

Health Ministry Spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari Said on Monday That Some 108 More Iranians Lost Their Lives From the Coronavirus Disease Over the Past 24 Hours Bringing the Total Deaths to 60,181

IRAN NEWS

Director General of the IAEA Rafael Grossi Said That Iran and the Agency Reached an Agreement in Mid-February, Which Is "a Temporary Technical Understanding" and "Compatible With Iranian Law"

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U.S. to Kneel Down To Iranian Nation

TEHRAN (IP) - President Hassan Rouhani said that the world and the US would kneel down to Iran because of the country's resistance.

Speaking at the Inauguration Ceremony of Azar oil field's development project in Ilam via videoconference, Hassan Rouhani said: "Oil and petrochemical industries are critical to us and these industries are considered as political and economic industries."

Rouhani said that during the last three years, the country's budget and the economy were with the least oil dependency. Rouhani noted that all country's industries are deeply dependent on oil without which many activities like transportation and power will face problems.

Hasan Rouhani said that Iran's non-oil export had reached 31 billion dollars, and we hope it would increase in the future.

While challenging with sanctions and COVID-19 for exporting our products, the petrochemical industry has boosted the country's budget. "The world and the US will kneel down to Iran because Iran has resisted. They have confessed that maximum pressure against Iran has failed," he added.

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Zarif Warns of Countermeasures If IAEA Issue Anti-Iran Resolution

TEHRAN (PressTV)- Iran's foreign minister has warned against a likely anti-Iran resolution by the IAEA Board of Governors, saying the Islamic Republic has some options to take in case "reason does not prevail" on the other side.

The board is about to hold a quarterly meeting in Vienna Monday, with the U.S. having said it wants a resolution to "express the Board's deepening concern with respect to Iran's cooperation with the IAEA".

The U.S. has reportedly sent a position paper to the board members, demanding that they call on Iran to reverse its remedial measures and cooperate with the IAEA to explain how uranium particles were allegedly found at old, undeclared sites.

"We have provided the necessary explanations about these conditions to all members of the Board of Governors. We hope that reason will prevail, and if that does not happen, we have options to take," Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on the sidelines of a meeting of the Parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Committee on Monday.

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Europe-Iran Business Forum Kicks Off



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Europe-Iran Business Forum kicked off on Monday with 3,000 participants to provide a basis for trading, scientific and technological cooperation to increase Iran's non-oil exports.

The three-day forum will be held by video conference with the collaboration of the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran, the European Union and the International ICT Center.

Economic activists, experts in economic affairs, and the press, who have registered in the event, will explore the latest paths of recovering and developing economic relations between Iran and Europe.

The themes to be covered in this forum include a new strategy for entering Iran's goods and technical services to Europe, maintaining and expanding relations between financial markets and banks of Iran and Europe, supporting European companies interested in investing in Iran despite current US sanctions and in light of European obligations in the JCPOA, expansion of trading medicinal plants and auto components, Iran's petrochemical products and IT services in Europe, Europe investment landscape in Iran and several other areas.

Mir Hadi Seyyedi, a senior official in Trade Promotion Organization, said that through this event, Iranian and European companies become familiar with each other and explore investment opportunities, as well as valuable ideas proper for investment.

During the event, some scholars from Iran and Europe will give educational lectures on 12 topics with the purpose of improving Iranian companies' expertise and competence.

Middle East Director-General in The European House - Ambrosetti, Luca Miraglia, told IRNA that the forum is a real opportunity to improve trading capacity and expanding exports from Iran to Europe.

He also opined that "when it comes to the U.S. sanctions, one may think no interaction is possible. But I say that our mission is to make Europe's stance clear; one that has never changed since JCPOA was signed".

According to reports, Iran's foreign trade with Europe was more than 16 million tons worth near 67 million dollars. Iran had exported \$10.3m worth of goods to 37 European countries and imported \$6.75b of goods from 44 European states.

Qatar, U.S. LNG Imports Make up for Turkey's Loss From Iran

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkey's natural gas imports from Iran dropped 31.2% down to 5.3 billion cubic meters (bcm) last year compared to 2019, according to Energy Market Regulatory Authority (EPDK) data last week, while the total gas imports increased with LNG agreements.

Repairs following an explosion at the Turkey-Iran pipeline in March 2020 took longer than expected due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This resulted in a two-month halt in gas imports from Iran, which dramatically decreased Turkey's overall gas imports from the country. Natural gas imports from Iran stood at around 7.7 bcm in 2019.

Nonetheless, Turkey's total natural gas imports increased by 6.5% up to 48.1 bcm compared to 2019.

Turkey imports natural gas via a long-term pipeline and liquefied natural gas (LNG) contracts as well as through the spot LNG market. The country has long-term natural gas import contracts with Russia, Azerbaijan and Iran, along with long-term LNG contracts with Algeria and Nigeria.

The year 2021 is being dubbed as a turning point for the natural gas sector given that a significant portion of Ankara's long-term gas contracts will be terminated this year, providing the groundwork for a better bargain in future contracts. Renegotiating those contracts and securing cheaper prices are among the primary demands of Turkey.

The contracts that are set to expire in 2021 cover a total of 15.9 bcm of natural gas out of a total of oil-indexed long-term contracts for 58 bcm. This would be determinative for next year's sectoral and natural gas expenditures.

Turkey imported the highest gas volumes from Russia at around 16.2 bcm in 2020. Natural gas imports from the country showed an increase of 6.4% year-on-year.

Imports from Azerbaijan rose by 20.5% to reach 11.5 bcm, with the gas flow through the Trans Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline being the main factor for this increase.

Turkey received the highest LNG volumes from Algeria in 2020 at 5.6 bcm, although LNG imports from the country decreased by 1.8% compared to 2019 levels. LNG imports from Nigeria fell by 22.2% down to 1.9 bcm last year compared to the previous year.

The biggest increases in Turkey's spot LNG imports were from Qatar and the U.S.

Last year, Turkey's spot LNG imports from Qatar grew 32.1% to 3.2 bcm while spot LNG volumes from the U.S. showed a huge 144% increase to 3 bcm.

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Russia Issues Guarantee On €1.2b Loan for Iranian Power Plant

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian says the Russian government has issued a guarantee for a €1.2 billion loan that will be used by Iran to fund the construction of a major power plant south of the country.

Ardakanian said on Sunday that his ministry had obtained the loan guarantee from Moscow earlier in the day.

He said Iran will now accelerate bureaucratic procedures needed to start off the project in Sirik just outside the Persian Gulf on the Sea of Oman.

"It is expected that the executive works of the project starts as soon as the administrative formalities (of the loan) are cleared on the Iranian side," the minister was quoted by semi-official Fars news agency.

Russia's Power Machines has been contracted by Moscow to use Russian funds to build the 1.4 gigawatt thermal power plant in Sirik.

Local companies will also contribute to the project which will also benefit from around 200 million euros in Iranian finances.

The project is considered a key step toward stabilizing electricity network in normally underprivileged regions in south and southeast Iran.

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Iran Not to Receive Goods In Exchange for Its Money From Iraq

TEHRAN (MNA) - The chairman of Iran-Iraq Joint Chamber of Commerce said that Iran will not import Iraqi products in exchange for its claims from that country.

Yahya Ale Eshaq said, "It should be noted that Iraq does not have goods that we want to import in exchange for our money. Therefore, we will not import goods in exchange for this money, and the money itself will probably enter the country."

"Iran's relationship with Iraq is a strategic and developing one," he said, adding, "Our estimate is that by the end of the [current Iranian calendar] year (March 20), our exports to Iraq will reach \$9.5 billion-\$10 billion, up from \$12 billion last year", the official stated.

"The two sides agree to increase trade between the two countries to \$20 billion over the next few years. But the circumstances that arise may change; for example, the coronavirus outbreak, have decreased the bilateral trade by 15 to 30 percent", he added.

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Tehran, Baku Enjoy Great Capacities to Boost Mutual Ties

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi says the Islamic Republic and the Republic of Azerbaijan enjoy great capacities to boost their bilateral relations in different fields.

"We believe that our good neighborliness with Azerbaijan has created good capacities for extensive communication," Araqchi said in an international conference which is underway in the central city of Qom to address the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

The Iranian diplomat also referred to the Nagorno-Karabakh issue as one of the most complex crises in the Caucasus region, saying that Iran has always been against any threat posed to countries' sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The deputy Foreign Minister stated that while the international community, including the Minsk Group, has failed to resolve decades of the territorial dispute between Baku and Yerevan, the Islamic Republic of Iran has a very good capacity in relation to the countries of the region and can help address the issue.

He said The Islamic Republic of Iran prepared a plan to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and presented it to the officials of the two countries.

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Mosques' Networks Successful During COVID-19 Pandemic

TEHRAN (IRNA)- Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Seyyed Abbas Salehi said on Sunday that cultural and artistic centers of mosques in Iran have articulated appropriate networks during coronavirus pandemic.

Salehi pointed to the fact that several cultural and artistic centers have tried to survive during the outbreak of the pandemic, while the cultural centers of the Iranian mosques could develop

their activities through proper networking and creating structures needed in this situation.

The cultural and artistic centers of Iranian mosques carried out two positive measures in order to reach their goals during the pandemic, the minister stated, adding that they succeeded in creating a unified network, known as FAHMA, in order to establish an integrated system of the centers after 27 years.

No Engagement With U.S. Without Lifting Sanctions

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has reiterated that the US has to lift its inhuman sanctions on the Islamic Republic before the two sides could engage in any negotiations.

"Not only has Iran opened up the pathway towards diplomacy, it has also lip it up," Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh told a press briefing in Tehran on Monday.

He repeated a three-step pathway that Tehran has devised for Washington before the latter could find its way back to any negotiation featuring the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

Referring to Donald Trump successor Joe Biden's administration, Khatibzadeh said, "The course that the U.S. has to take should feature putting the wrong policies of the previous administration behind."

He also regretted that to date, the Biden team has not affected any changes in his predecessor's approach.

"We respond to measures with measures, and actions with actions. We respond to positive measures with positive measures, and will respond proportionately if we see a different behavior on the part of the U.S. and Europe," the spokesman noted.

Khatibzadeh, meanwhile, said Biden has even did worse than Trump in certain areas for instance by trying recently to force a ratification of an anti-Iran resolution at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)'s Board of Governors.

He advised that the parties in violation of the JCPOA seize upon the most recent opportunity that has been provided to them by Iran.

"It is a source of great regret that Biden and his administration have gotten off to a very hopeless start," Khatibzadeh said.

"You cannot have the same inflexible behavior of the former administration and palm it off on a country in the name of diplomacy," he added.

Separately, the spokesman addressed recent remarks by Benjamin Netanyahu, in



which he tried to implicate Iran in an explosion featuring an Israeli-owned vessel in the Sea of Oman, and the Israeli prime minister's rehashing of his claim that he was determined to prevent Tehran from acquiring "nuclear weapons."

"Such a blame game only serves the Zionist regime's corrupt prime minister," Khatibzadeh said, noting that Netanyahu was afflicted with "a pathological mental obsession with Iran that is nothing new."

The Israeli premier's claim "reflects the confusion that emanates from the regime's adventurist behavior both inside and outside the occupied territories," the spokesman said.

Khatibzadeh, meanwhile, reiterated that nuclear weapons have no place in the Islamic Republic's doctrine.

"Unfortunately, it is the Western world and the U.S. that have closed their eyes to the Zionist regime's stockpiled weapons and nuclear bombs," he added.

Revolutionary Author Should Protect Islamic Revolution's Values

TEHRAN (IP) - Commander of IRGC's Quds Force said that a revolutionary author must write in line with protecting the Islamic Revolution's values.

The Quds Force Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC) Esmail Gha'ani stated that the writings of a revolutionary writer should support the Islamic Revolution in order to influence the world, leading to the progress of the Islamic society.

He noted that the continuation and impact of the Islamic Revolution on the resistance movement was based on certain principles, and the preparation of the text must have resistance in principles.

Addressing the writers who write about the martyred Commander of IRGC's Quds Force Lieutenant-General Qasem Soleimani, he recommended the writers not to exaggerate when describing Lt Gen Soleimani because he enjoyed special prominences and exaggeration would distract the minds of future generations about him.

The 15th Book Festival of the Year of the Revolutionary Writers was held in Tehran in the presence of Brigadier General Esmail Gha'ani, the Chief Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC) Major-General Hossein Salami and a group of state and military officials.

New World Civilization Rises From Iran

TEHRAN (IP) - The Chief Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC) said that the Islamic Revolution of Iran emerged to lay the foundation for a new civilization.

Delivering a speech in the 15th Book Festival of the Year of the Memorizers of the Writers, Major General Hossein Salami stated that the sun of the new civilization of the world rose from the horizon of Iran, and experience has shown that access to this civilization is possible only with thought and knowledge.

Stressing that all the Revolution Guards should act wisely, Salami noted: "We have ignorant enemies who have powerful tools, and this is a danger for us."

It is important to write experiences and pass them to future generations, he highlighted.

The Chief Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC) stressed that the Revolution Guards must think deeply and infiltrates the enemies' minds in order to dominate them.



Armed Forces Take Delivery of Optimally Overhauled Military Aircraft

TEHRAN (PresSTV) - Iran's Armed Forces take delivery of a slew of optimally overhauled military aircraft and aircraft engines that have been brought into line with the world's technological advancements thanks solely to indigenous brawn and brain.



The optimized arrivals on Monday included as many as nine military aircraft, including heavy-lift transport planes, 10 helicopters, and dozens of overhauled engines.

The equipment was handed over to the Armed Forces for pending application by the Army and the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC). The delivery took place during a ceremony joined by Defense Minister Brigadier General Amir Hatami as well as the commanders of the Army Air Force and Army Aviation, Brigadier Generals Aziz Nasirzadeh and Yousef Ghorbani, the Defense Ministry reported on Monday.

Hatami hailed that the dynamic nature of the country's defense industry indicated that it had managed to defeat the enemy's "maximum pressure" policy.

He was referring to the United States' political approach towards the Islamic Republic under former American president Donald Trump that has been kept up during his successor Joe Biden and followed closely by Washington's allies.

The enemy tried to target Iran with the dual strategies of sanctioning the country and preventing it from buying military equipment, Hatami said. However, the Islamic Republic successfully confronted the campaign using the three counterstrategies of self-reliance, optimization of its defensive and security equipment, and manufacturing of various new indigenous hardware, he said.

The official identified the overhauled military aircraft as F-4, F-14, Fokker F-27 Friendship, and Mirage planes, and said the transport planes were of the 704, 707, and the C-130 makes. Enhancement of the aircraft, he noted, "reinforces the Armed Forces' aerial combat squadron." The overhauled choppers are capable of carrying out various combat, security, and rescue operations, the defense chief noted, and said the optimized engines comprised turbojet, turbofan, and turboshaft types. Hatami noted how the Islamic Republic's defense industries have been experiencing sanctions since the 1979 victory of the country's Islamic Revolution.

The Defense Ministry has been battling the coercive measures by manufacturing different military equipment in line with each period's requirements on the one hand, and overhauling and redesigning its available hardware on the other, he said, describing the latter approach as "an economic and safe pathway towards levelling up the Armed Forces defensive capability."

"By God's grace, we put these adversities behind us and are today in possession of technology in our defense industry," said the defense minister.

Addressing an earlier event on Sunday, the Army Air Force commander said some of the country's defense universities have attained the capability to manufacture "various generations of jet engines."

"I daresay our students are among the best in their own majors throughout the country and even on the international level," Nasirzadeh noted. The Army Aviation commander, who had joined the defense minister, meanwhile, considered the country's helicopter squadron to be "the strongest in the region."

He also hailed that the squadron depended completely on the domestic defense industry for production of its various parts. Ghorbani also noted how the country has succeeded to come by the night-vision goggle technology, and is currently producing the equipment in its domestic facilities.

Only a handful of countries have the technology at their disposal, he said, noting that the equipment is successfully used during military drills across the country's southern coastline in January.

Tehran Warns IAEA Against Adopting Anti-Iran Resolution

TEHRAN (IFP) - The head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) has warned the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) against issuing a resolution on Iran at the upcoming meeting of its Board of Governors.

Ali-Akbar Salehi said if the IAEA adopts a resolution against Iran in reaction to the country stopping its voluntary implementation of the Additional Protocol, Iran will show a proper response. "A letter has also been sent [to the IAEA] in this regard," he added.

He further referred to a recent agreement between the AEOI and the IAEA, and said, "The appendix to the statement on the agreement with the IAEA about Iran's stopping the voluntary implementation of the Additional Protocol based on the Strategic Action to Lift Sanctions Act is confidential."

"No special conditions have been set in this regard, and due to the precise information mentioned in this appendix about the list of the installations and monitoring cameras, and because of security considerations and the necessity of key Iranian facilities remaining clandestine, this appendix

Iran Not to Hand Over Data to IAEA Until Sanctions Lifted

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Spokesman for Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) Behrouz Kamalvandi said on Monday that Iran will not hand over data to IAEA until the US sanctions were not lifted.

He made the remarks in briefing to the parliament National Security and Foreign Policy Commission hearing.

Kamalvandi said that some representatives had questions about the agreement between IAEA and the International Atomic Energy Agency and that he gave explanation on the issue in the hearing.

The spokesman said that the agreement with IAEA was compliant to parliament's legislation requiring the government to halt Additional Protocol and inspections beyond the IAEA Safeguards Agreement.

He added that Iran gave three-month moratorium to end the voluntary acceptance of the IAEA Additional Protocol and IAEA agreed that Iran would save nuclear information by itself until three months later and then, if sanctions were lifted, the information would be handed to the IAEA; otherwise,



all the information would be deleted.

During the three-month moratorium, according to Kamalvandi, no access, inspections or protocol statement would be provided by Iran.

He said that the agreement with the IAEA is for three months, adding that if other parties to the JCPOA fulfilled their obligations under the deal in the above-mentioned period, the government would inform the parliament through a report so that the legislature could make a decision.

Continuation of sharing information is in the interest of both sides, because the IAEA needs to have the information to be able to make verification and broad evaluation, Kamalvandi added. He said that the IAEA offered members of parliament to visit nuclear sites to watch the process of enforcing the law in question closely.

On the possibility that three European parties to the JCPOA would cooperate with the U.S. to pass an anti-Iran resolution in the next IAEA Board of Governors session, Kamalvandi underlined that the European Troika has made a non-constructive move that must stop.

Illegal U.S. Bases Train Terrorists in Syria

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Foreign Ministry spokesman has condemned recent attacks on areas east of Syria by US troops, saying the illegal bases run by American forces in the country are used to train terrorists for later use against the government in Damascus.

"Illegal American bases on the Syrian soil are training terrorists and using them as a means [against the Damascus government]," Saeed Khatibzadeh said on Sunday.

Recent military activities under the new U.S. administration blatantly violate Syria's territorial integrity and international law, which would intensify clashes and fuel instability in the

region, the Iranian official said.

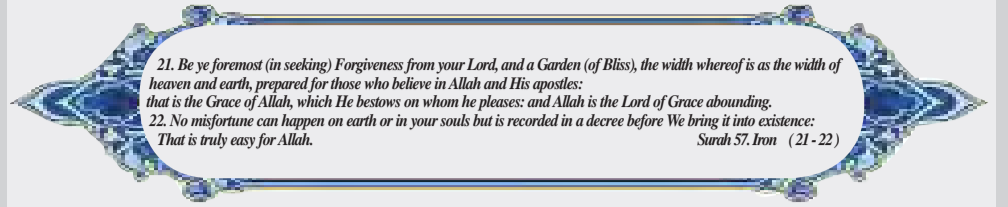
"These attacks, which were in the continuation of the Zionist regime's constant acts of aggression against the Syrian territory, have been carried out after American forces illegally entered Syria over the past few years and occupied parts of its soil and plundered its natural resources, including oil, which is an absolute right of the Syrian people."

One person was killed and four people were injured after US warplanes on Thursday conducted airstrikes on areas in Syria's eastern province of Dayr al-Zawr near the Iraqi border, the first of its kind under President Joe Biden.



PRAYER TIME

- Noon (Zohr) 12:16
- Evening (Maghreb) 18:18
- Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr) 05:08
- Tomorrow's Sunrise 06:31



Data Bank on Syria's Economic Needs to Be Unveiled

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Head of Iran-Syria Joint Chamber of Commerce says soon a data bank on Syria's economic needs will be unveiled which will help Iranian economic activists in trade with this Arab state.

Speaking in the Conference of Opportunities and Solutions for Trade With Syria, Keyvan Kashefi began his remarks with a report on the challenges, opportunities and suggestions for developing trade with Syria and then said despite emphasis on developing political ties, the economic relations with Syria is not satisfactory yet.

He added that Syria like Iran is under sanctions and it has made Syrian economy shrink, adding that by the way, we see the dominance of state bodies in different sectors and it is advantage and disadvantage.

Kashefi noted that despite actions taken by both sides, in the field of transportation there is still no shortest and fastest route available for access to Syria and in travels and air flights there are also some challenges, expressing hope after the consultations the number of direct flights to Syria would increase.

Explaining major actions of the Iran-Syria Joint Chamber of Commerce, he said preparation of consultation packages for economic activists is one of them, adding that soon a data bank which covers the latest economic needs of Syria will be unveiled by the chamber.

He also pointed to the specialized Iran Pavilion at Idlib Exhibition in Syria which covers an extensive group of audiences and it will be a good opportunity for the



presence of economic activists and Iranian companies.

Then Head of Iran Trade Promotion Organization Mr. Hamid Zadboum let the participants be familiar with the preliminary actions taken for developing ties between Iran and Syria in the next Iranian calendar year and said speaking about Syria is both easy and hard.

He then added that actions of the joint chamber especially regarding the launch of a trade center in Syria has shaped the infrastructure for boosting the ties but this is the economic activists of the private sector who should exploit this opportunity.

Zadboum also explained about Iran's free trade agreement with Syria, saying that free trade agreement is one way for developing bilateral trade whose ground has been paved by the industry ministry, reiterating that although Iran has no free trade agreement with any country, Syria is the only country which has signed such an agreement but economic activists have not used it yet.

He went on to say that the government is doing its best with the assistance of Majlis and the approval of Syria could zero the amount of custom tariffs on goods and the number of items of goods would also be increase as much as possible.

He also announced plans to improve trade relation with Syria until 2024.

Iraq to Pay Arrears as Part of Contract With Iran

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian said on Sunday that Iraq will pay arrears as part of the contract with Iran.

There is no reason to worry about payments related to electricity exports to Iraq, he said, adding that this is carried out within the framework of the agreement between the two sides.

There are no problems for Iran concerning the implementation of the electricity export contract to Iraq as well as other states when it is about energy exchanges, he further noted.

Iran needs to repatriate foreign assets to meet the expensive cost of the campaign against the deadly COVID-19 pandemic and demanded the government of Iraq and South Korea to pay their arrears to Iran.

Iran Steel Ingot Imports Up 67%

TEHRAN (MNA) – Statistics showed that import of steel ingot (billet, bloom and slab) into country in first 10 months of current year (from March 21, 2020 to Jan. 19, 2022) registered a 67 percent growth as compared to same period last year.

According to the statistical tables of Iranian Steel Producers Association (ISPA), 5,000 tons of steel ingots were imported into the country from March 21, 2020 to Jan. 19, 2021, the rate of which hit 3,000 tons in last year's corresponding period (from March 21, 2019 to Jan. 19, 2020).

Earlier, the Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade had announced that more than 95 to 98 percent of steel's requirement is met in the country.

According to the statistics, 4,000 tons of steel ingots (billet and bloom) was imported into the country in the first 10 months of the current year (from March 21, 2020 to Jan. 19, 2021), showing a 100 percent growth as compared to the last year's corresponding period.

It should be noted that Islamic Republic of Iran is the tenth largest steelmaker in the world. By achieving production capacity of 55 million tons of steel in 2025 Vision, suitable ways will be provided for the country to be listed among top seven steelmaking countries in the worldwide.

Iran Oil Fields Stand in Good Position Compared With Neighbors

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Iran Oil Minister said that Iran's oil fields were in a good position compared to regional neighbors, and the production capacity of crude oil in the west of Karun's joint fields had increased from 70,000 to 400,000 barrels per day.

Speaking at the inauguration of three national oil industry projects, Bijan Namdar Zanganeh stated that the inauguration of the two development projects of Azar oil field and ethane recovery unit of Kangan Petroleum Refinery with a total investment of about \$2.6 billion were big events.

Fortunately, by the end of President Hassan Rouhani's administration, Iran will reach a point where all oil fields have been put into operation in an excellent condition, Zanganeh noted.

President Rouhani yesterday officially launched the ethane recovery unit of Kangan Petro-Refining Company via videoconference.

The unit is touted as the largest feedstock supply unit for petrochemicals in the country.

He also signed off on commissioning Azar oil field development project with a daily production capacity of 65,000 barrels of crude oil. Azar Joint Field Development Project, known as the most complex oil field in the country, has officially come online by order of the President via video conference.

Providing national interests, creating employment opportunities for local forces and economic prosperity and infrastructure development in Ilam are among the prominent goals of implementation of the plan.

The President also yesterday broken grounds for construction of a strategic petrochemical project on Monday morning via videoconference. The CEO of Parsian Oil and Gas Development Group called Kian Petrochemical project one of the most strategic petrochemical plants in the country in line with the sustainable development of the petrochemical industry and creation of highly value-added projects, and said construction of the first phase of the facility officially began on Monday, February, 29.



Passenger Maritime Transportation Capacity to Hit 25m

TEHRAN (MNA) - Head of Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) has said the country's passenger maritime transportation capacity is going to reach 25 million people per year by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20), ILNA reported.



"The passenger transportation capacity of the northern and southern ports of the country is currently 24.8 million people per year, and considering the ongoing development projects in the mentioned regions, this figure will reach 25 million people by the end of the current year," Mohammad Rastad said.

Speaking in a ceremony for signing a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the Transport and Urban Development Ministry and the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism for the development of coastal and maritime tourism, Rastad noted that there are currently 57 passenger ships with a total capacity of 7,500 people operating in the country's ports, most of which are sailing in a route between Bandar Abbas and Qeshm Islands.

There are also 12,000 registered boats, 500 of which are operated by marine clubs, the official said.

He further noted that in addition to the mentioned passenger boats, ships and fairies, there are 50 landing crafts operating in the country's ports; these landing crafts have a total capacity for transporting 2,500 cars and 8,000 passengers.

The mentioned landing crafts mainly transport passengers and cars from the mainland to Qeshm Island in the southern Hormozgan Province; such vessels are also operating in other coastal areas, including Kish, and also between Genaveh and Khark, according to the official.

Having about 5800 kilometers of coastline in the north and south of the country, Iran has great capacities in terms of natural attractions of maritime tourism in the region and the world.

Mining, Mineral Export Value Exceeds \$5.6b

TEHRAN (MNA) – The export value of Iranian mining and minerals in the first 10 months of the current Iranian calendar year (from March 21, 2020, to Jan. 19, 2021) hit more than \$5.612 billion.

According to the statistics of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA), more than 34,090,000 tons of mining and mineral products was exported from the country in the said period.

Data showed that over 3.9 million tons of products in mining and mineral industrial sector, valued at over \$762,296,000, were exported to the target markets in the Iranian month of Dey (from Dec. 21, 2020 to Jan. 19, 2021).

Steel ingot and products, copper cathode and aluminum ingot accounted for the maximum export share in mining and mineral industrial sector in this period.

MSC's Mega Investment for Developing Urban Wastewater Network

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – On the sidelines of the 17th International Metallurgy Exhibition, Iran METAFO, in Tehran, the CEO of Khorasan Steel Complex Company elaborated his viewpoint on the strategic policy-making of the company in the future of the national steel industry.



Mr. Kasra Ghafoori hinted at the praiseworthy role of the company in the industrial, economic and social trend of its surrounding society and said MSC has always been the torch-bearer of development comparing to other production units of the country either inside the country or out of it.

He said he believes that water is the essential need of the steel, and steel-makers should not use clean water in steel production process while the country is challenging with the shortage of water.

Ghafoori added that with the approval of the water and wastewater company of the town of Neishabour, MSC took the control of the wastewater of the town for 25 years and it will be used in MSC and the surplus treated water will be used in the industry and agriculture of the province.

He reiterated that the project needs 1,100b tomans of investment in order that its executive operation can begin and it will create some 1,000 direct jobs.

Ghafoori also highlighted some major achievements of the company since the time he took the helm of the company, adding that the 2.5-million-ton Sangan concentrate-manufacturing plant of the company in Khaf has been the most important developmental project of the company which will boost the production chain and also profitability of the company.

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TENDER NO: 01-31-9780020

ITEMS	MATERIAL DESCRIPTION	QUANTITY
1	P/F "POLLS-ROYCE" INDUSTRIAL AVON GAS GENERATOR AVON MK. 1533-34-76G/101G REF. ROLLS-ROYCE LTD	10

Vendors who intend to participate in aforesaid tenders are requested to send their "INTENTION TO PARTICIPATE" letter via fax to the following number along with their resume according to qualitative assessment Form no.2, available at www.nisoc.ir not later than 14 days after the second announcement, otherwise, their requests for Participation in the tender will be disregarded.

The applicants should have relevant background in supplying the required goods and capability to provide and submit a bid bond of 11,088 EURO OR 3,143,573,617 RIAL in favor of NISOC.

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Navalny Moved to Penal Colony Outside Moscow

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny has been transferred to a penal colony outside Moscow to serve his prison sentence, a public commission said on Sunday, weeks after he returned to Russia after being poisoned.

Navalny's whereabouts had been unknown since Thursday when his allies learned that he was transferred out of one of Moscow's most infamous jails to an undisclosed location.

Navalny, 44, was arrested on his return from Germany last month and has been sentenced to more than 2-1/2 years for parole violations that he said were trumped up.



Czech Republic Turns To Russian Vaccine

PRAGUE (Dispatches) - The Czech Republic has requested a batch of Russia's Sputnik V vaccine while awaiting delayed EU-procured shots, the president said Sunday, adding that Prague will also consider seeking Chinese jabs.

The EU member has ranked among the world's worst-hit countries by the COVID pandemic in the past few weeks, with soaring numbers of infections and deaths, as the situation has been exacerbated by the new variants of the virus.

The vaccination rollout has been slower than expected with only 650,000 jabs administered since December in the country of 10.7 million people, which Czech politicians blame on slow procurement by the EU.



Trump Hints At 2024 Run



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Donald Trump returned to the spotlight Sunday telling enthusiastic conservatives that he may run for president again in 2024, as he sought to reassert his dominance over a Republican Party that is out of power.

The 74-year-old addressed the Conservative Political Action Conference in Orlando in a highly-anticipated keynote speech. But while he teased his future plans, he left the crowd guessing about whether he will challenge President Joe Biden in a rematch.

"Actually you know they just lost the White House," Trump said of Democrats, again promoting the claim that Trump was denied a second term because of election fraud.

"But who knows -- who knows?" he boomed. "I may even decide to beat them for a third time, OK?"

Banned from Twitter and other social media, Trump has maintained a low profile at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida since he left the White House on January 20. At the CPAC event, he walked out on stage to revel in a lengthy standing ovation by cheering loyalists, the vast majority maskless despite the coronavirus pandemic.

"The incredible journey we began together... is far from being over," Trump said of his populist movement. "And in the end, we will win."

Trump also put to rest the rumors that he might take his base of support to create a new political party.

"I am not starting a new party," Trump said. "We have the Republican Party. It's going to unite and be stronger than ever before."

Trump as expected took swipes at Biden, saying the Democrat just concluded "the most disastrous first month" of any modern president.

But he also painted America as a land divided.

"Our security, our prosperity and our very identity as Americans is at stake," he said, in a rambling speech that attacked immigrants, slammed "cancel culture," and criticized Biden policies on climate change, energy, and election integrity.

U.S. political parties usually face a reckoning after a string of setbacks such as those the Republicans saw under four years of Trump: losing the White House, the Senate and the House of Representatives.

The party is also marked with Trump's repeated lies about his election loss, his impeachment over inciting the U.S. Capitol riot on January 6, and the faultline his actions have caused between establishment Republicans and pro-Trump populists.

But, instead of jettisoning its troubled leader and charting a new path to claw back relevance, much of the party still sees Trump as retaining a vice-like grip on its future.

It is a perception he has encouraged, setting himself up as a vindictive Republican kingmaker. On Friday he endorsed an ex-aid against an Ohio congressman who voted to impeach him.

Myanmar Protesters March Again After Bloodiest Post-Coup Unrest

YANGON (Reuters) - Protesters marched in Myanmar on Monday in defiance of a crackdown by security forces that killed at least 18 people a day earlier, as calls grew for a more united international response after the worst violence since a coup one month ago.

Clashes took place in various parts of the country on Sunday and police opened fire on crowds in the biggest city of Yangon, after tear gas and warning shots failed to clear protesters demanding the restoration of Aung San Suu Kyi's government.

Police with water cannon and military vehicles were mobilised at protest hotspots in Yangon on Monday, while demonstrators marched in Kale, in northwest Myanmar, holding up pictures of Suu Kyi and chanting "democracy, our cause, our cause".

Live video on Facebook showed a small crowd in hard hats gathered across a street in Lashio, Shan State, chanting slogans as police marched towards them.

"It has been one month since the coup. They cracked down on us with shootings yesterday. We will come out today again," prominent protest leader Ei Thinzar Maung posted on Facebook.

Myanmar has been in chaos since the army seized power and detained elected leader Suu Kyi and much of her National League for Democracy (NLD) party leadership on Feb. 1, alleging fraud in a November election her party won in a landslide.

Having not been seen in public since her detention, Suu Kyi has a court hearing scheduled for Monday. She has been charged with illegally importing six walkie-talkie radios and of violating a natural disaster law by breaching coronavirus protocols.

The coup, which brought a halt to tentative steps towards democracy after nearly 50 years of military rule, has drawn hundreds of thousands of demonstrators onto the streets and the condemnation of Western countries.



Thousands of Haitians Protest Against Kidnappings, President

PORT AU PRINCE (Dispatches) - Thousands of Haitians protested Sunday in Port-au-Prince and several provincial towns against a spike in kidnappings by gangs, as well as accusing the president of establishing a new dictatorship.

Earlier Sunday in the capital city, a 63-year-old pediatrician was murdered in front of his clinic by unidentified assailants who had sought to abduct him, neighboring residents told local media. "We have a president that we no longer recognize because his term is over. Look at how a doctor was killed: is it possible to live in a country like this?" asked protester Moise Gueslin.

Since recent months, Haiti has seen an upsurge in kidnappings for ransom that have affected both the richest inhabitants and those living below the poverty level.

Additionally President Jovenel Moise has been ruling by decree for a year because there currently is no parliament, and only a third of its senators are in office. Legislative elections due in 2018 were delayed.

Moise maintains that his term lasts until February 2022 -- but the opposition argues it should have ended three weeks ago, in a standoff over disputed elections.

In the capital, thousands of people -- some of whom carried the national flag -- also chanted slogans against the UN representative in Haiti, whom they accuse of downplaying the scale of the demonstrations.

The dispute in Haiti stems from Moise's original election. He was voted into office in a poll subsequently cancelled after allegations of fraud, and then elected again a year later, in 2016. The issue has led to weeks of violent protests on the streets of the poor Caribbean country.



Hong Kong Activists Chant Protest Slogans

HONG KONG (Dispatches) - Protest slogans rang out as about 1,000 people gathered outside a Hong Kong court on Monday for the hearing of 47 democracy activists charged with conspiracy to commit subversion, as authorities intensify a crackdown on the opposition.

Security was tight, with more than 100 police officers deployed outside the West Kowloon court, in the largest rally this year despite social-distancing rules to curb the spread of coronavirus.

The activists are accused of organizing and participating in an unofficial primary poll last July aimed at selecting the strongest candidates for a legislative council election that the government later postponed, citing the coronavirus.

Authorities said the informal poll was part of a plan to "overthrow" the government, further raising alarm that Hong Kong has taken a swift authoritarian turn since Beijing imposed a national security law on its freest city last June.

"This is the most ridiculous arrest in the history of Hong Kong," said Herbert Chow, 57, who was queuing outside the court and wearing a black face mask. "But I have confidence in our judicial system

to restore justice. It's the last line of defence."

Many were dressed in black, the colour associated with the 2019 anti-government protests, while some chanted: "Liberate Hong Kong, revolution of our times" and "Fight for freedom, stand with Hong Kong," popular slogans during the unrest.

Others raised the three-finger salute that has become the symbol of protest against authoritarian rule in Myanmar.

The activists - 39 men and eight women, ages 23-64 - were charged on Sunday under the national security law, which punishes what China broadly defines as secession, subversion, terrorism and collusion with foreign forces with up to life in prison.

The queue to enter the court stretched several hundred metres, nearly reaching around the entire block.

Several foreign diplomats also queued.

Jonathan Williams, a British diplomat at the U.K. consulate in the city, said: "It's clear that the use of the national security law is going much broader than the Chinese and Hong Kong authorities promised."

He added, however, that the UK government had "full faith in the independent judiciary," to deal with the defendants fairly and impartially without political pressure.



Thai Protesters, Police Clash Near PM's Residence

BANGKOK (Dispatches) - Thai police shot rubber bullets and used water cannon and tear gas against pro-democracy protesters in Bangkok on Sunday at a rally outside a military barracks housing the prime minister's residence.

Protesters threw bottles at police and marched up to a barricade of shipping containers and barbed wire at the entrance to the base of the 1st Infantry Regiment in Bangkok, one of several army units that the government of Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-O-Cha transferred to the king's control in 2019.

Erawan Emergency Services said 16 people were injured. The Thai youth-led political movement was launched last year to demand Prayuth's resignation and broke taboos by calling for reforms of the monarchy.

The movement lost steam when it took a break in December and January as Thailand was hit by a second wave of coronavirus infections.

However, the arrest of four prominent protest leaders recently has reinvigorated the pro-democracy protests.

The four are among 58 protesters facing lese majeste charges and the prospect of up to 15 years in jail per charge if convicted of insulting the monarchy.

An estimated 2,000 demonstrators marched from the major Bangkok intersection Victory Monument to the nearby military barracks.

Protesters also showed support for anti-coup demonstrations in Myanmar, which has been in chaos since the army seized power and detained elected government leader Aung San Suu Kyi on February 1.

Their action was linked to the informal Milk Tea Alliance of pro-democracy activists from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Thailand and Myanmar, which on Sunday called for efforts in support of the protests in Myanmar.

Prayuth was targeted in part because he met Wednesday in Bangkok with the new foreign minister appointed by Myanmar's military rulers. "Prayuth welcoming a Myanmar official from their military government to Thailand earlier this week also show that he is supporting the dictator there," Chukiatt Sangwong, a Thai protest leader told Reuters news agency.



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400sq.m, 4bdrs
S/p, Sauna
J, balcony
marble fl
fireplace
pkg, & F.F

Shanon (adviser)

Kamranieh Villa (\$8000)
2000sq.m
6bdrs, S/p
Sauna, J
green yard
Terrace, S/q
elegantly Furn

Darrous Apts
140sq.m, 2bdrs (\$1600)
200sq.m, 3bdrs (\$2200)
300sq.m, 4bdrs (\$3200)
All with S/p, S, J, & F.F

Farmanieh (\$2000)
220sq.m, 3bdrs
S/p, S, J, pkg
L.balcony
pkg, F.F

Velenjak bldg (\$10000)
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Pakistan Likely to Resume Import of Cotton From India

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Pakistan may allow cotton import from India through land route as prospects of gradual restoration of bilateral trade ties have brightened after the new ceasefire agreement along the Line of Control, according to a media report on Sunday.

Citing sources in the Ministry of Commerce, The Express Tribune reported that Adviser to the Prime Minister on Commerce

Abdul Razak Dawood may take a decision on whether to import cotton and yarn from India next week.

They said that the issue of cotton shortfall has already been brought to the notice of Prime Minister Imran Khan, who also holds the portfolio of the commerce minister. Once a principled decision is taken, a formal order will be presented before the Economic Coordination Committee of the Cabinet, the sources told the daily.



China's GDP Makes Up over 17% of World Economy in 2020

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - China's economic output is forecast to account for more than 17 percent of the world's economy in the coronavirus-plagued 2020. As the sole economy recording positive GDP growth last year, China will ramp up efforts and strive to achieve higher quality, more efficient, sustainable and safer development in 2021, a senior government official said on Sunday.

China's GDP broke through the 100-trillion-yuan (\$15.5 trillion) mark, achieving an increase of 2.3 percent in 2020 despite the impact of COVID-19. To break down, the added value of the primary industry, taking up 7.7 percent of GDP, reached 7.78 trillion yuan, up 3.0 percent year-on-year; the secondary industry, taking up 37.8 percent of GDP, went up 2.6 percent; the tertiary industry, taking up 54.5 percent of GDP, rose 2.1 percent, according to an economic report released by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) on Sunday.

Throughout last year, total consumption expenditure drove a 0.5 percent drop in GDP, gross capital formation drove a 2.2 percent increase in GDP, while exports of goods and services contributed to a 0.7 percent increase in GDP, NBS data said.

The annual GDP per capita hit 72,447 yuan in 2020, up 2.0 percent year-on-year, surpassing \$10,000 for two consecutive years. The gross national income was 100.9 trillion yuan, an increase of 1.9 percent over the previous year.

"2020 is the closing year of the '13th Five-Year Plan' (2016-20) and a crucial year for achieving the first centenary goal. After five years of hard work and continuous national efforts, the main economic and social development goals set out in the plan have been achieved," said Sheng Laiyun, deputy director of the NBS.

During the 13th Five-Year Plan period, China's average annual nominal increase in GDP reached 6.5 trillion yuan, 1 trillion yuan more than that of the 12th Five-Year Plan period, he added.

"In the past year, trade protectionism and unilateralism prevailed, and economic globalization has encountered major challenges. In the face of this challenges, China's door to the outside world has not only remained open, but it has been opened wider and wider," said Sheng, adding that China has taken the initiative to strengthen international cooperation in the fight against the coronavirus, actively participated in economic globalization and nurtured many new growth opportunities.

The total value of imports and exports of goods in 2020 was 32.16 trillion yuan, an increase of 1.9 percent over the previous year, of which exports increased by 4 percent. The total value of trade and exports both hit a new record high, continuing to rank No.1 in the global trade in goods.

China has so far signed 19 free trade agreements with 26 economies. As of the end of January, a total of 205 cooperation documents have been signed, with 140 countries and 31 international organizations, to jointly build the iconic Belt and Road Initiative.

In 2021, marking the first year of the "14th Five-Year Plan" (2021-25), "We must take the first step and strive to achieve higher quality, more efficient, sustainable and safer development based on a new development stage, implementing new development concepts, and building a new development pattern," Sheng said.

Turkey Expresses Readiness to Deliver Gas From Turkmenistan to Europe

ANKARA (Dispatches) - The Turkish foreign minister has expressed his country's readiness to deliver Turkmen gas to Turkey and Europe.

"We are ready to do everything that depends on us in order to deliver gas from Turkmenistan to Turkey and further to Europe," Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu told his Turkmen counterpart Rashid Meredov at a joint press conference within the framework of a trilateral meeting in Ankara.

For his turn, Meredov said that "we can implement joint projects in the field of energy, transport, high technologies and other areas. Turkmenistan, for its part, will prepare a plan and relevant programs and offer them to Turkish friends."

The Turkmen minister added that despite the coronavirus pandemic, the trade turnover between Turkmenistan and Turkey amounted to about \$2 billion in 2020.

During the meeting, the two ministers signed a cooperation agreement for 2021 and 2022, and also emphasized the importance of strengthening bilateral relations within the framework of regional and international structures.

The Foreign Ministers of Azerbaijan, Turkey and Turkmenistan signed a joint statement after the meeting in the Turkish capital, agreeing to "support the further development of cooperation through the strengthening of the trade-economic cooperation, using the existing potential for promotion of investment and trade as well as carrying out joint projects and programs in the spheres of customs, energy, transport, telecommunications, industry, agriculture, science, education, culture, tourism, and environment."



Biden on Track to Apply Trump-Era Rule Targeting Chinese Tech Supply Chain Concerns

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The Biden administration plans to allow a Trump-era rule targeting Chinese technology firms deemed to pose a threat to the United States to go into effect despite objections from U.S. businesses, the U.S. Commerce Department said.

The department issued an interim final rule in the final days of the Trump administration aimed at addressing information and communications technology supply chain concerns and said it would become effective after a 60-day period of public comment. On Friday, a Commerce spokeswoman said in a statement the department would continue to accept public comment on the rule until March 22, when it would go into effect.

"Trustworthy information and communications technology and services are essential to our national and economic security and remains a top priority for the Biden Harris administration," the statement said.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce and groups representing major industries raised concerns in a letter to the Commerce Department in January that the interim rule gave it "nearly unlimited authority to intervene in virtually any commercial transaction between U.S. companies and their foreign counterparts that involves technology, with little to no due process, accountability, transparency, or coordination with other government programs."

Business Roundtable, a group representing major U.S. chief executives, said earlier the proposal is "unworkable for U.S. businesses in its current form."

The Wall Street Journal first reported the Biden administration's plans.

As the Commerce Department is still accepting public comments, it may still revise the rule based on objections from businesses and others.

Russian Business Confidence Bounces Back Strongly

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - There was a remarkable upswing in business confidence in January, according to Rosstat's monthly survey. Confidence levels rose to -1, their highest level since May 2019 marking a return to pre-corona crisis levels.

Business confidence in Russia is highly seasonal, during the winter months before the long holiday usually falling heavily to as low as -8. However, in 2020 despite the multiple

shocks to the economy the confidence levels didn't fall quite as far as usual, dropping to -7.3 in November as the shock concerns were offset by the optimism for a bounce-back that came with the certification of the various vaccines to combat the coronavirus (COVID-19).

Consumer confidence is only measured by Rosstat quarterly and the last reading in the 4Q20 remained at -26, the same level as during the crisis year of 2016.

The rising spirits of Russian business was confirmed by other surveys.

"The Markit IHS purchasing managers' indices (PMIs) for Russia illustrate this current improving sentiment. More importantly, they augur a gradual return of economic confidence in Russia. The readings for the manufacturing PMI (50.9) and services PMI (52.7) both exceeded a neutral reading of 50 points in January, thus indicating increasing business activity. The last time both indices were above 50 points was in September 2020. Confidence about the future in services rose sharply to a level last seen in October 2019," Bank of Finland Institute for Economics in Transition (BOFIT) said in a recent note.

Business activity of Russian enterprises in January almost reached pre-pandemic indicators of February 2020, according to another survey conducted by Promsvyazbank, Opora Russia business association and Magram Market Research agency.

According to the survey, under the RSBI index, business activity of small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) has been leaning to the growth zone for the third month in a row, and in January 2021 it amounted to 49.3 points, virtually equal to the pre-pandemic indicators of February 2020. The survey included owners and top managers of 1,773 SMEs from all regions of Russia. Like the PMIs, any result above 50 represents growth.

Aramco Seeks One-Year Extension on \$10b Loan

RIYADH (Dispatches) - Saudi Aramco has asked banks to extend by a year a \$10 billion loan it raised last May, two sources familiar with the matter said, suggesting that rebounding crude prices are not pushing the oil giant to reduce debt for the time being.

The sources confirmed a report by Loan Pricing Corporation, a fixed-income news provider owned by Refinitiv.

It is at the banks' discretion whether to extend the loan, but lenders will likely agree in order to maintain a good relationship with Aramco in the hope of receiving future business, LPC said citing a banker.

One of the sources, who confirmed the report, echoed that, saying: "It's Aramco. Why not?" LPC cited a banker as saying it was possible Aramco would try to push down pricing by arguing that market conditions have improved since May, when oil prices were much lower and there was much uncertainty about the pandemic.

The loan started at 50 basis points over LIBOR, a rate that steps up as more money is drawn from the facility, one of the sources told Reuters, adding Aramco could try to reduce pricing by 10 to 15 bps.

Brent crude futures settled at \$66.13 a barrel last week. In May last year they were trading at around \$30 a barrel, as global demand plunged due to the coronavirus crisis.

Sources told Reuters last year that Aramco would use the loan to back its acquisition of a 70% stake in Saudi Basic Industries Corp (SABIC) from Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund, a deal worth almost \$70 billion.



LPC had previously reported, citing a banker, that the loan would be repaid with the proceeds from a bond sale by the fourth quarter of 2020. That did not happen, even though Aramco raised \$8 billion in a multi-tranche bond deal in November.

Saudi Aramco's profits plummeted last year, but it stuck to a promised \$75 billion annual dividend, most of which goes to the Saudi government.

HSBC said this month that Aramco's prospects look more positive and promising for 2021, hinting at declining net debt and a possible dividend hike.

MTN Eyes \$65m Deal For Syrian Business



JOHANNESBURG (Dispatches) - MTN Group remains committed to negotiating a \$65 million sale of its 75 percent stake in its Syrian unit, the South African mobile operator said on Sunday, despite the business being placed under judicial guardianship last week.

MTN Syria was placed under guardianship by a court in Damascus over alleged MTN violations of the terms of its licensing contract, which the state says deprived the government of revenue.

MTN has denied the allegations and on Friday said that it intended to appeal.

The appointed guardian, who is chairman of MTN Syria minority shareholder TeleInvest, will be responsible for managing day to day operations while the guardianship order remains in place. The court's statement did not indicate how long that might be.

TeleInvest had been lined up to buy MTN Group's 75 percent stake in MTN Syria for a previously undisclosed price.

"MTN Group is still committed to executing on the agreed transaction with TeleInvest to dispose of its 75 percent shareholding and loans for a consideration of \$65 million in total," a spokeswoman for the South African company told Reuters.

The sale to TeleInvest is part of MTN Group's plans to exit the Middle East in the medium term.

The group's operations in the Middle East have been marred by allegations that it used bribes to win a 15-year operating license in Iran and that it aided militant groups in Afghanistan.

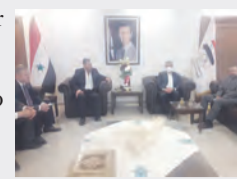
MTN denies the allegations.

In the six months to June 2020, MTN Syria accounted for 0.7 percent of the group's core profit.

Tatarstan, Syria Call for Cooperation With Iran on Sports

TEHRAN (IRNA) - National Olympic Committees of Syria and Tatarstan expressed readiness for signing MoU on developing sports cooperation with Iran.

The Syrian and Tatarstan officials made the remarks in a meeting with Iranian sports official in Damascus. Secretary General of the National Olympic Committee of Iran Keikavous Saeedi is on a visit to Syria to attend the 50th anniversary of Syria sports unity. Saeedi held a meeting with President of the Syrian Olympic Committee Feras Mouala.



"Crown," "Schitt's Creek," "Nomadland," "Borat" Win Top Golden Globes

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - The Crown was named Best TV Drama and Schitt's Creek was voted Best TV Comedy at the Golden Globe Awards ceremony Sunday.

The Crown scene-stealers Emma Corrin and Josh O'Connor also earned the Globes for Best Actress and Actor in a TV Drama, and their co-star Gillian Anderson scored the Best Supporting Actress on TV trophy.

Catherine O'Hara nabbed the prize for Best Actress in a TV Comedy for her work in Schitt's Creek and Jason Sudeikis picked up the Globe for Best Actor in a TV Comedy for Ted Lasso.

John Boyega earned the honor for Best Supporting Actor on TV for Small Axe and Mark Ruffalo won the statuette for Best Actor in a TV Movie, Limited Series or Anthology Series for his performance in I Know This Much is True.

Anya Taylor-Joy won the prize for Best Actress in a TV Movie, Limited Series or Anthology Series for The Queen's Gambit. The show also scored in the Best TV Movie, Limited Series or Anthology Series category.

Chloe Zhao won the Best Director of a Film Globe for helming Nomadland, which also was voted Best Drama Film.

The late Chadwick Boseman won the Best Actor in a Drama Film honor for Ma Rainey's Black Bottom and Andra Day picked up the Best Actress in a Drama Film award for The United States vs. Billie Holiday.

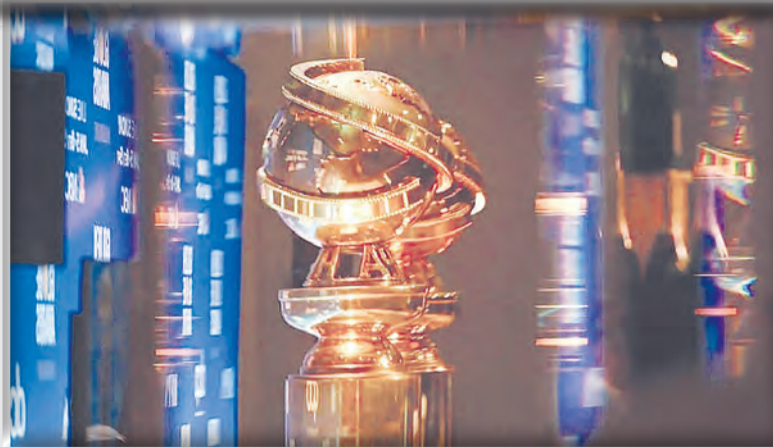
Jodie Foster won the Globe for Best Supporting Actress in a Film for The Mauritanian and Judas and the Black Messiah star Daniel Kaluuya was named Best Supporting Actor in a Film.

Borat Subsequent Moviefilm was named Best Musical or Comedy Film and its star Sacha Baron Cohen won for Best Actor in a Musical or Comedy Film.

Rosamund Pike earned the accolade for Best Actress in a Comedy Film for I Care a Lot.

Soul was deemed Best Animated Film, Minari was selected Best Foreign Language Film and Aaron Sorkin won the trophy for Best Film Screenplay for The Trial of the Chicago 7.

Norman Lear and Jane Fonda were also honored, respectively, with the previously announced Carol Burnett and Cecil B. DeMille awards for career achievement.



The Globes honor excellence in film and television. They are presented by the Hollywood Foreign Press Association.

Because of the coronavirus pandemic, Amy Poehler hosted the NBC event from California, while Tina Fey served as emcee for the New York portion of the broadcast.

Audiences for the two ceremonies were made up of masked and socially distanced first responders and essential workers.

Winners appeared virtually from their homes and other locations.

"We are so grateful for the work that you do and that you are here so the celebrities can stay safely at home," Fey told the crowd.

"We know that you've seen a lot of crazy stuff at your job this year," Poehler added. "But you haven't seen the kind of stuff that we've seen at previous Golden Globes. This front table right here usually houses the biggest stars in the world."

The women then joked about seeing Meryl Streep so drunk she couldn't remember what movie she was in and Brad Pitt trying to interrupt and flirt with them.

Biden in No Rush to Lift Venezuela Sanctions



WASHINGTON (Reuters) - President Joe Biden's administration is in "no rush" to lift U.S. sanctions on Venezuela but would consider easing them if President Nicolas Maduro takes confidence-building steps showing he is ready to negotiate seriously with the opposition, a White House official told Reuters.

Signaling that the new U.S. president may be unlikely to loosen the screws on Venezuela anytime soon, the official emphasized that existing sanctions have enough special provisions to allow for humanitarian aid shipments to help Venezuelans cope with economic hardships and the COVID-19 pandemic.

But the official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Maduro's Socialist government has been "actively preventing the delivery of humanitarian assistance."

This suggests that for now Biden is prepared to stick with the specific sanctions, including crippling oil-sector penalties, imposed by former President Donald Trump on the OPEC nation, despite the failure to force Maduro from power.

But Biden, by contrast, intends to move away from the mostly unilateral approach of Trump's "maximum pressure" campaign and enlist more countries to help seek a diplomatic solution, the official said in an interview.

Biden's administration has made clear it will continue to recognize opposition leader Juan Guaido as Venezuela's interim president. Dozens of countries have backed Guaido's claim following Maduro's re-election in 2018 in a vote Western governments called a sham, though cracks recently have appeared in Guaido's international support.

"We're in no rush to lift sanctions," the official said. "If the regime undertakes confidence-building measures that show that they're ready and willing to engage in real conversations with the opposition ... if they're ready to take serious steps, then we will consider the alleviation of sanctions."

The official did not specify what steps Maduro would need to make but said he could not be allowed to use negotiations as a "delaying tactic" to consolidate power and divide the opposition, as he has been accused of doing in the past.

Maduro, who calls Guaido a U.S. puppet, has shown no signs of giving ground. Having retained support of the military as well as Russia, China, Cuba and Iran, he has rejected or ignored previous demands for such concessions.

The Biden administration also appears to have little sense of urgency for major gestures toward Cuba despite hopes for a softer approach after Trump, often citing its support for Maduro, rolled back historic Obama-era détente with Havana.

Germany Set to Give AstraZeneca Jab to Older People

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Germany could soon authorize the use of the AstraZeneca vaccine for seniors after the head of the country's vaccination committee said his body's advice to give the Oxford-developed vaccine only to those under 65 had "somehow gone wrong".

Unlike the European Medicines Agency or Britain's MHRA, Germany's Standing Committee on Vaccination (Stiko) last month recommended against the use of the AstraZeneca vaccine on seniors, citing a lack of conclusive trial data to prove its efficacy in that age group.

But the independent panel's decision has faced increased criticism since, as the British-Swedish pharmaceutical company's product has been piling up in storage due to public scepticism and authorities' lagging behind in inviting people from the next priority group in line for appointments.

By the end of last week only 360,000 out of a delivered 1.4 million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine had been administered in Germany, with only about 5% of delivered doses being administered in states such as Saxony.

But Thomas Mertens, the head of Stiko, said on Friday his body would "very soon" update its recommendation, telling broadcaster ZDF it was "possible" the vaccine could also be cleared for seniors.

"We never criticised the vaccine, we just criticised the

lack of data for the over-65 age group," said Mertens. However, he conceded that the distinction may have been lost to much of the public, adding: "The whole thing has somehow gone wrong." The vaccine was also denounced in the German economic newspaper Handelsblatt last month. "AstraZeneca vaccine apparently hardly effective in seniors," it claimed in a report that alleged it had an effectiveness of only 8% in the elderly. "The government's vaccination strategy is shaky," it reported, attributing its 8% claim to an anonymous government source.

Angela Merkel has also become embroiled in the row. In an interview in Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, the German chancellor said last week: "I am 66 years old and I do not belong to the group recommended for AstraZeneca." This has been interpreted as a rejection of the vaccine itself, although some commentators claim she was merely suggesting that others should get the vaccine first.

The reputation of the AstraZeneca vaccine has also been impugned elsewhere. It has yet to be cleared for the over-65s in France, although President Macron said last week that he would be prepared to accept the vaccine having originally claimed it was "quasi-ineffective" at protecting the elderly. Swiss authorities have chosen to reject the vaccine, while the American FDA is not expected to rule on the product until April.

Qatar...

FROM PAGE 1

Turkey also received spot LNG cargoes from Norway, France, Spain and Cameroon.

Turkey's total natural gas consumption last year grew by 6.9% to reach almost 48 bcm.

Household consumption at 14.6 bcm accounted for 30% of total consumption.

Household natural gas in Turkey increased year-on-year by 8.7%. Consumption at gas-powered plants rose to 12.6 bcm in 2020, marking a 23.5% increase.

Due to a drought in the last months of 2020, causing a decline in hydro output, the

share of gas-powered plants out of total electricity generation increased by over 20%. Higher gas consumption in power plants and households was among the main factors leading to the growth in total gas consumption and imports.

Turkey's first floating storage and regasification units (FSRU) were launched in the Aliaga district in December 2016. In early February 2018, a second FSRU with 20 million cubic meters of send-out capacity per day was launched in the country's southernmost Hatay province.

Tehran, Baku...

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"The cessation of hostilities, the return of the occupied territories to Azerbaijan and the establishment of transit routes between the countries of the region and the establishment of human communication routes were among the most important axes of this plan."

Referring to Iran's support to the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, the diplomat said, "The signing of the Khodaaferin Dam by Iran and Azerbaijan showed Iran's serious opposition to the occupation of Armenia in Nagorno-Karabakh."

"During the difficult period of sanctions, our economic relations with Azerbaijan continued as before," he added.

"We are opposed to any threat to the territorial integrity of the countries," said the Deputy Foreign Minister.

The diplomat, elsewhere in his remarks, said, "There was a concern about the widespread presence of takfiri groups in the region, and the Azerbaijani authorities assured us that these groups have no place with the people and officials of Azerbaijan."

Meanwhile Head of Iran's Islamic Seminaries referred to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia and expressed hope that the liberation of the disputed region will lead to a deeper regional unity.

Ayatollah Alireza Arafai made the remarks while addressing an international conference about the Karabakh region in the central city of Qom.

"Holding this international conference in Qom, as one of the main bases of Islamic thought and as the city that founded the Islamic Revolution, has a special meaning and that is our great religious figures have a position on important issues of the

Islamic world," the Seminary head said.

"The discourse of the Islamic Revolution in the circle of the Islamic Ummah is based on unity, convergence and resistance," he said, adding, "Courage against the aggressors of the Islamic Ummah and the oppressors and bullies is one of the pillars of the discourse of the Islamic Revolution."

He noted this discourse follows the ideals and teachings of Islamic Revolution's founder, Imam Khomeini, and the Leader of Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei.

"The Islamic Ummah has great resources and reserves; Why should the Islamic world be raped and oppressed?" Ayatollah Arafai maintained.

He said protecting Islamic countries, regardless of factors such as race, ethnicity and beliefs, is one of the demands of the leadership of the Islamic Revolution from the leaders of Islamic countries

"For us, all Islamic lands, such as Nagorno-Karabakh, are as much valuable and sacred as Palestine."

The head of the Iranian seminaries added, "International rules and borders should be respected, and in cases such as Nagorno-Karabakh, we have taken care to observe these rules."

The conference on Karabakh started on Monday morning. It is attended by senior religious and political figures, including Head of Iranian Seminaries Ayatollah Alireza Arafai, Mohsen Rezaei, Mohsen Rezaei, the secretary of Iran's State Expediency Council, and Ali-Akbar Velayati, a senior advisor to Leader of the Islamic Revolution.

U.S. to Kneel...

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The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was so great that the whole world tried to destroy it, and Donald Trump implemented the Zionists' policies in the region, President Rouhani added.

Rouhani officially inaugurated Azar Oil Field Development Project in western Iran early Monday via videoconferencing in the presence of the Director of the Development Projects of Azar Oil Field Keyvan Yarahmadi. Dewatering, desalination, and detecting Hydrogen Sulfide (H2S) are the processes done on produced oil by the Azar oil field. Over 75 percent of the project's equipment is domestically-made, and 55 percent of the workforce were also Iranian.

Zarif...

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Zarif warned that an anti-Iran resolution by the IAEA governors will make a mess of the status quo with regard to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) – a landmark nuclear agreement Iran signed with six world powers, including the US, Russia, China, France, Germany and Britain, in 2015.

"The Europeans triggered a wrong move with the backing of the US at the IAEA Board of Governors. We think the move will make a mess of the situation," Zarif said. The meeting comes against the background of a halt by Iran of its voluntary implementation of the Additional Protocol that allowed the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) to carry out short-notice inspections at Iran's nuclear facilities.

Russia...

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Russia has agreed to guarantee other loans that will be provided by Russian lenders to enable Iran to build out its infrastructure using both Russian and Iranian companies.

Iran and Russia made initial agreements on Sirik power plant in 2016 but execution of the project had stalled mainly over financial and administrative issues.

Talks to start the project accelerated in 2018 under Ardakanian and after the United States withdrew from an international deal on Iran's nuclear activity and imposed a series of harsh economic sanctions on the country.

Iran Not to Receive...

FROM PAGE 1

In mid-December 2020, Iranian Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian said that Iraq is going to open a euro bank account to pave the way for settling all the country's gas and electricity dues to Iran.

"Based on an agreement which is going to be implemented in the coming days, Iraq is going to open a euro savings bank account in which the country's debts to National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) and the Power Generation, Distribution, and Transmission Company (known as Tavanir) will be saved," Ardakanian said on the sidelines of a cabinet meeting.

Faivre Dominates to Win Bansko Giant Slalom

SOFIA (Dispatches) - Mathieu Faivre followed his world title in the giant slalom by dominating in Bansko on Sunday to take his second career World Cup victory.

The Frenchman finished with a combined time of two minutes 25.29 seconds, 0.75sec ahead of Marco Odermatt of Switzerland with another Frenchman Alexis Pinturault 0.81 behind the winner in third. Faivre's only previous World Cup victory came in Val d'Isere in 2016 but he followed his golds in the giant slalom and parallel in Cortina d'Ampezzo this month with an emphatic win in Bulgaria.

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Long Jump Champion Spanovic Pulls Out of

BELGRADE (Dispatches) - Serbia's double European indoor long jump gold medallist Ivana Spanovic is injured and will miss the upcoming European Athletics Indoor Championships in Torun, Poland. The 30-year-old was forced to pull out of the March 5-7 event after suffering a hamstring problem in training, national coach Edin Zubovic told Serbian state television on Sunday. Spanovic, champion in Belgrade in 2017 and Glasgow in 2019 and world champion in Birmingham the year before, will now focus on preparing for the Tokyo Olympics in July.

Mavericks Snap Nets' Eight-Game Win Streak

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Luka Doncic scored 27 points and the visiting Dallas Mavericks pulled away in the second half for a 115-98 victory on Saturday night over the Brooklyn Nets, who saw their season-high winning streak snapped at eight games.

The Mavericks won for the eighth time in 11 games and bounced back nicely from Thursday's 111-97 loss in Philadelphia. Dallas held Brooklyn to 34 points after halftime.

Doncic shot 11 of 21 from the floor, added seven assists and six rebounds and had plenty of help. Kristaps Porzingis returned from missing three games with a back injury and added 18 points.

Jalen Brunson contributed 14, Tim Hardaway Jr. chipped in 13 and Dorian Finney-Smith finished with 12 as the Mavericks shot 52.3 percent and hit 14 3-pointers. The Nets were without Kyrie Irving (right shoulder) and Kevin Durant (left hamstring).

Backcourt mates Bradley Beal and Russell Westbrook continued to terrorize opponents, combining for 53 points, 22 rebounds and 18 assists in Washington Wizards' 128-112 win over visiting Minnesota.

Beal finished with a game-high 34 points while Westbrook recorded a second straight triple-double with 19 points, a game-high 14 rebounds and a game-high 12 assists as the Wizards won for the seventh time in their last eight games.

Karl-Anthony Towns had a team-high 23 points, with 11 rebounds and a team-high five assists to lead Minnesota, which lost its seventh straight.

Meanwhile Donovan Mitchell led seven Utah players in double figures with 31 points as the visiting Utah Jazz bounced back after a rare loss to beat Orlando Magic 124-109.

Jordan Clarkson continued his Sixth Man of the Year quest with 18 points off the bench. All-Star center Rudy Gobert contributed 12 points, 16 rebounds, three assists and two blocks, Joe Ingles added 17 points and seven assists, and Georges Niang fired in 13 points.

All-Star Nikola Vucevic was a one-man wrecking crew for Orlando, scoring 34 points with eight rebounds and four assists. Evan Fournier chipped in 16 points.

DeMar DeRozan had 32 points and 11 assists to lead a balanced attack as short-handed San



Antonio Spurs, playing its first home game in 18 days, held off visiting New Orleans Pelicans 117-114.

LaMarcus Aldridge added 21 points off the bench for San Antonio, which has won three of its past four games and won its first game since it had four games postponed because of COVID. Dejounte Murray scored 18, Lonnie Walker IV had 17, and Patty Mills added 13 for the Spurs.

San Antonio's Keldon Johnson, Derrick White, Rudy Gay, Devin Vassell, and Quinndary Witherspoon were held out because of health and safety protocols. Brandon Ingram led the Pelicans with 29 points, and Zion Williamson added 23 points and 14 rebounds.

Meanwhile Collin Sexton scored 28 points, Darius Garland added 25 points and nine assists and depleted Cleveland Cavaliers defeated host Philadelphia 76ers 112-109 in overtime.

Isaac Okoro had 15 points and eight rebounds, Jarrett Allen contributed 14 points and 10 rebounds and Danyelle Dotson had 10 points for the Cavaliers, who only had nine players available.

Joel Embiid led the Sixers with 42 points and 13 rebounds. Ben Simmons added 24 points, eight assists and seven rebounds, and Shake Milton had 11 points.

Popyrin Wins First ATP Title in Singapore



SINGAPORE (Dispatches) - Australia's Alexei Popyrin came back from a set down to beat Kazakhstan's Alexander Bublik at the Singapore Open on Sunday and win his first ATP Tour title.

Popyrin started off badly, losing the first set 4-6 but charged back and snatched the second 6-0.

Bublik put up more of a fight at the start of the third, with both men holding their serve until it reached 2-2.

But Popyrin then surged ahead, firing a total of 11 aces, to take the set 6-2 and clinch the title. The 21-year-old, who had earlier stunned former world number three Marin Cilic in the semi-finals, was delighted with his breakthrough.

"It's an unbelievable feeling to know I have won my first ATP title," he said.

"I always have the belief that I can compete against the top guys and without that belief, I would not be able to win an ATP title. It's a good start and hopefully I can build on this result."

He added that Bublik "was mentally up and down so I just had to keep my head level and weather the storm when he was playing well in the first set. I was not scared -- I knew I was playing well".

Qualifier Makes It to Finals at Cordoba Open

CORDOBA (Dispatches) - Qualifier Juan Manuel Cerundolo defeated countryman Federico Coria in an all-Argentine semifinal to advance to the finals of the Cordoba (Argentina) Open.

Cerundolo will face fifth-seeded Albert Ramos-Vinolas of Spain, who defeated Argentine Facundo Bagnis 7-5, 5-7, 6-3 in the other semi. Ramos-Vinolas needed nearly three hours to advance to the final.

Cerundolo defeated Coria 6-4, 4-6, 6-2 in two hours, nine minutes.

The top two seeds will meet in Sunday's final as No. 1 Roberto Bautista Agut of Spain won in straight sets and No. 2 David Goffin of Belgium needed three sets to advance at Montpellier, France.

Agut defeated Germany's Peter Gojowczyk 7-5, 6-1 in one hour, 14 minutes.

Goffin needed nearly another full hour to dispatch Egor Gerasimov of Belarus 6-4, 2-6, 6-4.

Alvarez Retains Super Middleweight Crown

MIAMI (AFP) - Saul "Canelo" Alvarez demolished Turkey's Avni Yildirim in three rounds to retain his WBC and WBA super middleweight titles by knockout.

Mexico's Alvarez dominated underdog Yildirim from the opening bell and sent the Turk crashing to the canvas with a crisp left-right combination in the third round at Miami's Hard Rock Stadium.

The outclassed Yildirim then failed to emerge from his corner for the fourth round as Alvarez once again demonstrated why he is regarded as the best pound-for-pound fighter in boxing.

Alvarez, who improved to 55-1-2 with 37 knockouts, had got back into the ring on Saturday a little over two months after beating Britain's Callum Smith in December.

After the fight, promoter Eddie Hearn said the 30-year-old Mexican star will next seek to add the World Boxing Organisation belt to his collection with a May 8 fight against Britain's Billy Joe Saunders.



Germany Coach Loew Opens Door to Return for Exiled Trio

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Germany coach Joachim Loew opened the door Sunday to a surprise summer return for Thomas Mueller, Jerome Boateng and Mats Hummels, the trio of veteran World Cup winners he controversially exiled two years ago.

"If you begin a transition, you should not reverse it and go back in the opposite direction," Loew told public broadcaster ARD Sunday.

"But the pandemic has stolen almost a year from us, so we can think about maybe pausing the transition if it is absolutely necessary," he added, suggesting that the trio could return for this summer's European Championships.

A return for Mueller, Hummels or Boateng could be possible "if I am of the opinion that we need an extra percent or someone who brings a bit of energy," said Loew.

It is the first time that Loew has shown signs of relenting from his controversial decision to drop the three experienced stars back in 2019.

Though under pressure to give younger players a chance at the time, criticism of Loew has mounted in the two years since as Germany have struggled and the three exiled players have returned to their best form.

Recent results have been poor for Loew's team, with a 6-0 away defeat to Spain in November a low point for the beleaguered, long-serving Germany boss.

With the rebuilding process not going as planned, Loew suggested Sunday that players like Mueller, Hummels and Boateng could be useful short-term solutions for Euro 2020.

They would be "quick to integrate because they already know exactly how things work with the national team," he said.

Spurs Need Bale To Keep Shining

LONDON (Dispatches) - Jose Mourinho admits Tottenham will need Gareth Bale to reproduce the dazzling display that destroyed Burnley after the Wales forward netted twice in Sunday's 4-0 win.

Bale maintained his recent revival with a man-of-the-match performance in the north London sunshine. The 31-year-old scored Tottenham's opening goal with a close-range finish, provided a superb assist with a long pass for Harry Kane's goal and then rounded off the scoring with another lethal strike.

After a wretched start to his second spell at Tottenham following his loan switch from Real Madrid, Bale is finally showing signs of the form that made him the world's most expensive player when he moved to Spain in 2013.

Tottenham desperately needed the jolt provided by Bale's renaissance after losing five of their previous six league games.

Battling to drag Tottenham back into the race to qualify for the Champions League via a top four finish, Mourinho hopes Bale can carry his team up the Premier League table.

"I'm very happy for him and very happy for the team because the team needs his talent. He is quiet, doesn't speak to you (the media), watches, reads, listens or probably not, because he is from Real Madrid, probably ignores it a little bit," Mourinho said.



Crisis-Hit Schalke Sack Gross in Major Clear Out

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Bundesliga crisis club Schalke sacked almost their entire sporting leadership Sunday, including coach Christian Gross, after an alleged player revolt and a 16th league defeat plunged their nightmare season deeper into crisis.

"The decision had become unavoidable after results against Dortmund and Stuttgart," said Schalke chairman Jens Buchta in a statement following Schalke's 5-1 loss to Stuttgart on Saturday, a week after defeat to local rivals Borussia Dortmund.

"The team now owe it to the club and the fans to be as successful as possible in the last third of the season."

Coach Gross, sporting director Jochen Schneider and team coordinator Sascha Riether were all relieved of their duties in Sunday's mass clear out.

Gross' assistant Rainer Widmayer and fitness coach Werner Leuthard were also fired.

The move comes with one-time giants Schalke bottom of the league and nine points adrift of safety, having won just one of their 23 league games this season.

Having been in the Champions League two seasons ago, Schalke are now hurtling towards their first relegation since 1988.

