

**IRAN NEWS** Felicitates All Muslims  
On the Occasion of Anniversary of  
Mab'ath (The Day Prophet  
Muhammad (PBUH) Was Chosen as  
God's Messenger). The Next Issue  
Wil Hit the News-Stands on Saturday

# IRAN NEWS

**Health Ministry Spokeswoman  
Sima Sadat Lari Said on Tuesday  
That Some 81 More Iranians Died  
From the Coronavirus Disease  
Over the Past 24 Hours Bringing  
The Total Deaths to 60,867**

VOL. XXVI, No. 7185 TEHRAN Price 40,000 Rials

www.irannewsdaily.com

WEDNESDAY MARCH 10, 2021 - ESFAND 20, 1399

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**3 DOMESTIC**

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Trade with Iran to \$1b**  
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## Leader Hails Iranian Women at Forefronts

TEHRAN (PressTV)—Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei has praised the sacrifices of the “the army of history-making angels” including the female veterans of the 1979 Islamic Revolution and the ensuing eight-year Iraqi war as well as the female medial workers currently at the forefront of the fight against the coronavirus outbreak.

Ayatollah Khamenei made the remarks in a message sent on Tuesday to a national congress in commemoration of the Iranian women who played a significant role in the uprising that led to the 1979 Islamic Revolution and the war that ex-Iraqi regime imposed on Iran in the 1980s, and those involved in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic over the past year.

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## Iran's Blocked Fund in Luxembourg Estimated at \$1.7b



**IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK**

TEHRAN – A member of presiding board of Netherlands-Iran Chamber of Commerce says the amount of Iran's blocked funds in EU countries is

very lower than other countries and he can point to \$1.7b of the funds blocked in Luxembourg.

Mohammad Hassan Didehvar told ILNA that due to the closeness of diplomacy of EU with the new U.S. Administration, some of the blocked funds of Iran in Europe can easily return to the country's economy through active negotiations.

Touching upon Iran's trade with the Netherlands, he said that Iran's trade with EU states in October 2020 and in ten months was \$3.6b euros as Iran's share of export was only around 600m euros while its imports stood at 3b euros.

Didehvar noted that the Netherlands is the second export destination of Iran in Europe as Iran's exports to this country in the same period was around 110.3m euros.

He added that after Germany and Italy, the Netherlands is the third destination for Iran's exports in Europe, adding that statistics show that the Netherlands was Iran's ninth export destination in Europe in the same period in 2019.

Didehvar reiterated that the Netherlands is also the third European exporter to Iran as its exports in 10 months in 2020 was around 298.5m.

On the effects of sanctions on the trade between Iran and the Netherlands, he said despite all sanctions, the trade cooperation between the two countries continued, reiterating that the Netherlands has always been among Iran's top five European trade partners. He admitted that due to the current economic situation of Iran, the level of trade between both countries has declined in recent years but it has not been halted.

On the amount of Iran's blocked funds in European countries, he said due to the sales of oil to the Asian countries like Japan, China and South Korea, the amount of Iran's blocked funds is more in those states comparing to its blocked assets in European countries, and he can point to \$1.7b of the blocked money in Luxembourg.

**4 INTERNATIONAL**

**China Hopes U.S. Will  
Remove Unreasonable  
Curbs on Cooperation**  
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**ViewPoint**  
By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

## CIA Policy Has Changed

In the news reports I read that the U.S. Senate on Wednesday, March 3 approved veteran U.S. diplomat William Burns as the new U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) director. One of the important goals of the Democrat Party in the 2020 U.S. presidential election campaign was that Joe Biden had announced he intended to pick Burns as the CIA director. Burns was once deputy secretary of state during Barack Obama presidency.

A slight study and investigation will tell us who Burns is and why the Democrat Party and Biden have chosen him for this sensitive post. This pick makes clearer an important part of change in the U.S. foreign policy. With a short search in the internet you will notice that Burns retired from the U.S. Department of State in 2014 and was one of the U.S. negotiating team with Iran over its nuclear program and you will also notice why and with what goal he has been picked by Biden for the CIA post.

Burns is a veteran diplomat which has had good relation with Biden in different times. When Biden was the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations chairman, he used to cooperate with Burns. Burns has good interactions with other Biden Administration members especially with National Security Advisor to U.S. President Jake Sullivan.

Media outlets like the New York Times has written on this pick that Biden by choosing Burns has intended to transfer this message to his friends and foes that the CIA is not under influence of the politics. Burns' experience as a consumer of intelligence and not a producer of intelligence has caused that he becomes the most appropriate choice for this sensitive post because CIA directors are expected to put aside their policy recommendations and focus on information and prediction. Still, former agency officials have asserted the most important quality in a director is not expertise in intelligence, but a relationship with the president, which Mr. Burns has.

In the past, Burns has been part of the U.S. Freemason community and the President of Carnegie Endowment for International Peace who had strived for preparing appropriate economic ground with the symbol of international peace. In 2014 and after 32 years in the U.S. Department of State he retired, and in the past two decades he has played role in the most important and critical conditions. He was opposed to the U.S. attack at Iraq, and in 2002 he announced explicitly his opposition to it in the U.S. media. **See Page 7**

### The First Digital and Electrical Home Appliances MegaStore



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## Iran Starts Enriching Uranium With Advanced Machines at Natanz

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has started enriching uranium with a third cascade, or cluster, of advanced IR-2m centrifuges at its Natanz nuclear facility, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) tells its members.

“On 7 March 2021, the Agency verified ... that: Iran had begun feeding natural UF<sub>6</sub> into the third cascade of 174 IR-2m centrifuges,” the UN nuclear agency said in a Monday report obtained by Reuters, referring to uranium hexafluoride, the feedstock for centrifuges. “The fourth cascade of 174 IR-2m centrifuges was installed but had yet to be fed with natural UF<sub>6</sub>; installation of a fifth cascade of IR-2m centrifuges was ongoing; and installation of a sixth cascade of IR-2m centrifuges had yet to begin,” it added.

Iran's representative to the Vienna-based organizations said in February that the country had installed new cascades of advanced centrifuges at two nuclear sites in Natanz and Fordow to increase enrichment capacity.

“Thanks to our diligent nuclear scientists, two cascades of 348 IR2m centrifuges with almost 4 times the capacity of IR1 are now running with UF<sub>6</sub> successfully in Natanz,” Kazem Gharibabadi said in a post on his Twitter account. Back in May 2018, former U.S. president Donald Trump pulled Washington out of the multilateral nuclear agreement, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), reached between Iran and major world states in 2015 and adopted the so-called maximum pressure campaign against Iran with the declared aim of forcing Tehran to negotiate a new deal. Iran remained fully compliant with the JCPOA for an entire year but as the remaining European parties failed to fulfill their end of the bargain, Tehran began in May 2019 to scale back its JCPOA commitments under Articles 26 and 36 of the accord covering Tehran's legal rights. In one of its latest steps away from the deal, Iran on January 4 announced the beginning of the process to enrich uranium to 20-percent purity at Fordow to reciprocate the American withdrawal and the European failure.

## Women Pivotal in Defeating U.S. Maximum Pressure

TEHRAN (IRNA) - First Vice President Eshaq Jahangiri said that the Iranian nation, women in particular, demonstrated ultimate patience in economic war waged by the U.S. and women had a pivotal role in defeating the U.S. policy against Iran.

Speaking to a conference on commemoration of martyr and veteran women, Jahangiri mentioned the difficulties Iranian nations suffered from during the eight-year war, and said that there were women at the time who sacrificed several members of their families.

Describing these women as the symbol of sacrifice, he praised several women attending the conference who had lost 4 to 8 members of their families.

## Iran Ready to Exchange Prisoners With U.S.

**TEHRAN (IRNA)- Government spokesman Ali Rabiei said on Tuesday that Iran is ready to exchange prisoners with the United States and that if it has not happened yet was due to the US unpreparedness.**

Speaking to reporters at his weekly press conference, Rabiei said Iran is waiting to see how much the new U.S. administration is serious to revise policies of the previous team.

On January 20, 2021, Joe Biden took office as the 46th U.S. President after he defeated Donald Trump at the November 3, 2020, presidential election.

During his campaign, Biden had expressed willingness to return to the July 2015 nuclear deal from which the former U.S. president withdrew unilaterally in May 2018.

As Rabiei noted, the "U.S. is not in a position to set condition for implementing its international commitments."

Contrary to the United States which defers its return to the JCPOA, Iran is ready to fulfill all its commitments along with other members of the deal soon, the spokesman added.

According to Supreme Leader's guidelines, the sole solution is removal of the U.S. sanctions and return of all sides to the deal, said Rabiei adding that if the U.S. has another way in its mind, it is wasting time.

Whenever the U.S. decides to lift sanctions in order to do its legal duties based on the international agreement, it will see that Iran will speedily fulfill all its commitments.



On the first anniversary of the U.S. withdrawal in May 2019, Iran decided to reduce its commitments to the international deal, based on Article 26 and 36 to reciprocate the U.S. move. Iran observed one-year 'Strategic Patience' and then decided to invoke Article 26 & 36 of the JCPOA.

"Iranian government will make effort to release every single cent belonged to Iran," the spokesman said, elaborating on the latest situation of national assets in Iraq.

He said that Central Bank of Iran (CBI) has reached agreement with Iraq on mechanism for taking delivery of the assets.

## Deputy Health Minister Outlines Anti-COVID-19 Plan for Nowruz Holiday

TEHRAN (IP) - The Spokesman for the National Task Force for Fighting Coronavirus talked about New Year's coronavirus restrictions.

Speaking at the fourth phase of the national mobilization of Martyr Gen. Qasem Soleimani's Plan to contain COVID-19 through intensification of restrictions ceremony held at the Health Ministry on Tuesday, Alireza Raisi defined the COVID-19 restrictions plan for the Iranian New Year holidays.

Raisi talked about the following measures that would be on the agenda in the upcoming Nowruz holiday including providing essential healthcare services, early detection of COVID-19 for the people exposed to the disease by intelligent technology up to 80%, providing care and support coverage for the elderly by at least 30%, two-week isolation of patients and suspected cases up to 100%, protection of those who have been quarantined over COVID-19, compliance with health protocols by 90% in the first 15 days and 95% in the second 15 days, complete and partial quarantine of communities where disease outbreaks approved.

According to Deputy Health Minister, the measures of the Ministry of Health with Basij Organization cooperation during New Year holidays are public education, intensification of diagnosing of the disease, intensification of tracking, ensuring isolation, intensification of caring of the high-risk elderly, and intensification of target groups.

## Enemy Devises Sanctions to Break Iran in Couple of Months

TEHRAN (IRNA) - President Hassan Rouhani said on Monday that the enemy has devised the maximum-pressure sanctions to bring Iran to its knees in a few months, but the maximum resistance of Iranians during the all-out economic war brought on another honor for Iran.

Speaking at the Supreme Council of Economic Coordination, President Rouhani said the oppressive sanctions are in direct relation with the people's livelihood, adding that all attempts made by the three branches of the Islamic System should be in line with reducing economic pressures on people.

Noting that most of these problems were in a way the result of the all-out economic war imposed on Iran in the past three years, the Iranian president added that people firmly resisted and neutralized the sanctions and

now it is time they got removed.

In a related development in mid-February, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said in a Twitter message that the U.S. has admitted that Iran stepped away from its commitments because the US withdrew from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) signed by the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council plus Germany and Iran.

"U.S. admits that only after it 'left the JCPOA, Iran has taken steps away' while until then 'Iran was living up to its limits' That US behavior—the CAUSE—has not changed," Zarif tweeted.

He added that the European troika is "also culpable" because they had "no business" with Iran "for 3 years".

## U.S. Strategy Is Managing Ongoing Chaos in Region

TEHRAN (IP) - The Leader's adviser in Defense Affairs defined U.S. strategy as managing constant chaos in the regions well as strengthening reactionary regimes.

Brigadier General Hossein Dehqan stressed that the Americans were seeking to disrupt the geopolitics of the West Asian region and that their strategy was to manage the ongoing chaos to justify their presence in the region and strengthen the regimes with which they have cooperation with. The Leader's adviser said that several issues were important to Americans in the West Asian region; One is the security of the Israeli regime, which they have defined as their own security, and stand against any force that threatens Israel.

Adviser to the Leader of the Islamic Revolution in Defense Affairs stated that the focus of all American actions in the West Asian region was to limit the influence and movements of the Islamic Republic of Iran, but on the contrary, there was a definite strategy and that was wherever nations and governments in the region and the world asked Iran for help, it would definitely be operational. The senior official noted that today the axis of resistance which was supported by Iran was directly opposite to the Americans and their forces present in the West Asian region.

Brigadier-General Hossein Dehqan noted that the ISIL terrorist outfit, which was created by the United States and some countries in the region, targeted most of the Islamic countries, and that the Islamic Republic of Iran stood up to ISIL in order to eliminate this terrorist group.

## Deputy FM Uzbekistan Iran's Top Trading Partner

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi in a meeting with his Uzbek counterpart Furqat Sadiqov on Monday termed Uzbekistan as one of the important trading partners of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The sixth round of political consultations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Uzbekistan was held in Tehran on Monday, co-chaired by Araqchi and Sadiqov.

In this meeting, the two sides exchanged views on a wide range of bilateral, regional, and international issues.

They stressed the greater use of important capacities that exist to expand relations in the fields of transportation, commerce, culture, tourism, cultural, and law.

Referring to the threats of terrorism and extremism in the region, they reiterated the need for cooperation to strengthen regional peace and stability.

Pointing to the appropriate volume of trade exchanges between Iran and Uzbekistan in the coronavirus era, Araqchi described the two sides' approach as boosting cooperation in all areas. He termed Uzbekistan as one of the important trading partners of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Sadiqov expressed his country's readiness for the comprehensive development of relations in all areas and called for accelerating the implementation of the roadmap for economic cooperation between the two countries.

## Science, Culture Only Sustainable Solutions for Proximity Among Nations

TEHRAN (IFP) - President Hassan Rouhani has referred to scientific and cultural bonds as one of the most lasting bonds among nations, urging the world to return to the sources of science and culture.

In a written message to the 3rd International Gundi-Shapour Congress on Tuesday, Rouhani thanked all scientists and students from Iran and other countries who attended the event to commemorate the 1750th anniversary of Gundi-Shapour University, the world's oldest university.

Rouhani described scientific and cultural ties between nations as the "most lasting and most durable" ones, stating that broadening such bonds can further deepen sympathy and friendship among nations. Referring to registration of Gundi Shapour as the world's oldest university by UNESCO, the President said that it's a proof that Iranians have been harbingers of science and friendship since ancient times.

He also underlined that Iranians today, following their ancestors, placed two occasions in their national calendar: 'The day of dialogue and constructive interaction with the world' and 'The day of non-violence and non-extremism.' "I believe the only durable and lasting way for proximity among nations is to return to lucid sources of science and culture, just as our ancestors in Iran did by establishing the world's oldest university," Rouhani added.

## U.S. Following Policy of Destabilizing Regional Governments

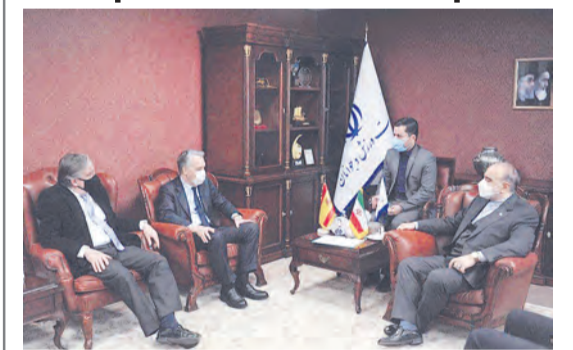
TEHRAN (MNA) - Condemning the U.S. unconstructive policy in the region, the Iranian Parliament Speaker's Special Aide for International Affairs said that the U.S. policy in the region is to destabilize and weaken regional governments.

Hossein Amir-Abdollahian made the remarks in his meeting with the Representative of the Lebanese Amal Movement in Iran Salah Fahs.

Referring to the deep-rooted and fraternal relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Lebanon, Amir-Abdollahian said, "Lebanon is an important and influential country in its interactions with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

He also called Lebanon's stability and security to the benefit of the region, adding, "Lebanon's economic development and stability will be achieved through the interaction and cooperation of the various government's officials and factions in the country."

## Minister Calls for Sports Cooperation With Spain



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Minister of Sports and Youth Affairs Masoud Soltanifar on Monday called for further sports cooperation between Iran and Spain.

Soltanifar made the remarks during a meeting in Tehran with the Spanish ambassador Luis Felipe Fernández.

The minister said that longstanding relations between Iran and Spain can serve as a ground for establishment of cooperation in the sports area.

Referring to Iran's high capacity in some sports such as karate, taekwondo, wrestling, volleyball and wushu, Soltanifar said that Iran is ready to share experiences with other world countries including Spain.

He also voiced Iran's readiness for cooperation with Spain on sports tourism and sports medicine.

The minister also expressed hope that Iran can make use of the experiences of Spanish football coaches for the promotion of Iranian football.

## Moving ISIL Terrorists From Syria to Karabakh "Worrying"



TEHRAN (MNA) - Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Commission Mojtaba Zonnour said that transferring ISIL terrorist groups from Syria and using them in Karabakh conflict is worrying.

Speaking in his meeting with Armenian Ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Iran Artashes Toumanian on Monday, he reiterated that the news of transferring ISIL terrorists from Syria and using these terrorists in the recent clashes erupted between Azerbaijan Republic and Armenia is worrying.

Referring to the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis and expressing concern over the use of Takfiri terrorism as a tool in regional conflicts, Zonnour said that news of the transfer of ISIL terrorists from Syria and use them in the recent conflicts is worrying.

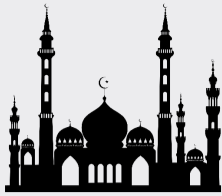
There is a long-standing friendship between Iran and Armenia, he said, adding, "Armenian people have also viewed Iran as their second homeland and Armenians living in Iran have always cooperated with the Islamic Establishment in ups and downs of the country."

Given the role and position of parliaments in governing structure of Iran and Armenia, Iranian Parliament is ready to strengthen its relations with the Armenian Parliament at various levels, Zonnour added.

Elsewhere in his remarks, he pointed to the recent conflicts erupted between Azerbaijan Republic and Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh region and stated, "What happened between our two neighboring countries was unpleasant, because, Islamic Republic of Iran does not consider the war in interest of people of the region. Therefore, maintaining the current security and stability is of great importance."

Armenian envoy to Iran, for his turn, welcomed the development of parliamentary cooperation between the two countries and said that strengthening cooperation between the two countries and increasing the number of delegates will play an important role in strengthening relations between the two countries of Iran and Armenia.

Islamic Republic of Iran is one of Armenia's important and long-standing neighbors in the region, he said, adding, "Therefore, we welcome the greater role of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the developments in the region."



## PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:14
■ Evening (Maghreb)	18:25
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:57
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:20

7. He it is Who has sent down to thee the Book: In it are verses basic or fundamental (of established meaning); they are the foundation of the Book: others are allegorical. But those in whose hearts is perversity follow the part thereof that is allegorical, seeking discord, and searching for its hidden meanings, but no one knows its hidden meanings except Allah. And those who are firmly grounded in knowledge say: "We believe in the Book; the whole of it is from our Lord:" and none will grasp the Message except men of understanding.

*Surah 3. The Family Of 'Imran, The House Of 'Imran (7)*

## Uzbekistan Eyes Boosting Trade with Iran to \$1b

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN – Uzbek Deputy Foreign Minister Furqat Sadiqov in meeting with the Head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mine and Agriculture (ICCIMA) Gholamhossein Shafei expressed hope that the bilateral trade volume would hit \$1b in five years.**

In the meeting, Sadiqov and Shafei discussed different topics for improving economic relation between Iran and Uzbekistan. They also exchanged views on identification and resolving hurdles in way of trade and bilateral cooperation.

Sadiqov said Uzbekistan is interested in increasing trade with Iran in the next five years and expressed hope that the bilateral trade volume would touch \$1b in the same period.

He also pointed to the considerable rise in investment of companies in Uzbekistan and explained the capacities for cooperation ahead of Iran and Uzbekistan. He then pointed to tourism, agriculture, mining, pharmaceutical and technology as the important fields for bilateral cooperation and joint investment.

Sadiqov also said holding international exhibition is one of the important tools for materializing the joint cooperation between Tehran and Tashkent, and also said establishing joint economic cooperation can be another option for strengthening bilateral cooperation.

He also pointed to the indexes for ease of doing business, emphasizing that these indexes have been improved in his country and Uzbekistan's presence in the international communities is considered as an advantage which plays important role in developing its economic ties with countries like Iran.

Then Shafei, for his part, said that in the current condition Iranian economic activists are eager to develop their ties with their Uzbek counterparts, adding that agriculture, medicines, medical equipment, housing, vehicle and transportation are of



the major fields for joint cooperation which should be noticed by economic activists of both countries.

He reiterated that establishing joint companies is the prerequisite to the development of joint cooperation between Iran and Uzbekistan in the Eurasia. He also pointed to the establishment of the Joint Iran-Uzbekistan Economic Committee at the ICCIMA and highlighted major performance of the committee since its launch and expressed hope the Joint Iran-Uzbekistan Joint Chamber of Commerce would be formed very soon.

Removing transportation problems, customs tariffs, issuing the technical and engineering services guarantee letters and launching the arbitration panel were of the other topics which were discussed between Shafei and Sadiqov, and Shafei called for operationalization of all of them through cooperation between Iran and Uzbekistan.

Sadiqov, leading an Uzbek delegation, arrived in Tehran on March 7, for talks with Iranian officials.

Presently, 272 companies are busy active in Uzbekistan with investment of Iranians.

The value of trade exchanged between the two countries of Iran and Uzbekistan in the last eight months of 2020 hit \$158 million.

It should be noted that Islamic Republic of Iran recognized the independence of Uzbekistan on December 25, 1991 and political relations have been established between the two countries since May 10, 1992.

## Iran Share of Regional Tourism Over %50

GORGAN (IP) - Minister of Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism said that the country's share of regional tourism was over 50 percent.

Aliasghar Mounesan said that regional tourism constitutes over %70 of international tourism with regional tourism constituting more than 50 percent of that, adding that the tourists coming to Iran were from Iraq and the Republic of Azerbaijan. He said that a significant number of the tourists coming to Iran were from neighboring countries with various goals including pilgrimage, tourism, and health.

"Pilgrimage tourism in Iran has developed to a hybrid tourism that is in addition to the pilgrimage, visiting Iranian touristic attractions is also in the program of foreign tourists which brings good currency for Iran," he added.

Mounesan also pointed to Nowruz's travels during the coronavirus pandemic and said: "Smart travel has been designed with detailed health protocols and announced to accommodation centers throughout Iran."

## UNESCO to Support Iran in Promoting Science, Technology

TEHRAN (MNA) – In a message to the 3rd International Congress on Gundishapur, the Director-General of UNESCO, announced that the intl. body is ready to support Iran in its efforts to promote science and technology, to create knowledge, and to share it.



Referring to the establishment of Gundishapur University, Audrey Azoulay noted that since its establishment, this university has been the intellectual capital of the Sassanid Empire, the main center of knowledge production, and a global forum for the production of science.

The UNSECO top official highlighted that this university has played a key role in Iran's historical superiority in science.

In ancient times, as she explained, Iran was the center of scientific achievements and the transfer of knowledge from China and India in the east to Greece and Rome in the west.

Due to this heritage, she continued, Iran is one of the main scientific partners of UNESCO. She noted that the establishment anniversary of Gundishapur University is an opportunity to celebrate and promote the scientific heritage that this institution proudly represents.

The congress is held online on March 9-10, 2021.

Ahwaz Gundishapur University of Medical Sciences (AJUMS) is a medical school in Khuzestan Province of Iran.

Located in southwestern Iran in the city of Ahwaz, the university was established as a College of Medicine administered by the Shahid Chamran University of Ahwaz in 1955, which itself was a revived reincarnation of the ancient Academy of Gundishapur that existed in the same area in antiquity.

## Sulphur Installation of Tombak Port To Come on Stream Next Year

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The project of Tombak service and export port Mr. Payam Motamed says the first mechanized industrial shed for receiving and delivering Sulphur of the port will come on stream



in the first quarter of the next Iranian calendar year, adding that export of the granulated Sulphur of the Pars II refineries will start from this port in the first half of the next year.

According to the public relations of Pars Oil and Gas Company, Mr. Motamed has said 5 giant refining and petrochemical complexes at Pars II will be connected to this port, adding that the first wharf for the liquid gas at Tombak Port with receiving product from the South Pars Phase 19 refinery has been operationalized and in the next stages, refineries of South Pars Phases 13, 22 to 24 and 14 as well as Kangan Petro Refining Complex will be connected to the port.

He also announced planning for entrance of a 44,000-ton vessel into the port for loading the second liquid gas cargo, noting that the first LPG shipment was loaded and exported from the wharf of the Tombak Port.

Motamed went on to say that this port has been built for export of liquid propane and butane gases separately as well as granulated Sulphur of Pars II refineries and it has significant role in enhancing the refineries through creating facilities for export of these strategic goods.

He then elaborated more details about the port and capabilities of for export of granulated Sulphur.

## Talks Underway for Boosting Iran-Japan Economic Ties



TEHRAN (MNA) – The two countries of Iran and Japan are consulting to increase bilateral trade and economic ties, according to Head of Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPOI) Hamid Zadboum.

Zadboum made the remarks in a meeting with the newly-appointed Ambassador of Japan to Iran Ikawa Kazutoshi in Tehran on Tue and pointed to the declining trend of bilateral trade exchanges between Iran and Japan. Despite sanctions imposed against Iran and problems caused by the outbreak of the novel coronavirus, COVID-19, Iranian markets in the Far East, Africa and Latin America are expanding, he said.

Turning to the interest of Iranian companies for development of cooperation with Japan, deputy minister of industry said that Iranian firms are interested in boosting their cooperation with Japan in the fields of petrochemicals, oil, mining and agriculture.

Zadboum also referred to the visit of a Japanese delegation to Chabahar Free Zone and suggested Japanese envoy visit this zone at the earliest opportunity.

Oman, India and Pakistan have invested in Chabahar Port and are interested in developing investments in this zone, he said, adding that Japanese companies can also be present and invest in this zone along with other foreign investors.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the TPOI head referred to holding more than 80 specialized exhibitions at Tehran International Exhibition Center and invited Japanese companies to participate in these exhibitions.

Japanese newly-appointed envoy to Tehran, for his turn, noted that the economy and trade play a key role in enhancing relations between the two countries.

Accordingly, Trade Promotion Organization of Iran and Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) can play a constructive role in strengthening and boosting trade and economic ties between the two countries, he added. Active presence of Iran in Japan's exhibitions, especially Osaka 2025 Expo, cooperation of Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPOI) and JETRO to establish relations between Iranian and Japanese companies, facilitate the export of pistachios and other agricultural products to Japan and help solve problems of Japanese companies based in Tehran were of the other topics discussed between the two sides in this meeting.

## Iran Registers Positive Economic Growth

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Governor of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) Abdolnaser Hemmati said that Iran has registered a positive economic growth in the first nine months of the Iranian calendar year (started on March 20, 2020).

Speaking during a meeting with Iran's banking system managers, Hemmati said that Iran's economic growth rate will continue to be positive until the end of the year.

Considering the global outbreak of the coronavirus disease, Iran's economic growth is acceptable compared to those of other countries, the official said.

He said that the performance of his colleagues at the CBI is defensible as the country has been under the toughest and most unprecedented pressures over the past two and a half years.

Iran's oil revenues used to stand at 40 to 60 billion dollars while the country's overall oil revenues over the past two years was less than \$20 billion, Hemmati said.

He said that Iran have even had difficulty to gain access to a large part of this reduced amount of oil revenues due to restrictions caused by the sanctions.

## Over 30m Trees for Timber Planted in Year to March

TEHRAN (Presstv) - Iran's minister of agriculture Kazem Khavazi says the country's tree plantation for timber drive has seen a massive boost in the current calendar year with some 30 million plantations recorded across the country.

Khavazi said on Monday that some 21,000 hectares of lands have been dedicated to tree plantation for timber in the year to March 20.

He said the area was around two third of all lands used for the same purpose from 2013 until March 2020.

The minister said Iran's forestry authority had also pushed ahead with its own tree plantation for conservation scheme which covered some 35,000 hectares of forest lands across the country.

That was in addition to a conservation scheme executed across 47,000 hectares of forests and plantations carried out over 10,000 hectares of sloping lands to prevent soil erosion, he said. Kahvazi said Iran's tree plantation for timber push would contribute to better living conditions and a stable income for people living in areas where forestry initiatives are executed, including by jobs created in plants to process the wood from the plantations, he said.

The policy is aimed at reducing massive imports of timber, creating jobs and preventing the devastating impacts of floods through the expansion of forests.

Khavazi said tree plantation for timber along watershed and groundwater management have been among key priorities of his ministry in recent years. He said watershed management schemes have been implemented over one million hectares of lands across Iran in the current calendar year to help restore rural lands and to attract people to return to villages from cities.

## Isfahan Province Comprehensive Passive Defense Plan Unveiled at EORC

ISFAHAN – The comprehensive passive defense plan of Isfahan Province was unveiled at Isfahan Oil Refining Company (EORC) in presence of Head of Iran's Passive Defense Organization Brigadier General Gholam Reza Jalali, governor general of Isfahan, the CEO of Esfahan Oil Refining Company Mr. Morteza Ebrahimi and some of the state and provincial officials.

In the ceremony, Brigadier General Jalali pointed to the studies conducted in the region and identifying threats against the province and reiterated removing threats is of the priorities of the province. He added such plans are devised based on the national defense strategy and identifying threats and vulnerable areas.

The Governor General of the Province Mr. Abbas Rezaee

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said the comprehensive passive defense plan of the province is the guarantee for the sustainable security and for advancing the economy of the province.

He added that due to the geography of the province, the plan was carried out at the EORC, and since it needed a united command and coordination, the CEO of the company Mr. Ebrahimi was chosen as the senior commander of the plan. He noted that the area where Esfahan Refinery is

located is very crucial and sensitive in terms of economic, social and security of the region.

Meanwhile in the ceremony, Mr. Ebrahimi officially was named as the senior commander of the passive defense, crisis management and HSE of Energy Industrial Park of northwest Isfahan.

## Death Toll Rises to 31 From Equatorial Guinea Explosions

MALABO (Reuters) - The death toll from a series of explosions in a military barracks in Equatorial Guinea has risen to 31, the health ministry said on Monday, as volunteers continued to search for bodies in the rubble.

About 600 people were injured in the blasts, which started with a fire at the Nkoantoma Military Base in the coastal city of Bata, according to the defence ministry.

President Teodoro Obiang Nguema attributed the accident to negligence related to the handling of dynamite and said the explosions damaged almost all homes and buildings in Bata, a city of just over 250,000 people.



## Italy's Coronavirus Death Toll Passes 100,000

ROME (Dispatches) - Italy became the second European country to pass the bleak milestone of 100,000 fatalities from Covid-19 on Monday, with Prime Minister Mario Draghi warning of further pain ahead as hospitalizations jump.

Italy is the seventh country in the world to reach the grim tally, following the United States, Brazil, Mexico, India, Russia and the UK. The health ministry said 318 new deaths from the disease had been recorded in the past 24 hours bringing the total tally since the epidemic hit the country 13 months ago to 100,103. It took nine months for Italy to register its first 50,000 deaths, and just three and half months to double it.



## China Hopes U.S. Will Remove Unreasonable Curbs on Cooperation



BEIJING (Dispatches) - China urged the United States on Sunday to remove "unreasonable" curbs on cooperation as soon as possible and work together on issues like climate change, while accusing Washington of bringing chaos in the name of spreading democracy.

Last week, U.S. President Joe Biden singled out a "growing rivalry with China" as a key challenge facing the United States, with his top diplomat describing the country as "the biggest geopolitical test" of this century.

Speaking at his annual news conference, the Chinese government's top diplomat, State Councillor Wang Yi, struck a tough line even as he outlined where the world's two biggest economies could work together.

Questioned about U.S.-China frictions over Taiwan, Xinjiang and the disputed South China Sea, Wang said Beijing "will never accept baseless accusations and smears". The United States had used democracy and human rights as a basis for arbitrarily interfering with other countries' affairs, he said. "The U.S. should realise this as soon as possible, otherwise the world will continue to experience instability." The White House brushed aside the criticisms over Taiwan and said Washington would continue to support Taipei.

Wang said differences between Beijing and Washington must be managed carefully, the two sides must advocate healthy competition not zero-sum finger-pointing, and that areas like climate change and fighting the pandemic were where they could cooperate.

"It is hoped that the United States and China will meet each other halfway and lift the various unreasonable restrictions placed on Sino-U.S. cooperation to date as soon as possible, and not create new obstacles artificially."

The United States and China are at odds over influence in the Indo-Pacific region, Beijing's economic practices, Hong Kong, Taiwan and human rights in China's Xinjiang region.

The Biden administration has indicated it will broadly continue the tough approach to China taken by former President Donald Trump, but do so in coordination with allies.

Wang warned there was no room for compromise on Chinese-claimed Taiwan and the new U.S. government should drop the previous administration's "dangerous acts of playing with fire".

Biden's team called the U.S. commitment to democratic Taiwan "rock solid" and on Monday White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki told a regular news briefing Washington would "continue to assist Taiwan in maintaining a sufficient self-defence capability."

"Our position on Taiwan remains clear. We will stand with friends and allies to advance our shared prosperity, security and values in the Indo-Pacific region," she said when asked about Wang's remarks.

Under Trump, the United States imposed sanctions against China and its officials over Xinjiang, Hong Kong and Beijing's economic policies, which have not been lifted by Biden.

## Lebanese Block Roads in Protest At Poverty, Political Inaction

BEIRUT (AFP) - Demonstrators blocked key roads across Lebanon on Monday in protest at the country's political paralysis after its currency hit record lows on the black market.

Lebanon is in the grips of its worst economic crisis in decades, compounded by the coronavirus pandemic.

Prices have soared and more than half of the population are living below the poverty line, but the divided political class has for more than six months been unable to form a cabinet. Black smoke billowed up from overturned rubbish dumpsters and tyres set ablaze by protesters at various entrances to Beirut from the early morning.

"We've closed off all the roads today to tell everyone: It's over, we have nothing left to lose. We've even lost our dignity," said Pascale Nohra, a protester blocking the northern road into Beirut.

She said it was time to revive the mass cross-sectarian protests of late 2019 against the political class.

"We want everybody to show solidarity and come out on the street," said the former worker in real estate.

"We need to return to the streets and revive our revolution."

Another protester, Anthony Doueichi, said: "The people, this country are dying, collapsing."

"If we don't come out now, these corrupt barons will continue ruling us for another thirty years."

Similar protests were held Monday in the northern port city of Tripoli.

Lebanon's currency has lost more than 80 percent of its value since the autumn of 2019, plunging to an all-time low of nearly 11,000 pounds to the greenback.

In a country that imports most of its food, state subsidies have until now helped to partially stem the inflation.

But with foreign currency reserves fast running out, the authorities have warned they will not be able to keep them up much longer.

As Lebanese brace to slide deeper into poverty, footage circulated last week of a fight over cheaper, subsidised milk formula in a supermarket.

The Crisis Observatory at the American University of Beirut warned that the situation would likely only worsen.

"If the repercussions of the pound's plunge in value are evident in the deterioration of Lebanese and other residents' buying power, and in feverish, sometimes violent competition over subsidized goods in some shops, the worst is still to come," it said in a report.



## Iraq PM Urges National Dialogue

BAGHDAD (Reuters) - Iraq's prime minister on Monday called on the country's rival political groups to use dialogue to solve their differences, a move he said would reflect the "love and tolerance" shown by Pope Francis' historic visit to the country.

Iraq suffers from chronic mismanagement and corruption, and a steady level of violence often linked to the rivalry between Iran and the United States in the region 18 years after the U.S. invasion of Iraq.

"In the atmosphere of love and tolerance promoted by the visit of His Holiness the Pope to the land of Iraq, we present today the call for a national dialogue," Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi said in a televised speech.

Many in Iraq hope the Papal visit will garner more international support for Kadhimi's government to handle sensitive crises, including reining in Iran-backed militias whose power and influence Kadhimi has sought to curb since taking office in May 2020.

The prime minister said dialogue would help to reduce tension in his country and pave the way for a successful early election.

Controlling armed groups which operate out of state control is still an significant challenge for the prime minister.

Pope Francis ended his tour, the first ever papal visit to Iraq, on Monday after visiting conflict-torn cities, meeting Muslim and Christian leaders and preaching peace and coexistence over war. The visit had started on Friday. The pontiff also made a rare first event in meeting Iraq's Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, Iraq's top Shi'ite Muslim cleric who is one of the most important figures in Shi'ite Islam, both within Iraq and beyond.

## Women Rally Across the World Despite Coronavirus Restrictions

LONDON (Dispatches) - Thousands of women across the globe took part in annual marches and protests to mark International Women's Day, in a muted affair due to restrictions on large gatherings as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

From India to the Philippines to Spain, women called for equal rights and freedoms and an end to violence against women. Several hundred Muslim Uighur women in Turkey staged an International Women's Day march along the Bosphorus demanding the closure of mass incarceration camps in China's Xinjiang region.

The protesters chanted "stop the genocide" and "close the camps" as they marched within a few hundred metres of China's walled-off consulate in Turkey's largest city, Istanbul.

Rights groups believe at least one million Uighurs and other mostly Muslim minorities have been imprisoned in camps spread out across the vast northwestern region.

In the Philippines, hundreds of mostly female demonstrators rallied in the capital Manila and took aim at the country's president, Rodrigo Duterte, for alleged rights abuses against women.

Protesters smashed an effigy of Duterte with sledgehammers during a demonstration near his residence in Manila during which women's rights activists denounced him for what they called abusive security policies.

"We are facing a virus far deadlier than COVID and it is the rotten, anti-people, pro-foreign interest, and macho-fascist presidency," said Joms Salvador, secretary general of Gabriela, a prominent women's organisation in the Philippines.

Since taking office in 2016, Duterte has infuriated women's groups, who call him a misogynist after he made jokes about rape on several occasions.

At the national palace in Mexico City, protesters painted the names of hundreds of femicide victims across three-metre metal barriers that were erected last week to protect the historic building from vandalism during Monday's marches. Protesters were angered by President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador's support of a politician accused of rape at a time - Felix Salgado - when the country is suffering rampant gender violence.

In Venezuela, human rights activists protested to demand the release of 17 women they consider political prisoners, as well as to demand punishment for perpetrators of femicide.

In a demonstration outside the UN Development Program's Caracas office, attorney Ana Leonor Acosta told a crowd that some of the 17 women were being held in order to blackmail wanted relatives into surrendering or confessing.

"They are hostages," Acosta said.



## Brazil Judge Overturns Ex-Leader Lula's Convictions

BRASILIA (Dispatches) - A Brazilian Supreme Court judge on Monday overturned graft convictions against former president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, clearing the way for the left-wing leader to run in the 2022 presidential election.

Justice Edson Fachin overturned all four convictions against the popular-but-tarnished ex-president (2003-2010) stemming from a probe into a massive corruption scheme centered on Brazilian state oil company Petrobras.

Fachin ruled the court in the southeastern city of Curitiba that convicted Lula "lacked jurisdiction," and sent the cases to a federal court in the capital, Brasilia.

Lula, 75, regains the right to run for office unless the convictions are reinstated.

The cases stem from Operation Car Wash, a sprawling anti-corruption investigation that brought down a Who's Who of powerful politicians and business executives in Brazil, jailed for using inflated construction contracts to systematically fleece Petrobras for billions of dollars.

Lula, who spent more than 18 months in jail before being freed in 2019 pending appeal, was the most powerful figure felled.

The court in Curitiba, where the probe was based, convicted Lula of using the corruption scheme to take bribes, remodel a triplex beach apartment and channel illegal funds to his foundation.

The convictions badly tarnished his image.

But the former metal worker remains a hero on the left, which sees the cases against him as a conspiracy that culminated in the rise of current President Jair Bolsonaro.

An Ipec opinion poll published Sunday gave Lula more potential votes in the October 2022 presidential elections than Bolsonaro -- the only politician to outperform the far-right president.

But Lula remains highly controversial -- so much so that the Sao Paulo stock exchange plunged by more than 1.5 percentage point when news of the court decision broke.

The former president's press office said he had no immediate comment on the ruling.



**Shanon**  
(adviser)

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L.balcony  
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5bdrs, S/p  
S, J, balcony  
yard, & F.F

**Parsian**

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**Gheitarieh (\$2200) 220sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, S, J, pkg, F.F**  
**Sa`adat abad (\$1800) 180sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, S, J, pkg, F.F**

**Aghdasieh (\$2700) 220sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, S, J, pkg, F.F**

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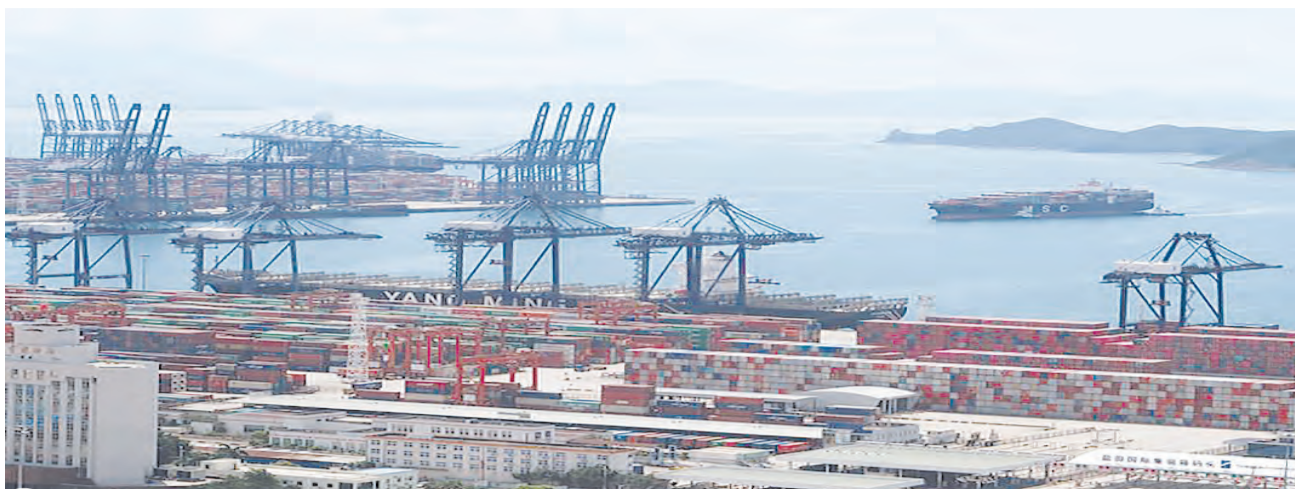
## Indonesia, UAE Committed to Driving Economic Transformation

JAKARTA (ANTARA) - Indonesia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are committed to an economic transformation for the future, wherein knowledge, innovation, and technology will drive their economies, Coordinating Minister for Maritime Affairs and Investment, Luhut Binsar Pandjaitan, said.

He made the remarks in the context of the Indonesia-Emirates Amazing Week 2021, which was held last week, in conjunction

with the visit of the UAE Minister of Energy and Infrastructure, Suhail Al Mazroui, to Indonesia.

"Through the Indonesia-Emirates Amazing Week 2021, I increasingly feel the same spirit and vision that the two countries are preparing something big for the future of their future generations," the Indonesian minister said on his personal Instagram account.



## China February Exports Post Record Surge From COVID-19-Depressed 2020 Levels

BEIJING (Reuters) - China's February exports grew at a record pace from a year earlier when COVID-19 battered the world's second-biggest economy, customs data showed on Sunday, while imports rose less sharply.

Exports in dollar terms skyrocketed 154.9% in February compared with a year earlier, while imports gained 17.3%, the most since October 2018. The data did not include figures for January alone.

In the January-February period, exports jumped 60.6% from a year earlier, when lockdowns to contain the pandemic paralysed the country's economic activity. That exceeded the forecast of analysts in a Reuters poll for a 38.9% surge.

Strong exports, which benefited from China's success in largely containing the public health crisis, have helped fuel the country's recovery from a pandemic-induced paralysis.

The surge was driven by a rebound in foreign demand, customs said in a statement on its website, citing improvements in manufacturing industries in the European Union and the United States, and their increased imports of Chinese products thanks to fiscal stimulus measures.

"In addition, a majority of manufacturing employees (in China) chose to stay put over the Lunar New Year holidays," the statement said. "Our survey showed a lot of firms in export-oriented provinces stayed open, and orders that usually only get delivered after the new year had been delivered normally."

Chinese factory activity usually goes dormant during the Lunar New Year break, which fell in the middle of February this year, as workers return to their hometowns. This year, the government appealed to workers to avoid travelling to curb the risk of a spread of the coronavirus.

In January-February, imports increased 22.2% from a year earlier, above the 15% forecast, partly due to stockpiling of semiconductors and energy products, according to customs.

China posted a trade surplus of \$103.25 billion for the first two months. Analysts had expected the trade surplus to narrow to \$60.15 billion from \$78.17 billion in December.

In yuan terms, exports rose 50.1% in the two months from a year earlier, while imports gained 14.5%. "Due to the impact of the new coronavirus, overall trade (in yuan terms) in January-February last year fell 9.7%, and the low base was one of the reasons for the larger increase this year," customs said. "But even when compared with normal years, such as the comparable periods in 2018 and 2019, growth in China's overall trade was around 20%."

China's economy expanded 2.3% last year, helped by solid demand for Chinese-made goods such as medical and work-from-home equipment, although the growth was its weakest in 44 years. This year, China has set a modest growth target of at least 6%, planning a careful course out of a year disrupted by COVID-19 and amid heightened tensions with the United States.

China's trade surplus with the United States stood at \$51.26 billion in January-February. Chinese customs did not give a monthly breakdown. The surplus was \$29.92 billion in December.

## Turkey One of Rare Countries Dodging COVID-19 With Least Damage

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkey has become one of the rare countries that have been able to dodge the pandemic with the least damage due to its effective health and economic policies, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has said, informing the government allocated 311 billion Turkish Lira to support Turkish people and economy during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We have used around 311 billion Turkish Lira for the subsidies and the support to our people. We have also allocated around 54 billion liras as social protection that includes social support and short-time working allowance," Erdoğan said in his video message he sent to the Bosphorus Summit on March 8.

Noting that the world and Turkey will soon mark the first year of the pandemic, Erdoğan stressed that Turkey provided free-of-charge health services thanks to the country's effective healthcare system. The pandemic has drastically affected every sphere of life -- from human ties to health, from tourism to politics, the president said.

"Figures about growth, employment, trade and others in 2020 display the severe destruction caused by the pandemic on the global economy. Economies shrunk, investments decreased, and unemployment figures increased in the past year. Turkey is one of the rare countries that dodged the first year of the pandemic with minimum damage thanks to the economy and social policies it implemented," he stated.

Turkey also assisted 157 countries and 12 international organizations by supplying medical equipment even in the most difficult days, Erdoğan recalled.

Turkey ranked in second place after China with its 1.8 percent growth rate, according to the figures announced last week, the president said.

"We are observing a similar success in the industrial production and exports. We are also observing an increase in the amount of international capital inflow," he added.

Stating that Turkey is determined to maintain this performance in the coming period as it is aware that investment inflows should be sustainable and inclusive, Erdoğan said: "Investments that address sustainability, social entrepreneurship and social responsibility offer important opportunities for humanity. We attach importance to support this innovative approach that connects today's social and business life."



## S. Korea's Food Prices Show 4th-Highest Increase Among OECD States

SEOUL (Dispatches) - South Korea's food prices increased at the fourth-highest rate among members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development in January, largely due to a supply shortage brought on by bird flu, according to data and market experts Monday.

January's prices for groceries and nonalcoholic beverages soared by 6.5 percent on-year, more than twice the OECD average of 3.1 percent, data compiled by the OECD and Statistics Korea showed.

Among the 37 OECD member states, steeper increases were seen only in Turkey, Chile and Iceland, which recorded price rises of 18.1 percent, 7.8 percent and 6.7 percent, respectively.

In February Korea's food price inflation rate posted an even higher figure, 9.7 percent. It was the fastest gain since August 2011, when food prices rose 11.2 percent.

The latest food price hike came amid a decline in the production of agricultural goods triggered by a highly pathogenic strain of bird flu, experts said.

"A desirable situation that we expect is where food prices increase on the back of surging consumer demand as a result of economic recovery."

However, recent price hikes were led by pressure from the supply side due to the outbreak of bird flu," said Jung Kyu-chul, economic outlook director at the Korea Development Institute.

According to Statistics Korea, chives increased in price by a record 227.5 percent last month from a year earlier, the sharpest gain since May 1994, when they rose 291.4 percent. Egg prices advanced 41.7 percent on-year, while the cost of apples, red pepper flakes and pork all jumped in the same month -- 55.2 percent, 35 percent and 18 percent, respectively.

Affected by these on-year price hikes, the consumer price increase rate rose from 0.6 percent in January to 1.1 percent last month.

Meanwhile, Jung of KDI forecast that food prices would rise slightly between April and May if the price of petroleum products increased, but said there was a limited possibility that inflation would rise sharply in the short term as supply shortages of farm products would ease in the spring.

## Saudis Raise Crude Prices to Asia, U.S.



RIYADH (Dispatches) - State oil producer Saudi Aramco increased pricing for Arab Light crude for Asia, its largest regional market, by 40 cents a barrel to \$1.40 more than the benchmark.

Saudi Arabia raised pricing for its crude for shipment to Asia and the U.S. next month after OPEC+ extended oil supply constraints, pointing to a tightening physical market.

The world's biggest crude exporter is boosting April pricing for crude exports eastwards to the highest levels since just before the Saudis unleashed a brief price and supply war a year ago. After maintaining prices to Asia at an eight-month high for the past two months, the premium for Light crude rose to the highest since March 2020. It suggests the Saudis see demand growth continuing even after Thursday's shock OPEC+ decision to keep oil supply largely unchanged sent Brent crude higher.

State oil producer Saudi Aramco increased pricing for Arab Light crude for Asia, its largest regional market, by 40 cents a barrel to \$1.40 more than the benchmark. Ahead of last week's OPEC+ surprise, Aramco had been expected to keep pricing for the grade unchanged, according to a Bloomberg survey of traders and refiners.

Aramco raised all other pricing to Asia, except for its Heavy crude which remained unchanged.

The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries and allies including Russia decided at a meeting on March 4 that they would be sticking with the output cuts that have buoyed the market so far this year. The Saudi pledge to extend a unilateral 1 million barrels-a-day cut through at least April also helped spur the benchmark to an almost two-year high at nearly \$70 a barrel.

The world's biggest exporter had intended to boost production next month by adding back the 1 million barrels-a-day of oil that it unilaterally slashed for February and March. Instead, the kingdom took the path of greater caution, not risking an erosion in price gains if pandemic-hobbled economies ease off on demand growth.

The exception to the decision was Russia, which will be able to add some production next month. Aramco is cutting pricing to Europe, where its barrels largely track the cost of Russian Urals crude. Russia wants to add production to prevent US producers from adding output and capturing market share.

## Japan Upgrades Economic Assessment for January to Upturn Phase

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- Japan on Monday raised its economic assessment for January, the first upgrade in five months, saying there were signs of an "upturn" in growth as industrial output started recovering from the impact of the novel coronavirus pandemic.

The Cabinet Office's coincident index of business conditions rose 3.5 points from December to 91.7 against the 2015 base of 100, the first increase in three months.

The office said the economy has signaled an "upturn phase," compared with its evaluation of a "bottoming out" in the previous month.

One step short of "improving," the most optimistic of its five assessment levels, the expression "upturn phase" was used for the first time since June 2013, when the depreciation of the yen helped export-oriented companies boost production. For 12 straight months through July, the government had rated the economy as "worsening," the most pessimistic designation.

In January, shipments of items such as semiconductors and general-purpose machinery expanded notably as exports grew, according to a government official. Still, the latest reading of 91.7 is lower than 94.8 marked in January last year, when the outbreak of the virus started affecting Japan.

The leading index of business conditions, forecasting the situation in the coming months, rose 1.4 points to 99.1 in the reporting month, following a 0.3 point decline in December.

Some economists have cast doubt over whether the coincident index reflects the actual state of the economy, saying the government focuses too much on data linked to the manufacturing sector rather than nonmanufacturers including service providers, which are still suffering from the impact of the coronavirus.

## Bad Loans to Rise at Indian Banks as Easy Liquidity May Tighten

BENGALURU (Reuters) - Bad loans and credit costs are expected to rise at Indian banks as easy money policies to shore up a pandemic-battered economy may start to tighten, Fitch Ratings said on Monday.

The coronavirus lockdowns last year slammed an already struggling financial sector, but recent quarterly reports have shown an improvement in profits and asset quality.

Noting that the recent improvement masked underlying pandemic stress, Fitch said banks would increasingly feel the pinch from the continued impact on small businesses and rising unemployment.

"Fitch believes that the disproportionate shock to India's informal economy and small businesses, coupled with high unemployment and declining private consumption, have yet to fully manifest on bank balance sheets," the rating agency said in a note.

India's economy returned to growth in the third quarter, but many sectors continue to operate below capacity and some indicators point to stress in retail customers, Fitch said.

Fitch added it sees high risk of a "protracted deterioration" in asset quality with more pressure on loans to retail and stressed small and medium-sized enterprises.

The Reserve Bank of India had in January warned that banks may see bad loans double to 14.8% under a severe stress scenario.

State-owned banks, with their limited capital buffers, will be more vulnerable to the impact of the pandemic than private-sector peers, and the government's plan to pump \$5.5 billion into these lenders over fiscal 2021 and 2022 is unlikely to be enough, Fitch said.

The ratings agency estimates state-owned lenders need \$15-58 billion in capital, under various stress scenarios.

Higher contingency reserves at private banks, which offer them better earnings and capital resilience, make them better poised for growth in 2021, Fitch said.

## Iran to Continue Naval Exercises With China, Russia

TEHRAN (MNA) – Referring to Iran’s capacity to form alliances with friendly and allied countries, Deputy Navy Commander for Coordination asserted Naval exercises with China and Russia will continue.

Large countries with advanced navies are willing to conduct joint exercises with the navy of the Army and the IRGC, and they are ready to do so in the region, Deputy Navy Commander for Coordination Rear Admiral Hamzeh Ali Kaviani

said and added, “This shows that the armed forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran have a very high capability in the field of maritime and open waters.”

Today, the Navy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is powerful enough to establish security in the Persian Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz, the North Indian Ocean, and wherever the interests of the Islamic Republic of Iran require, he said.



## U.S. Set to Surpass China in Post-COVID Economic Recovery

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - With the world economy slated to grow around 6 percent this year according to Oxford Economics, the U.S. could play a central role, The Wall Street Journal (WSJ) reports.

That more central role in the global comeback would be in contrast to the U.S. recovery from the 2008 financial crisis.

WSJ writes that this shows the “unusual nature” of COVID-19 compared to past crises, and how flexible the American economy is.

Some of the ingredients propelling the likely growth include the rollouts of vaccines, the recently-passed \$1.9 trillion aid package, easy money from the Federal Reserve and pent-up savings, as American households are sitting on around \$1.8 trillion in savings over the past year.

The U.S.’s expected larger role would be the first time since 2005 that the country is expected to make a larger contribution to global growth than China. China powered the economic growth in the wake of the 2008 crisis, with the U.S. experiencing the slowest growth since the Great Depression.

But because the U.S. economy is around a third larger than China’s, the recovery is expected to be larger if they both grow roughly at the same rate, which analysts say is likely.

The U.S. contracted 3.5 percent last year and is expected to grow 7 percent this year, while China grew 2.3 percent last year and is expected to grow 8 percent this year, reports from Goldman Sachs say.

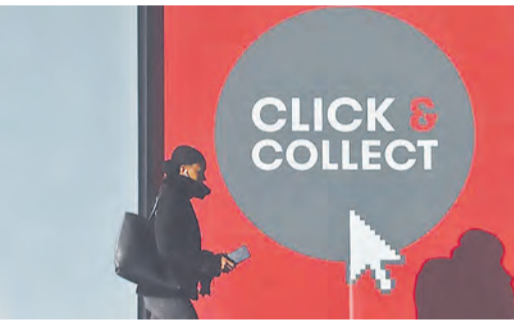
According to economists with J.P. Morgan, the U.S. could surpass its pre-crisis trend growth rate by the middle of the year. China, they say, has already gotten back



to the pre-pandemic trajectory but won’t exceed it.

The presence of the digital economy could help soften the blow, though, Karen Webster wrote a year ago as the pandemic was just beginning. The increase in things like live-streaming, gaming apps and eCommerce all helped to keep the world going amid the presence of the virus.

## UK Economy Will Never Return to Pre-Covid Pattern



LONDON (Dispatches) - The UK can see light at the end of the Covid-19 tunnel but the economy will never fully return to its pre-pandemic pattern, the governor of the Bank of England has said.

Speaking at an event organized by the Resolution Foundation thinktank, Andrew Bailey said the shifts in spending and working patterns seen since the country first went into lockdown measures a year ago would prove permanent. The governor said the economy had been through a “traumatic experience” but predicted the scarring caused by the deepest recession in 300 years would be less than that caused by the decline of heavy industry in the 1980s and early 1990s.

Bailey said the UK needed to increase investment in order to limit the long-term damage but said the Bank would be cutting its forecast for the peak in unemployment after the decision to extend the furlough scheme until the end of September.

The Bank’s February monetary policy report predicted unemployment would peak at 7.5% later this year, but Bailey said that forecast would be updated following the budget. “My expectation would be that this is likely to reduce the peak level of unemployment over the coming months. However, some rise in unemployment as the scheme tapers will be hard to avoid.”

With a YouGov poll showing consumer confidence at its highest level since the pandemic began, Bailey said: “If I had to summarise the diagnosis, it’s positive but with large doses of cautionary realism.”

He said there was a lot of uncertainty about the extent to which the structural economic changes seen over the past year would persist, but “my best guess is that we will see some persistence, not full persistence but not a full reversion to pre-Covid either. “We will work more from home than we used to and shop more online because new habits will persist to some degree, and to the extent they unwind it will be over a period of time.”

Bailey said the Bank was making the necessary preparations for either higher interest rates or a cut below zero depending on how the recovery from the latest lockdown evolved.

“There is a growing sense of economic optimism, in markets and in consumer and business confidence measures. The rate of new Covid infections is declining, and the vaccine programme is a huge achievement. There is light at the end of the tunnel,” he said.

## EU Medical Official Warns of Sputnik Jab Russian Roulette

VIENNA (Dispatches) - The head of the management board at the EU’s medicines regulator warned late Sunday against emergency national authorizations of Russia’s Sputnik V vaccine, comparing the idea to “Russian roulette”.

Last week the Amsterdam-based European Medicines Agency (EMA) launched a rolling review of the Sputnik V vaccine, a key step towards being approved as the first non-Western jab to be used across the 27-nation bloc.

Hungary has already approved Sputnik V and started using it as part of its vaccine rollout, while the Czech Republic and Slovakia have also ordered doses and say they will not wait for EMA approval.

Asked about the prospect of Austria taking the same step, EMA management board chair Christa Wirthumer-Hoche told Austria’s ORF broadcaster: “It’s somewhat comparable to Russian roulette.”

“I would strongly advise against a national emergency authorization,” she said, pointing to the fact that there was not yet sufficient safety data about those who had already been given the vaccine.

“We could have Sputnik V on the market in future, when we’ve examined the necessary data,” she said, adding that the vaccine needed to match up to European criteria on quality control and efficacy.

Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz on Friday met the top Russian official in charge of marketing Sputnik V, and had previously emphasised that vaccine procurement should not be subject to “geopolitical struggles”.

Kurz has said however that Austria will wait for EMA approval before using the vaccine.

Russia has said it is ready to provide jabs for 50 million Europeans as soon as Sputnik V gets the green light.

Moscow has pushed Europe to follow the lead of dozens of countries around the world that have approved Sputnik, but Brussels has been wary the Kremlin will use the vaccine as a soft-power tool.

The EU, which has been criticised for a slow start to its mass vaccination rollout, has so far authorised three vaccines: the US-German Pfizer/BioNTech jab, US firm Moderna’s shot, and the British-Swedish AstraZeneca/Oxford vaccine.

It is set to decide on the one-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine on March 11, while jabs by Novavax and CureVac are also under rolling review.

## Football Can Drive Green Revolution

PARIS (Dispatches) - Football might not be seen as the most eco-friendly of sports, but a new report suggests it has the potential to become one of the main drivers of the coming green transition, EURACTIV France reports.

“Football can be a formidable vector of popular ecology and solidarity,” according to a consultation paper published on Friday (5 March) by the group Football Ecologie France, which supports clubs in pursuing green initiatives.

Faced with the climate emergency, the association is calling for an “eco-support movement” – a “surge of collective commitment from each and every one of us at his or her own level [...] so that the number one sport can reinvent itself and move towards environmental responsibility”.

There’s no doubt football’s economic and social weight are significant. France’s 15,000 amateur clubs count 2.2 million members and generate a turnover of no less than €7 billion, according to Football Ecologie France.

And the sport’s environmental impact is no less significant. The 2018 World Cup generated an estimated 2.1 million tonnes of carbon dioxide, the group said in a press release, while a Ligue 1 match generates an average of 10 tonnes of rubbish.



This has led the beautiful game to gain a dirty reputation. In a study last summer 62% of fans asked by the group said football is not an environmentally friendly sport. This could change if “the whole of football were to make a concrete commitment to the ecological transition,” the group said.

Should this happen, the world’s most popular sport could contribute to improving air quality, preserving nature and reducing energy bills. The majority of respondents to the survey said this was the responsibility of both fans and the clubs, with 74% saying they would like their local club to implement environmental projects.

Fans said the sport should focus on three sustainability priorities: Reducing waste, raising awareness and reducing carbon emissions from travel.

Focusing on these areas, football holds great potential to drive societal change. Football “has the means to become a major player in the ecological transition thanks to its unifying power and its reputation”, said Football Ecologie France.

“Football has every interest in reinventing itself, for itself and society,” the group added. After all, “it can only be played if the planet is viable and society is stable.”

## Commercial Ports’ Capacity Should rise to 600m Tons

TEHRAN (MNA) - Head of Iran’s Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) said that the country’s commercial ports’ capacity should be increased to 600 million tons.

Emphasizing that Iran’s commercial ports’ capacity should be doubled, Mohammad Rastad said the current 300 million tons of capacity should become 600 million tons.

He pointed out that commercial ports act as an important infrastructure for development and centers of employment, added value and income, adding the Ports and Maritime Organization should be able to take a fundamental and strategic step to achieve the set goals by creating and developing commercial ports on the Makran coast.

“According to the past experiences in the development of Chabahar port,

one of the key areas that can lead the country to economic prosperity along the Makran coasts is to create and increase the capacity of commercial ports along these coasts”, the official further reiterated.

In late January, Rastad announced the plans for the construction of the country’s largest commercial port in Jask Island, southern Hormozgan Province.

The official made the announcement during a visit to the mentioned port city. “The development of Jask is very important and strategic at the national level, and we have reached a conclusion in the recognition phase to build the country’s largest commercial port in this city,” Rastad said.

### CIA Policy...

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In his profile, it is seen that he has been the U.S. ambassador to Moscow and Jordan. He has also experience as deputy secretary of state in his profile and has served both during the Democrats and Republican rulings. During Obama presidency and the nuclear talks with Iran, Burns was in the U.S. negotiating team and he was one of the behind-the-scene influential members of the p5+1 and paved the way for the 2015 nuclear deal.



Appointing Burns who was one of the ardent critics of Donald Trump’s policies like the U.S. pullout of the JCPOA and assassination of Martyr Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani can be interpreted as the shift of the U.S. foreign policy into a different era especially that Trump during his presidency had tried to reduce the importance of the intelligence service officials in the structure of the U.S. policy-making system, and reacting to the analysis about the threat against the U.S. national security by Iran, Trump called the intelligence officials passive and naïve who follow Europe’s path.

In criticizing Trump policies, Burns rejects Trump’s maximum pressure on Iran and believes that this incorrect action by Trump has made him fail to materialize his policies against Iran. The Israeli newspaper the Jerusalem Post, which is one of the key Zionist regime newspapers, writes about Burns, “Some former U.S. intelligence officials told the Post Burns also may be more hesitant to take aggressive covert actions and strikes and may express more skepticism about Iran-related intelligence originating from Middle Eastern countries such as Israel.”

With collecting and reading articles on Burns one can have his primary judgment that Burns is a diplomat who enjoys a great deal of respect and credibility among the Democrats and the Republicans and according to the Wall Street Journal, he has a great deal of experience in the security and sensitive fundamentalism.

The essential question which is raised is how Burns can work with Avril Hunter who is Biden’s choice for the National Security Agency (NSA). Biden’s transition team has said that Ms. Hunter will be the top intelligence official in the administration and she does not intend officially add CIA to the cabinet.

What will Burns do about Iran, Saudi Arabia and Israel? How will he act? And how will he define the strategy for getting close to Iran? Perhaps we may not be able to predict Bum’s four-year policy just in the his early days of at the CIA but what can be understood from his characteristics and background is that he has changed the open confrontation between the U.S. and China that Trump had concealed behind it, and he will alleviate China’s concern for drawing its reserves from the U.S. and this policy will be able to have sustainable effect on the declining U.S. economy.

Today the U.S. is facing with two important and sometimes contradictory challenges: whether it rebuilds the U.S. reputation or to focus on direct economic goals. In other words, instead of compromising with China, it compromises with Saudi Crown Prince Bin Salman or sacrifice Bin Salman for the U.S. reputation in democracy and human rights issues and seek saving the country’s economy by getting closer to China.

### Leader...

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“Female martyrs as well as those who were injured and held captive manifest one of the highest summits of honors [gained by] the Islamic Revolution and the Islamic Republic,” the Leader told the event, dubbed the ‘Army of History-making Angels.’

The power of faith, Ayatollah Khamenei added, opened the path of great endeavors before the Iranian women and enabled them to create “unique and awe-inspiring” scenes of courage, sacrifices and creativity at difficult junctures.

“From the passionate demonstrations of the Revolution days to the unforgettable period of the Sacred Defense, from heroism in the ranks of battles to forging their children and spouses to embrace danger and providing services behind the frontline, from presence at the front of science, research and technology and brilliance in the field of literature and art to performance in social and political and administrative sectors, and finally sacrifices in the field of health and serving patients in the recent high-risk test, they are all signs of the spiritual promotion of Iranian women, which has come about thanks to the Islamic establishment and Islamic lessons and values,” the message added.

“Undoubtedly, female martyrs as well as those who were injured and held captive — whose number is estimated to be 17,000 — stand at the peak of these honors,” the Leader said.

“Despite the Western culture of corruption and deviation imposed on many women during the Pahlavi era, the Iranian women were able to approach Islam’s desired nobility and purity, and this is a great honor; Praise be to God, Lord of the universe,” Ayatollah Khamenei added.

## Matthews Claims Paris-Nice Lead

PARIS (Dispatches) - Outsider Cees Bol won a crash-strewn stage two of Paris-Nice on Monday as the industrious Australian Michael Matthews took the yellow jersey in his first major race for the Bike Exchange team. As a crash disrupted the finale Bol rocketed to the head of a reduced bunch sprint outpacing the 2019 world champion Mads Peterson, while Matthews came third. But Matthews in his first major race since leaving Sunweb in January also took bonus seconds in the intermediary sprints on both Sunday and Monday.

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http://www.irannewsdaily.com

**E-Mail Address:**  
info@irannewsdaily.com  
**ISSN 1024-6053**  
**P.O. Box:** 15875-8551  
**Address:** No 13, Pajouhesh St., Golestan II St, Golestan St.Marzdaran Blvd., Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran  
**Printed by:**Honar Sarzmin Sabz  
**Distributed by:**  
Cities of Iran Cultural and Artistic Institute  
**Managing Director:** Fereydoon Taherpour Asl

## Marseille Knocked Out of French Cup

PARIS (Dispatches) - Marseille were dumped out of the French Cup by fourth-division outfit Canet-en-Roussillon, stumbling to an embarrassing 2-1 loss in their final game before Jorge Sampaoli takes over as coach, while Lille eased into the last 16. A difficult season for Marseille took another turn for the worse, despite stand-in coach Nasser Larguet naming a strong side for the last-32 encounter. Forwards Arkadiusz Milik, Dimitri Payet and Valere Germain all started for the visitors at Canet, but the Ligue 1 giants could only muster two shots on target.

# Antetokounmpo Leads Team LeBron To All-Star Win

ATLANTA (Dispatches) - Even in the strangest NBA All-Star Game of them all, LeBron James was still the perfect captain. Team LeBron showed off its high-flying and long-range skills during a dominating run to close out the first half, setting up a 170-150 romp over Team Durant in the league's 70th midseason showcase Sunday night. This one sure was different than the previous 69 All-Star contests. Determined to pull off an exhibition that is huge for TV revenue and the league's worldwide brand, the NBA staged the game in a mostly empty arena in downtown Atlanta, a made-for-TV extravaganza that was symbolic of the coronavirus era. James is now 4-0 as a captain, led this time by two former All-Star Game adversaries. Giannis Antetokounmpo was the game MVP after shooting 16 of 16 for 35 points. Stephen Curry chipped in with 28 points, while Damian Lillard had 32. James spent most of the night admiring his drafting skill, playing less than 13 minutes and finishing with four points.



Jaylen Brown of the Celtics scored 22 points as a reserve for Team LeBron. Jayson Tatum started for Team Durant and scored 21 points. The only good thing for Kevin Durant: He didn't have to participate in this shellacking, sitting out the game because of an ailing hamstring. Bradley Beal led Team Durant with 26 points. On a night highlighting Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Team LeBron swept the first three quarters and was first to reach the final target score, earning a total of \$750,000 for its charity, the Thurgood Marshall College Fund. The game got out of hand late in the second quarter. With scant defense being played, Team LeBron took turns dunking off alley-oop passes. Chris Paul delivered back-to-back lobbs that Lillard and Curry slammed through. Then, it was Paul on the receiving end of a payback pass from Curry. After showing they could handle shots up close, Team LeBron headed outside in the final seconds of the half. Lillard pulled up for a 3-pointer from the half-court line. Not to be outdone, Curry knocked down one from virtually the same spot. The atmosphere at State Farm Arena was downright eerie compared to a normal All-Star Game. Instead of a packed house, with A-list celebrities crammed into prime courtside seats, this game was attended by a smattering of hand-picked guests. They had plenty of room to spread out in a 17,000-seat venue that was essentially transformed into a giant television studio, with socially distanced spectators kept far from the court. Towering video screens were set up behind the benches. Vegas-style lights flashed around the arena. Recorded crowd noise blared over the sound system. The entertainment was provided by the host Atlanta Hawks, who didn't have any players in the game but were represented by their cheerleaders, drum line and DJ. To address fears that one of its biggest events would become a super-spreader for a virus that has killed more than a half-million Americans, the NBA pared down its usual weekend-long ritual of extravagant parties, gridlocked streets and people watching. This All-Star Game was a one-night-only event, with a pair of skill competitions held shortly before the game and the Dunk Contest squeezed into the halftime break. The players flew in Saturday afternoon and were largely confined to a nearby hotel except for their time on the court.

## Bale Over Psychological Scars Of Past Injuries

LONDON (Reuters) - Tottenham Hotspur manager Jose Mourinho said Gareth Bale has recovered from the "psychological scars" of previous injuries after the forward fired Spurs to a 4-1 win over Crystal Palace. Bale and Harry Kane struck two goals each on Sunday to help Spurs move into sixth spot in the Premier League on 45 points after 27 games, two points adrift of Chelsea in fourth. Welshman Bale rejoined Spurs from Real Madrid on a season-long loan in September after enduring his worst season in Spain in 2019-20 with three goals in all competitions. He had a slow start to life back at Spurs due to a knee problem and a lack of first-team football but has rediscovered his form with six goals in the last six games for the club. "I found psychological scars," Mourinho said. "When you have a couple of seasons with lots of injuries I think it is not about the muscular scars but the psychological scars -- that brings fears and instability. "There is a moment when you are working very well and everyone around you is giving everything we can give, there is a moment where that psychological barrier has to be broken. "And he broke it. It was him, not us. We just supported him." Spurs host Dinamo Zagreb in the first leg of their Europa League last-16 tie on Thursday before visiting Arsenal for the north London derby on Sunday.



## Laporta Elected New Barcelona President

BARCELONA (Dispatches) - Joan Laporta returned as Barcelona president on Sunday after winning the club's elections by a landslide, with his central pledge to try to persuade Lionel Messi to stay. Laporta was last president at Barca between 2003 and 2010, which included overseeing the hugely successful appointment of Pep Guardiola as coach and the iconic treble-winning team of 2008/9. In total, the club won four La Liga titles and two Champions Leagues during Laporta's seven-year spell in charge. The 58-year-old will return after holding off competition from Victor Font and Toni Freixa, the other two candidates to gain enough support to make the final stage. Laporta won 30,184 votes, Font 16,679 and Freixa 4,769 from a total of 55,611 lodged by the club's members. Amid champagne celebrations shared with his team on Sunday night, Laporta shouted with a grin on his face: "Now let's go to Paris and see if we can make another 'remontada' happen!" Barcelona face Paris Saint-Germain on Wednesday in the Champions League last 16, with a 4-1 deficit to make up from the opening leg. Longer-term, Laporta's task will be to rebuild a club in crisis, with crippling debts exacerbated by the pandemic, its reputation damaged and Messi considering leaving for free when his contract expires this summer.

## Official in Suspended PSG-Basaksehir Game Banned

NYON (Dispatches) - A match official in the December Champions League game between Paris Saint-Germain and Istanbul Basaksehir that was suspended after allegations of racism has been banned for the rest of the season for "inappropriate behaviour", UEFA announced on Monday. Sebastian Coltescu, from Romania, was banned from carrying out "any referee's function until the end of the 2020/21 season, i.e. until 30 June 2021" but was not found to have breached UEFA articles covering racism and other discriminatory conduct.

## Rare Bryant Rookie Card Sells for \$1.795m

LONDON (Dispatches) - A flawless Kobe Bryant rookie card, considered "one of the rarest in existence," according to Goldin Auctions, has sold to an anonymous buyer for \$1.795 million. The Topps trading card is one of just two in the world considered to be in "black label pristine condition," the auction house said, and is the most expensive Kobe Bryant card ever sold. The National Basketball Association (NBA) champion died a little over a year ago in a helicopter crash alongside his daughter and seven others at the age of 41, shocking the world of sport and sending fans of the Los Angeles Lakers star into mourning. "The fact that it sold for the final auction price of \$1.795 million, the all-time record for any Kobe Bryant card, speaks to just how beloved he was around the world," said Goldin Auctions founder Ken Goldin.

## Football Close To an Ideal Champions League

TURIN (Dispatches) - The new format of the Champions League after 2024 could be "close to ideal" and just a short time away from being formalised, Andrea Agnelli, boss of Juventus and the European Club Union (ECA), said on Monday. "I would dearly hope that everything would be done within the next couple of weeks," said Agnelli after a general assembly of the ECA which confirmed the consensus around a remodelling of the group phase and the expansion from 32 to 36 clubs. "There are details that need to be addressed, one being the access to the competitions," he said. "If we have four extra spots, how will these be allocated?" "But I would say within a couple of weeks everything should be pretty much sorted. "It's very, very close to an ideal Champions League." Discussions will continue over who will benefit from the four extra spaces although it looks likely France, which currently only has three spots, will be allocated one of them to bring them into line with England, Spain, Germany and Italy. The new format would see the scrapping of the current 'round-robin' group stage comprising eight groups of four clubs, each playing the other three teams home and away, a total of six matches leading into the knockout stage.



## Decision on Int'l Fans At Tokyo Games in Late March-IOC

LAUSANNE (Dispatches) - A decision on whether international spectators will be allowed to attend the Tokyo Olympics Games this summer will be taken by the end of March, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) said on Monday. "In terms of spectators there will be a decision towards the end of March, at least regarding international spectators," IOC spokesman Mark Adams told a virtual news conference. "Beyond that it is too difficult to say." Most Japanese do not want international visitors to attend the Games which are due to open in July amid fears that a large influx of visitors could spark a resurgence of novel coronavirus infections, a Yomiuri newspaper poll showed. The survey showed 77% of respondents were against allowing foreign fans to attend, versus 18% in favor. Tokyo 2020 President Seiko Hashimoto has said she wants a decision on whether to let in overseas spectators before the start of the torch relay on March 25. The Olympics, postponed by a year because of the COVID-19 pandemic, are scheduled for July 23 to Aug. 8 and the Paralympics from Aug. 24 to Sept. 5.

