degree on the number of planes and defects involved, the person said.



## OPEC+ to Weigh Modest Oil Output Boost at Meeting

LONDON (Dispatches) - OPEC+ oil producers will discuss a modest easing of oil supply curbs from April given a recovery in prices, OPEC+ sources said, although some suggest holding steady for now given the risk of new setbacks in the battle against the pandemic.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and allies, known as OPEC+, cut output by a record 9.7 million bpd last year as demand collapsed due to the pandemic. As of February, it is still withholding 7.125 million bpd, about 7% of world demand.

In January OPEC+ slowed the pace of a planned output increase to match weaker-than-expected demand due to continued coronavirus lockdowns. Saudi Arabia made extra voluntary cuts for February and March.

Three OPEC+ sources said an output increase of 500,000 barrels per day from April looked possible without building up inventories, although updated supply and demand balances that ministers will consider at their March 4 meeting will determine their decision.

"The oil price is definitely high and the market needs more oil to cool the prices down," one of the OPEC+ sources said. "A 500,000 bpd increase from April is an option - looks like a good one."

A rally in prices towards \$67 a barrel, the highest since January 2020, the rollout of vaccines and economic recovery hopes have boosted confidence the market could take more oil. India, the world's third biggest oil importer, has urged OPEC+ to ease production cuts.

Saudi Arabia's voluntary cut of 1 million barrels per day (bpd) ends next month. While Riyadh hasn't shared its plans beyond March, expectations in the group are growing that Saudi Arabia will bring back the supply from April, perhaps gradually.

Some OPEC+ members also anticipate that the Saudis will be willing to ease cuts further, but it was not clear if they had had direct communication with Riyadh.

Saudi Arabia has warned producers to be "extremely cautious" and some OPEC members are wary of renewed demand setbacks. One OPEC country source said a full return of the Saudi barrels in April would mean the rest of OPEC+ should not pump more yet.

"The Saudi voluntary cut will be back to the market," the source said. "I'm personally with no more relaxation, not until June."

Russia, one of the OPEC+ countries which was allowed to boost output in February, is keen to raise supply and a source last week said Moscow would propose adding more oil if nothing changed before the March 4 virtual meeting.

## Pakistan Gets \$1.1b Financing to Import Oil, LNG

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - With sub-optimal utilization of earlier \$4.5 billion worth of three-year financing framework, Pakistan and the International Islamic Trade Finance Corporation (ITFC) on Wednesday signed a \$1.1bn trade financing facility for the current year.

Under the Annual Financing Plan, "ITFC will mobilize trade financing of \$1.1bn during the year 2021", said an official statement after the signing ceremony. The financing available through this facility will be utilized by the Pakistan State Oil (PSO), Pak-Arab Refinery Ltd (Parco) and Pakistan LNG Ltd (PLL) for the import of crude oil, refined petroleum products and LNG during the year 2021 and help augment foreign currency reserves of the country and provide resources to meet the oil import bill.

The document was signed by Economic Affairs Division Secretary Noor Ahmed and ITFC's Chief Executive Officer Eng Hani Salem Sonbol.

ITFC is a subsidiary organization of the Islamic Development Bank Group.

On the sidelines of the signing ceremony, the two sides also agreed to firm up another three-year financing framework agreement while expanding the scope of the plan to also include agricultural commodities including DAP fertilizer from existing pipeline of oil products and liquefied natural gas, informed sources told Dawn. The next financing framework would be taken up for approval at the annual meetings of the Islamic Development Bank in June.

The government could not utilize almost one-third of the earlier package for three years that expired on Dec 31, 2020. Total utilization in three years ending December 2020 amounted to about \$3bn. The \$4.5bn package was signed by the two sides in April 2018 to cover oil and LNG imports over a period of three years (2018-2020) at the rate of about 1.5 per cent per annum.

The annual utilization, however, did not cross \$900 million in first two years while third year utilization just went past \$1bn.

The facility had formally become effective on July 1, 2018, when it rolled over about \$100m loan. Before the 2018-20 framework agreement, the ITFC had extended about \$3.2bn trade financing facility of similar tenure to Pakistan mostly covering crude oil and some petroleum products. That three-year facility had come to an end in 2017.



## Majority of Americans Support \$15 Minimum Wage

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - A majority of Americans support the idea of more than doubling the minimum wage to \$15 per hour, a Reuters/Ipsos poll showed on Thursday as Senate Democrats await a ruling on whether they can tuck that measure into a \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief bill.

Democrats, who narrowly control the House of Representatives and Senate, are trying to pass the progressive policy without Republican votes through a maneuver known as reconciliation, which allows them to act with just a simple 51-vote majority rather than the chamber's normal 60-vote requirement.

The Senate's parliamentarian on Thursday is expected to decide whether the rules will allow them to use the coronavirus spending bill to enact a sweeping wage policy.

Regardless of the ruling, the idea of raising the minimum wage to \$15 by 2025 from its current \$7.25 is broadly popular, a Reuters/Ipsos poll found. Some 59% of respondents said they supported the idea, with 34% opposing it.

When told that "raising the minimum wage should lift some families out of poverty, but government economists also expect it could eliminate some low income jobs, potentially making some families worse off," 55% of respondents said they supported it.

Even if the Senate parliamentarian, Elizabeth MacDonough, rules that the minimum wage can be passed through reconciliation, it will not change the fact that the proposal faces an uphill battle in the Senate.

Democrats are not united in support with two of their number - Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona - against the idea.

## Turkey to Unveil Economic Reforms in March

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkey will unveil details of its new economic reform policies in the second week of March, the treasury and finance minister said, while data next week is expected to show that the Turkish economy was among the few that ended the coronavirus pandemic-ravaged 2020 with a growth.

"We have come to the end of our economic reform work, which includes macroeconomic stability policies and structural policies," Lutfi Elvan said on Twitter on Thursday. Elvan stressed that 2021 would be a year of reforms for Turkey.

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan late last year pledged a new economic era and promised a slate of economic and judicial reforms, which he said would raise the standards for democratic rights and freedom.

He on Wednesday said a human rights action plan would be announced next week.

Economic reforms are expected to focus on investment, production, export and employment.

"I hope we will reveal our determination to grow our country once again by announcing our economic reform package," the president noted.

Top Turkish officials have held negotiations on the reforms with key business leaders over recent months.

Elvan had said Turkey would maintain fiscal discipline and would focus on sustainable and "high quality" economic growth policies in the coming period to increase employment.

Turkey's economy is expected to have grown at a hot 7.1% pace in the fourth quarter and to have logged 2.3% growth in 2020 as a whole, emerging as one of the few countries to avoid a contraction amid the pandemic, a poll showed on Wednesday.

The Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat) is expected to announce fourth-quarter gross domestic product (GDP) data at 7 a.m. GMT on March 1.

The major emerging market (EM) economy expanded 4.5% year-on-year in the first quarter when social and business curbs were imposed, leading to a 9.9% contraction in the second. It rebounded 6.7% in the third quarter as state banks offered cheap credit and as restrictions were lifted.

The median forecast in a Reuters poll of 16 economists for the October-December quarter was for 7.1% year-on-year growth with estimates ranging between 3% and 8.3%. The median estimate of 2.3% for 2020 was based on 19 respondents. Last year the government had forecast GDP growth of 0.3%.

For 2021, the GDP is estimated to grow by 4.5% as the economy continues to rebound, according to the median estimate of 11 economists in the Reuters poll.

## China Plans Mega Transport Network to Boost Trade, Economic Growth

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China's plan to build a global rapid logistics circle for goods by 2035, which would allow goods to be delivered to neighboring countries and major international cities within two- three days, will likely boost China's trade with major economies in the EU and Asia, observers said.

Some expect the country's foreign trade to grow more than 5 percent annually during the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-25), and analysts said the broad plan is also significant in terms of coordinating a global industry chain where China plays a centralized and pivotal role. Riding on such momentum, the world's economic center of gravity could gradually shift to China, they predicted.

According to a plan jointly issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council, China's cabinet, on China's comprehensive transportation network layout, the country aims to build 200,000 kilometers of railways, 460,000 kilometers of highways, and 25,000 kilometers of high-level sea lanes by 2035.

The total transportation network will reach 700,000 kilometers by 2035, according to the plan, with 27 major coastal ports, 400 civil transportation airports and 80 express hubs.

That will provide support for the "global 123" fast logistics circle for goods, which stands for one-day delivery in domestic market, two-day delivery for neighboring countries and three-day delivery for major global cities, the plan noted.

The unprecedented blueprint would create the world's largest transportation network. Analysts said that as the plan will significantly shorten shipping times, it will facilitate China's goods flow with other major economies -- in particular with Asian countries with which China shares a land border, and countries along China's southwest passage such as Pakistan, Myanmar and European nations.

At the end of 2020, the EU completed negotiations for a bilateral investment treaty with China, the bloc's largest trading partner. Also, China in November signed the world's largest trade deal, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), that encompasses one- third of the global economy.

Analysts said that improved logistics connectivity could speed up those trade deals' implementation. "It is expected that under the plan, the annual number of China-Europe freight trains will double from the current level to 40,000 to 50,000 by 2035. Transportation times will also be cut from more than half a month now to 10-20 days by that time," Tian Yun, vice director of the Beijing Economic Operation Association, told the Global Times on Thursday.

## India's Economy Probably Resumed Growing Last Quarter



NEW DELHI (Reuters) - India's economy probably returned to growth in its fiscal third quarter after a recession earlier in 2020, economists said, and the recovery is expected to gather pace as consumer demand and investments shake off the effects of the pandemic.

The median forecast from a survey of 58 economists this week predicted gross domestic product in Asia's third-largest economy grew 0.5% year-on-year in the December quarter, after shrinking 23.9% and 7.5% in the April-June and July-September periods, respectively.

The forecasts ranged from a contraction of 4.7% to growth of 2.6%. India is set to announce GDP data for the December period.

Economists have raised their forecasts for the current and next fiscal year, expecting a pick-up in government spending, consumer demand and resumption of most of economic activities were helping the economic recovery.

"Improving consumption, government reforms to boost domestic manufacturing and low interest rates will propel corporate India's post pandemic recovery," Moody's said in a statement on Thursday.

Moody's revised its forecast to a 7% contraction for the current fiscal year, ending in March, from an earlier estimate of a 10% contraction. It predicted 13.7% growth for next fiscal year, helped by resumption of economic activities.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government earlier this month rolled out plans to fund a huge vaccination drive, while outlining a slew of tax incentives to boost manufacturing.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI), which has slashed its repo rate by a total of 115 basis points since March 2020 to cushion the shock from the pandemic, has projected growth of 10.5% for the fiscal year starting April.

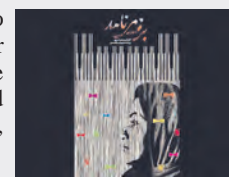


## “The Snow Calls” Wins At Big Sky Film Festival

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iranian documentary ‘The Snow Calls’ directed by Marjan Khosravi has been awarded at Big Sky Film Festival in the US.

Iranian documentary ‘The Snow Calls’ directed by Marjan Khosravi and produced by Mahdieh Sadatmehvar has won the Best Feature Film award at Big Sky Film Festival in the US.

‘The Snow Calls’ is about an expectant mother named Mina who has one last chance to deliver a boy after bearing three daughters, or her husband will marry another woman. Mina decides not to have an ultrasound scan for fear of the result and the gossip that would ensue. She is already under enough pressure from her in-laws, although she does still have people on her side too.



## Strong Exports, Construction Boost German Economy in Q4

BERLIN (Reuters) - Strong exports and solid construction activity helped the German economy to grow by a stronger-than-expected 0.3% in the final quarter of last year, the Federal Statistics Office said, revising up an earlier estimate.

The office, which previously had reported a 0.1% expansion over the previous quarter, also revised upward its 2020 full-year GDP figure for Europe's largest economy to -4.9% from -5.0%.

Adjusted for calendar effects, the economy shrank by 5.3% last year, a much smaller contraction than in many other European countries, helped by a strong fiscal response to the damage caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

A debt-financed fiscal splurge created an overall state budget deficit of 139.6 billion euros or 4.2% of gross domestic product in 2020, the office said. This was the first deficit since 2011 and the second-highest since German reunification.

The fourth quarter expansion followed a record quarterly growth rate of 8.5% in the third and an unprecedented plunge of 9.7% in the second, due to the effects of Germany's first lockdown to slow the coronavirus pandemic.

The second lockdown, imposed at the beginning of November on bars, restaurants and entertainment venues and expanded in mid-December to include most shops and services, caused a plunge in household spending in the fourth quarter, the office said.

Disposable income rose slightly, however, thanks to job protection schemes and state aid for parents. As the lockdown prevented many consumers from spending, the savings rate posted an unusually high reading of 15.7%.

Exports grew by 4.5% on the quarter while household spending fell by 3.3%. This meant net trade contributed 0.6 percentage points to the overall growth rate, whereas sluggish domestic activity subtracted 0.3 percentage points, the office said.

Investments in construction rose 1.8% on the quarter, the office said.

Thomas Gitzel from VP Bank said low interest rates had helped the construction industry to continue to prosper while the export-oriented manufacturing sector had benefited from growing orders from Chinese customers.



The outlook remains clouded because German authorities have extended the stricter lockdown until at least March 7.

“Going forward, we stick to our forecast of a 1.5% q/q decline in the first quarter of 2021, mainly due to the negative effects on overall economic activity from the extended and tightened lockdown,” UniCredit said in a research note.

Carsten Brzeski from ING said that stricter lockdown measures since mid-December, harsh winter weather in February, a reversal of pre-Brexit hoarding in the UK and weaker foreign demand, at least from other euro zone countries, had increased the downside risk for the first quarter of 2021. “The growth drivers of the fourth quarter could easily become drags in the first,” Brzeski cautioned.

## Turkish Economy Grows 2.3% in 2020 Despite Pandemic



ISTANBUL (Reuters) - Turkey's economy grew at a hot 7.1% pace in the fourth quarter and logged 2.3% growth in 2020 as a whole, emerging as one of the few countries to avoid a contraction amid the coronavirus pandemic, a Reuters poll showed on Wednesday.

For 2021, gross domestic product (GDP) is estimated to grow by 4.5% as the economy continues to rebound, according to the median estimate of 11 economists in the Reuters poll.

The major EM economy expanded 4.5% year-on-year in the first quarter when social and business curbs were imposed, leading to a 9.9% contraction in the second. It rebounded 6.7% in the third quarter as state banks offered cheap credit and as restrictions were lifted.

The median forecast of 16 economists for the fourth quarter was for 7.1% year-on-year growth with estimates ranging between 3% and 8.3%. The median estimate of 2.3% for 2020 was based on 19 respondents.

Last year the government had forecast GDP growth of 0.3%.

In a list of selected large economies, the IMF forecasted expansions in only Turkey, China and Egypt in 2020 due to pandemic fallout, based on its January World Economic Outlook Update.

“After historically high credit growth last year to fight the pandemic’s effect on the economy, credit growth is now negative (and the) focus has shifted from growth to price stability in November,” BofA said in a client note that raised growth forecasts for 2020 and 2021.

Faced with a second COVID-19 wave, the government imposed new measures at the end of last year but sought to free up supply and production chains. Ankara is considering lifting some restrictions as of March.

Seen as a precursor to growth figures, industrial production expanded 10.1% year-on-year in the fourth quarter.

“Indicators still show growing demand for manufacturing despite COVID-19 restrictions,” BofA added.

Although the new economy management “is keen on slowing domestic demand to help bring down inflation, pent-up demand and opening of the services sector can put more pressure on inflation.”

Turkey's economy, which has expanded 5% on average over the last two decades, has languished well below those levels for the last few years, growing just 0.9% in 2019.

The Turkish Statistical Institute is expected to announce fourth quarter GDP data at 0700 GMT on March 1.

## Outlook for Airlines Deteriorating in 2021

LONDON (Reuters) - Global airline industry body IATA warned that the outlook for airlines had weakened since its December forecasts, and due to tightening travel restrictions it now expected the sector to still be bleeding cash by the fourth quarter of this year.

IATA raised its forecast for total airline cash burn for 2021 to between \$75 billion and \$95 billion, up from the \$48 billion it had forecast in December.

While many countries have started rolling out vaccines to tackle the novel coronavirus, the emergence of more infectious variants in countries such as Britain, Brazil and South Africa has forced many governments to ban all but essential travel.



This summer is make-or-break for many airlines and holiday companies which are struggling to survive with close to a year of almost no revenue due to pandemic restrictions. Without it many will need extra funds after burning through cash reserves.

Britain's Heathrow Airport said on Wednesday it had plunged to a 2 billion pound loss in 2020 and that digital health checks were now vital to building any kind of recovery in international travel.

IATA also said on Wednesday it planned to launch a COVID-19 travel pass at the end of March, bringing into use a digital system for test results and vaccine certificates which will help facilitate travel.

## Malaysia's Palm Oil Stocks Seen Below 1.5m Tons for Most of 2021

KUALA LUMPUR (Reuters) - Palm oil inventories in Malaysia, the world's second largest producer and exporter, will remain low throughout the year and continue to support high prices, the Malaysian Palm Oil Council (MPOC) said.

Output in top producers Indonesia and Malaysia fell last year due to wet weather and labor shortages, pushing Malaysia's stockpile at the end of 2020 to a more than 13-year low of 1.27 million tons.

Although production is expected to rise, Malaysia's state agency and industry body MPOC only saw a small increase in inventory as exports are expected to grow.

“We foresee the monthly stock for Malaysia would range below 1.5 million tons,” MPOC deputy director Faisal Iqbal said during a webinar.

“The entire mix is a classic scenario for higher crude palm oil prices in the first half of 2021, or safe to say for the most part of 2021,” he added.

Malaysia's benchmark crude palm oil price traded at 3,635 ringgit (\$899.98) a ton.

MPOC pegged 2021 crude palm oil production in Malaysia to rise to 19.6 million tons from 19.1 million tons last year, while Indonesia's production is seen rising to 45 million tons from 42.3 million tons in 2020.

MPOC projected crude palm oil exports from Malaysia to climb 10% from last year to 4.8 million tons, while Indonesia's crude palm oil exports are expected to drop 10% as its new export levy structure makes Malaysia's product more competitive.

“Looking at the average uptake of crude palm oil by the Malaysian refining industry in the range of 15.5-15.6 million tons, there will be a deficit of crude palm oil within Malaysia which will be met by imports,” Faisal said.

“This supply and demand scenario is likely to create low month ending stocks for much of 2021,” he added.

## Owner of Israeli-Owned Cargo Ship Damaged Close to Mossad Chief

LONDON (Dispatches) - Reports have disclosed that the owner of a ship hit by an explosion in the Sea of Oman is Israeli businessman Abraham Ungar, who has close relationship with the head of Israel's Mossad spy agency, Yossi Cohen.

Maritime security firm Dryad Global and a United Nations ship database identified owners of the Bahamas-flagged ship, the MV Helios Ray, as a Tel Aviv-based firm called Ray Shipping Ltd., which registered in the Isle of Man.

On Saturday, Hebrew-language media outlets reported that Ungar, 74, who goes by “Rami,” is the founder of Ray Shipping Ltd., and is known as one of the richest men in Israel.

The outlets further highlighted that Ungar is close to the Israeli regime's spymaster.

According to the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO), the MV Helios Ray was carrying vehicles. It was apparently en route to Singapore from Dammam in Saudi Arabia.

The UKMTO, which is run by the British navy, said on Friday an explosion struck the vessel near the strategic mouth of the Persian Gulf.

The incident occurred at 20:40 GMT on Thursday, the UKMTO said, but gave no details about a possible cause.

Ray Shipping confirmed that one of its vessels carrying a “Bahamas flag” was damaged “when an explosion was heard in the Persian Gulf near the Strait of Hormuz.”

### Iran Able to...

FROM PAGE 1

“We have the capacity now, and as the law has allowed us, we can increase our Uranium enrichment up to 60% in 24 hours.”

Referring to a recent joint statement between the Iranian nuclear agency and the IAEA which had been agreed upon during a visit of the IAEA Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi to Tehran, Salehi said that Iran's joint statement with the IAEA has no hidden aspect, and Grossi declared that IAEA recognizes Iran's right to enforce the parliamentary law.

After the U.S. exit from the world powers' nuclear deal with Iran in May 2018 and imposing the unprecedented sanctions on the Iranian nation, followed by the indifference of the European parties to the need for compensating Iran's losses as a result of the U.S. violation of the international accord, Iran started reducing its JCPOA commitments in five steps and finally suspended voluntary implementation of the Additional Protocol on Monday midnight.

Salehi also said cameras installed by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) at the Iranian nuclear sites will be withheld if sanctions are not removed in three months.

For three months, the IAEA will be denied access to surveillance cameras, Salehi said, stressing that if sanctions are not lifted, information recorded by the cameras will be deleted and cameras will be uninstalled.

On February 23, Iran stopped voluntary implementation of the Additional Protocol, in compliance with with a Majlis (Parliament) Law. However, some necessary inspections are underway within the framework of Safeguards Agreements up to next three months.

Asked why “three months” is set at the agreement, Salehi explained that the IAEA releases report every three months.

### Release of Iran's...

FROM PAGE 1

Moreover, Iran and South Korea have agreed on transfer of even more funds through the channel provided by the Swiss Humanitarian Trade Arrangement (SHTA), established in February 2020 after an okay from Trump administration.

CBI Governor also said that Iran has started talks with other countries including Oman, Japan and Iraq to release frozen assets.

Hammati had a meeting with South Korean Ambassador to Tehran last week convened at the request of South Korean embassy.

In the meeting, an agreement on transfer of Iran's assets to specified destinations as per the CBI's decision on amount and the banks for delivery.

South Korean Foreign Ministry said the day after this meeting that Iran's blocked assets would be released after consultation with the U.S.

### India...

FROM PAGE 1

On March 4, India will be celebrating the ‘Chabahar Day’ as it hosts the Maritime India Summit from March 2 to March 4.

The summit will be inaugurated by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Ministers from Afghanistan, Armenia, Iran, Russia, and Uzbekistan will be participating in the “Chabahar Day”. More than one lakh registrations have taken place for the summit.

Bandyopadhyay added, “Chabahar has been a very ambitious project of the country....we have sent consignments of wheat and pesticides as required by Afghanistan.”

At present, there are eight cranes at the port and four lifters.

Chabahar is key to India's westward connectivity, providing connectivity to Afghanistan and beyond. India Ports Global Chabahar Free Zone took over the operations at Chabahar's Shahid Beheshti terminal on December 25, 2018.

Till January 31, 2021, about 123 vessels have been berthed at the terminal. Importantly, Chabahar is key to the International North-South Transport Corridor that connects Mumbai to Moscow and reduces the distance by 40 per cent and cost by 30 per cent.



## Umar Akmal's 18-Month Ban Reduced to One Year

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Pakistani cricketer Umar Akmal's 18-month ban over corruption charges was reduced to a year, the Court of Arbitration for Sports said Friday.

The verdict from the Lausanne-based body will likely come as a relief for the troubled batsman with a history of disciplinary issues that has earned him a string of fines and bans during his career.

But the court also hit Akmal with a hefty fine of 4.25 million rupees (\$26,800) over his role in the incident.

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## Giles Pulls out of European Indoors to Focus on Olympics

LONDON (Dispatches) - Britain's Elliot Giles, who ran the second-fastest indoor 800m of all time in Poland last week, has withdrawn from the European Indoor Championships to focus on the Tokyo Olympics, British Athletics said.

Giles' time of one minute, 43.63 seconds broke Sebastian Coe's long-standing British record of 1:44:91, which the double Olympic 1,500m champion set in 1983.

The Indoor Championships will take place from March 4-7 in Poland.

8 IRAN NEWS

SPORTS

SUNDAY FEBRUARY 28, 2021

# Nets Roll to 8th Straight Win

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Kyrie Irving totaled 27 points and nine assists as the Brooklyn Nets recovered from a slow start and extended their season-high winning streak to eight games with a 129-92 victory over the Orlando Magic in New York.

Irving made 11 of 18 shots and reached the 25-point mark for the 18th time in 24 games as Brooklyn posted its most lopsided win of the season. The Nets are on their longest winning streak since 2006 and won their sixth straight without Kevin Durant (strained left hamstring).

James Harden added 20 points, seven assists and nine rebounds for the Nets, who shot 61.1 percent over the final three quarters, 53.3 percent overall and hit 20 3-pointers. Reserve Landry Shamet added 19 as Brooklyn dominated in its second game since some fans were allowed to return.

Nikola Vucevic collected 28 points and 12 rebounds points for Orlando, which shot 40.2 percent and absorbed its most lopsided loss of the season. James Ennis III added 15 for the Magic, who were outrebounded 51-35.

Joel Embiid scored 23 points and grabbed nine rebounds to lift host Philadelphia 76ers past Dallas Mavericks 111-97.

Embiid shot 5 of 20 from the field but made 11 of 12 free throws. Ben Simmons added 15 points and seven assists while Seth Curry contributed 15 points for the Sixers, who improved to 14-2 at home.

Luka Doncic led Dallas with 19 points. Josh Richardson added 13 and Tim Hardaway Jr. had 12 for the Mavericks, who had their two-game winning streak snapped. Dallas big man Kristaps Porzingis sat out due to lower back tightness.

Rookie Immanuel Quickley scored 25 points and Alec Burks added 24 off the bench, propelling host New York Knicks to a 140-121 victory over Sacramento Kings.

Julius Randle collected 21 points and 14 rebounds and Derrick Rose made 7 of 11 shots from the floor to finish with 18 points for the Knicks. Rose was inserted into the starting lineup in place of Elfrid Payton, who sat out for the first time this season due to an ailing hamstring.

De'Aaron Fox had 29 points and 11 assists and Harrison Barnes added 22 points for the reeling Kings, whose season-high losing streak reached nine games.

Meanwhile Bradley Beal scored 33 points,



Russell Westbrook had 16 points, 10 rebounds and 10 assists, and visiting Washington Wizards beat Denver Nuggets 112-110.

Rui Hachimura scored 20 points, Raul Neto added 15 and Robin Lopez had 10 for Washington.

Jamal Murray finished with a game-high 34 points, Nikola Jokic had 24 points and 11 rebounds and Michael Porter Jr. added 18 points and 10 rebounds for the Nuggets, who couldn't make a comeback in the final seconds.

Giannis Antetokounmpo had 38 points and 10 rebounds and Khris Middleton added 31 points as host Milwaukee Bucks held off New Orleans Pelicans 129-125.

Donte DiVincenzo scored a career-high 24 points and Brook Lopez and Bobby Portis scored 12 each as the Bucks won their fourth straight game.

Zion Williamson scored 34, Brandon Ingram had 23 and Lonzo Ball scored 20 to lead the Pelicans, who defeated the Bucks 131-126 on Jan. 29 in New Orleans.

Jonas Valanciunas recorded 16 points and 15 rebounds, Tyus Jones came off the bench to score 20 points and host Memphis Grizzlies beat Los Angeles Clippers 122-94.

All five Grizzlies starters scored in double figures, including Dillon Brooks with 19 points in his return from a three-game absence caused by a thigh injury. Brooks' 3-of-5 3-point shooting set the pace on a night Memphis made 11 of 19 shots from long range.

Clippers All-Star selections Kawhi Leonard and Paul George were held to 17 and 13 points, respectively. Serge Ibaka added another 13 points for Los Angeles, and Reggie Jackson scored 12 points off the bench.

## Swiatek to Play Bencic In Adelaide Final

ADELAIDE (AP) - French Open champion Iga Swiatek is into the Adelaide International final against second-seeded Belinda Bencic after a 6-3, 6-2 win over Jil Teichmann.

Bencic advanced later Friday with a 7-6 (2), 6-7 (4), 6-2 win over American teenager Coco Gauff in 2 hours, 45 minutes. Bencic ended Gauff's victory streak at five — three in the main draw and two in qualifying.

Fifth-seeded Swiatek was dominant in the opening set, breaking the Swiss left-hander's serve in the fourth game. The 19-year-old Swiatek bothered her opponent with a series of powerful groundstrokes as Teichmann made 13 unforced errors in the first set.

Teichmann failed to convert a break point in the fourth game of the second set — her only one of the match — and it was a turning point. Swiatek held serve, then broke the unseeded Teichmann's serve the next two times to keep her perfect record for the tournament — she has not lost a set.

"I feel solid and that is the most important thing for me because when I play good I just enjoy everything," Swiatek said.

## Woods Moved to New Hospital To Continue Recovery

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Tiger Woods has been moved to a new hospital in Los Angeles, the Harbor-UCLA Medical Center said, as he recovers from multiple injuries sustained in a serious car accident this week.

The 15-time major winner underwent surgery to stabilize compound fractures of his tibia and fibula, after the grisly accident on Tuesday. The Los Angeles County Sheriff said Woods, 45, would not face criminal charges in the crash.

"Woods was transferred to Cedars-Sinai Medical Center for continuing orthopaedic care and recovery," Harbor-UCLA Medical Center interim CEO Anish Mahajan said on the hospital's Twitter account.



# Contract Talks With Neymar on Track

PARIS (Dispatches) - Talks with Neymar over a new contract are "on track", while discussions with Kylian Mbappe are still ongoing, Paris Saint-Germain sporting director Leonardo said on Thursday.

The French champions' two star forwards -- the world's two most expensive players -- are both out of contract in June 2022.

Several media reports have suggested that an agreement with Neymar has already been reached.

"It is on the right track," Leonardo told France Bleu Paris radio station. "But at the end of the day, a contract is signed when it's signed, and that's not yet the case."

Mbappe, who like Neymar joined PSG in 2017, has been heavily linked with a future move to Real Madrid.

"We've been talking (with Mbappe)," said Brazilian Leonardo.

"We've been talking for a long time. It's always (getting) clearer. We're going to arrive at the moment when we have to take a position, a decision.

"I think that we are getting closer and closer to that moment each time."

Leonardo also confirmed that PSG want to extend the deals of Angel Di Maria and Juan Bernat, whose contracts expire at the end of this season.

## Mourinho Says Pressure at Spurs Like Oxygen

LONDON (Dispatches) - Tottenham boss Jose Mourinho said Friday that being under pressure was "like oxygen" for him as he seeks to turn around the club's terrible Premier League form.

Mourinho's job has come under scrutiny after a run of five Premier League defeats in six games left them ninth in the table -- nine points outside the top four.

But the Portuguese, whose team topped the table in December, said it was just part of the job. "The problem is if you don't have pressure," he said. "I felt in trouble when I was at home and did not have pressure for a few months."

"That's the problem. It comes like oxygen, it is our life, I don't think there is any coach in the world without objectives or any kind of pressure. "You just get used to it and also used to the way the press is at the time, you just have to adapt to it."

Mourinho said earlier this week that he was confident he would be remembered for the right reasons at Spurs despite overseeing a collapse in their form during his first full season in charge.

The poor run in the league is unprecedented for the 58-year-old in a long and mostly successful managerial career at Porto, Chelsea, Inter Milan, Real Madrid and Manchester United.



## Schwartzman Reaches Cordoba Quarters

CORDOBA (Dispatches) - Teenager Juan Manuel Cerundolo had not played a tour-level match prior to this week, but now has reached the quarterfinals of the Cordoba Open in his native Argentina.

The 19-year-old, who started the week ranked No. 335 in the world, rallied for a 6-7 (3), 7-5, 6-2 victory against No. 3 seed Miomir Kecmanovic of Serbia.

Cerundolo will face Brazil's Thiago Monteiro in the quarterfinals. The seventh-seeded Monteiro advanced with a 6-3, 6-4 win against Spain's Roberto Carballes Baena.

The tournament's top seed, Argentina's Diego Schwartzman, also remains in play after winning 6-2, 6-2 over Italy's Marco Cecchinato.

Top-seeded Roberto Bautista Agut of Spain cruised past French qualifier Gregoire Barrere 6-0, 6-3 in just 66 minutes to reach the quarterfinals in Montpellier, France.

Agut will square off against sixth-seeded Ugo Humbert.

Spain's Alejandro Davidovich Fokina upset fourth-seeded Hubert Hurkacz of Poland 7-5, 6-2, and Austria's Dennis Novak bumped off third-seeded Dusan Lajovic of Serbia 7-6 (5), 7-5 to book their spots in the final eight. Top-seeded Adrian Mannarino of France swept Italy's Roberto Marcora 6-3, 7-5 to advance to the quarterfinals in Singapore.

