

**Health Ministry Spokeswoman
Sima Sadat Lari Said on Saturday
That Some 82 More Iranians Have
Died From the Coronavirus
Disease Over the Past 24 Hours
Bringing the Total Deaths to 60,594**

IRAN NEWS

**Irish Foreign Minister Simon
Coveney Was Scheduled to Arrive in
Tehran Late Saturday to Confer With
President Hassan Rouhani and Other
Iranian Officials on the JCPOA and
Re-Opening Embassy in Tehran**

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President Says Distribution of Coronavirus Vaccines Unfair

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – President Hassan Rouhani urged the people of Iran to keep observing the health protocols amid the coronavirus pandemic considering the limited vaccine output and its uneven distribution in the world.

In remarks at a meeting of the Coronavirus Fight National Headquarters on Saturday, the president cautioned people to avoid underestimating the situation and continue to abide by the COVID-19 restrictions.

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India Likely to Start Full Operations at Chabahar Port by May End

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India expects to start full-scale operations at Iran's Chabahar general cargo port it has built by the end of May, the country's shipping minister said in a boost for regional trade.

India has been developing a part of the port on Iran's south-eastern coast along the Gulf of Oman as a way to transport goods to Iran, but also Afghanistan and central Asian countries, and avoiding rival Pakistan.

But U.S. sanctions on Iran slowed down the port's development and Indian officials are now counting on a thaw in relations between Washington and Tehran under President Joe Biden to move forward with near \$500 million of investments.

"I am expecting to visit Iran in April or May for the inauguration of full operations," Mansukh Mandaviya, India's ports and shipping minister, told Reuters.

India is developing two terminals at the port including the Shahid Beheshti complex and under an agreement signed with the Iran, it would run the terminal for 10 years.

Mandaviya said the port had already commenced operations in a limited way and the growth potential was evident. Chabahar port had handled 123 vessels and 1.8 million tons of bulk and general cargoes from February 2019 to January 2021, he said. "This is much higher than our expectations. Imagine the scale of operations and freight saving once it is fully operational," he said.

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Trio of Persian Gulf Islands Are "integral" Part of Iran



TEHRAN (PressTV)- Iran's Foreign Ministry has dismissed the Arab League's "fruitless claims" about three Persian Gulf islands, saying those territories are an "integral" part of the Iranian soil.

"It is unfortunate that some Arab countries are trying to divert the public opinion from their wicked and destructive actions by creating an imaginary enemy instead of addressing the main problems gripping the Arab world, such as letting the occupying tension-creating Zionist regime into the region, not doing enough regarding the Palestinian cause, continuing the oppressive war against Arab people in Yemen, creating the most heinous humanitarian crisis of the present era, and supporting terrorism and terrorist groups for years," Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said.

Khatibzadeh made the remarks, two days after foreign ministers of the Arab League made groundless accusations against the Islamic Republic in a resolution adopted during their meeting in the Egyptian capital of Cairo.

The Arab League resolution alleged that Iran's "occupation" of the Persian Gulf islands of the Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb and Abu Musa violates "the UAE's sovereignty" in a way that destabilizes the region and threatens international peace and security.

"The countries, which have the blood of innocent people on their hands and their devastating act of aggression has destroyed Yemen's infrastructure and left millions of people hungry, sick, displaced and impoverished over the past six years, are seeking to absolve themselves of responsibility for the crimes by leveling baseless accusations at others," Khatibzadeh added.

The strategically-positioned islands have always been part of Iran, the proof of which can be found in and corroborated by countless historical, legal, and geographical documents in Iran and other parts of the world.

"The repetition of the fruitless claims regarding the three Iranian islands does not and will not change the existing historical, geographical and historical facts. These islands are an integral part of the Iranian territory," Khatibzadeh said. He also stressed that Iran's principled policy towards its neighbors is based on good neighborliness, mutual respect and non-interference in their internal affairs.

The spokesman expressed hope that the Arab League and certain regional states would move towards regional dialog and cooperation, instead of issuing empty and provocative statements that only prolong the current destructive trend.

Russia Ready to Help Revive Iran Deal in Its Original Form

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia's foreign minister says a window of opportunity for saving a 2015 multilateral nuclear deal signed between Iran and major world powers remains open, expressing hope that all sides will return to the full implementation of the agreement in its original form.

"We hope that it will become possible to improve the situation in the near future and to return the JCPOA [the nuclear deal - officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action] implementation process to the initially coordinated framework," Sergei Lavrov said in an interview with the Russkaya Mysl magazine published in the UK. He added that the revival of the JCPOA is possible only if all parties to the agreement fully implement their commitments.

"Tehran has repeatedly spoken in favor of its willingness to completely unfreeze all of the JCPOA's provisions that it had suspended as soon as the forfeited balance of interests is restored," the top Russian diplomat said, referring to Washington's sanctions and unilateral withdrawal from the agreement and Iran's subsequent countermeasures in the face of US hostility.

He emphasized that Moscow is "closely" cooperating with all the JCPOA participants to secure their full compliance with the deal and said, "For example, we also maintain regular contact with European partners for elaborating possible decisions to rectify the current situation."

Former U.S. President Donald Trump withdrew the US from the JCPOA on May 8, 2018 and imposed what he called the "maximum pressure" policy on Tehran. In response, Iran gradually reduced its nuclear obligations under the accord starting on May 8, 2019, but declared that its measures will be reversed as soon as the U.S. honors its JCPOA commitments. The measure was taken as part of a law, passed by the Iranian Parliament last December, requiring the government to suspend more of its commitments under the nuclear deal, should the US fail to lift its sanctions by February 21.

Elsewhere in his interview, Lavrov emphasized that not everything depends on Russia or the European parties to the JCPOA. "The position of [new U.S.] President Joe Biden's administration on the nuclear deal is an essential aspect. In our opinion, Washington's steps sending a message to Tehran showing serious US intentions to rejoin the JCPOA could help resolve the situation concerning Iran and its nuclear program," the Russian foreign minister said.

When asked whether it was possible to restore the Iran nuclear deal in cooperation with European countries, he expressed Russia's readiness to "help reach the relevant agreements in every way."

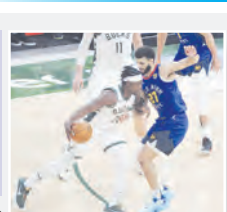
4 INTERNATIONAL

**Pope Urges Iraq
To End Violence**
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8 SPORT

**Bucks Win Thriller
Over Grizzlies**
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Tehran Warns of Consequences of Any Move by Israel

TEHRAN (PressTV) - A top Iranian diplomat has warned of consequences of any possible miscalculated measure by Israel over an explosion that damaged an Israeli ship in the Sea of Oman last week.

Iranian Ambassador to the United Nations Majid Takht Ravanchi made the remarks on Friday, in a letter addressed to UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres on Friday.

The letter came a week after an Israeli-owned cargo ship said it had been crippled by a suspected blast while it was in the Sea of Oman, claiming that it suffered holes in both sides of its hull.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu hastily accused Iran of attacking the ship. Iran categorically rejected the charge.

"The incident has all the characteristic of a complicated false flag operation carried out by actors in order to pursue their malign policies and to advance their illegitimate objectives," wrote Takht Ravanchi in his letter to the UN.

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Iraq Settles Part of Iran Energy Debts

TEHRAN (Dispatches)- The Deputy Head of Iran-Iraq Joint Chamber of Commerce said on Friday that the Arab country has started repaying its energy debts to Iran and part of the dues has been settled.

"This achievement is the result of diplomacy and pursuit of the governor of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI), the energy minister and the head of the Judiciary," Hamid Hosseini told IRNA.

According to Hosseini, a part of the mentioned resources will be used to import basic goods into the country.

In this regard, a corn cargo was recently imported into the country through Iraq which was paid for by the mentioned funds, Hosseini said.

Iraq owes Iran over \$6 billion for electricity and gas imports from the Islamic Republic, of which \$3 billion is claimed to be blocked and inaccessible in the Trade Bank of Iraq (TBI).

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Biden Renews U.S. National Emergency, Sanctions Against Iran

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - President Joe Biden has extended for another year the US national emergency declared in 1995 with respect to Iran as well as comprehensive sanctions against the Islamic Republic.

In a letter sent to U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi on Friday, Biden said, "I have determined that it is necessary to continue the national emergency declared in Executive Order 12957 with respect to Iran and to maintain in force comprehensive sanctions against Iran to respond to this threat," according to the White House.

He also claimed that the actions and policies of the Iranian government pose an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security, foreign policy, and economy of the United States. The U.S. president further alleged that Tehran is proliferating and developing "missiles and other asymmetric and conventional weapons capabilities," supporting "terrorist groups" and maintaining what it called "network and campaign of regional aggression."

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President Calls for Further Int'l, Bilateral Ties With Ghana

TEHRAN (IRNA) - President Hassan Rouhani in a message on Saturday congratulated his Ghanaian counterpart Nana Akufo-Addo on the country's Independence Day and hoped Tehran-Accra international and bilateral cooperation in all areas grows.

President Rouhani also congratulated the Ghanaian people on the national Independence Day on March 6. Ghana annually celebrates National Day and marks independence from the United Kingdom in 1957.

At his message, Rouhani wished prosperity and success for the people of Ghana.

Vaccination Alone Not To Defeat COVID-19

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The spokesman for the National Task-force for combating Coronavirus on Saturday urged for paying more public attention to managing and controlling coronavirus, saying vaccination would yield results in long run.

Alireza Raisi said that one of the concerns of the World Health Organization was the negligence of people to the management and control of coronavirus with the start of vaccination.

Explaining the latest situation of COVID19 in the world and in Iran on Saturday, Raisi stated that people and governments should continue to focus on managing and controlling coronavirus because the vaccination would be effective when 70% of the world's population were vaccinated adding that it would take a long time for the vaccine to work.

"Apart from vaccination, health protocols must be followed properly, and the minds of people and governments must focus on managing and controlling COVID-19," Raisi said.

The health official also stated about the situation of COVID-19 in Iran and said that the disease spreading trend in almost all provinces of the country has been almost stable, but the circulation of the UK coronavirus has occurred in most provinces.

Raisi stated that the situation in Khuzestan province was different and the trend of coronavirus in this province has an upward slope, therefore in such circumstances when the number of patients was high, the mortality was high.

He emphasized that the people of Khuzestan province must follow the health protocols properly and fight the mutated Coronavirus vigorously.

Raisi added that defeating the UK coronavirus variant required strict adherence to health protocols and should be carefully monitored so that the situation in Khuzestan province was not repeated in other provinces.



He stated that in the northern provinces of Iran with good management, the trend of COVID- 19 is decreasing and strictly only the necessary trips were allowed.

Meanwhile the spokesman for the Food and Drug Administration of Iran announced that over 180 million doses of the COVID-19 vaccine would be provided for Iran within a year, which was beyond the country's needs.

Kianoosh Jahanpour, the spokesman of the Food and Drug Administration of Iran, said on Saturday: "The comprehensive vaccination program of coronavirus in Iran, considering the possible conditions, had 4 parallel routes to supply the vaccine needed by the country from the beginning."

He added: "With the follow-up of all 4 routes, more than 180 million doses of vaccine will be provided to the national vaccination mobilization in a year, which is beyond the estimation of the country's needs."

According to Jahanpour, the four strategies of direct purchase, import through COVAX, co-production, and home-made production of vaccines are successfully continuing at the predicted level, and accordingly, the one-year vaccination in Iran will be finished even earlier than planned. "21 million doses of coronavirus vaccine have been purchased through direct purchase and COVAX, which will gradually enter the country according to the schedule and the production capacity of the producers," he added.

Jahanpour said that Iran can also help other nations and communities that need the corona vaccine.

Zarif, Armenian Counterpart Discuss Regional Security

TEHRAN (MNA) – Foreign Minister and his Armenian counterpart stressed the significance of addressing regional challenges in a phone talk on Saturday.

Foreign Minister of Armenia Ara Ayyazian had a telephone conversation with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iran Mohammad Javad Zarif, ARMENPRESS was informed from the press service of the MFA Armenia.

The Foreign Ministers exchanged views on issues of the bilateral agenda. The sides expressed satisfaction with the dynamics of the development of relations based on centuries-old friendship and mutual readiness to strengthen it further was reaffirmed, including through the activation of political dialogue at various levels.

The interlocutors touched upon regional security and stability issues. The Ministers highlighted the role of coordinated cooperation in addressing new regional challenges.

Martyr Soleimani's Sacrifices Made Pope's Iraq Visit Possible

TEHRAN (MNA) – Had it not been for sacrifices that Martyrs Qassem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi Muhandis made, Pope could not be in Iraq today, according to an aide to the speaker of the Iranian parliament on Friday

"As arriving in Baghdad, Pope Francis was unable to do so w/safety & convenience, w/o sacrifice of al-Muhandis, M.J. Soleimani & counter-terror, -Daesh martyrs in #Iraq & across region," Hossein Amir-Abdollahian,

Iranian Parliament Speaker's Special Aide for International Affairs wrote in a post on his Twitter account after the Catholic Pope Francis arrived in the Iraqi capital Baghdad on an official visit on Friday.

This is the Pope's first foreign visit in 15 months and it comes as part of a move to preserve Iraq's ancient Christian communities and supports the return of the Christians who were driven out by ISIL terrorist

Iran Resilience to Sanctions Due to Resistance Economy

YAZD (IP) - First vice-president stated that the country's resilience against US sanctions was due to the resistive economy's approach.

Referring to the government's actions in the field of resistive economy, Iranian First vice-president Eshaq Jahangiri said: "Resistive economy showed its performance against the U.S. sanctions and economic war against the Iranian nation."

According to Jahangiri, the country's resilience against these sanctions was due to the resistive economy approach.

Upon arrival in Yazd Province, Eshaq Jahangiri told reporters on Saturday: "Yazd is an important and inspiring province for all Iranians in various fields, and it is one of the important centers of development, digital economy and knowledge-based industries."

Iran, India Sign Aviation Cooperation Agreement

TEHRAN (MNA) -- Director General of Iran Air Navigation and Airports Company (IAC) revealed the signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Indian Airports Company to use bilateral aviation consulting, technical-engineering services.

Mohammad Amirani broke the news on Sat. and stated that the main purpose of signing this Memorandum of Understanding is to create a platform for identifying and cooperating in support of aviation infrastructures, capacity building through training services and providing advice on

the development of Air Navigation Services (ANS) solutions.

The member of the Board of Directors of Iranian Airports and Air Navigation Company stated that this MoU is valid for 10 years, adding that this Memorandum of Understanding has been exchanged with the cooperation Vice-Presidency for Development and Progress Cooperation Center.

By signing and sealing this MoU, suitable platform will be provided between Iranian Airports and Air Navigation Company and Indian Airports Company to use consulting, technical and engineering services in relevant issue, he added.

Tehran, Madrid Discuss Expansion of Library Cooperation



LONDON (IRNA) - Iranian cultural attaché in Madrid and the head of the National Library of Spain stressed expansion of library cooperation between the two countries and presented some suggestions in this regard.

Mohammad Mehdi Ahmadi and Ana Santos Aramburo met on Thursday.

Ahmadi made two suggestions in the meeting. First, he demanded that Iranian researched be granted access to the books regarding Iranian studies and Islamic studies in the Spanish libraries and in exchange Iran will grant Spanish researchers access to the books regarding Spain in and the Spanish speaking world. Second, he suggested the same kind of mutual access to historical documents.

The director of the National Library of Spain, Aramburo, said that Iran and Spain do not have a common history but are culturally related.

She said that a large part of the archive of the National Library of Spain has been digitalized, to which Iranian researchers can be given access.

At the suggestion of the Iranian party, it was decided in the meeting that joint cultural programs and specialized meetings with the head of the National Library of Iran be held in the future. The National Library of Spain was established in 1712 in Madrid and now it has 44 million documents, 15 million books, 4.5 million graphic works, 600 thousand audio files, 510 thousand music pieces, 500 thousand micro documents, 500 thousand maps, and 30 thousand manuscripts.

Rescue Operation Underway to Contain Blaze at Afghan-Iran Border

TEHRAN (PressTV) - An Iranian official says efforts are underway to put out a fire at a customs outpost in western Afghanistan on the border with Iran, but winds are fanning the flames across the region.

Director of Mahiroud Border Terminal, Ali Akbar Mazidi, told IRNA that the blaze started at the Abu Nasr-e-Farahi border crossing point in Afghanistan's western Herat province at 10:30 a.m. local time (0500 GMT) on Saturday, and swept through two tankers loaded with 500 metric tons of fuel. He said strong winds helped the fire grow bigger and spread farther to two more fuel tankers.

Mazidi noted that fire brigades from Iran's eastern South Khorasan Province rushed to the border area to assist their Afghan counterparts in extinguishing the massive fire.

Farah provincial governor Taj Mohammad Safi later said the major fire broke out at a fuel reservoir in the customs point, noting that four fuel trucks have been damaged and the fire is extending.

He said that efforts have started to extinguish the fire.

Back on February 13, dozens of fuel tankers were damaged in a massive explosion at the Islam Qala crossing in Afghanistan's western Herat province.

Reports showed that at least 60 people had been injured in the blaze. Others said many lorry drivers were feared dead. At that time, Iranian customs officials said a key crossing on the eastern border with Afghanistan had not been affected by the massive blaze.

A senior official from Iran's Razavi Khorasan province said that the fire in Afghanistan's Islam Qala border crossing had not spread to Iran's Dogharoon post.

E3 Give Themselves Chance by Halting Resolution Against Iran

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iran's permanent representative to Vienna-based international organizations said that E3 gave themselves another chance by suspending the resolution process at the International Atomic Energy Agency's Board of Governors.

"The three countries [Britain, France and Germany] have claimed that by doing so [suspending the resolution process at IAEA BoG], they have given Iran and the IAEA another chance to continue their work on some issues, and reserve the right to request an extraordinary meeting of the Board of Governors at any time," Kazem Gharibabadi told reporters on Saturday.

"I must say that the three countries have, in fact, given themselves another opportunity to act in the light of inaction and non-compliance with their obligations under the JCPOA, on the one hand, and not destroying the atmosphere of diplomacy and cooperation between Iran and the IAEA on the other," he added.

"The cessation of the resolution process is the result of diplomacy and active resistance, as well as significant progress in the nuclear field in the light of the recent law of the Iranian Parliament," Gharibabadi noted, stressing, "Therefore, we warn the founders of any resolution against Iran at any stage and time. If you want to return to the path of confrontation, the Islamic Republic of Iran is ready to give a strong response, especially in the field of nuclear technology."

Iran Sets 0.8% Economic Growth for 9 Months

TEHRAN (FNA) - Iran's Statistics Center announced on Friday that the country's 9-month economic growth has been 0.8% despite the US illegal sanctions and the pandemic restrictions.

Statistical figures indicate that Iran's economic growth for (March 20- December 20, 2020) period was 0.8% with oil revenues taken into account.

The figures showed that the economic growth rate stood at 0.2% with oil revenues not being taken into account.

The agricultural crops witnessed an increase of 5.5%, the industry and mining sector rose by 3.7% while the service group decreased by -1.8% as compared to the same period last year.

In relevant remarks in early January, Iran's President Hassan Rouhani hailed the country's positive economic growth rate in the first half of the current Iranian year (March 20- September 20, 2020) despite the spread of the coronavirus disease.

"Iran is one of the rare nations which have managed to set a positive economic growth despite the pandemic," Rouhani said on Wednesday January 6.

"The government has paid most attention to the underprivileged classes of the society over the past two and a half years while the country was under tough U.S. sanctions," he added.

Doors Open for Development Of Tehran-Islamabad Ties

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iranian envoy to Pakistan said all doors are open for the development of Tehran-Islamabad relations.

In an interview with SUCH TV, Mohammad Ali Hosseini said: "All doors are open for the development of relations with Pakistan, and Tehran-Islamabad relations will never be affected by our relations with any other country."

"Fraternal relations between the two countries are not affected by Iran's relations with any country, and according to the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution, all doors are open for the development of Iran-Pakistan relations," he said.

"Iran considers the development and security of Pakistan as its development and security, and the country, as a neighboring and Muslim one, is a priority in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic," he added.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran has so far fulfilled its obligations to Pakistan in various contracts, including the electricity and gas supply joint agreements, and we wait for the Pakistani brothers to fulfill their obligations under joint cooperation projects," the ambassador said.

He named swapping of goods, increasing border markets, clinching preferential trade agreements, and holding regular consultations as ways to promote trade between the two countries.

"Despite the problems, cooperation and partnership between the two neighboring countries of Iran and Pakistan can be expanded," Hosseini noted.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:15
■ Evening (Maghreb)	18:22
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:01
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:24

28. O ye that believe! Fear Allah, and believe in His Messenger, and He will bestow on you a double portion of His Mercy: He will provide for you a Light by which ye shall walk (straight in your path), and He will forgive you (your past): for Allah is Off- Forgiving, Most Merciful.
29. That the People of the Book may know that they have no power whatever over the Grace of Allah, that (His) Grace is (entirely) in His Hand, to bestow it on whomsoever He wills. For Allah is the Lord of Grace abounding.
Surah 57, Iron (28 - 29)

Central Banks Urged to Boost Barter Trade Between Iran and Armenia

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The central banks of Iran and Armenia have been urged to support more of barter trade mechanism between the two states.

Deputy Head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) for International Affairs Mohammad-Reza Karbasi met with Director of Union of Manufacturers and Entrepreneurs of Armenia (UMEA) Gagik Makaryan and during the meeting both sides explored economic capacities of the two countries for the future cooperation.

The two sides in the meeting emphasized barter trade as the major way for enhancing trade exchanges between Iran and Armenia and they called for more supports from the central banks of both countries for this mechanism.

In the meeting, Karbasi expressed hope that due to the positive approach of statesmen of Armenia and Iran for strengthening ties, hidden capacities of the two countries would be exploited and economic activists of Iran and Armenia would make the most of this opportunity.

He then briefed the Armenian officials about the actions of ICCIMA as well as the Iran-Armenia Joint Chamber of Commerce for strengthening bilateral relations of both countries.

Karbasi then pointed to the establishment of Iran-Armenia Joint Chamber of Commerce and its actions, saying that one of the important goals behind the launch of the joint chamber has been to identify capacities ahead of economies of Iran and Armenia.

He reiterated that Iran enjoys high potentials for production and commercial and agro capacities which can complete the capacities of Armenia and they can be used favorably in line with bilateral interests of both countries.

He went on to say that Armenia as a member of Eurasian Economic Union can be a land gateway for Iran for its access to the Eurasian member states, and through



launching joint venture companies in the transportation sector, Iran can use this capacity for faster transfer of goods to Eurasia.

Karbasi added that agro and fishery are two intact sectors by both countries and announced readiness of Iran for joint cooperation in the aquatic sector. He also pointed to the strong capabilities of Iranian companies active in the technical and engineering sector and announced readiness for implementing joint projects with the Armenians.

He then reiterated that barter trade can be a good and important mechanism for boosting bilateral trade and urged the central banks of both countries for supporting this mechanism.

Then Makaryan, for his part, explained the reason for the launch of the UMEA and said that the goals of the union are in close cooperation with Armenian government, reiterating that international cooperation and developing exports are of the major priorities of the union.

He termed exchange of technical knowhow is of the most important fields for joint cooperation between Iran and Armenia, reiterating Iran's capacity in this field is very important for Armenia.

He also urged ICCIMA to prepare a list of Iranian companies which are keen to be active in Armenia. He emphasized that currently there are some dormant factories in Armenia and through cooperation with these companies, the factories can resume their activities, production of joint goods and their exports could be shaped through cooperation between Armenian and Iranian partners.

Tehran, Islamabad Discuss Establishing Joint Border Market



TEHRAN (MNA)- Iran and Pakistan have held an online meeting to discuss issues related to developing border trade and reached an agreement to establish the two countries' first joint border market, an official with the Iranian Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) announced.

"A virtual meeting was held to discuss a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on the establishment of joint border markets between Iran and Pakistan, and agreements were reached in this regard," IRNA quoted Reza Seyed Aqazadeh as saying.

According to the official, following the preparation of the draft for the mentioned MOU in December 2020, additional negotiations were made for finalizing the memorandum in the online meeting which was held at the level of deputy ministers.

Referring to the 950-kilometer border between Iran and Pakistan, as well as the two countries' interest in developing trade, Seyed Aqazadeh noted: "Border markets have so far been created unilaterally by Iran or Pakistan, and a joint market will be established between the two countries for the first time."

The development of the joint border markets is expected to improve the business activities of border residents, he added.

"Based on the agreements reached, the two sides have appointed technical teams to determine the location and size of the joint markets and to prepare a list of the items that would be traded in the markets," the official explained.

He stated that joint markets will be set up in Kuhak and Pishin (Saravan) in the near future, and specified: "Pakistan has proposed six points on the border to create joint markets, and the Iranian side is interested in setting up joint markets as much as possible in place of existing approved markets."

Currently, border markets of Saravan-Jaleq, Saravan-Kuhak, Sarbaz-Pishin and Chabahar-Rimdan in Sistan-Baluchestan province are active on the border with Pakistan, and the Mirjaveh market has been merged with Mirjaveh customs, according to Seyed Aqazadeh.

Iran Ready to Boost Transportation Cooperation With Iraq

BAGHDAD (IP) - Minister of Roads and Urban Development announced Tehran's readiness to develop and strengthen transportation cooperation with Iraq.

During a visit to Baghdad on Saturday, the Iranian Minister of Roads and Urban Development Mohammad Eslami and the Iraqi transportation minister discussed the expansion of cooperation in the field of roads, urban development, and transportation.

This morning, the meeting was held following

the visit of the Iranian minister of roads and urban development and his accompanying delegation to Baghdad.

The Iraqi minister said that the meeting focused on strengthening Iran-Iraq relations and cooperation to benefit from Tehran's experience and technical capabilities in sea, air, and rail transportation.

The Iranian minister also announced his country's readiness to expand cooperation and strengthen ties between the two neighboring countries.

Chabahar to Shortly Receive 2nd Port Equipment From India

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Chabahar port in the southeast of the country will receive the second shipment of port equipment from India in the next few days, Managing Director of Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) of Iran Mohammad Rastad said.

Rastad, who is also Deputy Minister of Roads and Urban Development, made the remarks in an interview with the Iranian official newspaper "IRAN."

After receiving the port equipment at Shahid Beheshti Port in Chabahar, the capacity of this strategic port will reach 33 million tons from 8.5, Rastad said.

The first part of the equipment which arrived in Chabahar about a month ago included two derricks with \$8.5m worth, Rastad noted adding that India will give second port equipment to Iran in the next few days.

About the recent Maritime India Summit 2021 which also commemorates Chabahar Day to highlight the importance of this strategic port, Rastad said the development of Chabahar is of paramount importance.

Chabahar with its important strategic position is the main center for development. The port plays a key role in the exchange of goods among Central Asian states.

Thanks to having joint borders with two neighboring countries of Afghanistan and Pakistan, Chabahar can function as a route to join the Indian Ocean and Africa to the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Iranian President Hassan Rouhani has already noted.

As Rastad underlined, the presence of India in the development of Chabahar is within the framework of the build-operate-transfer (BOT) agreement for ten years.

Chabahar. On other hand, Iran intends to tie the potentials of this region in the South with the potentials existing in the Caspian Sea in the North and to help to the development of the latter region as well."

Festival on Innovation in Top Iranian Products Held

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The fourth festival on innovation in top Iranian products was held on March 2-3 at Sharif Industrial University in presence of senior officials in the field of research and technology, teachers of the university as well as the selected companies.

According to the reports, the festival based on evaluating top Iranian products and innovation in their production chooses the best ones.

After the thorough evaluation by the jury of Sharif University of Technology, Khuzestan Steel Company (KSC) was awarded with golden statue of the festival for producing the refrigerant gas collecting device.



Director of research, technology and efficiency of Khuzestan Steel Company Mr. Ebrahim Dadres received the award on behalf of the company.

Meanwhile Messrs. Shafiee and Mousavi in the ventilation and refrigerating unit of the company were applauded in the festival for manufacturing this device.

On the sidelines of the festival, Mr. Dadres in a press conference explained the programs of the company in line with developing creativity, innovation and technology.

He also expressed hope that next year with the support of the senior managers and executive steps for presenting new technologies in the field of steel industry.

Iran Railway Ready to Test Home-Made Mono Block Wheels

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Deputy Road and Urban Development Minister and the CEO of Islamic Republic of Iran Railways (RAI) Company during his visit to the pavilion of Industrial Development and Renovation Organization of Iran (IDRO) in the International Exhibition of Rail Transportation and Related Industries and Equipment (Rail Expo 2021) said that RAI is ready for testing the mono block wheels of trains which has been indigenized by an affiliate company to IDRO.



Saeed Rasuli during his visit evaluated it a serious progress the quality of axels of locomotive, cargo and passenger wagons manufactured at Esfarayen Industrial Complex which has both met the domestic needs and succeed in expanding export markets.

During his visit of IDRO pavilion, officials of IDRO and Esfarayen Industrial Complex briefed Mr. Rasouli regarding the project for providing 2,000 metro wagons for nine metropolises in the country and tentative production of mono block wheels. Then Mr. Rasouli expressed his satisfaction on IDRO's plans for renovation and development of rail industries and creating the chain for providing major equipment and devices of metro wagons in the country.

He added that localization and mass production of mono block wheels has effective role in forex saving and developing rail industry.

Esfarayen Industrial Complex Company is an affiliate company to IDRO and has started tentative production of the mono block wheels based on the blacksmithing method and in accordance with international standards and it has passed the laboratory quality testing successful.

Mono block wheel is one of the main components in the cargo and passenger wagons.

Moumeni Appointed as New Secretary of Free Zones

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – President Hassan Rouhani in a decree appointed Hamid Reza Momeni as his advisor and Secretary of Supreme Council of Iran's Free Trade, Industrial and Special Economic Zones.



Moumeni replaced Morteza Bank after Mr. Bank retired. President Rouhani in his decree hailed the former secretary of the zones for his performance and wished his successor Mr. Moumeni success in his new job.

In his decree, the President urged Mr. Moumeni to observe all charters of the Hope and Prudence Government by abiding by law and to serve Islam and honorable Iranian nation.

Khorasan Steel Co. Honored as Exemplary Exporter of Province

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – In the ceremony for honoring the exemplary exporters of Khorasan Razavi Province, Khorasan Steel Complex Company was honored as the top exporter of the year.



In the ceremony held to honor the top exporters of the province in presence of governor general of Khorasan Razavi Province, head of Khorasan Razavi Chamber of Commerce and some government officials, like last year the name of the biggest eastern country's industrial complex and the major transfer of industrial products of this vast province resurfaced.

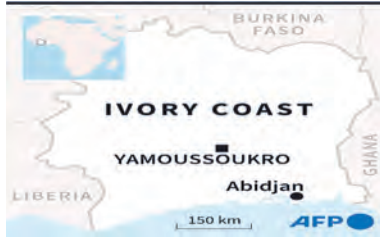
Director of the public relations office of the company Mr. Boghrat who had attended the ceremony on behalf of the CEO of the company Mr. Kara Ghafoori said that fortunately despite hostile unilateral U.S. sanctions on Iran's steel industry, the success streak of the big family of Khorasan Steel continued in exports due to Almighty's blessing and endeavors of his colleagues in the complex.

Ivory Coast Heads Into Elections

ABIDJAN (AFP) - Ivory Coast went to vote in a parliamentary ballot on Saturday in a key test of stability after presidential elections last year marked by violence.

Grappling with a deep political crisis, President Alassane Ouattara has offered an olive branch to his former rival, Laurent Gbagbo, whose party has now lifted a decade-long boycott of elections.

His Ivorian Popular Front (FPI) is the driving force of a centre-left coalition named Together for Democracy and Solidarity (EDS). More than 1,500 candidates are vying for the votes of roughly seven million people in a contest for the 255-seat National Assembly.



Pope Urges Iraq To End Violence



BAGHDAD (Reuters) - Pope Francis began his most risky foreign trip on Friday, flying into Iraq amid the tightest security ever seen for a papal visit to appeal to the country's leaders and people to end militant violence and religious strife.

The country has deployed thousands of security personnel to protect him during the visit, which comes after a spate of rocket and suicide bomb attacks and a spike in COVID-19 cases.

Even before he landed, Francis told reporters on his plane that he felt duty-bound to make what he called an "emblematic" trip despite the difficulties because the country "has been martyred for so many years".

At the official welcome in the presidential palace, the 84-year-old Francis, limping from what appeared to be a fresh flare-up of his painful sciatica, made an impassioned call for Iraqi to finally give peacemakers chance.

"May the clash of arms be silenced ... may there be an end to acts of violence and extremism," he said.

President Barham Salih thanked the pope for making the first-ever papal visit to Iraq "despite the many recommendations to delay" because of the pandemic and other challenges in "our wounded country".

The fact that the pope came anyway "multiplies the value of this visit for the Iraqi people", the president said.

Hundreds of people gathered in small clusters to see him being driven into Baghdad in bulletproof BMW, a departure for a pope who normally insists on using small, normal cars.

A motorcade of dozens of vehicles accompanied him out of the airport compound, which recently came under rocket fire from militia groups.

In his speech at the palace, Francis, looking tired at the start of his first foreign trip in 16 months, criticized factional and foreign interests that have destabilised Iraq and the wider region and hit ordinary people the hardest.

"Iraq has suffered the disastrous effects of wars, the scourge of terrorism and sectarian conflicts often grounded in a fundamentalism incapable of accepting the peaceful coexistence of different ethnic and religious groups," Francis said.

He later paid tribute to people killed in attacks motivated by religion, visiting a Baghdad church where Islamist gunmen killed about 50 worshippers in 2010.

Their deaths were a reminder that "violence or the shedding of blood are incompatible with authentic religious teachings", he said.

Iraq's security has improved since the defeat of Islamic State in 2017, but the country continues to be a theatre for global and regional score-settling, especially a bitter U.S.-Iran rivalry that has played out on Iraqi soil.

The U.S. invasion of 2003, after years of international sanctions and a devastating war with Iran instigated by former leader Saddam Hussein in the 1980s, plunged Iraq into sectarian conflict and chronic mismanagement that has plagued it since.

Ecuador's Interior Minister Quits

QUITO (Dispatches) - Ecuador's interior minister resigned Friday in the wake of simultaneous riots in four prisons that left 79 people dead.

"It is my own personal decision to submit my irrevocable resignation as minister," Patricio Pazmino said in a letter to President Lenin Moreno, which was made public on Twitter.

Pazmino, a reserve police officer, said his "management at the head of the ministry has been questioned," without giving further details.



Pandemic Response Ignites Protests in Paraguay

ASUNCION (Reuters) - Protesters clashed with police in Paraguay's capital, Asuncion, late on Friday as anger over the government's handling of the coronavirus crisis boiled onto the streets and forced the resignation of the country's top health official.

Security forces fired rubber bullets and tear gas on hundreds of rioters who gathered around the Congress building in downtown Asuncion, while protesters broke down security barriers, burned road barricades and threw stones at police.

The riots, which turned the capital's historic center into a make-shift battlefield of fire, smoke and gunshots, broke out amid growing outrage as coronavirus infections hit record levels and hospitals verged on collapse throughout the South American nation.

"It is a pity that young people have taken this too far. They are people who seek only to destroy," Interior Minister Amaldo Giuzzio told the Telefuturo television channel. "This violence does not make sense."



Duterte Wants to Finish Off Communist Rebels

MANILA (Dispatches) - Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has ordered the military and police forces to "finish off" and "kill" all communist rebels in the country, prompting fears that it could unleash a new wave of bloodshed similar to his deadly war on drugs.

"I've told the military and the police, that if they find themselves in an armed encounter with the communist rebels, kill them, make sure you really kill them, and finish them off if they are alive," Duterte said on Friday, as he addressed a government meeting aimed at countering communism.

"Just make sure to return their bodies to their respective families."

"Forget about human rights. That's my order. I'm willing to go to jail, that's not a problem," the president added, speaking in his native Visayan language commonly used in the southern island of Mindanao, where the meeting was held. "I do not have any qualms about doing the things that I have to do."

Addressing the communist rebels directly, Duterte said, "You are all bandits. You have no ideology. Even China and Russia are all capitalists now."

At the same time, he promised them jobs, housing and livelihood if they give up arms. The communist rebels have been fighting the government in the Philippines since 1968 - one of the longest-running Maoist uprising in the world. According to the military, the rebellion has already claimed more than 30,000 lives during the last 53 years.

Several presidents had attempted but failed to reach a peace agreement with the rebels, whose leader, Jose Maria Sison is now in self-exile in The Netherlands.

When he ran for president in 2016, Duterte promised to finally put an end to the rebellion through peace talks, highlighting his ties with rebel commanders when he was the mayor of Davao City in Mindanao, where the communist insurrection is still active.

After taking office, Duterte ordered direct talks with the communists, only to find the military and the rebels in frequent armed encounters.

UN Envoy Calls for Action Against Myanmar Junta

NEW YORK (Reuters) - The United Nations special envoy on Myanmar called on the U.N. Security Council to take action against the ruling junta after the killings of protesters who have continued to defy security forces at demonstrations against last month's coup.

The Southeast Asian country has been plunged into turmoil since the military overthrew and detained elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi on Feb. 1, with daily protests and strikes that have choked business and paralysed administration.

More than 50 protesters have been killed according to the United Nations - at least 38 on Wednesday alone. Protesters demand the release of Suu Kyi and the respect of November's election, which her party won in landslide, but which the army rejected.

"How much more can we allow the Myanmar military to get away with?" Special Envoy Christine Schraner Burgener told a closed meeting of the 15-member U.N. Security Council on Friday, according to a copy of her remarks seen by Reuters.

"It is critical that this council is resolute and coherent in putting the security forces on notice and standing with the people of Myanmar firmly, in support of the clear November election results."

A junta spokesman did not answer calls requesting comment. The army says it has been restrained in stopping

the protests, but has said it will not allow them to threaten stability.

On Saturday, in the southern town of Dawei, protesters chanted "Democracy is our cause" and "The revolution must prevail". Protesters were also gathering in the biggest city, Yangon.

People have taken to the streets in their hundreds of thousands at times, vowing to continue action in a country that spent nearly half a century under military rule until democratic reforms in 2011 that were cut short by the coup.

"Political hope has begun to shine. We can't lose the momentum of the revolution," one protest leader, Ei Thinzar Maung, wrote on Facebook. "Those who dare to fight will have victory. We deserve victory."

At least one man was killed by security forces in protests on Friday. An official from Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) and his teenage nephew were also stabbed to death by military supporters, local media reported.

The killing of protesters has drawn international outrage.

"Use of violence against the people of Myanmar must stop now," South Korean President Moon Jae-in said in a tweet, calling for the release of Suu Kyi and other detainees and for the restoration of democracy.



Chinese Cyber-Espionage Unit on U.S. Hacking Spree

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - At least 30,000 US organizations including local governments have been hacked in recent days by an "unusually aggressive" Chinese cyber-espionage campaign, according to a computer security specialist.

The campaign has exploited recently discovered flaws in Microsoft Exchange software, stealing email and infecting computer servers with tools that let attackers take control remotely, Brian Krebs said in a post at his cyber security news website.

"This is an active threat," White House spokeswoman Jennifer Psaki said when asked about the situation during a press briefing.

"Everyone running these servers needs to act now to patch them. We are concerned that there are a large number of victims," she added.

After Microsoft released patches for the vulnerabilities on Tuesday, attacks "dramatically stepped up" on servers not yet updated with security fixes, said Krebs, who cited unnamed sources familiar with the situation.

"At least 30,000 organizations across the United States -- including a significant number of small businesses, towns, cities and local governments -- have over the past few days been hacked by an unusually aggressive Chinese cyber espionage unit that's focused on stealing email from victim organizations," Krebs wrote in the post.

He reported that insiders said hackers have "seized control" of thousands of computer systems around the world using password-protected software tools slipped into systems. Microsoft said early this week that a state-sponsored hacking group operating out of China is exploiting previously unknown security flaws in its Exchange email services to steal data from business users.

The company said the hacking group, which it has named "Hafnium," is a "highly skilled and sophisticated actor." Hafnium has in the past targeted U.S.-based companies including infectious disease researchers, law firms, universities, defense contractors, think tanks, and NGOs.

In a blog post on Tuesday, Microsoft executive Tom Burt said the company had released updates to fix the security flaws, which apply to on-premises versions of the software rather than cloud-based versions, and urged customers to apply them.





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J, balcony
green yard
Nicely Furn

Shanon (adviser)

Darrou Villa (\$4000)
1000sq.m
5bdrs, S/p
S, Jacuzzi
marble floor
Fully Furn

Parsian

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S/pool, S, J
gym, pkg
(\$3200)

Apt (\$1300)
Zaferanieh
130sq.m, 2bdrs
S/p, S, J, gym, & F.F

Velenjak bldg (\$10000)
5storey, 20bdrs
S/p, S, J, pkgs
marble floor
Brand new
Semi Furn

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Jordan (\$1800) 3bdrs, & S/p
Jordan (\$2200) 4bdrs, & S/p

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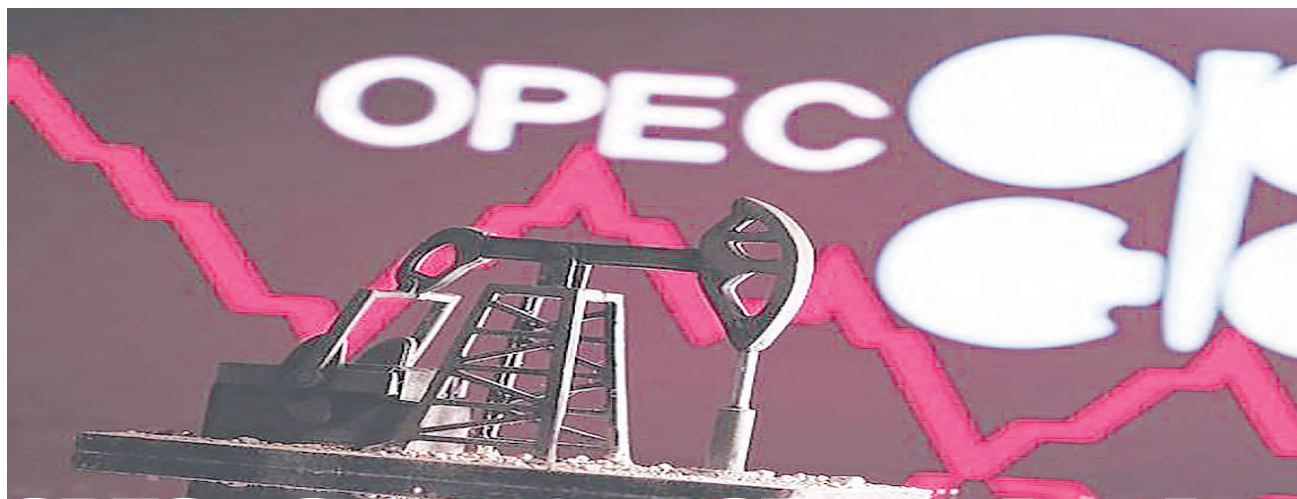
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Hyundai Profit Hit After Electric Car Recall

SEOUL (Reuters) - A large global recall of electric vehicles has led Hyundai Motor Co to sharply revise down fourth-quarter operating profit, although reports said battery maker LG Chem Ltd would bear the bulk of the costs.

LG will assume 70% of the estimated \$900 million costs to replace battery systems in some 82,000 electric vehicles globally, according to Yonhap news agency and other South Korean media.

But Cho Hyun-ryul, an analyst at Samsung Securities, said he estimated LG's burden was slightly lower at 62% of the costs.



OPEC+ Squeezes Oil Production Tight to Protect Price Recovery

LONDON (Dispatches) -Saudi Arabia and its OPEC+ allies shocked the oil market with a decision to keep supply in check, sending prices surging and adding inflationary pressure to the global economy as it emerges from the pandemic.

One year on from the outbreak of a bitter price war that sent crude below zero, the kingdom showed that its priority is preserving the hard-won oil recovery rather than worrying about tightening the market too much.

"I don't think it will overheat," Saudi Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman told reporters after Thursday's meeting. Last year "we suffered alone, we as OPEC+" and now "it's about being vigilant and being careful," he said.

The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies had been debating whether to restore as much as 1.5 million barrels a day of output in April. From trading houses in Geneva to Wall Street banks, much of the oil world was in agreement that global markets could use some more barrels to temper a rapid run-up in prices.

But after being urged to "keep our powder dry" by Prince Abdulaziz, OPEC+ members agreed to hold steady at current levels -- with the exception of modest increases granted to Russia and Kazakhstan. Saudi minister went one step further, saying the additional 1 million barrel-a-day voluntary production cut the kingdom introduced last month was now open ended.

That means the cartel will still be withholding about 7 million barrels a day from the market -- equivalent to about 7% of global demand -- even as fuel consumption recovers in many countries.

"OPEC+ definitely risks over-tightening the oil market," said Amrita Sen, chief oil analyst at consultant Energy Aspects Ltd. in London. Brent crude rose as much as 5.7% in London.

Brent has already rallied about 30% this year to almost \$68 a barrel. Throughout the first quarter, OPEC+ has kept production below demand in order to drain the glut that built up during the worst of the Covid-19 lockdowns. Without additional supply, that deficit will widen significantly in April, according to the cartel's internal estimates.

"We expect oil prices to rise toward \$70 to \$75 a barrel during April," said Ann-Louise Hittle, vice president of macro oils at consultant Wood Mackenzie Ltd. "The risk is these higher prices will dampen the tentative global recovery. But the Saudi energy minister is adamant OPEC+ must watch for concrete signs of a demand rise before he moves on production."

With the bond market already on edge for signs of inflation, the aggressive move from OPEC+ could become a headache for the U.S. Federal Reserve and the European Central Bank. And it's not just oil that's surging. From copper and steel to corn and soybeans, the prices of many commodities are rapidly rising.

Strengthening economies, the rollout of coronavirus vaccines and continued government stimulus are among the reasons financial markets are anticipating an acceleration in price growth, although such forces are countered by weak labor markets.

"We should closely monitor to avoid overheating of the market," Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said in an interview with state TV Rossiya 24 after the meeting.

U.S. Job Growth Likely Regained Steam in February

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - U.S. job growth likely accelerated in February as more services businesses reopened amid falling new COVID-19 cases, quickening vaccination rates and additional pandemic relief money from the government, putting the labor market recovery back on firmer footing and on course for further gains in the months ahead.

The Labor Department's closely watched employment report on Friday will, however, also offer a reminder that as the United States enters the second year of the coronavirus pandemic the recovery remains excruciatingly slow, with millions of Americans experiencing long spells of joblessness and permanent unemployment.

Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell on Thursday offered an optimistic view of the labor market, but cautioned a return to full employment this year was "highly unlikely."

"We will probably see more people having gone back on payrolls," said Sung Won Sohn, a finance and economics professor at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. "Many will be related to service jobs, but that will not mean a rapid increase in jobs. It's a slow progress toward eventual full recovery."

Nonfarm payrolls likely increased by 182,000 jobs last month after rising only 49,000 in January, according to a Reuters poll of economists. Payrolls declined in December for the first time in eight months.

Economists saw no impact from the mid-February deep freeze in the densely populated South as the winter storms hit after the week during which the government surveyed establishments and businesses for the employment report.

But unseasonably cold weather last month, especially in the Northeast, and production cuts at auto assembly plants because of a global semiconductor chip shortage likely shortened the average workweek. The labor market has been slow to respond to the drop in daily coronavirus cases and hospitalizations, which helped fuel a boost in consumer spending in January that prompted economists to sharply upgrade their gross domestic product growth estimates for the first quarter.



Historically, employment lags GDP growth by about a quarter. But economists believe the catching up started in February, a year after the economy fell into recession at the start of the U.S. COVID-19 outbreak.

A survey last week showed consumers' perceptions of the labor market improved in February after deteriorating in January and December. In addition, a measure of manufacturing employment increased to a two-year high in February.

Though millions are unemployed, companies are struggling to find workers, which is contributing to holding back job growth. A survey on Wednesday showed employment growth in the services industry slowed last month, with businesses reporting they were "unable to fill vacant positions with qualified applicants."

BOJ Stresses Need to Keep Bond Yields "Stably Low"

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Bank of Japan Governor Haruhiko Kuroda stressed the need to keep long-term borrowing costs stably low to underpin an economy hit by the coronavirus pandemic, signaling that widening an implicit band for its yield target was hardly a done deal.

Markets are rife with speculation the BOJ will widen to 60 basis points from the current 40 points the band at which it allows 10-year bond yield to move around its 0% target. Kuroda said the BOJ has not reached a conclusion yet on whether it will widen the band, saying "much more debate" was needed before deciding at the March review of its policy tools.

"It's a difficult decision. The economy remains under pressure from the COVID-19 pandemic," Kuroda told parliament. "While we need to enhance bond market functions, it's also important to keep the yield curve stably low for the time being," he said on Friday.

The BOJ caps the 10-year bond yield around zero under a policy dubbed yield curve control (YCC), and currently allows the benchmark yield to move 40 points around its 0% target.

Expectations of a strong post-pandemic recovery have pushed up global yields including those for Japan, where the 10-year yield crept near the BOJ's implicit 0.2% ceiling.

Allowing yields to move more flexibly around the BOJ's target would make YCC more flexible, one of the key goals of a review of its policy framework scheduled on March 18-19.

The challenge, however, would be to make the tweak without giving markets the BOJ is tightening policy. At the March review, the BOJ will also look at ways to make its purchases of exchange-traded funds (ETF) more flexible.

Bangladesh Is Becoming South Asia's Economic Bull Case

DHAKA (Dispatches) - Bangladesh has won plaudits from The Wall Street Journal for the economic strides it has made in recent years in the wake of its graduation from the UN's least-developed-country categorization.

The South Asian nation received the UN Committee for Development Policy's recommendation to be elevated to the developing country category as it gears up to enter the 50th of its independence.

In an article titled, 'Bangladesh Is Becoming South Asia's Economic Bull Case',

the New York-based newspaper credited Bangladesh for being 'the closest proxy for the successful development models seen at various stages in South Korea, China and Vietnam.' Export-led development has the best modern track record of moving countries from very low-income levels into middle-income status, according to WSJ.

The article also highlighted the progress made by Bangladesh in terms of exports and GDP per capita in comparison to India and Pakistan which have seen a marginal decline in these measures.

WSJ points out that the 80 percent growth in exports in the past decade is driven by the country's booming garment industry. It attributed a very young demographic structure, a continued competitive edge in terms of wage levels, strong and rising female labour-force participation especially relative to the rest of South Asia to the success of Bangladesh's development model.

Nevertheless, the country's economic growth remains well below that of Vietnam or Cambodia, where exports have more than tripled and more than doubled respectively over the past 10 years.

Another caveat is that India's exports had also boomed in the early 2000s before stagnating, meaning that there is no guarantee of a continued upward trend, according to WSJ.

Moving forward, Bangladesh should look to emulate Vietnam by transition toward higher-value forms of manufacturing and exporting, according to WSJ.

Bangladesh's export industry is heavily reliant on garment manufacturing while its economic complexity, ranked by Harvard University's Growth Lab, is 108 out of the 133 countries measured.

While the country remains outside of major Asian trade blocs, diversifying its manufacturing exports would require greater participation in intra-Asian supply chains and a closer economic relationship with its neighbors to the east, the article says.

China Sets Low Bar for GDP Growth, Pledges More Jobs

BEIJING (Reuters) - China on Friday set a modest annual economic growth target, at above 6%, and pledged to create more jobs in cities than last year, as the world's second-biggest economy planned a careful course out of a year disrupted by COVID-19.

In 2020, China dropped a gross domestic product growth target from the premier's work report for the first time since 2002 after the pandemic devastated its economy. China's GDP expanded 2.3% last year, the weakest in 44 years but making it the only major economy to report growth.

"As a general target, China's growth rate has been set at over 6% for this year," Premier Li Keqiang said in his 2021 work report. "In setting this target, we have taken into account the recovery of economic activity." But the 2021 target was significantly below the consensus of analysts, who expect growth could beat 8% this year. Chinese shares fell.

China's conservative growth target reflects a public effort to demonstrate a return to economic stability after last year's COVID-19 upheaval, policy advisers said, while also keeping a lid on appetite for debt and risk.

"It's obvious this year's growth will be over 6%. The purpose is to tell people that we should focus on higher quality growth," Yao Jingyuan, an adviser to China's cabinet, told Reuters.

While the low GDP target does not mean the government will rush to tighten policy, with many parts of the economy still struggling, it will give planners more room to push reforms.

Premier Li pledged to spur domestic consumption and innovation, as part of a plan to reduce reliance on overseas markets and technology for long-term development. As such, China plans to boost annual research and development spending by more than 7% every year until 2025.

"The target should be a bottom line. We should have more room for pushing forward difficult reforms," said Xu Hongcai, deputy director of the economic policy commission at China Association of Policy Science. In 2021, China will aim to create more than 11 million new urban jobs, Li said in

his report delivered at the opening of this year's meeting of parliament, up from last year's goal of over 9 million and in line with recent years.

The government is targeting a 2021 budget deficit of around 3.2% of GDP, less than a goal of above 3.6% last year, though giving room to fund infrastructure and aid small firms. Iris Pang, chief economist for Greater China at ING, said continued fiscal latitude was a more meaningful target than the growth target. "The very low GDP growth target is like there is no target at all because the consensus is 8% and my forecast is 7%," Pang told Reuters. "I believe that most of the money will be used for technology R&D and continue to provide some buffer for job stability just in case COVID will have a comeback," she added.

The quota on local government special bond issuance was set at 3.65 trillion yuan (\$563.65 billion), down from 3.75 trillion yuan last year.

Palm Oil Row Fuels Swiss Vote On Indonesia Trade Deal



ZURICH (Dispatches) - Switzerland votes Sunday on a free trade deal with Indonesia but the agreement, which opens up a vast potential market, could slip up over the issue of palm oil imports.

Under the deal, tariffs would be gradually removed from almost all of Switzerland's biggest exports to the world's fourth most populous country, while the Swiss would abolish duties on Indonesian industrial products.

Anyone importing Indonesian palm oil must prove that it meets certain environmental and social standards.

But controversy around palm oil and its sustainability fuelled enough concern in Switzerland to trigger a public vote. Two separate polls in February put support for the deal at 52 percent, with 41 to 42 percent against.

The agreement was signed in 2018 and approved by the Swiss parliament in 2019, but opponents were especially critical of Bern's move to reduce import duties on palm oil.

The deal contains exceptions for agricultural products, notably to protect Switzerland's sunflower and rapeseed oil production. For palm oil, customs duties will not be removed but instead reduced by between 20 percent to 40 percent.

These reductions will only be granted on a volume limited to 12,500 tonnes per year -- and importers will need to prove that the palm oil has been produced in a sustainable manner.

Campaign posters backing the economic partnership agreement show a Swiss bear hugging a tiger, while those against show an orangutan and baby clinging to a tree trunk, surrounded by flames.

The agreement aims to boost ties with Indonesia, which despite its population is only Switzerland's 44th biggest economic partner, and only its 16th biggest export market in Asia. In 2020, Swiss exports to Indonesia amounted to just 498 million Swiss francs (\$540 million, 450 million euros).

Home-Made App to Help Diagnose COVID-19

TEHRAN (IP)- Head of the headquarters for the management of operations against coronavirus in Tehran says that a home-made application called 'Riske Man' uses artificial intelligence to help diagnose COVID-19.

Speaking at the unveiling ceremony of the Riske Man (My Risk) Application held at Shahid-Beheshti University, Alireza Zali

stated that the other significant point of this app was that it was applicable at all levels and for all ages, and it could even detect coronavirus.

Zali stated that one of the main features of the 'Riske Man' application was being indigenous and it could be used in other countries as well.



Uzbekistan, India Moving Swiftly to Partner on Chabahar

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India and Uzbekistan are swiftly moving to strengthen their partnership to develop connectivity in Central Asia via the Chabahar port.

Last week, the Foreign Minister of Uzbekistan, Abdulaziz Kamilov, had visited New Delhi and met External Affairs Minister, S. Jaishankar, to discuss various aspects of bilateral cooperation.

Kamilov invited Jaishankar to attend an international conference on regional connectivity in Tashkent in July this year. This was preceded by the India-Uzbekistan Virtual Summit between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Uzbekistan President Shavkat Mirziyoyev in December last year.

The two high-level meetings are significant in view of the change in the administration in the US. Unlike the Donald Trump administration which followed a strong pro-Israel line, alienating Iran, the recently elected government of Joe Biden in the US is keen on re-engaging with Tehran. It is likely that Biden may revive the U.S.-Iran nuclear deal which had been signed under the Barack Obama administration but was revoked by his successor Trump.

A land-locked country, Uzbekistan is interested in the Chabahar port that India is developing in Iran. Soon after Biden was elected in the US presidential elections, Uzbekistan, India and Iran held their first trilateral meeting for the joint use of the port.

Home to almost half of Central Asian population, Uzbekistan is a fast growing economy which has picked up pace under President Shavkat Mirziyoyev's economic reforms. This has created huge demand for investments. Because of the lack of connectivity to sea, the oil and gas-rich Central Asia remains largely dependent on China's market.

The coronavirus pandemic related shutdown brought in a realisation across the world that over dependence on China for essential and manufactured goods was fraught with grave dangers. As a result, President Mirziyoyev has been keen on exporting to diverse markets, including India, via the Chabahar port.

For India, the historically hostile Pakistan, has been a stumbling block to access the oil and gas resources through land route in Central Asia. Amid this blockade, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which runs through Central Asia, poses greater economic competition.

To overcome the two-pronged challenge, New Delhi has invested \$500 million in the Chabahar port, which connects India with Afghanistan and Central Asia,



bypassing Pakistan. India's budgetary allocation to Chabahar doubled in 2020-21 from the previous year.

In the meantime, Uzbekistan has built a 75-km railway line between Mazar-i-Shareef and Hairatan town on the Uzbek-Afghan border. Tehran has also built the first railway link between Afghanistan and Iran. India and Uzbekistan under the 2011 Ashgabat Agreement are to build a transit and transport corridor between Central Asia and the Persian Gulf.

Given the significance of the partnership with Tashkent on Chabahar, New Delhi confirmed a \$448 million Line of Credit for the development of connectivity related infrastructure, information technology and energy in Uzbekistan. Both the countries have also signed several agreements in various sectors apart from actively cooperating in the regional platforms like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the India-Central Asia Dialogue (ICAD).

Brazil Economy Faces Headwinds After Worst Plunge in Decades

RIO DE JANEIRO (Dispatches) - Brazil dodged the most dire economic forecasts in 2020, but official figures released Wednesday show the COVID-19 pandemic still battered the nation and it continues to dim the outlook for recovery.



Brazil's gross domestic product contracted 4.1% in 2020, the biggest annual recession since the series began in 1996, according to Brazil's official statistics institute, known as IBGE. Still, the result is better the 5.3% plunge forecast by the International Monetary Fund in April last year.

Since the beginning of the health crisis, Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro has been adamant that the economy must keep running, arguing that lockdowns and restrictions would inflict greater hardship on the population than the disease. That position, which flew in the face of public health experts' recommendations, helped stave off an even deeper recession, at least in the short term — as did a generous pandemic welfare program.

But the country is once again recording more than 1,000 daily deaths from COVID-19, which could cause further economic slowdown.

"The worsening COVID-19 outbreak is casting a dark cloud over the outlook for the next few months at least," William Jackson, an economist at Capital Economics, wrote in a report published Wednesday. Jackson pointed to a plunge in retail sales and likelihood of tighter measures to limit the virus' spread.

The number of new COVID-19 cases in Brazil is still surging, with a new record high 1,641 deaths reported on Tuesday. The state-run Fiocruz Institute said Tuesday that intensive-care unit occupation rates in 18 states and the Federal District had surpassed 80% — a level considered critical.

Monica de Bolle, a Brazilian senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics in Washington, said the GDP figures don't yet capture the full impact of the disaster, including implications of lives lost, people going on disability from long-lasting side effects and lingering costs for the health system.

Now that the welfare program has ended, "lots of things are going on in the economy and none of them are good, and we're going to have a very bad year in 2021. Had the government done things differently, it wouldn't have been that way," said de Bolle, who has done postgraduate studies in immunology and genetics. "If public health is in complete collapse, obviously the economy will be in complete collapse."

Many state governors, scientists and health experts have begun pushing for tighter restrictions. The governor of Sao Paulo, Brazil's biggest state economy, announced Wednesday that stricter measures would take effect this weekend.

Bolsonaro has forcefully opposed measures by governors and mayors to limit activity, though the Supreme Court ruled last year that such decisions are local authorities' prerogative.

Singapore Is World's Freest Economy

SINGAPORE (Dispatches) - Singapore's economy has been ranked the most free in the world this year in The Heritage Foundation's 2021 Index of Economic Freedom, the second year in a row it topped the list.

The Republic scored 89.7 points, with its overall score up by 0.3 point from last year, mainly due to an improvement in points gained for government spending, the conservative Washington think-tank said yesterday.

Its score placed it far ahead of both the regional average for 40 countries in the Asia-Pacific (60.2) and the world average (61.6).

It was followed by New Zealand, Australia, Switzerland and Ireland, in that order, with scores ranging from 83.9 (New Zealand) to 81.4 (Ireland).

The United States ranked 20th with a score of 74.8, and Germany was 29th with a score of 72.5.

Thailand took the 42nd spot with a score of 69.7, and China was No. 107 with a score of 58.4.

Hong Kong, which had topped the list for 25 of the last 26 years, was left out of this year's index as it has come under the direct control of Beijing, The Heritage Foundation said.

The city's ties to Beijing are increasingly "forged in steel" and "traditions of English common law, freedom of speech and democracy have weakened significantly", Dr Edwin J. Feulner, founder of The Heritage Foundation, wrote in the Wall Street Journal on Wednesday.

"The loss of political freedom and autonomy suffered by Hong Kong over the past two years has made that city almost indistinguishable in many respects from other major Chinese commercial centres like Shanghai and Beijing."

The index ranks 12 indicators under four categories: rule of law, size of government, regulatory efficiency and open markets.

Mr Anthony Kim, research manager at The Heritage Foundation and editor of the index, told The Straits



Times: "Singapore remains the only country in the world that is considered economically free in every index category."

He added: "The foundations of Singapore's economic resilience and competitiveness include strong protection of property rights and effective enforcement of anti-corruption laws."

"Efficient government provides good public services with low tax rates. The regulatory environment is flexible and transparent, encouraging vibrant commercial activity. "A strong tradition of openness to global trade and investment has long boosted productivity while facilitating the emergence of a more dynamic and competitive financial sector."

In addition, Singapore has, over the years, been storing or reserving "relatively ample policy space to be flexible and resilient thanks to its high degree of competitiveness, whether through monetary or fiscal policy tools", Mr Kim added.

The broader Asia-Pacific scored lower than the world average in seven of 12 indicators: property rights, judicial effectiveness, government integrity, monetary freedom, trade freedom, investment freedom and financial freedom.

But in tax burden, government spending, fiscal health, business freedom and labour freedom, the Asia-Pacific exceeded world averages, the report said.

Also, citizens of free or mostly free countries "enjoy incomes that are more than double the global average and more than six times higher than in repressed economies", the report said.

The more economically free a society, the longer people live healthier lives, alongside greater access to quality social goods such as education, healthcare and a cleaner environment, it added.

The findings "confirm the importance of economic freedom in promoting rapid growth and sustainable social progress".

India...

FROM PAGE 1

Last year amid the pandemic, India used the Chabahar port to send 75,000 tons of wheat as humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan and 25 tons of the pesticide malathion to Iran to deal with a locust invasion.

The second batch of 25 tons has recently reached Chabahar.

As part of the agreement with Iran, India would provide six cranes and other equipment worth \$85 million to equip and operationalise the Shahid Beheshti terminal. So far, India has supplied two of these Mobile Harbour Cranes (MHC) and four others will be delivered over the next few weeks.

"Chabahar Port has emerged as the connecting point for the region to deliver humanitarian assistance during the Covid pandemic," Mandaviya said. India also plans to set up an around 600 km railway line from Chabahar port to Zahedan, the provincial capital of Sistan-Baluchestan in Iran close to the Afghan border, at a cost of \$1.6 billion to facilitate the movement of goods to Afghanistan. New Delhi has also proposed inclusion of Chabahar port in the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)- connecting Mumbai with Moscow, the minister said, referring to discussions at a virtual summit on Chabahar port on Thursday. The INSTC project, proposed by India, Russia and Iran in 2000, and later supported by 10 other central Asian countries, envisions a 7,200 km-long multi-mode network of ship, rail and road for freight transport, aiming to cut carriage costs by about 30% and transit time from 40 days to about 20 days.

President Says...

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"People should keep in mind that the production of (coronavirus) vaccine in the world has limitations and it is not possible to produce vaccine for the whole population. Moreover, the distribution of vaccine is not fair either," he noted, stressing that vaccine rollouts would not mean an end to the challenge.

He called on the Iranians to maintain the lifestyle under the pandemic for one more year, warning them to avoid planning any trip during the upcoming Nowruz (new year) holidays at the beginning of spring.

The president said the tolerance of the country's health system "has a limit," urging the public to cooperate when it comes to observing health protocols.

"The start of the vaccination drive in the country should not lead to people considering the situation as normal," he said.

President Rouhani also complained that foreign vaccines are not distributed among countries fairly.

He also called for a change of lifestyle given that there have been numerous mutations in coronavirus.

"The coronavirus-style of living should continue for at least one year from now due to the many mutations of the virus," said the president.

Travels to the Iranian cities categorized as red and orange zones will be prohibited during the new year's holidays, the president noted.

Tehran Warns...

FROM PAGE 1

The giant MV Helios Ray, a Bahamian-flagged roll-on, roll-off vehicle cargo ship, which sat at dry dock facilities at Dubai's Port Rashid on Sunday for repairs following the alleged blast, left the port on Wednesday, sailing along the Omani coast toward the Arabian Sea.

"The Israeli regime that threatens Iran on an almost daily basis, desperately attempts, through accusing Iran as well as playing victim to distract attention away from all its destabilizing acts and malign practices across the region," Iran's UN envoy further said.

Takht Ravanchi also called on the international community not to lose sight of the "crimes, brutalities and threats" committed by the Tel Aviv regime, particularly "its occupation of Palestine and parts of other countries."

He also warned the global community of Israel's "persistent military adventurism" in a region as volatile as the Middle East.

In conclusion, Takht Ravanchi stressed that Tel Aviv must "be held accountable for all such unlawful and reckless activities and also be reminded that it will bear all consequences as a result of any possible miscalculation."

Iraq Settles...

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In December 2020, Iran reduced its gas exports to the neighboring country by over 45 million cubic meters a day (mcm/d), threatening to further reduce the current five mcm/d of gas supply to three mcm/d.

Iranian Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian visited Iraq in late December 2020 to meet with senior officials from the country and discuss the country's energy debts to Iran.

Biden...

FROM PAGE 1

The administration of former US president Trump unilaterally abandoned the nuclear deal, formally called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in May 2018, and unleashed the so-called "maximum pressure campaign" with the stated objective of forcing Iran to negotiate "a better agreement."

Tehran refused to bow down to pressure and threats and responded to Washington's pressure policy with "maximum resistance."

President Joe Biden has indicated his government's willingness to return to the agreement, but Washington has been dragging its feet on taking any meaningful measure to undo the former US government's wrongs.

Spezia Keeper Tests Positive for Covid

ROME (Dispatches) - Italian club Spezia on Friday confirmed goalkeeper Ivan Provedel was among two coronavirus positives after this week's Serie A game against Juventus, who also have a case.

Italian Provedel, 26, tested positive on Thursday along with a member of the team's staff. "A first team staff member and the footballer Ivan Provedel tested positive for the molecular nasopharyngeal swab carried out yesterday (Thursday) and are currently in isolation," the promoted side confirmed.

LICENCE HOLDER: SOKHAN GOSTAR INSTITUTE

Switchboard:

(+98) (21) 44253448

Public Relations Tel:

(+98)(21) 44253450

Editorial Board: 44253449

Public Relations Fax:

(+98)(21) 44253395

Advertising Department:

Tel/Fax:(+98) (21) 44253335-9/44253234

Website:

http://www.irannewsdaily.com

E-Mail Address:

info@irannewsdaily.com

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Bayern Starlet Musiala Pens Contract Until 2026

BERLIN (Dispatches) - A week after his 18th birthday, Bayern Munich's rising star midfielder Jamal Musiala has signed his first professional contract until 2026, it was announced Friday.

"I just feel very good at the club and in the team, I'm playing with the best players in the world and I can learn from them every day in training," said Musiala in a statement.

"I just want to keep getting better and win a lot more titles with FC Bayern."

Bucks Win Thriller Over Grizzlies

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Jrue Holiday's step-back, baseline jumper with two seconds remaining powered the Milwaukee Bucks to a 112-111 win over the host Memphis Grizzlies.

Holiday's shot over the outstretched hand of Dillon Brooks capped a wild final 39.1 seconds in which the two teams exchanged the lead five times.

The raucous stretch included a goaltending call against Milwaukee's Giannis Antetokounmpo and Memphis' Ja Morant scoring the last of his game-high 35 points on a layup in traffic, just seconds before Holiday's game-winner.

Antetokounmpo led the Bucks with 26 points and 11 rebounds. Khris Middleton contributed 22 points and 10 rebounds for Milwaukee. Brooks scored 23 points for Memphis.

Washington Wizards 119 - Los Angeles Clippers 117: Bradley Beal scored 33 points and grabbed seven rebounds as host Washington handed Los Angeles its third straight loss.

Russell Westbrook added 27 points, 11 assists and nine rebounds for the Wizards. Moritz Wagner contributed 12 points to help Washington snap a two-game skid.

Kawhi Leonard led a short-handed Clippers team with 22 points. Patrick Beverley added 17 and Lou Williams 16 in the loss.

Miami Heat 103 - New Orleans Pelicans 93: Jimmy Butler returned from a two-game absence to score 29 points as the visiting Heat defeated the Pelicans, who were without Zion Williamson (toe).

Butler, who had been sidelined by right knee inflammation, scored 10 points during the final six minutes as the Heat held off a Pelicans comeback.

Brandon Ingram scored 17 points and Steven Adams added 15 to lead the Pelicans.

Denver Nuggets 113 - Indiana Pacers 103: Michael Porter Jr. had 24 points and 11 rebounds,

Nikola Jokic added 20 points, 12 rebounds and eight assists, and Denver won its fourth straight road game, beating Indiana in Indianapolis.

Jamal Murray scored 23 points and Will Barton had 16 for Denver, which improved to 4-0 on its road trip. The Pacers enter the All-Star break with five losses in their past six games.

Phoenix Suns 120 - Golden State Warriors 98: Host Phoenix finished the NBA's first half



in second place in the Western Conference after shellacking Stephen Curry-less Golden State.

The Suns won for the 16th time in their last 19 games. Reserve Cameron Payne led seven Phoenix players in double figures with 17 points to go with a game-high 10 assists. Devin Booker scored 16 points and Deandre Ayton had 11 points and a team-high 10 rebounds.

Jordan Poole, recalled from the G League earlier in the week, poured in a career-high 26 points in 26 minutes off the bench to lead the Warriors. Andrew Wiggins had 16 points, and James Wiseman contributed 11 points and 11 rebounds.

Boston Celtics 132 - Toronto Raptors 125: Jayson Tatum had 27 points and 12 rebounds, Jaylen Brown scored 20 of his 21 points in the second half and host Boston downed Toronto to extend its winning streak to four games. Grant Williams added a season-high 17 points off the bench for the Celtics.

Chris Boucher scored a career-high 30 points, Norman Powell 25 and Terence Davis 22 as the Raptors lost for the second straight night. Kyle Lowry had 14 points and a career-high 19 assists.

New York Knicks 114 - Detroit Pistons 104: Julius Randle had 27 points and 16 rebounds as host New York defeated Detroit.

New York played without point guard Derrick Rose for the second consecutive game due to the NBA's health and safety protocols. He returned multiple negative tests for COVID-19 before the game, but the league ruled him ineligible to play against his former team.

All five Knicks starters scored in double figures. RJ Barrett scored 21 points and had five assists and four rebounds. The Pistons spread the points out even more, finishing with eight players in double figures. Wayne Ellington led with 17 points on 6-of-14 shooting.

Tottenham Captain Lloris Praises Alli

LONDON (Dispatches) - Tottenham Hotspur captain Hugo Lloris has lauded Dele Alli for the way he has responded after being prevented from leaving the club.

It appeared the England international would move from the north London side during the January transfer window having been sidelined by manager Jose Mourinho, with former Spurs boss Mauricio Pochettino reportedly keen to take Alli to Paris Saint-Germain on loan.

Spurs, however, decided to keep Alli in their squad and the midfielder made his first Premier League start since the opening day of the season during Thursday's 1-0 win against Fulham. France goalkeeper Lloris said he was pleased by the way Alli had put any "disappointment" aside.

"Well, I don't want to talk about January. It's his personal situation and I don't want to talk on behalf of the club, I'm not the right person to do it," Lloris told reporters on Friday. "As a team-mate, he's always been professional."

"He put his disappointment on the side and from day one in the second part of the season, after the transfer market closed, he switched on and he started to step-by-step improve his fitness and get as much confidence as he can. "Now he's coming back and that's good for the team and obviously the best for the season is ahead of us."

Police Call for Premier League Cooperation to Tackle Racist Abuse

LONDON (Dispatches) - Police have called on the Premier League and English Football League to boost cooperation with officers in the drive to stamp out racist abuse in the game.

A number of players including Manchester United trio Anthony Martial, Marcus Rashford and Axel Tuanzebe have been targeted on social media in recent weeks.

Deputy Chief Constable Mark Roberts wrote to Premier League chief executive Richard Masters and English Football League chairman Rick Parry in January but only received replies this week, according to the BBC. Roberts, who leads on football for the National Police Chiefs' Council, fears there could be a rise in hate crimes when fans return to stadiums as the coronavirus lockdown is eased.

Barcelona Ditching Suarez Was a "Huge Mistake"



MADRID (Dispatches) - "Of course it was a huge mistake," Diego Forlan says. "As soon as Barcelona said he was for sale, I knew it was a mistake."

Forlan goes back a long way with Luis Suarez, to 2007 when he set up Suarez's first goal for Uruguay and to 2013, when Suarez set up Forlan's last. "I was the old one when he started so he was always coming to me and asking questions," Forlan tells AFP. "Now it's the other way round."

They spoke last summer when Barcelona decided in the wake of the 8-2 mauling by Bayern Munich that Suarez would be let go, not sold but released, and not to a team far away but to Atletico Madrid.

"All I know is it wasn't about his performances on the pitch," said Forlan.

"I messaged him and said, 'listen you're not the first and you won't be the last. You have to keep being yourself. You don't have to prove anything to anyone so just keep doing it at Atletico Madrid.'

"But when you get punished for something you didn't do, when you're still in great shape, playing well, of course your aim is going to be to show that you can still perform."

Suarez has played like proving them wrong is everything, his 16 goals filling Atletico's goalscoring gap and propelling them to the top of La Liga.

Klopp Plays Down Salah Reaction After Substituting Top Striker

LONDON (Dispatches) - Jurgen Klopp has played down any potential fallout following Mohamed Salah's show of displeasure after his substitution in Liverpool's 1-0 defeat by Chelsea.

The Egypt international made no secret of his annoyance at being withdrawn just after the hour mark at Anfield on Thursday as the champions slipped to a fifth successive home league defeat for the first time in their history.

Liverpool are languishing in seventh place in the Premier League and are four points behind fourth-placed Chelsea ahead of Sunday's home game against lowly Fulham.

Klopp said he could not make substitutions on the basis of what reaction it created, adding he took off the Premier League's leading scorer because he thought he was feeling the intensity of the game. "I'm not even sure if this situation is now a reason for a 'proper talk' about it," he said on Friday.

"We are 1-0 down, that makes no player happy. You go off and you react in different ways because you are not happy."

"You get subbed, you are a striker and you think you should stay on the pitch. That's all completely clear and not an issue, it is just normal life."

Klopp said managers were forced to make quick judgements on the basis of what they saw on the pitch.

"We make these decisions in the moment and not with any thoughts in behind, the problem only is you only have to explain it after the game and the day after the game," he said.

"These kind of stories (rumours of unhappiness) so far didn't happen. I cannot guarantee for the future and for all times it will never happen but these kind of discussions we never had."



Tuchel Hails Players for Unbeaten Run

LONDON (Dispatches) - Thomas Tuchel says his Chelsea players should take the credit after masterminding a 10-match unbeaten run since he replaced Frank Lampard as manager.

Chelsea's 1-0 win against Liverpool on Thursday lifted them to fourth in the Premier League table and put them on course to qualify for next season's Champions League.

The Stamford Bridge side were languishing down in ninth place when Tuchel took over in late January. German boss Tuchel has refused to take credit for that resurgence however, insisting the players must receive the plaudits.

Asked to explain his role in Chelsea's revival, Tuchel replied: "I am flattered but I will just give the flowers to the players and to the club."

"It is proven that Chelsea is an organisation and a club that has everything that you need to be successful as a coach and as a football team, so now it is my job to bring out the very best of myself, together with the team." Tuchel inherited a Chelsea squad lacking direction as Lampard's reign stuttered to a frustrating end.

The former Paris Saint-Germain boss has quickly tightened up the team's defence and they have conceded just twice on his watch.

Tuchel will pit his wits against Carlo Ancelotti when Chelsea host Everton on Monday. The fifth-placed Toffees are a point behind Chelsea but have a game in hand.

"I am happy to be on the sideline," said Tuchel. "I feel an attitude, an unbelievable attitude towards training, towards games, I feel the bond that is necessary."

"In the whole world when football is played, the teams that stand out are the teams that fight for each other, are ready to sacrifice, are happy for each other, push each other from the bench and this is exactly what I found. I found a lot of talent."

