

**Health Ministry Spokeswoman
Sima Sadat Lari Said on Sunday
That Some 93 More Iranians Have
Died From the Coronavirus
Disease Over the Past 24 Hours
Bringing the Total Deaths to 60,687**

IRAN NEWS

**Saeed Mohammad Says He Would
Register for Iran's Upcoming
Presidential Election as He Left
His Job as Commander of
Commander of Khatam-ul-Anbia
Headquarters of IRGC**

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Corridor to Bring "Stability"**
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**Iran Could Raze
Tel Aviv, Haifa**

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has hit back at Israel after the latter said it was updating plans to attack Iranian nuclear sites, with the Iranian defense minister pledging that Tehran will raze Tel Aviv and Haifa if the occupying regime commits any mistake.

"Sometimes, their heads bite off more than they can chew and make threats that is clearly out of desperation. Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei responded well to the Zionists many years ago. He said that the Zionist regime is not our main enemy and not at the level to be hostile against the Islamic Republic."

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**Irish FM Calls U.S. Departure
From JCPOA "a Historic Mistake"**



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Ireland's visiting Foreign Minister Simon Coveney in meeting with President Hassan Rouhani in Tehran said called Trump's departure from the nuclear deal "a historic mistake" and alleged that the new U.S. administration was determined to return Washington to the pact.

Trump's successor, Joe Biden, has only voiced a willingness to rejoin the JCPOA. His administration has, however, stopped short of any concrete effort that could mirror the expression of alleged interest amid Tehran's definitive position that it would only reverse its reprisal if Washington lifted the sanctions.

Coveney said as an international agreement, the JCPOA was very important to global peace, noting that Dublin would do all in its power to preserve the deal. He said Dublin was prepared to play whatever role that could ameliorate the situation and enable fresh negotiation among the JCPOA's partners.

Meanwhile in the meeting President Rouhani criticized the Europeans' inaction toward reviving the multilateral 2015 nuclear deal, saying negotiations based on "mutual respect" and free from "threat and pressure" is the best means of resolving the current standoff.

"The best way to resolve the differences with our European partners on various bilateral, regional, and international levels is negotiations based on mutual respect and avoidance of any sort of threat and pressure," Rouhani said.

The president was apparently referring to the Europeans' submission to the U.S. demand that Tehran take the first step to revive the nuclear accord, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), even though it was the US that unilaterally abandoned the deal and restored the unlawful sanctions against the Islamic Republic.

Rouhani said Iran is the only party to have paid a price for attempting to preserve the nuclear agreement it signed with the P5+1 group of states -- the US, the UK, France, Russia, and China plus Germany -- in Vienna in 2015. The president, however, warned that the status quo could not last as the deal has to be observed by all of its signatories.

"The Islamic Republic has been committed to the JCPOA and its preservation. Iran has been the only party to have [ever] paid the price of preserving the JCPOA. But this status is unsustainable in its current form," he noted.

Under his signature "maximum pressure" policy against Iran, former U.S. president Donald Trump withdrew Washington from the landmark accord and restored the economic sanctions that the deal had lifted. The US also began threatening third countries with "secondary sanctions" if they did business with Iran in defiance of the bans.

Rouhani noted that the U.S.'s "maximum pressure" policy and its illegal sanctions had, as acknowledged by U.S. officials themselves, been defeated in the face of the Iranian nation.

"In order for the JCPOA to be preserved and revived, it is necessary for all of the deal's members to fully implement Resolution 2231."

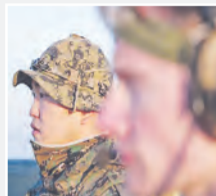
The president said Iran was prepared to "immediately" reverse its nuclear counter-steps once the US lifted the sanctions and "abandoned its policy of threat and pressure" against the Islamic Republic.

Rouhani also said Iran was prepared to cooperate with international organizations towards resolution of regional crises. Later Coveney met his Iranian counterpart Mohammad Javad Zarif.

Coveney who arrived at Tehran on Saturday held talks on issues of mutual interest with Zarif. Ireland is the facilitator of the UN Security Council Resolution 2231 that endorsed the JCPOA.

4 INTERNATIONAL

**South Korea,
U.S. Scale Back Military
Drill Over Coronavirus**
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ViewPoint
By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

**Religion Has
Never Been an Opium**

Leftist and rightist thoughts, according to Martyr Master Morteza Motahhari, in a root contradiction have been to compete with Islam as the most guiding school of thought and to ignore its human-related aims.

This dear and lasting Master in the garb of a noble ideologue has a famous sentence that when one ponders about it deeply, he finds the current condition of the world more understandable. He says, "Left and Right are both like two sharp edges of a scissors that when they reach each other, are after cutting Islam." Just a couple of days ago I was reading an article from Master Yadollah Javani that I like to quote it here in my article entirely.

He writes, "If religion used to be presented as the opium to the people and as a factor for human society backwardness before the victory of the Islamic Revolution, but today Islam has clarified all ways of salvation of human from all man-made deadlocks. The era of man-made schools with materialistic approach has come to its end. Socialism should be studied in the history museums and liberalism is agonizing and it will never revive from its death bed. The Islamic Revolution with the slogan of "No to the East, No to the West" targeted the socialist and liberalist school of thoughts, and with reviving the genuine Islam of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) it put on display the capacities of political Islam for administering the human societies. The Islamic Republic in action proved that not only Islam is not an opium to the people and the factor for keeping human societies backward, but also it is for the growth and excellence of mankind and his progress either individually or socially. With the Islamic Revolution and Iranian nation's 42 years of resistance against all pressures and plots of the satanic and arrogant powers, most of false allegations against Islam like "the contradiction between science and belief" have turned pale. When the Islamic Republic defines "Islamic Civilization" and paving the ground for "growth and excellence of human" on the earth as its doctrine, this doctrine and all goals inspired by it can have describable attractions for all humans from any ethnic and race. Emergence of Islamic resistance in the strategic West Asia region, Islamic awakening in all Muslim states, attention to spirituality in all countries in the world, the growth of Islamism in the Western societies especially in Europe are all signs of charms of the political Islam."

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**Georgia Bans Bitumen
Imports From Iran**

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Georgia has banned imports of bitumen from Iran, according to Tehran.

Bitumen and other infrastructure-related commodities like clinker, rebar and cement, were classified as items that would not be imported from Iran from February. As a result, bitumen exports from Iran to Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia have declined.

"Our bitumen producers located in Tabriz [in northwest Iran] were unhappy about the export ban that has happened in neighboring countries such as Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Turkey," said an Iranian source.

Iran exported around 105,000t and 35,000t to Georgia and Armenia respectively before 2018, based on industry statistics. Since then, higher availability of cargoes from countries like Russia could have resulted in reduced exports from Iran.

"Our buyers have switched to import bitumen from Socar in Azerbaijan, then Russia and Iraq instead of Iran over the past year," said a market source.

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Homegrown 'Massaf' Assault Rifle Unveiled

TEHRAN (IFP) - Iranian Defense Minister Brigadier General Amir Hatami has unveiled a domestically-built assault rifle named "Massaf".

The advanced assault rifle was unveiled along with a number of sport weapons in a ceremony held in Tehran on Sunday, March 7, 2021.

The Iranian assault rifle has a calibre of 7.62x51mm NATO, and its effective firing range equipped with a day vision and a thermal vision scope is respectively 800 and 600 meters.

Massaf is apparently the Iranian version of the German assault rifle HK417, manufactured by Heckler & Koch.

Putin Responds to Ayatollah Khamenei's "Important" Message

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Russia's President Vladimir Putin responds in writing to an important message that had been forwarded to him last month on the part of Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei, in which the Leader had underlined the "strategic and strong" nature of the two countries' ties.

Russia's Ambassador to Tehran Levan Jagarian handed over the response to Ali Akbar Velayati, a senior advisor to Ayatollah Khamenei, on Saturday.

Iran's Parliament Speaker Mohammad-Baqer Qalibar had delivered the message in the form of a letter by the Leader, to Chairman of the State Duma Vyacheslav Viktorovich Volodin during a three-day visit to Moscow in February.

Speaking during the trip, Qalibar had noted that through the message, Ayatollah Khamenei had laid emphasis on the "strong and strategic nature of relations between Iran and Russia."

The quality of the ties had rendered them insusceptible to political changes and unilateral approaches throughout the world, Qalibar had added, still citing the contents of the letter.

In their Saturday meeting, Velayati and the Russian envoy also addressed the issue of bilateral relations, stressing the importance of their development in all areas, including the defense, oil, nuclear, industrial, agricultural, and trade sectors.

Velayati called the neighbors "important friends" to one another, whose strategic relationship was characterized by "adherence to reciprocal respect."

The official pointed to the longevity of the countries' strategic ties as well as



their economic, cultural, and commercial cooperation, and noted how regional situations and developments had deepened the two sides' cooperation and interaction even further.

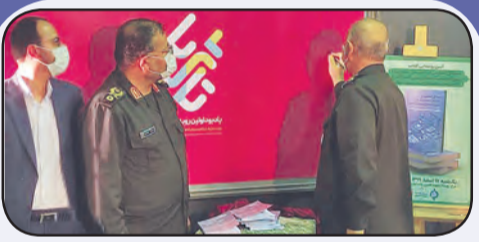
The advisor cited Iran and Russia's decisive contribution to Syria's anti-terror struggle that has been going on at Damascus' request, and their consultations and contribution to restoration of peace between Azerbaijan and Armenia late last year as important instances of their successful cooperation.

In the case of Syria, Velayati said, Tehran and Moscow's "very effective cooperation" helped the Arab country triumphantly resist "an imposed international war" that was recruiting more than 70 countries. He was referring to the 2014 invasion of Syria by a bloated United States-led coalition under the pretext of fighting the Takfiri terrorist group of Daesh.

Velayati said the strategic nature of the Russo-Iranian relations, therefore, warranted effective cooperation on the regional and international arenas.

The Russia ambassador, for his part, expressed delight concerning the progressive quality of the bilateral ties, noting that the countries had taken "effective steps" towards enhancing the relations.

It's Time for Decline of Great Powers



TEHRAN (IP) - The chief commander of the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC) said that we are in the era of the decline of great powers that consider themselves ahead of the world in terms of science and technology.

In an exhibition entitled "Lifelong-learning", support and commercialization of technological and innovative capacities of Basijis (voluntary forces), Major-General Hossein Salami stated that Iran must begin scientific and economic independence and leave behind the enemies in scientific progress.

Noting that no countries helped Iran progress, he added that the Iranians achieved progress, freedom, and value.

"Despite all-inclusive sanctions, Iran has been able to meet the needs of society and be a country where there is no sign of any sanctions," he added.

"The main point of our power is the youth who are building the future of the country and have nothing short of lasting stability, progress, and independence," Salami explained.

He pointed out that Iran was powerful in defense and the industrial, scientific, economic, civil, cultural, and political aspects and the whole world.

"We have a wise leadership to reach the peaks of progress and a nation with the will and awareness of knowledge and young people who are responsible and forward-looking in the field of scientific progress," Salami pointed.

He concluded that Iran was the birthplace of a new human civilization based on spirituality, morality, human dignity, freedom, identity, and progress in all areas.

Martyr Fakhri-zadeh Exhibition entitled "lifelong-learning", support and commercialization of technological and innovative capacities of Basijis, was held focusing on solving production surge problems in Tehran.

Foreign Intervention in Iraq's Affairs Detrimental to Entire Region

TEHRAN (IFP) - President Hassan Rouhani says Tehran is against any kind of foreign intervention in Iraq's internal affairs and considers it detrimental to the Arab country and the entire region.

Speaking in a phone conversation with Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi on Saturday, the Iranian president said the security, integrity, and peace in Iraq is a priority for Iran.

"We are against any kind of foreign intervention in Iraq's internal affairs and we consider it detrimental to the country and the entire region," he noted.

President Rouhani described Iraq as a Muslim country and a friend of Iran which has a very important position in the political and security interactions of the region.

He also stressed the development of relations and cooperation between the two countries in all fields of mutual interest. Rouhani referred to the potentialities in Iran and Iraq for cooperation as two neighboring countries, and said, "The promotion of economic cooperation alongside political relations is very important."

The president also referred to the billions of dollars of Iran's money illegally blocked in Iraq, which has not been yet released despite the promises of Iraqi officials, stressing that Iran's assets in Iraq should immediately be released.

The president further noted that the presence of American troops in regional countries, including Iraq, causes instability. "The Americans have always had a destructive role in the region, and the acceleration of implementing the Iraqi parliament's resolution regarding expelling American troops from the country can help establish peace and stability in the country and the region," he added.

Stating that regional issues and problems need to be resolved by regional countries themselves, President Rouhani emphasized Iran's readiness for cooperation with regional countries in this regard with the aim of preserving security and peace.

The president also referred to the good agreements between Tehran and Baghdad for development of cooperation and relations, including the Shalamcheh-Basra railway project, stressing the importance of accelerating the implementation of the agreements.

"Fortunately, important steps have been taken in this regard, and we need to attempt to consolidate and develop this relation further," he added.

In turn, the Prime Minister of Iraq described Iran as a friendly country and a good neighbour of Iraq, and stressed the development of relations between the two countries in all fields.

He further described the Shalamcheh-Basra railway as an important step in the development of economic and trade relations between Tehran and Baghdad.

Mustafa al-Kadhimi Appreciated Iran for helping establish stability and security in Iraq, describing America's sanctions against Iran as illegal and unfair.

"Fortunately, with the changes in the American administration, new conditions have been provided for countries for cooperation, and Iraq will do whatever it can for the complete lifting of the sanctions against Iran."

The Iraqi Prime Minister also said that a special committee has been formed in the country to facilitate the process of the transit of goods between the two countries.

Zarif, Irish Counterpart Eye Expanding Relations

TEHRAN (IP) - Foreign Minister and his Irish counterpart consulted on mutual interest issues and expanding bilateral relations.

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and his Irish counterpart Simon Coveney held a meeting on Sunday, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tehran.

The Irish Foreign Minister also met the Iranian

President Hassan Rouhani earlier on Sunday.

Coveney said in a statement posted on the Irish Foreign Ministry's website on Saturday, saying: "The trip to Iran follows a decision made by the government last week to facilitate the staying of a charge d'affaires and reopen the Irish embassy in Tehran by 2023, at an important juncture in bilateral relations."

Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe Released

TEHRAN (IP) - Iranian-British national Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, imprisoned for five years in Iran, was freed on Sunday, her lawyer said.

Zaghari-Ratcliffe, 42, was imprisoned in Iran for 5 years on charges of trying to orchestrate a soft overthrow of the Islamic Republic.

The prosecutor general of Tehran had stated in October 2017 that she was being held for running "a BBC Persian online journalism course which was aimed at recruiting and training people to spread propaganda against Iran."

On June 24, 2019, Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman said Zaghari-Ratcliffe would serve out her five-year prison sentence.

However, Zaghari-Ratcliffe's husband has been told a new court case against her is scheduled for next Sunday and she will face new charges.

1m Doses of COVID-19 Vaccine To Enter in Iran by March 20

TEHRAN (IP) - The spokesman for the National Task Force for Fighting Coronavirus announced the entry of one million doses of the COVID-19 vaccine by the end of the Iranian year (March 20).

On Saturday night in a special news talk show, Alireza Raisi stated that by the end of the Iranian year, Iran would increase the total number of vaccines imported from Russia, China, and India to one million doses by receiving another 400,000 doses of vaccine from Bharat of India.

He noted that the first batch (1,100,000 doses) of the COVAX vaccine of the World Health Organization (WHO) would enter Iran, and the total number of these vaccines would increase to 2 million doses to continue vaccination in the country.

He pointed out that by the arrival of the second batch of the COVAX vaccine, the number of imported vaccines would increase to 4.2 million doses, which would boost vaccination in Iran.

"The Pasteur Institute vaccine will be available soon, and in addition to the Baretat vaccine, the number of available vaccines will increase to 10 to 12 million doses at the beginning of next summer, including imported and home-made vaccines," Raisi said. He added that to further control the COVID outbreak in the country, flights from 32 countries to Iran were currently banned.

Exploded Tanks in Afghanistan Do Not Belong to Iran

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran's NIORDC announced that none of the tanks burnt in the massive fire that broke out at Abu Nasr Farahi customs on the Iran-Afghanistan border on Sat. belong to Iran.

Head of the Public Relations department of the National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company (NIORDC), Fatemeh Kahi, assured on Sunday that none of the Iranian installations at the border have been damaged.

Local officials in Afghanistan's Farah province said that a fire broke out at Abu Nasr Farahi customs in the province on the border with Iran and has not yet been contained.

Farah Governor Taj Mohammad Jahed described the blaze as "severe" and said there were no facilities to contain it in the port of Abu Nasr Farahi.

Iran dispatched firefighting crews to put off the massive fire. This was reportedly the second fire in Farah customs in the last two weeks.

Imposing Sanctions Against Iran Ineffective

TEHRAN (MNA) - First Vice President said that the U.S. government must follow the path of logic and rationality towards Iran.

First Vice President Eshagh Jahangiri made the remarks on Saturday, noting the U.S. imposed sanctions against Iran in order to force the Islamic Republic to surrender, however, the Iranian nation did not accept the humiliation. He went on to say that U.S. illegal sanctions will be removed in near future due to the measures adopted by the Iranian government.

According to Jahangiri, the U.S. knew that the assassination of Lt. General Soleimani was not an easy task, therefore they were prepared for a major confrontation. However, Tehran gave an appropriate response to the enemy using all the capabilities of the country.

Iran's Support for Iraq, Syria Based on Fraternity

TEHRAN (IRNA)-Foreign Ministry said on Sunday that the country's support for Iraq and Syria in the fight against terrorism has been based on the principle of fraternity, not economic returns.

In a press statement on the remarks made by the Secretary of Iran's Expediency Discernment Council Mohsen Rezaee in a recent interview, the ministry said that they were personal views of the interviewee and far from Iran's stance.

"In all cases and occasions, Iran rushed to help Iraq and Syria governments based on the principle of fraternity; this is manifested in the fight against ISIS," the statement added.

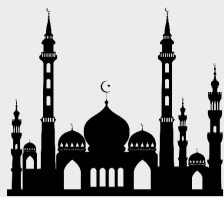
"Understanding the danger of terrorism in the region, Iran showed up at the request of Iraq and Syria governments," according to the FM Public Relations.

Previously, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif took to Twitter to react to his remarks, saying: "Iranian polity is vibrant & officials express diverse opinions But those opinions should NOT be confused with state policy."

"As Iran's FM & chief nuclear negotiator, I will shortly present our constructive concrete plan of action—through proper diplomatic channels," Zarif added.

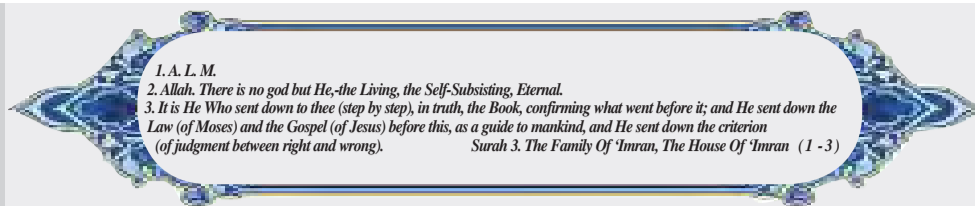
Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh also reacted, stressing that any issue related to foreign policy would be announced only by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and through its channels.

Speaking to Financial Times, Rezaee had suggested that Iran's assistance to neighboring countries struggling with terrorism was done in return for economic advantages.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:15
■ Evening (Maghreb)	18:23
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:02
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:23



Iran-Afghanistan-Uzbekistan Corridor to Bring "Stability"

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – The vice-president of IPIS noted that the implementation of the Iran-Afghanistan-Uzbekistan transport corridor will help stabilize the economic situation in this country, bringing great benefits to the Afghan people.

A video conference held on the topic "Iran and Uzbekistan: bilateral and regional cooperation", between the Institute for Political and International Studies (IPIS) of Iran and the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan (ISRS).

During the event, the whole range of topical issues of bilateral relations and the prospects for their further development were discussed, the official website of ISRS reported.

Particular emphasis is placed on the need to accelerate the processes of connecting the transport and logistics hubs of the two countries and strengthen interaction in promoting the peace process in Afghanistan.

Relations between Uzbekistan and Iran are traditionally based on the principles of mutual respect and consideration of the interests of both countries and have centuries-old origins, ISMI director Eldor Aripov said in the meeting.

These ties, according to E. Aripov, were developed with the election of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Sh.M. Mirziyoyev.

As noted by the director of IPIS Seyed Kazem Sadjadpur, the growing interest of Iranian business circles in Uzbekistan and in general in Central Asia is due to the modern regional policy of Tashkent, thanks to which the region is turning into a space of peace, sustainable development and mutually beneficial cooperation.

He added that Uzbekistan has established itself as a leading representative of the region, which has a positive impact on the nature of regional relations.

Developing this topic, the head of the ISMI center, Bakhtiyor Mustafayev, noted that the radical change in the political climate in Central Asia, achieved thanks to the proactive diplomacy of Uzbekistan, contributed to the growth of investment attractiveness and improvement of the economic performance of the region.

Supporting this opinion, the first secretary of the Embassy of the Republic of Uzbekistan in Iran, Eldor Askarov, spoke in favor of expanding cooperation in all areas of mutual interest.

Among the most priority areas of cooperation, he identified trade, industrial cooperation, and cultural and humanitarian direction.



Gholam Hussein Yadegari, Director of the Department for Bilateral Relations under the Iranian Foreign Ministry, also pointed to the need for strengthening cooperation in these areas.

According to him, Iran highly appreciates the presence of common traditions and the historical proximity of the peoples of Uzbekistan and Iran in cultural terms, which contributes to better mutual understanding at the political level.

In turn, Bahman Agarazi, a senior researcher at the IPIS, focused on the issues of building transport and communication interconnection between countries.

He regarded this direction as the most promising, capable of creating a turning point in bilateral cooperation.

The Iranian expert emphasized that the seaports of Iran are geographically closest (the ports of Bandar Abbas and Chabahar) to the transport communications of Uzbekistan, which makes it possible to reduce transport costs when using the transit potential of the Termez-Mazar-i-Sharif-Herat-Delorum-Bandar-Abbas / Chabahar corridors.

Summing up the opinions of his colleagues, the vice-president of IPIS Majid Gafelebashi noted that the implementation of the Iran-Afghanistan-Uzbekistan transport corridor, bringing great benefits to the Afghan people, will help stabilize the economic situation in this country.

This will be a logical continuation of efforts to resolve the conflict in Afghanistan and an important condition for achieving long-term stability on Afghan soil, he added.

In general, the conference participants agreed that there is significant potential for cooperation in Iranian-Uzbek relations.

In this regard, the experts of the two institutions agreed to continue the dialogue to identify promising cooperation projects between the countries in the near future.

IME Weekly Trades Edge Up

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Close to 940,000 tons of commodities worth of 123,000 billion rials were traded last week on the International Mercantile Exchange (IME) spot platforms.



The market cap, released by the international affairs of the IME, reports that the previous week saw rise in trade volume and value of listed spot commodities with near 940,000 tons of underlying assets' trade.

The industrial trading floor of the exchange saw trade of 478,000 tons of steel sections and 94,000 tons of copper, aluminum, zinc ingots, iron ore, coking coal, and 16 kilograms of gold bar.

In the domestic petrochemical trade venue and the export ring, market participants traded 362 tons of polymers, vacuum bottom, bitumen, polymeric material, chemical products, lube cut, base oil, insulation rolls and sulfur.

The agriculture market of the IME sold 600 tons of dates and the side market of the exchange sold 4800 tons of non-exchange-listed commodities.

Total spot market volume within the period in question reached 940,000 tons worth of \$500m showing 19% and 17% rise respectively compared to the week earlier.

As the market prepares to bid a farewell to the year 1399 in less than 15 days, trade activity is gaining momentum by traders and clients before the week-long holiday of the New Year. Therefore, the manufacturing units and plants are intensifying works of trade to secure as much commodity as they can afford for their stockpile as the hiatus is looming. It's worth noting that, the IME transactions surpassed last year's trade figures in less than 9 month of trade activity this year and is forecast to wrap up higher by 35% than the year earlier.

EAEU Member Companies Invited to Visit Iran



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - To take part in the First Eurasian Exhibition in Tehran, Iranian Minister of Energy invited Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU)'s member companies to visit the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) holds a prestigious trade event every year and the First Eurasian Exhibition, which is going to be held in Tehran Permanent International Exhibitions on May 18-21, 2021, provides a great opportunity for Iranian traders, producers and neighboring countries especially members of Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU).

In an interview with Sputnik on Sat., Iranian Minister of Energy Reza Ardakanian stated, "In addition, we seek to prepare and develop relations of chambers of commerce in different provinces of Iran with their partners in Eurasian Economic Union's member states optimally."

Given the diversity of Iran's trade fields in terms of diverse climatic conditions, a variety of agricultural products and consumer goods are produced in Iran throughout the year, Ardakanian added.

In addition, Islamic Republic of Iran has vast and rich mineral resources that provide a good opportunity to supply these products, he said, adding, "We hope that organizing First Eurasian Exhibition in Iran will be highly welcomed by businessmen, traders and producers of neighboring countries especially Eurasian Economic Union's member states."

Elsewhere in his remarks, he pointed to the participants in this prestigious trade event and stated that member states of the Eurasian Economic Union, including five countries of Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and of course Iran's neighboring countries can also take part in this exhibition.

Certainly, holding these events strengthen Iran's determination to use the advantages of Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) with Eurasia, energy minister emphasized.

The government of the Islamic Republic of Iran is determined to make this membership 'permanent', so that Iran can have a broad economic relationship with the Eurasian member states, he added.

Majlis Wraps Up budget Bill Discussions

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The amendment to the new fiscal year (2021-2022) was finalized by legislators in the Parliament. The lawmakers finalized the amended budget bill for the upcoming new Iranian year (starts March 21) after several sessions and debates over the issue over the past two weeks.

Last week, Iranian lawmakers approved the revenues section in the next fiscal year's budget bill with 198 votes in favor, two votes against while four MPs abstained from voting.

In the upcoming fiscal year, the operating budget, including revenues derived mainly from taxation and exports at the disposal of the government, has been projected to stand at 9,107 trillion rials.

Moreover, revenues earmarked for ministries and government institutions worth 950.73 trillion rials take the total sum of the general budget to 10,058 trillion rials.

Lawmakers approved the outlines of the fiscal 2021-22 budget revised by the government on February 16. The approval came after the parliamentarians had initially rejected the outlines of the bill on February 1 and returned it to the government for revision.

The operating budget had been initially projected to stand at 8,410 trillion rials in the original bill, registering a 47% increase compared with the current year's budget (2020-21). The government increased it to 8,546 trillion rials in the amendment.

Revenues earmarked for ministries and governmental institutions were projected to stand at 894 trillion rials from 884 trillion rials in the first draft, which took the total sum of the general budget to 9,440 trillion rials from 9,298 trillion rials.

The ceiling set for the government's total budget increased from 24,357 trillion rials to 24,499 trillion rials.

The budget of state companies, banks and for-profit organizations had been put at 15,619 trillion rials in the original proposal. The government kept the figure unchanged in the budget amendment.

Total tax earnings had been set at 2,515 trillion rials in the first draft.

After the rejection of the first bill, the government added 250 trillion rials to tax revenues in the amendment. (1USD= 242,800 rials on Sunday, March 07, 2021)

4,200m Drilling Carried Out in South Pars Oil/Gas Field

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Petropars Group CEO Hamidreza Masoudi said on Sunday that the company, despite unsettled weather in the winter, some 4,200 meters drilling was carried out and that the drilling operation is underway at Phase 11 of South Pars Gas Field.

Masoudi said on Sunday that the drilling operation started on December 14 last year and has reached a depth of 4,200 meters so far.

To achieve early production in the last Phase of South Pars Field, he said that drilling is carried out in two stages: first, one delineation well as well as three extraction wells are drilled and completed and then, eight well are drilled after installation of the extraction platform.

He underlined that the company's objective is to use the utmost of domestic production and service capacity to support Iranian oil and gas industry.

100 percent of initial study and public services contracts, 50 percent of subsurface and surface equipment and 100 percent of subsurface and surface contractors were procured from Iranian domestic market, according to the official. Phase 11 of South Pars Gas Field construction and operation were set to be done by a consortium of France's Total, China's CNPC and Iran's Petropars. But after U.S. withdrawal of Iran nuclear deal and resumption of its unilateral sanctions, Total and CNPC abstained and left the project.

Petropars, afterwards, was assigned the development of the last phase of South Pars.



Iran to Cash out Frozen Funds in Iraq

TEHRAN (IRNA)- Finance and Economic Affairs Minister Farhad Dejjpasand on Saturday said that Iran will cash out its frozen funds in Iraq.

Iran is reaching its right and these irrational pressures are reduced, Dejjpasand pointed out.

He expressed the hope that these resources will be spent on facilitating economic activities.

The head of the Central Bank will provide further information in this regard in a documented and accurate manner, he underscored.

Earlier, Chairman of Iran-South Korea joint chamber of commerce Hossein Tanhayi has said that Seoul is supposed to pay Iran's frozen funds based on the items requested by the Iranian officials.

Tehran, Baghdad Discuss Shalamcheh-Basra Railway

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iranian and Iraqi roads ministers discussed Shalamcheh-Basra railway connection between the two countries.

In a meeting with visiting Iranian Minister of Roads and Urban Development Mohammad Eslami on Sunday, Iraqi Minister of Transport Nasser Hussein Al-Shibli emphasized the need for promoting quality of land, sea, air, and rail transport between the two countries.

The two sides also stressed the possibility of connecting the railway from Shalamcheh to Basra province in Iraq.

The prospect of joint cooperation connecting Shalamcheh-Basra railway was discussed between the two sides as well. Iraqi transport minister said that his country is ready to work on a transit system with the Iranian side according to the administrative instructions for transit cooperation with neighboring countries such as Turkey, Syria and Jordan, and even start of cooperation with the Iranian side.

He went on to announce plans to hold meetings to resolve remaining issues and finalize an agreement between the two countries.

During the meeting, he discussed residents of Shatt al-Arab and cooperation of the two sides in facilitating navigation for its residents. Iranian Minister of Roads and Urban Development, for his part, pointed to the issue of transportation as a "vital lifeline of trade" and expressed readiness of the Islamic Republic of Iran to support and mutual cooperation and strengthen relations between two neighboring countries to improve quality of transportation.

Maduro Receives First Dose of Russian Vaccine



CARACAS (Dispatches) - Venezuelan president Nicolas Maduro and his wife Cilia Flores received a first dose of the Russian Sputnik V vaccine against the coronavirus on Saturday, state television reported.

"I am vaccinated," said a smiling Maduro, joking that he should now be able to speak Russian.

On February 18, Venezuela began administering a first dose of the Sputnik vaccine to health care workers, after receiving an initial shipment of 100,000 of the 10 million doses it has ordered.

The country has also received 500,000 doses of the Chinese-made Sinopharm vaccine, which was due to start being administered from Monday.

Mexican President Defends 10-Foot Barriers



CITY (Dispatches) - Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador on Saturday said a metallic barrier to wall off the presidential palace ahead of a planned women's march on International Women's Day was to avoid provocation and protect historic buildings from vandalism.

In a country where femicides rose nearly 130% between 2015 and 2020, critics said the decision to erect the 10-foot-high (3-meter) barriers was symptomatic of Lopez Obrador's apathy toward the crisis of violence afflicting women. Ahead of International Women's Day on Monday, barriers were also installed around other emblematic buildings and monuments in downtown Mexico City where a year ago tens of thousands of people protested rampant violence against women and impunity.

South Korea, U.S. Scale Back Military Drill Over Coronavirus



SEOUL (Reuters) - South Korea and the United States will conduct its springtime military exercise this week, but the joint drill will be smaller than usual because of the coronavirus pandemic, Seoul said on Sunday.

The allies will begin a nine day "computer-simulated command post exercise" on Monday, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement. South Korea and the United States decided to move forward with the drills after "comprehensively taking into consideration the COVID-19 situation, the maintenance of the combat readiness posture, the denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula and the establishment of peace," the JCS said, noting that the exercise is "defensive" in nature.

The drills will not include outdoor manoeuvres, which have been carried out throughout the year, and the number of troops and equipment will be minimized due to the pandemic, Yonhap news agency reported. The exercises also provide a chance to assess South Korea's readiness to take over wartime operational control (OPCON), and the series of scaled back drills could complicate President Moon Jae-in's drive to complete the transfer before his term ends in 2022.

Even before the pandemic the drills had been reduced to facilitate U.S. negotiations aimed at dismantling Pyongyang's nuclear programs.

The combined drills are closely monitored by North Korea which calls them a "rehearsal for war".

While Pyongyang has sometimes responded to such drills with its own shows of military force, it may be unlikely to do so this time, said Chad O'Carroll, CEO of Korea Risk Group, which monitors North Korea.

"I think there's too much on the domestic agenda going wrong to risk any significant tit-for-tat escalation," he said on Twitter. "And this is a government which tends to focus most of its resources on dealing with one key issue at a time."

North Korea's drastic measures to prevent a COVID-19 outbreak have exacerbated human rights abuses and economic hardship, including reports of starvation, for its citizens, already battered by international sanctions, a United Nations investigator has said.

Swiss Vote on "Burqa Ban"

GENEVA (Dispatches) - Switzerland voted Sunday on whether to ban full facial coverings in public places, despite women in Islamic full-face veils being an exceptionally rare sight in Swiss streets.

Polls indicate a slim majority supports the move, in a vote that comes after years of debate following similar bans in other European countries -- and in some Muslim-majority states.

Even though the proposal "Yes to a ban on full facial coverings" does not mention the burqa or the niqab -- which leaves the eyes uncovered -- there is no doubt what the debate concerns.

Campaign posters reading "Stop radical Islam!" and "Stop extremism!", featuring a woman in a black niqab, have been plastered around Swiss cities.

Protesters Back on Myanmar Streets

YANGON (Reuters) - Tens of thousands of people came out on the streets in Myanmar on Sunday to demonstrate against last month's coup despite overnight raids by security forces in the main city Yangon to crack down on protest leaders.

The biggest protest was in Myanmar's second city of Mandalay, local media said. Protests were also held in Yangon, in Kale near the Indian border, and in Dawei, a coastal city in the south. There were no reports of violence.

The Southeast Asian country has been plunged into turmoil since the military overthrew and detained elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi on Feb. 1. Daily demonstrations and strikes have choked business and paralysed administration and the United Nations says security forces have killed more than 50 people.

Into the early hours of Sunday, residents said soldiers and police moved into several districts of Yangon, firing shots. They arrested at least three in Kyauktada Township, residents there said. They did not know the reason for the arrests.

"They are asking to take out my father and brother. Is no one going to help us? Don't you even touch my father and brother. Take us too if you want to take them," one woman screamed as two of them, an actor and his son, were led off.

Soldiers also came looking for a lawyer who worked for Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy but were unable to find him, a member of the now dissolved parliament, Sithu Maung, said in a Facebook post.

Reuters was unable to reach police for comment. A junta spokesman did not answer calls requesting comment.

Well over 1,700 people have been detained under the junta by Saturday, according to figures from the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners advocacy group. It did not give a figure for overnight detentions.

"Detainees were punched and kicked with military boots, beaten with police batons, and then dragged into police vehicles," AAPP said in a statement. "Security forces entered residential areas and tried to arrest further protesters, and shot at the homes, destroying many."

Myanmar authorities said on Saturday they had exhumed the body of 19-year-old Kyal Sin, who has become an icon of the protest movement after she was shot dead in Mandalay on Wednesday wearing a T-shirt that read "Everything will be OK".

State-run MRTV said a surgical investigation showed she could not have been killed by police because the wrong sort of projectile was found in her head and she had been shot from behind, whereas police were in front.



Pakistani PM Wins Vote of Confidence



ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan has won a vote of confidence that he sought from the lower house of parliament, following a surprise electoral defeat on a Senate seat earlier this week.

Khan is the leader of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party, which leads a ruling coalition, and was elected to power in a general election in 2018.

The prime minister received 178 votes reposing confidence in his leadership in the 342-member National Assembly, the lower house of parliament, Speaker Asad Qaiser said following Saturday's vote.

"Consequently, Mr Imran Khan has obtained the vote of confidence from the National Assembly and commands the confidence of the majority of the members of the National Assembly as the prime minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan," he said.

On Friday, the opposition's 10-party Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) announced that it would boycott the vote, and the opposition benches were almost entirely deserted throughout the proceedings on Saturday.

Boy Killed in Senegal Protests

DAKAR (Dispatches) - A 17-year-old boy was killed by gunfire in southern Senegal on Saturday, a government official said, and several police stations were ransacked as opponents of President Macky Sall called for more protests next week.

The boy was killed during clashes in the southern town of Diaobe, said the official, who asked not to be named. Protesters also burned down a military police station and ransacked several government buildings, the official said.

At least five people have died in protests sparked by Wednesday's arrest of Ousmane Sonko, Senegal's most prominent opposition leader. It is the worst political unrest in years for a country widely seen as one of West Africa's most stable.

A spokesman for Senegal's military police confirmed one person had died during clashes in Diaobe but did not say under what circumstances. He said protesters ransacked six police stations across the country on Saturday.

Sonko, who finished third in the 2019 presidential election, was arrested after an employee of a beauty salon accused him of raping her. Sonko denies the allegation and says it is an attempt by Sall to kneecap a political rival.

The government denies this. The mostly young protesters cited a range of other grievances too, including high unemployment and strict measures to control the coronavirus that have inflicted economic pain, especially on informal workers.

Many are especially dubious about the accusation against Sonko because two other top rivals of Sall were previously targeted by criminal charges that prevented them from running for president in 2019.

In a statement, the opposition Movement to Defend Democracy (M2D) coalition called for three days of nationwide protests beginning on Monday. "M2D ... calls on the Senegalese people to pursue its mobilisation and peaceful struggle by using all of its constitutional rights to reject the dictatorship of Macky Sall," it said.

Swedish Police Break Up Coronavirus Demonstration in Stockholm



STOCKHOLM (Dispatches) - Swedish police on Saturday dispersed hundreds of opponents of coronavirus restrictions who staged a protest in the capital Stockholm in defiance of a ban on large gatherings.

Police blocked a bridge in the center of the city and said on their website they were in dialogue with organizers to persuade demonstrators to disperse.

TV images showed police shoving some protesters. The police said six officers were injured, one of whom was taken to hospital. Fifty people were moved on under a temporary pandemic law.

"Police have taken the decision to break up the non- authorised gathering which is ongoing," Stockholm police said on their website on Saturday.

Earlier this week, protest organiser Filip Sjöström told local media that he was expecting around 2,000 people to join the demonstration, which had been announced on Facebook.

TV images showed hundreds of people had gathered. According to Swedish daily Dagens Nyheter, demonstrators had travelled from several parts of Sweden, which has a ban on public gatherings of more than eight people.

Sweden, which has 10 million inhabitants, registered 4,831 new coronavirus cases on Friday, and 26 new deaths, taking the death toll to 13,003.

The government said last month that it would cut opening hours for restaurants, bars and cafes and tighten limits on the number of people allowed in shops, in a bid to ward off a third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The centre-left government has gradually tightened restrictions since late last year after keeping most schools, restaurants and businesses open, relying primarily on voluntary measures.

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5bdrs, S/p
green yard
Fully Furn

Parsian

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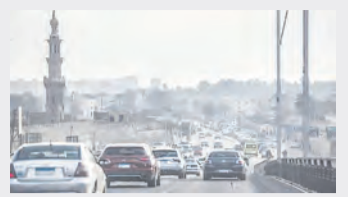
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Egypt Gets \$440m World Bank Loan

CAIRO (Dispatches) - The World Bank has approved a \$440 million loan to modernize signalling and upgrade track on 763 km of Egypt's 5,000 km rail network, the bank said in a statement. Egyptian National Railways (ENR) will put \$241 million into the project on the Cairo-Giza-Beni Suef section of the network, bringing the total cost to \$681 million, the World Bank said.

Obstacles faced by ENR showed there was "margin for improving its performance, namely in the realms of operations, cost recovery, maintenance, and customer service," it said.

Egypt has focused heavily on investment in transport and urban development infrastructure, seeking development finance to help fund the projects.



China Wants Economy To Grow Over 6% in 2021

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China's leaders said Friday they had set a target for GDP to grow more than 6 percent this year, as the world's second largest economy surges out of a pandemic-induced slump.

The global growth powerhouse stuttered in 2020, logging its slowest expansion in four decades as strict virus containment measures at home collided with a freeze in international trade.

The slowdown raised doubts about the Communist Party's ability to deliver on its pledge of continued prosperity in return for unquestioned political power. But with the coronavirus largely brought under control domestically, analysts expect a strong comeback, with some suggesting the economy could expand by as much as nine percent this year. Beijing usually sets a target it feels it can exceed. It did not set one at all last year.

Announcing the figure at the start of the annual legislative session, Premier Li Keqiang said the government had "taken into account the recovery of economic activity."

The target of over 6 percent also dovetails with future goals, Li said, and these include reform, innovation, and "high-quality development."

Authorities say they want to create 11 million new urban jobs this year, and keep urban unemployment around 5.5 percent.

Outside observers caution that China's unemployment figures may not tell the whole story, with many people across the vast nation involved in the informal workforce.

Analysts had widely predicted the continued global uncertainty would make it tricky for China to set a GDP target again this year, and greeted the 6 percent figure as deliberately cautious.

"The bar is set too low ... (it's) as if there is no target," ING chief economist for Greater China Iris Pang told AFP.

This could be because Beijing does not want to slash its growth target next year, when distortions from the pandemic subsided, added Nomura chief China economist Lu Ting.

The figure also reflects "the shifting focus from quantity to quality of economic growth," said Zhu Chaoping, a strategist at JPMorgan Asset Management.

That could include resources being allocated to long-term initiatives like environmental protection, Zhu added.

Leaders also did not specify a growth target in its new five-year plan draft published Friday, as is its usual custom, only saying it would be "maintained within a reasonable range." China has been trying to rebalance the economy from its export- and investment-led economic model to one driven by consumer spending and high-quality development.

The post-COVID economic rebound saw China's GDP growth recorded at about 2 percent last year, which made it the only major economy to post positive figures in a year lost to the virus.

With weakness around the world caused by the prolonged pandemic shutdown, capitals around the globe will be watching China's economic performance eagerly.

OPEC+ Decision to Extend Oil Output Cuts to Hit India Economic Recovery

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India, the world's third-biggest oil importer and consumer, said the decision by major producers to extend output cuts as prices move higher could threaten the consumption led-recovery in some countries.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and its allies, a group known as OPEC+, agreed on Thursday not to increase supply in April as they await a more substantial recovery in demand amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Oil prices jumped more than 2% on Friday, hitting their highest in nearly 14 months in reaction to the decision. "As one of the largest crude-consuming countries, India is concerned that such actions by producing countries have the potential to undermine consumption-led recovery and more so hurt consumers, especially in our price-sensitive market," Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas Dharmendra Pradhan told Reuters.

India, hit hard by the soaring oil prices, has urged producers to ease output cuts and help the global economic recovery.

"The decision by OPEC+ has saddened us. It is not good news for India, China, Japan, Korea and other consuming nations," Pradhan said. Rising oil prices are posing fiscal challenges for India, where heavily-taxed retail fuel prices have touched record highs in some parts of the country, threatening the demand-driven recovery.

India, Asia's third-largest economy, imports about 84% of its oil and relies on Middle Eastern supplies for meeting over three-fifths of its demand.

German Industrial Orders Jump on Export Demand

FRANKFURT AM MAIN (AFP) - New business for German industrial firms climbed in January on strong foreign demand, official data showed yesterday, but domestic orders took a hit from fresh coronavirus restrictions.

Orders rose 1.4 per cent month-on-month, federal statistics office Destatis said in seasonally adjusted figures, rebounding from a 2.2 per cent slump in December.

Compared with January 2020, new orders were up 2.5 per cent, Destatis said.

Industrial orders are closely watched as a key indicator of future economic activity, especially in manufacturing powerhouse Germany.

The month-on-month January increase was driven by a 4.2 per cent jump in new orders from abroad, particularly outside the eurozone, Destatis said.

Within Germany, new orders plunged 2.6 per cent, reflecting the impact of COVID-19 shutdowns that have sapped demand for consumer goods in Europe's top economy.

Slow Economic Recovery Ahead for Latin America

BOGOTA (Dispatches) - Latin America and the Caribbean face a bumpy road to economic recovery from the deep scars left by the coronavirus pandemic.

The labor markets in the region regressed at least 10 years, according to the International Labour Organization, reaching unemployment levels as high as 14.6% or 15.9% in countries with previously strong economies, such as Brazil and Colombia.

Unemployment rose 2.5% compared to the previous year, going from 8.1% to 10.6%, meaning that the number unemployed reached 30 million.

Poverty reached levels unseen in years in the region, with more than 16 million people having fallen into conditions of extreme poverty in 2020 due to the pandemic, totaling more than 83 million people, according to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). Although the IMF forecasts that Latin America's economy will grow 4.1% in 2021 - higher than the 3.6% it predicted last October - it does not compensate for the 9.4% that the region's economy shrank during 2020 due to the pandemic, compared to the

3% contraction projected for emerging economies by the organization. It is estimated that the region will return to previous income levels around the year 2023.

Latin America is one of the worst-affected regions due to the pandemic. With only 8% of the world population, the region accounts for 19% of the COVID-19 cases and about 27% of deaths, based on Johns Hopkins University data. Economic growth has been strongly impacted by lockdowns implemented by all countries, from Mexico to Argentina.

However, as countries began to loosen the measures during the second half of 2020, the economy has started to partially recover.

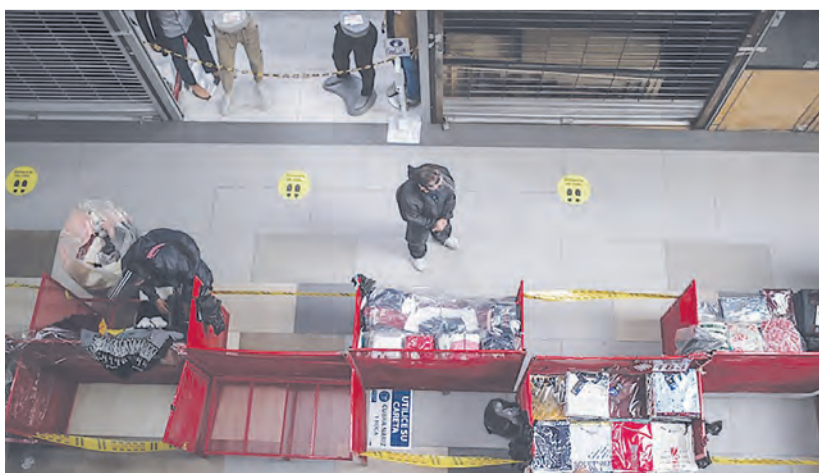
"The economies of Latin America and the Caribbean began to reverse the initial economic devastation left by the impacts of COVID-19, especially in the second quarter of 2020," said Alejandro Werner, the IMF's Western Hemisphere Department director, during a press conference on the fund's economic outlook for the region in February.

However, the IMF emphasized that Latin America and Caribbean economies will only bounce back from devastation caused by COVID-19 if there is a major reduction in coronavirus infections. "The resurgence of the pandemic at the end of last year and at the beginning of 2021 threatens to frustrate an already uneven recovery and to aggravate the enormous social and human costs that are being experienced," Werner added.

An example of the uneven recovery can be seen in the split by country of the average 4.1% growth that the IMF expects for the region for 2021. In fact, the World Bank's projections show ten countries with an above average expected growth and 16 with an expected growth below the 4.1% average growth of the region.

The first group includes nations such as Peru, which will grow 7.6% after a 12.0% contraction in 2020, Argentina will grow 4.9% after a 10.6% contraction in 2020 and Colombia, which will grow 4.9% after a 7.5 percent contraction last year.

The countries that are expected to grow below the 4.1% average growth include Bolivia, which will grow 3.9% after a 6.7% contraction in 2020, Mexico will grow 3.7% after a 9% contraction, and Brazil will grow 3% after a 4.5% contraction in 2020. Other countries are forecasted to continue the negative trend of growth during 2021, such as Nicaragua and Surinam. The recovery will depend, to a large extent, on how efficient countries are in distributing and administering the vaccine, Werner said. And so far, vaccination in Latin American has not taken real impulse.



More Than 20,000 U.S. Organizations Compromised Through Microsoft Flaw

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - More than 20,000 US organizations have been compromised through a back door installed via recently patched flaws in Microsoft Corp's email software, a person familiar with the US government's response said on Friday.

The hacking has already reached more places than all of the tainted code downloaded from SolarWinds Corp, the company at the heart of another massive hacking spree uncovered in December. The latest hack has left channels for remote access spread among credit unions, town governments and small businesses, according to records from the U.S. investigation.

Tens of thousands of organizations in Asia and Europe are also affected, the records show. The hacks are continuing despite emergency patches issued by Microsoft on Tuesday.

Microsoft, which had initially said the hacks consisted of "limited and targeted attacks," declined to comment on the scale of the problem on Friday but said it was working with government agencies and security companies to provide help to customers.

It added, "impacted customers should contact our support teams for additional help and resources." One scan of connected devices showed only 10% of those vulnerable had installed the patches by Friday, though the number was rising.

Because installing the patch does not get rid of the back doors, US officials are racing to figure out how to notify all the victims and guide them in their hunt.

All of those affected appear to run Web versions of email client Outlook and host them on their own machines, instead of relying on cloud providers. That may have spared many of the biggest companies and federal government agencies, the records suggest. The federal Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency did not respond to a request for comment.

Earlier on Friday, White House press secretary Jen Psaki told reporters that the vulnerabilities found in Microsoft's widely used Exchange servers were "significant," and "could have far-reaching impacts."

"We're concerned that there are a large number of victims," Psaki said.

Microsoft and the person working with the US response blamed the initial wave of attacks on a Chinese government-backed actor. A Chinese government spokesman said the country was not behind the intrusions.

What started as a controlled attack late last year against a few classic espionage targets grew last month to a widespread campaign. Security officials said that implied that unless China had changed tactics, a second group may have become involved.

More attacks are expected from other hackers as the code used to take control of the mail servers spreads.

Asian LNG Prices Edge Higher On Indian, Chinese Demand



SINGAPORE (Reuters) - Asian spot liquefied natural gas (LNG) prices edged higher this week, boosted by spot purchases from Chinese and Indian buyers though ample supply capped gains, industry sources told Reuters.

The average LNG price for April delivery into Northeast Asia was estimated at about \$5.70 per million British thermal units (mmBtu), up about 10 cents from the previous week, sources said.

Prices for cargoes delivered in May were estimated at about \$5.80 per mmBtu, they added. Several tenders were issued by both buyers and sellers this week.

GAIL (India) issued a tender seeking to buy two cargoes for delivery into India and offering two cargoes for loading from the United States, two industry sources said.

It likely bought the cargoes at \$5.40-5.50 per mmBtu, one source said.

India's Gujarat State Petroleum Corp (GSPC) is seeking two cargoes for delivery over late March and early April through two separate tenders, and is also seeking one cargo a month for delivery over May until April next year, sources said.

Guangzhou Gas bought a cargo for April 5-11 delivery into Dapeng at about \$5.60 to \$5.80 per mmBtu on a delivered ex-ship (DES) basis, while China Gas bought a cargo for April 9-15 delivery into Dalian at \$5.50 to \$5.70 per mmBtu, sources said.

China's Dongguan Daosen also bought a cargo for delivery into Shenzhen over March 31 to April 2 at \$5.50 to \$5.70 per mmBtu, one source said.

On the supply side, Malaysia's Petronas likely sold a cargo for early May delivery at around \$5.60 per mmBtu while Oman LNG may be offering a cargo for delivery in the second half, the source added.

Venture Global LNG expects to install the 7th and 8th of 18 liquefaction trains at its Calcasieu Pass LNG export plant in Louisiana, United States in the next few weeks, which is expected to add to supply by early next year.

Blood Donated in Iran Safest in World

TEHRAN (IRNA)- Managing Director of Iran's Blood Transfusion Organization Peyman Eshqi said on Sunday that donated blood in Iran is the safest in the world, adding that almost 2.1 million Iranians donate blood a year. Eshqi said that Iran's Blood Transfusion

Organization (IBTO) is a technical, specialized organization and over 80 percent of its staff consists of technical forces. In the meantime, he added, the IBTO is a cultural body that must be familiar with culture, interests and motives of the people it is communicating with.



US, EU to Suspend Tariffs in Boeing-Airbus Dispute

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - A first phone call on Friday clinched the first trade breakthrough to start rebuilding transatlantic relations between the United States and the European Union in the wake of the Trump presidency.

After U.S. President Joe Biden and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen spoke, both sides decided to suspend tariffs used in the long-standing Airbus-Boeing dispute for the next four months.

Von der Leyen said that "as a symbol of this fresh start, President Biden and I agreed to suspend all our tariffs imposed in the context of the Airbus-Boeing disputes, both on aircraft and non-aircraft products, for an initial period of four months."

The discussion hardly covered all outstanding issues that were left to fester ever more under the four-year presidency of former President Donald Trump, but the EU gladly took whatever it could get from the first personal exchange between the Biden and von der Leyen.

Von der Leyen called it "a very positive signal for our economic cooperation in the years to come".

"This is excellent news for businesses and industries on both sides of the Atlantic," she said.

With the initiative to ease the aircraft fight that long weighed on trade relations, the European Union - a 27-nation bloc whose executive branch is the European Commission - is seeking to rekindle the spirit of cooperation between Washington and Europe that has long defined global diplomacy.

Von der Leyen hopes it is the first indication that both the US and Europe will stand shoulder to shoulder like they have so often over the past century to face global challenges.

Von der Leyen said she invited Biden to a global health summit in Rome on May 21 to streamline the fight against COVID-19, the common enemy that has killed over a million people in the EU and US combined. She hopes the commonality would extend to foreign policy issues as well, where both could cooperate better to face the rising power of China.

On Friday though, it was trade that mattered and the suspension will give a four-month window to address the more fundamental issues. In the aircraft dispute, the US was allowed to impose tariffs on \$7.5bn of EU exports to the US and as a result of the deal, EU tariffs will be suspended on \$4bn of US exports.

The tariff suspension will affect everyone from French winemakers to German cookie bakers in Europe and U.S. spirits producers, among many others.



"Lifting this tariff burden will support the recovery of restaurants, bars and small craft distilleries across that country that were forced to shut down their businesses during the pandemic," the U.S. Distilled Spirits Council said.

Not that both sides can now drink to the cessation of trade hostilities.

Still outstanding, for example are the tariffs that Trump slapped on EU steel and aluminium, which enraged Europeans and other allies by calling their metals a threat to US national security. The so-called Article 232 proceeding both hurts European producers and raises the cost of steel for US companies. Europe retaliated by raising tariffs on US-made motorcycles, bourbon, peanut butter and jeans.

And Friday's mellow phone call has not dented Europe's push for digital taxes on US tech behemoths like Google and Amazon.

The breakthrough in the aircraft dispute, heading into its 17th year, should not be underestimated, though.

Religion Has Never Been...

FROM PAGE 1

The main reason behind this charm is its alignment and unison in the main mottoes of the Islamic Revolution like justice, liberty, ethics, spirituality, progress and human dignity, with an intact and health nature of human.



Now the Islamic Republic as the flag-bearer of the Islamic Revolution civilization movement has turned into an inspiring country for other nations but one should know that Islam has enough power for paving the path and removing all challenges provided that Islamic experts and intellectuals strive in accordance with Islam and with time requirements and operationalizing Islamic concepts and its sublime values, and rise for a deserved jihad in this regards. Now the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution, who has wisely in the past three decades steered the Revolution and the Islamic establishment towards the ideals and steered it to survive the tough passes, has such a demand from the Islamic scientists. Last week and in the meeting with the chairman and members of the Assembly of Experts, the Leader termed the spiritual and valuable concepts of Islam as the software of the structure of the Islamic establishment and called for upgrading this software in accordance with expansion of Islamic establishment activities and emergence of new challenges, saying, "One of the important tasks of scholars and intellectuals is to strengthen the school of thought of the Islamic government in order to operationalize the required concepts in the society."

Regarding the deep concepts that the writer has brought in his article, this notification is timely that why the Islamic Revolution in creating a psychological behavior bed has not provided the ground for the welfare of its citizens, to understand it better, I should mention that in the executive operation in the Islamic Republic we have faced with rightist and liberal governments and during the past 42, it has not been the Islamic Revolution to have set the executive policy, but it has been the choice that set the base for the behavior basics for running the country and if all convergent foundations in choosing had been aligned with the Islamic Revolution, we would have never faced with such a challenge that the Gini coefficient, used in the economy as the standard for representing income inequality, becomes so gravely wide.

Today fortunately the ground for better understanding of executive deviations has been set up and this optimism exists that on course of screening, we can provide a ground for a choice matching the Revolution material in order that people find a model fully in line with proper and religious concepts and move towards its materialization.

Iran Could Raze Tel...

FROM PAGE 1

The Zionist regime knows, and if it does not know, it should know that the Islamic Republic will raze Tel Aviv and Haifa to the ground if it commits a mistake," Brigadier General Amir Hatami said on Sunday.

"The order of the Commander-in-Chief of the Iranian Armed Forces has been carefully enacted and turned into a blueprint, which will be implemented with a single beckon from the Command-in-Chief. I advise them not to make this mistake, even verbally."

The remarks came after the Israeli minister of military affairs said the regime was updating plans for military strikes on Iran's nuclear sites in case Tehran continues what he characterized as "nuclear escalation".

In an interview with Fox News, Benny Gantz was asked about Iran's nuclear program and whether Israel was completing preparations to attack Iranian targets.

"We have them (plans) in our hands of course but we will continue constantly improving them," he said.

"The Iranian nuclear escalation must be stalled. If the world stops them before, it's very much good. But if not, we must stand independently and we must defend ourselves by ourselves."

Iran has repeatedly enunciated its nuclear program as exclusively civilian, subject to the most intensive UN supervisions ever.

Mars Rover Travels 6.5 Meters in Flawless First Drive



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - NASA's Mars rover Perseverance has taken its first, short drive on the surface of the red planet, two weeks after the robot science lab's picture-perfect touchdown on the floor of an enormous crater, mission managers said on Friday.

The Perseverance rover first ventured from its landing position Thursday, two weeks after landing on the Red Planet to seek signs of past life.

Taking directions from mission managers at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) near Los Angeles, the rover rolled four metres (13.1 feet) forward, turned about 150 degrees to its left and then drove backwards another 2.5 metres (8.2 feet) for a total of 6.5 metres (21.3 feet) during its half-hour test within Jezero Crater, site of an ancient, long-vanished lake bed and river delta on Mars.

"It went incredibly well," Anais Zarifian, a JPL mobility test engineer for Perseverance, said during a teleconference briefing with reporters, calling it a "huge milestone" for the mission.

The roundabout, back and forth drive lasted just 33 minutes and went so well that the six-wheeled rover was back on the move Friday.

Perseverance is capable of averaging 200 metres of driving a day.

NASA displayed a photo taken by the rover showing the wheel tread marks left in the reddish, sandy Martian soil after its first drive.

Another vivid image of the surrounding landscape shows a rugged, ruddy terrain littered with large, dark boulders in the foreground and a tall outcropping of rocky, layered deposits in the distance - marking the edge of the river delta.

So far, Perseverance and its hardware, including its main robot arm, appear to be operating flawlessly, according to Robert Hogg, deputy mission manager.

But JPL engineers still have additional equipment checks to run on the rover's many instruments before they will be ready to send the robot on a more ambitious journey as part of its primary mission to search for traces of fossilized microbial life.

The team has yet to conduct post-landing tests of the rover's sophisticated system to drill and collect rock samples for return to Earth via future Mars missions.

The deck of NASA's Perseverance Mars rover, featuring Planetary Instrument for X-ray Lithochemistry, one of the instruments on its stowed arm, is seen in an image taken by the rover's

More Than a Quarter of Lawmakers Worldwide Are Women

GENEVA (Reuters) - More than a quarter of lawmakers worldwide are women after the proportion inched higher in 2020, but progress is so slow that it will take 50 years at the present rate before they achieve parity with men, a global body of legislatures said on Friday.

"Although progress has been steady over the past few years, it is still excruciatingly slow," the Inter-Parliamentary Union, made up of 179 national member parliaments and 13 regional parliaments, said in an annual "Women in Parliament" report.

"At the current rate, it will take another 50 years before gender parity is achieved in parliaments worldwide," the Geneva-based IPU said.

Women made up 25.5 percent of parliamentarians in 2020, up 0.6 percentage points from 2019. In 1995 the portion of women was just 11.3 percent.

Only three countries have as many women in their



legislatures as men: Cuba, Rwanda and the United Arab Emirates. Some countries including, Papua New Guinea, Micronesia and Vanuatu, have no women in parliament at all.

IPU secretary-general Martin Chungong said quotas were important to make more headway.

"We have seen in 2020 again confirmation of the fact that quotas, when legislated, well-designed and ambitious, have the potential to drive up women's political and parliamentary representation," he told journalists.

He hailed progress in places such as the United States, where women now hold 26.9 percent of seats in the two house of Congress, a record high. But other countries were backsliding, including Jordan and Burkina Faso, he said.

Overall, the Americas had the highest portion of women in parliaments with 32.4 percent. The Middle East and North Africa had the lowest with 17.8 percent.

Pandemic Risks Undoing Gains for Women

BERLIN (Dispatches) - German Chancellor Angela Merkel warned Saturday that the pandemic risked rolling back progress made on gender equality, as women take on the lion's share of childcare in lockdown and are more likely to work in at-risk jobs.

"We have to make sure that the pandemic does not lead us to fall back into old gender patterns we thought we had overcome," Merkel said in a video message ahead of International Women's Day on March 8.

Women have been disproportionately affected by the health crisis, she said, while being underrepresented in decision-making positions.

"Once again it's more often women who have to master the balancing act between homeschooling, childcare and their own jobs," said the veteran leader.

Women also outnumber men in care professions at a time when those jobs are "particularly challenging".

"More than 75 percent of those working in the health sector are women, from doctor's offices and hospitals, to labs and pharmacies," Merkel said -- yet women account for barely 30 percent of management positions in those areas.

The square remains a makeshift memorial for George Floyd who died at the hand of police making an arrest.

Indonesia Develops Medical Tourism for Elderly Tourists

JAKARTA (Bernama): Indonesia will build the Sanur area in Bali into a world-class Health Special Economic Zone (SEZ), focusing on medical tourism serving elderly tourists.

Addressing the Investor Forum 2021 webinar recently, Indonesian Minister of State-Owned Enterprises Erick Thohir highlighted the potential of Sanur -- a coastal town and a well-known resort in the south of Bali, reported Vietnam News Agency (VNA).

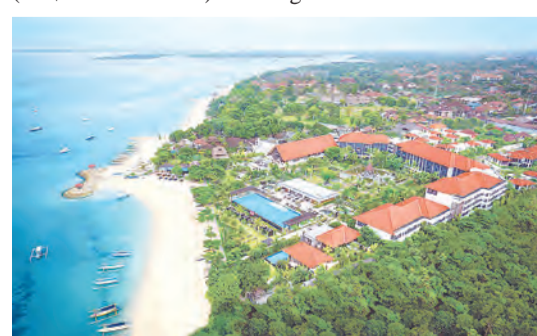
He called on the Government, state businesses, local and foreign investors to develop the 41-ha SEZ.

Of the total area, 21.2 ha will be allocated for building a health tourism hub with a number of facilities, including international hospitals, parks, trade areas and art markets as well as hotels and hospitality schools.

As of late 2020, Indonesia had established 15 SEZs, including

nine industrial SEZs and six tourism SEZs with a total committed capital of 70.4 trillion rupiah (US\$5.03 billion).

Last year, they earned around 5.2 trillion rupiah (US\$362.62 million) in foreign currencies.



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MLS Probes Inter Miami Signing of Matuidi

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Major League Soccer said it is conducting a formal review of Inter Miami's signing last August of French midfielder Blaise Matuidi, a former Juventus and Paris Saint-Germain standout. Major League Soccer is investigating Inter Miami's signing of French international Blaise Matuidi last year for possible violations of league salary budget and roster rules, the league announced Friday. Matuidi, a midfielder who turns 34 next month, helped France to a 2018 World Cup title in Russia.

Veteran Conley Finally Gets NBA All-Star Nod

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Mike Conley became one of the oldest first-time all stars in NBA history on Friday, the 33-year-old Utah Jazz player replacing Devin Booker in Sunday's annual showcase event. For the past several years, the Jazz guard has been considered one of the NBA's best players to have never been chosen to play in an all-star game. He was added to Team LeBron as a replacement for Phoenix Suns Booker, who has an injured left knee.

Khaka Shocker Costs Arsenal, Southampton Halt Slump

LONDON (Dispatches) - Arsenal's chances of a top-four finish in the Premier League look forlorn after Granit Khaka's error gifted Burnley a 1-1 draw on Saturday, while Southampton ended a nine-game winless run by beating Sheffield United 2-0.

The Gunners' best hope of a return to the Champions League for the first time in five years now lies in winning the Europa League after letting two more points slip away at Turf Moor. Mikel Arteta's men remain in 10th, nine points adrift of the top four and with that gap certain to grow on Sunday when fourth plays fifth as Chelsea take on Everton. "It is really complicated. I have a feeling with the way that we are playing at the moment that we can win any game," Arteta said.

"But if you are giving something to the opponent anything can happen. This is where we have the biggest margin for improvement."

But, with their hopes of qualifying for the Champions League via a top four finish in tatters, Arsenal will have to prioritise their trip to Greece to play Olympiakos in the Europa League last 16 first leg on Thursday.

Arsenal could not have asked for a better start as Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang took advantage of some sluggish defending and a slow reaction from England goalkeeper Nick Pope to squeeze home his 14th goal of the season after just six minutes.

Khaka was stupidly sent-off when the sides last met in December in the midst of a run of one win in 10 games that gave Arsenal a mountain to climb to get back in the race for a European place.

The Swiss midfielder had another afternoon to forget as six minutes before half-time he inexplicably fired the ball into the midriff of Chris Wood and the ball ricocheted into the net off the New Zealand striker.

Arsenal should still have won the game after the break as Erik Pieters escaped one strong penalty shout for handball and then saw a red card and a penalty rescinded by a VAR review for another shot that came back off the Dutchman's shoulder.



Dani Ceballos also hit the post in a frantic finale, but Burnley held on for a point to edge seven clear of the bottom three.

Southampton are now 10 points clear of the relegation zone after easing fears they could be dragged into a battle for survival.

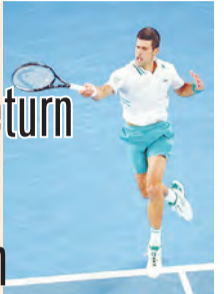
Ralph Hasenhuttl's men topped the table in November, but a run of one point from a possible 27 had them looking over their shoulders.

However, the Championship-bound Blades proved the perfect opponents for Southampton despite losing top scorer Danny Ings to an early injury.

James Ward-Prowse's penalty opened the scoring just after the half hour mark before Che Adams registered his first goal in 17 games with a blistering strike into the top corner on 49 minutes.

Sheffield United remain 12 points adrift of safety with just 10 more games to save themselves.

Djokovic Confirms Return To Tour at Miami Open



LONDON (Reuters) - World number one Novak Djokovic has said he will return to the court at this month's Miami Open having recuperated from a muscle tear suffered during his Australian Open title defense.

The 33-year-old Serbian suffered the injury during a third round match at Melbourne Park but that did not stop him from clinching a record-extending ninth Australian Open title and his 18th Grand Slam.

He will surpass Roger Federer's all-time record for most weeks as ATP world number one on Monday, holding the top spot for the 311th week.

According to a partial schedule posted on his website, Djokovic is entered for the ATP Masters 1000 event on the hardcourts in Miami from March 22-April 4. It is the first of three events he will play in before heading to Europe for the claycourt swing ahead of the French Open in end May.

From Miami, where he has won six titles, Djokovic will head to Monaco for the Monte-Carlo Masters, running from April 11-18, before returning home to Belgrade for the ATP 250 Serbia Open.

Premier League Trying To Relegate West

LONDON (Reuters) - West Bromwich Albion manager Sam Allardyce hit out at the Premier League's fixture-planners ahead of Sunday's game against Newcastle United, saying unfair scheduling was pushing his team towards relegation.

West Brom host Newcastle at noon, just 60 hours after Thursday's 1-0 home defeat by Everton and Allardyce is concerned with the lack of preparation time afforded to his players.

In contrast, Newcastle have not played since their 1-1 draw with Wolverhampton Wanderers last Saturday.

"We asked if we could play it next Monday and they (the Premier League) said no," Allardyce told reporters. "And then what do we have to do? Play at 12 on Sunday."

"Thank you very much, that's really nice of you at the Premier League, helping us to get relegated, or trying to get us relegated. That's how it is. You can ask for different dates or times but any one we asked for has been completely ignored."

Allardyce, who has a reputation for helping struggling teams, is aware of the significance of Sunday's contest. Second-from-bottom on 17 points after 27 matches, West Brom are nine adrift of 17th-placed Newcastle, who are just above the relegation spots and have a game in hand.

"If we lose we're 12 points away," he said. "That would make it as big a task as anybody has achieved to try to stay in the Premier League."

Spinners Lead Sri Lanka to Series-Levelling Win Over Windies

COLOMBO (Dispatches) - Sri Lanka's spinners bamboozled world champions West Indies to claim a 43-run win in the second Twenty20 International at Coolidge Cricket Ground.

Having lost by four wickets in the opening game on Wednesday, in a game where West Indies skipper Kieron Pollard launched six sixes in an over, the tourists successfully defended 160 on Friday to level the three-match series. West Indies were all out for 117 in the 19th over as Sri Lanka ended an eight-game losing streak in T20.

Kvitova Wins Second Qatar Title



"It's been a great run -- tough conditions," said Kvitova after her victory. It followed her Doha title of 2018, which also came at the expense of Muguruza.

DOHA (Dispatches) - Petra Kvitova thrashed Garbine Muguruza 6-2, 6-1 to win her second Qatar Open title.

The fourth-seeded Czech needed just over an hour to see off her fellow two-time Grand Slam winner.

It was Kvitova's 28th career title from 38 finals played.

"I'm sorry for the second time, I hope we can meet somewhere else," she added, nodding towards her vanquished rival.

Kvitova has won 20 career matches in Doha, the most of any player, passing Svetlana Kuznetsova and Caroline Wozniacki on 19.

Muguruza said that "every day is a new match, congrats to Petra with all the conditions -- and for a second time she took the title away from me".

"I can't wait to come back next year," added the Spaniard who has lost five times in a row to Kvitova.

Two-time Wimbledon winner Kvitova served first and went ahead, contending with the blustery conditions that shaped her hard-fought semi-final clash with American Jessica Pegula.

Ibrahimovic Poised for Sweden Comeback

STOCKHOLM (Dispatches) - Zlatan Ibrahimovic will return to international football at the age of 39, Swedish media reported on Saturday.

Sweden, coached by Janne Andersson, have qualified for the Euros and kick off their campaign against Spain in Bilbao on June 14.

The return has been under discussion for several months, according to reports, but has not been confirmed by the Swedish football federation (SvFF).

"It is certain that the Milan star is making a comeback in Janne Andersson's squad for the World Cup qualifiers," said the site Footbolldirekt, in a report that was picked up by the Swedish national press.

The striker, who has 116 caps and 62 goals, has not worn the Swedish jersey since Euro 2016, where he was captain but failed to score as Sweden finished bottom of their group.

Last autumn, he said he "missed" wearing the yellow jersey. The SvFF said that the player then had a "good and fruitful" meeting with Andersson.

"The dialogue with Zlatan continues," SvFF spokesman, Jakob Kakembo Andersson, told AFP on Saturday, adding that the players selected for the next matches, a pair of World Cup qualifiers against Georgia and Kosovo and a friendly against Estonia, will be announced on March 16.

Ibrahimovic has scored 14 goals in 14 Serie A matches for AC Milan this season. Ibrahimovic expressed an interest in playing in the 2018 World Cup, but Andersson opted not to recall the star. Sweden reached the quarter-finals.

The team then qualified without him for the Euro-2020, postponed to June and July 2021 because of Covid-19. They will face Spain, Poland and Slovakia in their group in the first round.



India Crush England In Final Test for 3-1 Series Victory

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India have crushed England inside three days of the fourth test to seal their series 3-1 as spinners Ravichandran Ashwin and Axar Patel took five wickets each.

Ashwin bowled Dan Lawrence for 50 as England were bowled out for 135 on Saturday to complete an emphatic innings and 25 run victory in Ahmedabad.

Virat Kohli's India bounced back from an opening defeat to win three in a row and book their meeting with New Zealand in the World Test Championship at Lord's in June.

It was another failure for Joe Root's England, who suffered a drubbing after their two-day loss in the third Test of a series dominated by the spinning wickets.

Ashwin led the series bowling chart with 32 wickets followed by Patel, who played one game fewer, on 27. England spinner Jack Leach was third with 18 scalps.

This win was set up by wicketkeeper-batsman Rishabh Pant, who made 101 on day two, and Washington Sundar, who hit an unbeaten 96 as India made a commanding 365.

India's Ravichandran Ashwin bowls [Amit Dave/Reuters] Pant scored his third Test ton in a 113-run stand with Sundar to lift India from a precarious 146-6 in response to England's first innings total of 205.

Sundar kept up the attack as the final three wickets fell on Saturday morning but ran out of partners and remained four shy of his century.

England lost early and regular wickets to go down tamely in 54.5 overs. Ashwin struck twice on successive balls to send back Zak Crawley for five and Jonny Bairstow for nought. It was Bairstow's third duck in four innings.

