

Health Ministry Spokeswoman  
Sima Sadat Lari Said on Friday  
That Some 53 More Iranians Lost  
Their Lives Due to the COVID-19  
Over the Past 24 Hours Bringing  
The Death Toll to 61,069

# IRAN NEWS

Esmail Baghaei Hamaneh, Iran's  
Ambassador and Permanent  
Representative to the UN Office, Has  
Emphasized the Role of the  
Conference on Disarmament, Calling  
For Fulfilling Objectives of the Body

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## Sanctions as Brutal as Terrorism, War Crimes

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's Ambassador to the United Nations Majid Takht-Ravanchi has denounced sanctions as inhumane, immoral and illegal, saying their far-reaching, devastating and long-term consequences are as brutal and vicious as terrorism, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

"In order to combat food insecurity in the world, it is necessary to lift siege and sanctions and foster international cooperation," Takht-Ravanchi said via videoconference to a meeting of the UN Security Council on Thursday that discussed how conflict and food security are interlinked.

"The current number of people at risk of hunger and food insecurity in the world are alarming, which has made it essential and urgent to deal with this challenge," he added.

Takht-Ravanchi then highlighted the right to food is the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger and malnutrition under any circumstances, whether in peace or war. The senior Iranian diplomat stressed that full realization of such a right requires a comprehensive approach and effective measures, both at national and international levels, which would particularly address all root causes of food insecurity and ensure secure international cooperation.

Takht-Ravanchi also underlined the need for closer cooperation among the General Assembly, the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), as well as the relevant institutions and agencies of the world body to that goal. "To combat the acute food insecurity caused by conflicts, the Security Council needs to oblige all parties to adhere to these principles, and at the same time the Council itself must not, under any circumstances, boycott humanitarian trade, especially food and medicine," the Iranian ambassador to the UN said.

"Nothing is more urgent than the immediate lifting of the inhumane siege against the Yemeni people, and removal of the illegal blockade of Gaza," Takht-Ravanchi stated.

He also referred to sanctions as a main reason behind food insecurity, noting that the US anti-Iran bans have prevented Tehran from gaining access to food, medicine as well as medical equipment, and undermined the Islamic Republic's ability to effectively deal with the coronavirus pandemic.

"Countries should not use economic and political coercive tools to put pressure on other governments; and immediate removal of sanctions should be taken into consideration as a key step in tackling food insecurity," Takht-Ravanchi said.

## Tehran Rejects Unfair UN Expert Report On Human Rights Situation

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's permanent ambassador to the UN office in Geneva says the United Nations' rapporteur's report on the human rights situation in the country is "unfair and deviant" since it propagates "prejudicial" statements about the whole nation.

Esmail Baghaei Hamaneh made the remarks at the 46th regular session of the Human Rights Council during an interactive dialogue with Javahid Rehmman, UN special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran, who presented a report on current rights "concerns" inside the Islamic Republic.

Rehman claimed in his report that women and girls "continue to be treated as second-class citizens in Iran."

Baghaei Hamaneh dismissed the report, saying Iranian women are not denigrated as second-class citizens but rather honored as they make up half of the country's population as mothers, sisters and daughters.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran honors our female doctors and nurses whom we lost to the pandemic. They are regarded as our Martyrs not as 'second class citizens,' as pejoratively called by Mr. Rehman .... We are alarmed how a flawed mandate can be reduced into a venue for propagating oversimplifying, prejudicial and judgmental statements about a whole nation," he said.

"In today's Iran, women run 50 percent of managerial positions in the Ministry of Health; 73 percent of health professionals and 49 percent of physicians are women; The women's life expectancy has reached, from 56 years in 1976 to 79 in 2018. Close to 50 percent of internet users in Iran are women and women's participation rate in R&D activities has increased to 31.2 percent according to a recent UNESCO survey. Close to 50 percent of higher education graduates are women, and 31 percent of the employees are women with higher education," he said.

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## Leader Rebukes U.S. Hypocrisy, Double Standards



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution says that Americans should be expelled from Iraq and Syria without delay. Says

On Thursday, Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei delivered a televised speech to the nation on the occasion of Eid al-Mab'ath, the day which the Almighty God formally entrusted the universal mission for the guidance and salvation of all humanity to His Last and Greatest Messenger, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

The Leader congratulated Eid al-Mab'ath, to all the Iranian nation, the Islamic Ummah and the freedom-seeking people of the world.

In his speech, he said that the Iranian presence in Syria and Iraq is consultative and not a military presence and it came upon the request of the two countries, reiterating that the Americans should leave Syria and Iraq soon.

He pointed out that the U.S. created ISIS terrorist organization and it has admitted that and that the U.S. rejects that other countries to possess nuclear programs while it possesses the largest nuclear weapons arsenals in the world which it had previously used.

"The U.S. has the biggest nuclear weapons arsenal in the world. They have thousands of atomic bombs and are the only state that has used Nuclear Weapons and massacred 220,000 people. Then they shout that they oppose weapons of mass destruction," Ayatollah Khamenei said.

Condemning Saudi Arabian crimes against the Yemeni people, the Leader stated that the ugliness of the UN measures against the Yemeni people is worse than the US support of the Saudi regime.

"Now that the highly skilled Yemeni nation, using their own abilities, has built defensive weapons and is responding to their 6-year bombing, their propaganda is shouting! The UN's ugly action against Yemen is even worse than the oppressive U.S. Gov'ts measures in this case," he added.

The Leader went on to say, "The U.S. supports the Saudi regime, a criminal who cuts its opponent into pieces with a saw, and then claims to be supporting human rights! They twist the truth around and lie to this extent."

Ayatollah Khamenei stated that the enemy pursues two goals in soft warfare.

He added: "There is an obvious military, hard and violent war that has its own rule, but soft warfare is more difficult to be cured from and more dangerous in a sense. In this soft warfare, the enemy makes two moves and pursues two goals. One is to break this chain of attachment to truth and patience, and the second is to turn the facts upside down, to show the facts of the world upside down."

Ayatollah Khamenei stated that the soft war causes people to feel lonely and hopeless, and wills to weaken and hopes to diminish. "The courage to do the action will be lost. These things happen when there is no recommendation. When hopes and courage diminish and wills weaken, great and sublime goals are forcibly diminished and forgotten, hence these officers of soft war, the youth, must not allow this to happen. They should advise about perseverance, about not getting tired and lazy."

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## Asian Refiners Hopeful for Iranian Crude, Condensate Trade Resumption

LONDON (Dispatches) - Asian refiners and petrochemical makers have started to prepare for a possible resumption in Iranian crude imports amid growing optimism that tensions between Washington and Tehran could improve under the Biden administration, with several Asian oil companies and trading firms reviewing recent Iranian crude official selling prices and S&P Global Platts South Pars condensate price assessments.

The Biden administration on Feb. 18 formally offered to restart negotiations with Tehran, inching the two sides closer to a deal that could see the restoration of Iran's approximately 2.6 million b/d export capacity.

Refineries like additional supply to the markets, particularly for complex secondary units, Mitsuyasu Kawaguchi, general manager for crude oil & tanker at Cosmo Oil, said during a panel discussion at the Platts 8th Asian Refining Virtual Summit on March 4.

"On the U.S. side, oil policy of Biden administration [towards Iran] is more accommodating to [that of] Trump, but it's certainly not the first priority," he added.

Rahul Prithiani, director of CRISIL Research echoed a similar sentiment at the event.

"[There are] positive noises from the US administration clearly towards potential resumption of supplies from Iran, but I think there are lot of other milestones that will need to be achieved and it may not be a fast recovery," he said.

"Maybe going into the middle of next year probably you will see movement and a lot of ground work that needs to be done for the Iranian supplies to come back is my sense," he said, adding that oil demand would also have recovered somewhat by then. At least one Asian trading house, as well as a South Korean petrochemical maker, a Thai refining entity and a Chinese refiner have recently started to track back and study the recent months' Iranian crude OSP differentials and Platts South Pars condensate assessments to analyze the adequate market value of Iranian grades, according to trading and feedstock procurement sources at the three companies.

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## ViewPoint By: Hamid Reza Naghashian Biden a Bigger Liar Than Trump

I do not forget hours after the time Joe Biden began his term in the White House by putting an end to the sordid presence of Donald Trump who launched any threat and resorting to the U.S. ruling bodies.

The American daily The Washington Post by issuing a report revealed the number of falls claims and lies which had been made by the former President Trump which stunned the minds of the people in the world. This reminded me of the fate of us after the death when record of our performance during our days and nights in the lifeis submitted and it reveals what we have done and above all what lies we have told in our lives. According to this report, Trump during his four years in office has had 30573 lies or misleading claims. As per report, the biggest repeated false claim or lie of Trump has been this remark that he was responsible for creating the greatest economy in U.S. history. The newspaper claimed that under just about every metric, Dwight D. Eisenhower, Lyndon B. Johnson and Bill Clinton had more robust economies during their presidencies.

According to this report, Trump's last false claim was made in his farewell speech at the Joint Base Andrews and hours before Biden swearing-in ceremony was held. In his speech Trump addressing his supporters and American people said, "We passed the biggest tax cut in history of our country." The Washington Post rejected this claim and with studying the gross domestic product of the country during Trump and former President Ronald Reagan's eras, it claimed the biggest tax cut happened during Reagan's presidency.

Considering all of these false claims and lies made by Trump during his term in office, I believe the Democrats are bigger liars than the Republicans. They say something in front and act differently behind, and they call it shrewdness and politics. The world has watched this point that when Barack Obama took power as the U.S. President, his main motto was "change" that most of observers and even governments had considered it as a change in the war-mongering policy of George Bush while Obama was seeking the strategy of change in the target areas and for the U.S., and carried out most of Bush's goals and strategies with the new methods and for the shock of change in the counterparts.

Although Obama had sent some messages for retreat of Iranian officials before the 2009 presidential election in Iran, he had carried out the key role in Mir-Hossein Mousavi and Mahdi Karroubi's sedition and unrests in the streets known as the 2009 sedition. Except Iran, he also masterminded sedition in Russia, and regarding this country, he sought the goal of swallowing Dmitry Medvedev government by implementation and resorting to the cheating in the field of advanced technologies which was a fairly alluring proposal for the Russians and guided the southern and western Russia towards instability and more threats by the tools of the NATO and color revolutions.

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## 16 States Forming Coalition at UN Against Unilateral Force, Sanctions

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - A group of 16 countries, including Iran, Russia and China, are reportedly pushing to create a coalition at the United Nations to counter the use or threat of force and unilateral sanctions by the West.

The coalition, known as "Group of Friends in Defense of the Charter of the United Nations," also includes Syria, Palestine, North Korea, Venezuela and Cuba as member states.

Other founding members of the group are Algeria, Angola, Belarus, Bolivia, Cambodia, Eritrea, Laos, Nicaragua, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

Viewed by Reuters, a concept note for the group described as "unprecedented" attacks against multilateralism and said the imposition of coercive measures and withdrawal from global agreements were signs of growing unilateralism.

China has lambasted American officials as habitual liars and said the US was trying to take the world back to the "jungle age" after Washington accused Beijing of subjecting women of ethnic minorities to forced abortion.

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# 100,000 Doses of Cuban-Iranian Vaccine Arrives in Iran

TEHRAN (IP) - The spokesman of the Iran Food and Drug Administration (IFDA) said a shipment of 100,000 doses of Cuban-Iranian vaccine for phase 3 of the clinical trials have arrived in Iran from Cuba. The shipment arrived at the Imam Khomeini International Airport in Tehran on Thursday. Earlier, the IFDA spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour had said Cuba was preparing for a Phase III clinical trial of the coronavirus vaccine with 150,000 participants. 50,000 people in Iran are participating in this phase (Phase III clinical trial of coronavirus vaccine). It is noteworthy that the clinical trial of this vaccine in children and adolescents will also begin in Cuba.

## Lifting of Sanctions Only Diplomatic Option Available

**TEHRAN (IFP) – President Hassan Rouhani says Washington’s lifting of anti-Iran sanctions and living up to its commitments under the 2015 nuclear deal is the only diplomatic way to resolve the current standoff.**

In a phone conversation with British Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Wednesday, President Hassan Rouhani said this is the only way to settle the issue.

“The clear way to diplomacy is for the U.S. to lift sanctions and make good on its obligations, and there is no other option available,” said the president.

Rouhani underlined Iran’s policy vis-à-vis the JCPOA is “action for action,” adding, “The European sides’ failure to deliver on their commitments under the JCPOA has only led to Iranian people losing trust in Europe and further restricting the diplomatic atmosphere,” President said.

“The U.S. government claims it would like to return to and implement the JCPOA, but it has taken no practical measures in that regard so far. Moreover, their return does not need negotiations because they left without negotiations,” said Rouhani.

He noted it is not only Iran which should pay the price for preserving the JCPOA. “All measures that Iran has adopted so far has been within the JCPOA aimed at striking a balance within the agreement and preserving the deal,” said the president.

He reiterated that sanctions and moves by the U.S. and its allies to keep Iran from gaining access to its financial resources outside Iran further added to the health and



medical problems caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

He also denounced the United States as a major violator of the JCPOA and UN Security Council Resolution 2231.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Rouhani touched upon Britain’s long-overdue debts to Iran with regards to purchases of defense equipment.

“While we are seeing that most countries indebted to Iran are either releasing the frozen assets or paying back their debts, it is very strange that no headway has been made with the trend of returning debts to Iran which are more than forty years overdue,” he said.

Rouhani further emphasized that Iran has always wanted to see peace and tranquility established in the region.

The British premier, in turn, presented a report on measures adopted by his country to make all signatories to the JCPOA to deliver on their commitments.

He said the UK and other parties to the JCPOA are interested in preserving the deal.

## Nation Emerged Victorious in Clash of Wills With U.S.

TEHRAN (PressTV) - President Hassan Rouhani says the former US administration put forth its utmost efforts but failed to bend Iran to its “disgraceful will,” as the nation emerged victorious in the “clash of wills.”

“The Americans sought to do something to bring about the [Islamic] establishment’s collapse, but our people endured the sufferings over the last three years, and the establishment has grown more powerful today compared to three years ago in light of the sacrifices of this great and resilient nation,” Rouhani said in an address to the inauguration ceremony of a number of national projects on Thursday.

He was referring to the term of ex-US president Donald Trump, who initiated the “maximum pressure” campaign against Iran by imposing the “toughest ever” sanctions aimed at paralyzing the country’s economy.

“The new rulers of the White House repeatedly announce that the policy of [economic] war and maximum pressure pursued by the former US administration has only led to defeat. In other words, our nation has achieved a great victory,” he added. The president said this “great epic” created by the Iranian nation encourages all freedom-seekers across the world to stand up to oppression and aggression.

Rouhani said although the Iranian people have through a very difficult time, especially economically, because of the U.S. sanctions, they achieved brilliant victories in moral, political and legal arenas.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Rouhani said the Iranian nation has succeeded in achieving another “honorable” epic through its resistance in the face of the enemy’s economic war after the outbreak of the deadly coronavirus pandemic. He noted that Iran has managed to adopt positive measures to produce COVID-19 vaccines at home.

## U.S., Israel to Be Defeated in West Asia

TEHRAN (MNA) – IRGC Quds Force Commander Brigadier General Esmail Ghaani has highlighted the U.S. crimes in West Asia, adding that “When we tell them we will break their bones, one day you will hear the sound of [fractured bones].”

Speaking in a ceremony in Mashhad to commemorate martyrs during the Iraqi-imposed war on Iran, the IRGC Quds Force Commander Brigadier General Esmail Ghaani hailed the role that martyrdom has played in keeping the Palestinians’ struggle against Israeli occupation.

“Palestine, which has undergone great changes today, has learned [lessons] from our martyrs,” the Quds Force commander said.

Gen. Ghaani also referred to the Saudi-led invasion against Yemen, saying, “The ruthless and corrupt Arab

countries, led by Saudi Arabia and the Global Arrogance (US-led West), have invaded the oppressed people of Yemen.”

“The path is not over, despite the problems that the enemies are creating for the Islamic Revolution, but our Establishment is moving forward every day and the United States and Israel regime that are ranting and raving are not same Israel and America on the first day,” he added.

Emphasizing that the Israelis were born criminals, he noted “Today, Israel is building 6-meter high walls around itself that will collapse.”

The IRGC Quds Force commander stated, “The United States is a criminal in our region,” adding, “When we tell them we will break their bones, you will hear the sounds [of their fractured bones] in due time.”

## Iran Countermeasures Legal, Meant to Maintain Balance of JCPOA

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif says the countermeasures Iran began to take one year after the United States’ withdrawal from a 2015 nuclear agreement are legal and aimed at preserving the balance of the multilateral deal, reiterating that they can be reversed in case the Washington returns to compliance with its obligations.

“If the U.S. lifts its illegal sanctions [against Iran] and implements its obligations as per the JCPOA (the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action), Iran will also reverse all its remedial steps,” Zarif said in a phone call with his Finnish counterpart, Pekka Haavisto.

He added that despite the U.S.’s breach of the JCPOA, its imposition of “cruel and illegal” sanctions on Iran and inaction of the European parties to the deal, Tehran remained fully compliant with the nuclear agreement for one year.

The Islamic Republic’s countermeasures in response to Washington’s pullout were in conformity with the JCPOA and meant to restore its balance, the top Iranian diplomat said.

A senior Iranian security official told Press TV on Wednesday on condition of anonymity that the U.S. needs to lift the sanctions imposed on the Islamic Republic during the administrations of former presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump before Tehran reverses its countermeasures and returns to full compliance with the JCPOA.

The source added that in addition to sanctions imposed on Iran by the hawkish Trump administration, the U.S. needed to lift the Obama-era sanctions, including the Iran Sanctions Act (ISA) and the Visa Waiver Program (VWP).

The Finnish foreign minister, for his part, said his country supports the JCPOA, stressing the importance of giving more chances to diplomacy to settle the ongoing challenges on the nuclear issue.

Haavisto also called for the expansion of political, economic, health, consular and research cooperation with Tehran and invited his Iranian counterpart to take part in a meeting of foreign ministers of the EU member states in Helsinki.

Meanwhile, in a phone conversation between the Iranian foreign minister and his Japanese counterpart, Toshimitsu Motegi, on the same day, the two sides discussed ways to improve mutual relations and the latest regional and international developments, including the JCPOA. Zarif welcomed the expansion of Tehran-Tokyo ties and said the Islamic Republic is ready to return to its JCPOA commitments if the other side fulfills its obligations and lifts the sanctions.

The top Iranian diplomat said Tehran plays a constructive role in curbing regional crises and outlined various measures taken by the country, including cooperation with the UN secretary general’s representative for Yemen, to this effect.

Motegi also stressed the importance of strengthening relations between the two countries and said his country supports the JCPOA and its full implementation.

## Leader’s Fatwa Against Nukes Sets Iran’s Course of Action

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) has once again dismissed claims that the country seeks nuclear bombs, saying the fatwa (religious decree) issued by Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei against weapons of mass destruction sets Iran’s course of action.

In an interview with the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), an American public broadcaster and television program distributor, Ali-Akbar Salehi was asked whether anyone in the Iranian government ever raises the issue of the benefits of nuclear bombs as “effective deterrence” against nuclear-armed powers, despite the country’s official assertion that its nuclear work has no military dimensions.

“You see, the final wording on this is by the Supreme Leader. Once the Supreme Leader has issued the fatwa, that fatwa is not only a religious fatwa, but it is something, a decree,” he replied. “It’s not that no one can say. You can speak your mind. I mean you can you speak whatever you wish. But, in reality, when it comes to action, we do what the fatwa says. We do what the decree says.”

Ayatollah Khamenei’s fatwa bans the production, possession and stockpiling of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction.

Iran’s nuclear chief also drew a distinction between a nuclear bomb and a long-range missile, saying the latter is used to “hit the places that you wish to hit.”

“But nuclear bomb, as it was used in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, inflicted harm on innocent people; 200,000 lives were evaporated in matters of seconds,” he added.

Elsewhere, Salehi complained that although US President Joe Biden has “promised to sort of come back to the JCPOA, ... he has not yet delivered” on that promise.

He was referring to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the nuclear deal that Iran signed with six world states — namely the US, Germany, France, Britain, Russia and China — in 2015 to show to the world the peaceful nature of its nuclear program.

Salehi said Iran’s nuclear issue is “not really complicated,” and that “the one who has left the JCPOA has to come back first.”

“We have already the deal, the JCPOA deal. It’s a deal that was negotiated for over two years. And the U.S. administration at one time felt that they want to leave the deal. You are the one who has left the deal, and you have to come back to the deal, and then we sit on the table within the framework of the 5-plus-one and talk whatever issues that are deemed to be talked about.”

Salehi said, “We have not restricted the IAEA inspections in Iran. But the other part of the voluntary agreement that we had committed ourselves within the JCPOA, and that was the Additional Protocol, those, we have put aside.”

The IAEA cameras, he noted, keep on recording “whatever they want to record. But the IAEA will not have access to the information. For up to three months, if the JCPOA is back, they will be given [to] the administration.”

He also confirmed that the recording will be trashed if the nuclear deal is not back, emphasizing, “It is easy to resolve the issue. Come back to the JCPOA, and [do] not let this happen.”

## No Difference Between Biden, Trump

TEHRAN (MNA) – A spokesman with the Iranian Armed Forces says US President Joe Biden is following the same policies that were pursued by Donald Trump.

“In our view, there is no difference between [Joe] Biden and [Donald] Trump. US is an arrogant, oppressive, and looter regime and Biden’s taking office will not create any difference in the totalitarian policies of Americans,” Brigadier General Abolfazl Shekarchi said.

“Trump was implementing U.S. oppressive policies openly and Biden is implementing those more covertly; so we should be vigilant against U.S. measures,” added the military official.

Iran’s stance regarding meddlesome policies of America in West Asia is that they should leave the region, he said, adding that “We will never budge an inch against this.”

Despite claims made during election campaigns, Joe Biden is yet to introduce a change in US foreign policy, including a return to the 2015 Iranian nuclear deal that the Trump Administration pulled out of unilaterally in 2018.

## Leap in Production Not Possible Without Promotion of Exports



TEHRAN (IFP) - Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and a number of top exporters of goods and technical-engineering services have discussed foreign trade and export of such services in a meeting in Tehran.

During the three-hour meeting, Foreign Minister Zarif was briefed on the viewpoints of the country’s economic managers and activists.

“The export of goods and technical-engineering services is key to the development of Iran, and a leap in production is not possible without exports,” Zarif said.

He said the Ministry of Foreign Affairs must strive and help Iranian producers to promote their exports, and praised the unmatched role played by the private sector in expansion of Iranian exports.

“The government and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are duty-bound to support private sector exporters, and the government cannot replace the private sector in this field,” he added.

He said one of the duties of the Foreign Ministry is to inform Iranian companies about the capacities of other countries including the projects and auctions where Iranians can export their goods and services.

“One of our other duties is to introduce and transfer domestic capabilities to foreign countries so that Iranian companies would be able to participate in foreign and international tender offers. Zarif also highlighted the significance of developing an economy-based attitude among the Foreign Ministry’s experts and managers, and said, “A development-oriented Ministry of Foreign Affairs must be a political and economic body.”

“We have emphasized to our ambassadors in other countries that their performance is evaluated based on the amount of non-oil exports, export of technical-engineering services, export of human resources, import of capital and technology, and development of tourism (increased visits of tourists to Iran),” he added.

He also stressed the Foreign Ministry’s resolve to provide economic training for the Iranian ambassadors starting their missions, and underlined the need for consultation with economic activists in this regard and informing the ambassadors and diplomats about Iran’s economic needs.

## Publication of Stamps by KRG Against Int’l Law, Principles

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Ministry Spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said on Wednesday that what has been published by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), Iraq in general is against international laws and principles.

In reaction to a question about the stamps in the KRG, Iraq, Khatibzadeh stressed that it is clear what has been published in the public is against international principles and rules.

He stated that the Islamic Republic of Iran while protesting the Iraqi government, has called for the immediate reversing this unfriendly action.

On the occasion of Pope Francis’ visit to Iraq’s Northern Provinces, the Ministry of Transport of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq published some commemorative stamps that not only have not replaced Arabic as Iraq’s first official language on stamps but also included a fake map on it.

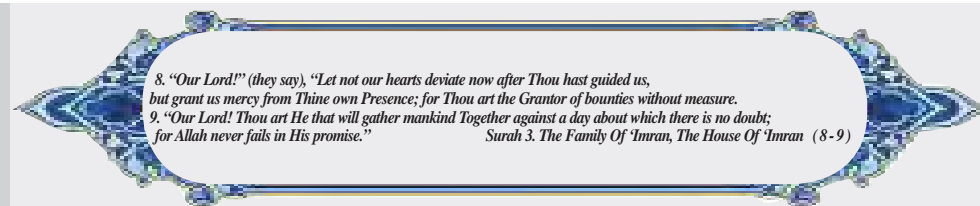
Pope Francis landed in Baghdad on March 5 for a three-day historic and first-ever visit to Iraq and the Kurdistan Region, where he met with senior officials and leaders.





## PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:13
■ Evening (Maghreb)	18:28
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:52
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:16



8. "Our Lord!" (they say), "Let not our hearts deviate now after Thou hast guided us, but grant us mercy from Thine own Presence; for Thou art the Grantor of bounties without measure.  
9. "Our Lord! Thou art He that will gather mankind Together against a day about which there is no doubt; for Allah never fails in His promise."  
Surah 3, The Family Of 'Imran, The House Of 'Imran (8-9)

## Tehran, Vienna Exchange Views on Boosting Trade

**TEHRAN – Iran and Austria, on Wednesday and in the tenth meeting of Iran-Austria Joint Committee which was held online, exchanged views on boosting bilateral trade and economic cooperation, and both sides announced readiness to boost the cooperation.**

Head of Iran Trade Promotion Organization Hamid Zadboum in the meeting pointed to old and historic relation as well as the positive trade approach of Iran and Austria, and announced Iran's all-out readiness for developing cooperation with different European countries especially with Austria.

He then pointed to the foreign trade volume of Iran with different countries, and reviewed shares of European countries from Iran's foreign trade with its 20 target export and import countries, and expressed hope Austria's share would increase in the upcoming years after the removal of the coronavirus restrictions.

Zadboum then pointed to the achievements of Iran regarding the COVID-19 and effects of the pandemic on its economy, saying that despite problems of the pandemic on the world and Iran's economy, these problems were intensified in Iran for providing the needs of the country in the field of health due to the sanctions and restrictions for the sake of the pandemic.

He then referred to the achievements of the country regarding the COVID-19 and success of Iranian researchers for producing domestic COVID-19 vaccines.

Then Austrian Deputy Minister for Digital and Economic Affairs Florian Frauscher, for his part, pointed to the problems because of the pandemic, adding that economic pressure because of the virus caused economic regress in the GDP of Austria and it



hit the hardest blow to Austria's tourism industry.

Then he expressed interest for enhancing the level of trade relation with Iran, noting that Austrian government has earmarked a 500-billion-euro stimulus package for helping the companies and labor market, expressing hope that Iran can have considerable share of this basket.

Then Austrian Ambassador to Tehran Stefan Scholtz, for his part, expressed his interest for developing trade relation between Iran and Austria, noting that the embassy is trying to prepare a ground for involvement of the interested Austrian companies in business in Iran in order that it can help the trade between Iran and Austria grow more than ever after containing the pandemic.

Iran's ambassador to Vienna Mr. Abbas Baqerpoor in the meeting expressed his satisfaction over the agreement of both countries for drawing up the Iran-Austria roadmap. He added that the agreement indicates the strong will of both countries for enhancing trade relation and expressed hope that creation of the joint committee and six workgroups of it can be a base for developing bilateral trade,

He admitted that the unilateral U.S. cruel sanctions and restrictions because of it have affected Iran-Austria's trade ties.

## Iran, Uzbekistan Trade Volume Can Increase to \$1b

TEHRAN (IP) - Chairman of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization Hamid Zadboum said that the volume of trade between Iran and Uzbekistan can be increased up to one billion dollars in short term considering the existing capacities.



During a meeting with Uzbek Deputy Foreign Minister Furqat Sidiqov, Hamid Zadboum announced the holding of the 14th Joint Commission on Economic Cooperation meeting between the two countries in the spring of 1400 (Next year in the Iranian calendar starting from March 21, 2021) to develop economic relations.

Referring to the cooperation between the Chabahar Free Zone and the Uzbek Free Zone in various fields of logistics, energy, and industry, he stressed the need to strengthen alternative routes to access the Uzbek market.

Zadboum emphasized the strengthening of exhibition cooperation between the two countries, voicing Iran's readiness to participate in Uzbekistan's building and plastic exhibitions next year.

Currently, there are about 290 Iranian-invested companies operating in Uzbekistan, he added.

## Armenia, Zanjan Province Pursue Economic Cooperation



ZANJAN (IRNA) - A roadmap is ready for promoting economic and trade cooperation between Armenia and Iran's Zanjan province, Chairman of Zanjan Chamber of Commerce Ali Yeganeh Fard says.

Speaking in a meeting with the Armenian Ambassador to Iran Artashes Toumanian, Yeganeh Fard said on Wednesday that the roadmap consists of 10-year capacities of the province in terms of exports of its own products as well as capacities of other countries involving in trade exchanges with Zanjan.

Zanjan province enjoys export capabilities in different sectors, including agriculture, fisheries, industries such as producing copper, silver, knives, and electrical products, he noted.

Pointing to holding joint exhibitions in the province to promote economic cooperation between Armenia and Zanjan, the official argued that the two sides can hold an online meeting to discuss trade and economic consultations and expand the exchange of information among businessmen of both sides.

The Iranian official also invited Armenian economic activists to visit Zanjan province and become acquainted with the capacities of the province, adding that Zanjan investors can invest in Armenia's agriculture and fisheries.

Lack of information hinders collaborations. For his part, Armenian Ambassador Artashes Toumanian called for the expansion of economic ties between Zanjan province and his country.

Emphasizing direct trade and investment as the two priorities of cooperation between the two sides, he said that holding economic seminars and dispatching trade delegations are the next steps to expand economic relations.

Toumanian further referred to the fact that Armenia has experienced a good progress in different areas such as IT and agriculture, expressing regret that lack of enough information between the two countries has been among the reasons behind the postponement of cooperation.

He said that Armenia is keen on pursuing serious economic cooperation with Zanjan province, noting that Yerevan is ready to contribute to producing foodstuff and agricultural products in order to export to other countries such as Russia.

## Iran's Exports to Russia Doubled in 2020 to \$800m

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran more than doubled its exports to Russia in value terms last year amid efforts in the country to boost trade with neighbors to compensate for losses suffered in reduced oil sales because of U.S. sanctions.

Iran's ambassador to Russia Kazem Jalali said on Thursday that exports from Iran to Russia had reached to \$800 million in dollar terms last year, an increase of 105 percent against 2019.

Jalali said increased exports to Russia show that Tehran and Moscow are expanding their strategic political and security cooperation to include more economic exchanges in future.

The envoy described booming trade with Russia as a major achievement for Iran in its attempts to neutralize sanctions imposed by the United States.

"Iran cannot be limited and isolated because of its

geopolitics despite what the Westerners are seeking to impose a blockade on the country," said Jalali during a meeting with authorities at Iran's ministry of trade (MINT).

Iran's exports to Russia jumped last year after the country signed a major trade agreement with the Russia-led bloc of regional countries known as the EAEU.

Russia has also increased its supply of staples like wheat to Iran as part of the preferential trade agreement.

That caused the volume of trade between two countries to increase by 43 percent last year, according to figures by the Iranian government.

Jalali said that Iran will be in need of more supplies of grain and animal feed from Russia to respond to a growing demand inside the country. However, he said Iran is expected to benefit from higher exports of farming products, including fresh fruits, to Russia in the upcoming years.

## Iran Launching Major Trade Office in Iraq's Kurdistan

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran is launching a major trade office in Iraq's Kurdistan to boost exports of farming products and manufactured goods to the semi-autonomous region.

A senior official at Iran's Trade Promotion organization (TPO) said on Wednesday that the trade center will be inaugurated in Sulaymaniyah, the largest city run by the Kurdistan Regional Government, until April 20.

Farzad Piltan said Iranian businesses and trade institutions will be represented in a four-storey building of the office that has been built in a 6,000-meter piece of land in the central district of Sulaymaniyah.

"The center will also provide trade and marketing consultation services and legal and technical assistance to the participants," said Piltan, who added that Iranian businesses and companies will be able to rent booths in the facility to present their products and services to partners in the region.

The official said launching the new trade office would be a major boost to TPO's efforts to increase exports from Iran to the KRG.

Iranian companies have been a major supplier of manufactured goods and farming products to the Iraqi Kurdistan region in recent years. Exports continued unabated last year even at the height of restrictions imposed at borders because of the coronavirus pandemic. Iran has also activated several more markets in areas bordering the KRG territory to further boost the trade.

Government reports suggest exports to the KRG territory account for nearly a half of all Iranian shipments sent to the neighboring worth nearly \$1 billion per month.

Kurds in Iraq have developed a strong preference for Iranian goods and services compared to products that come from Turkey where an ongoing crackdown on ethnic Kurdish population has sparked discontent in the KRG territory.

## South Pars Refinery Yields 13 bcm of Gas

TEHRAN (Shana) -- The director of the 11th refinery of the South Pars Gas Complex announced that since the beginning of the current calendar year, which began on March 21, more than 13 billion cubic meters of gas has been produced and processed in the facility.

According to the National Iranian Gas Company, Mohammad Saeidian said:

"The 11th refinery of the South Pars Gas Complex (SPGC) is one of the newest refineries in the complex, which is now operating at full production tilt and has been able to make a significant contribution to the production portfolio of SPGC.

Referring to the production and export of products in this refinery, he said: "Since the beginning of the year, more than 13 thousand and 102 million cubic meters of gas have been produced and processed in the facility



and in the same period, more than 257,136 tons of ethane has been sent to neighboring petrochemical plants."

The director of the 11th refinery of the South Pars Gas Complex stated: "With the efforts of the specialists and staff of this refinery, since the beginning of this year, 17,010 tons of granulated sulfur and nearly 12 million barrels of gas

condensate have been produced."

Saeidian pointed to other important measures and achievements in this refinery this year, and said breaking the production record of 50 million cubic meters of gas per day, minimization of the refinery's flaring, commissioning and optimization of unit 108 and reducing the delivery of acid gases to flare stacks are some of the important and significant steps of this year.

## Italian Embassy in Tehran Holds Virtual Business Forum



### IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Italian Embassy in Tehran and the Italian Trade Agency (ITA) held a two-days virtual business forum on agricultural machinery on 9-10 March 2021. The event was organized in collaboration with the two countries' sectorial business associations (FEDERUNACOMA and ATMAK) and with the support of the bilateral Chambers of Commerce and Industry (Italy-Iran and Iran-Italy), several territorial Chambers (Iran, Arak, Isfahan and Tehran) and Iran Chamber of Cooperatives.

In the introductory session, the Ambassador of Italy, Giuseppe Perrone, stressed the important role historically played by Italian companies in this sector and the continuing interest existing in both countries towards greater cooperation. Through the online event, a large number of participants were able to establish new contacts and discuss prospects for cooperation on a business to business basis in the digital platform made available by the Italian Trade Agency.

Agricultural machinery is indeed a field of traditional strength for Italian companies in Iran. In the current scenario in which Iran is looking to strengthen its position as a regional agricultural hub, the potential for cooperation with Italian companies is quite significant and can help further raise productivity of Iranian businesses in the agricultural sector.

## CBI Provides Foreign Currency Away From Frozen Assets

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Governor of Central Bank of Iran Abdolnasser Hemmati said on Thursday that foreign currency is provided from CBI financial resources away from frozen assets.

In reaction to the recent remarks of the U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Hemmati said that Blinken has made objection to release of Iranian assets from South Korea until Iran returns to the nuclear deal aka JCPOA.

From the beginning, it was clear that the Korean government did not have an independent resolve to pay its arrears to Iran, he said.

The South Korean ambassador's request for negotiations to pay Iran's assets were also made by the Koreans themselves, he said, adding that I asked him at the meeting whether they had received the necessary permission from the U.S..



## Gaza Fishermen Killed By Israeli Drone

GAZA (Dispatches) - Three Palestinian fishermen who died in an offshore blast on Sunday had encountered an explosive-laden Israeli drone that had fallen into the sea and blew up in their nets, the Hamas-run Interior Ministry in Gaza said on Thursday.

An Israeli military spokeswoman had no immediate comment. At the time of the blast, the Israeli military had denied it had any involvement in the incident.

The incident came at a time when Palestinian militants have been test-firing rockets into the sea, and a Gaza-based human rights group, the Palestinian Center for Human Rights, said on Sunday the fishing boat may have been hit by accident.



## Denmark, Norway Suspend AstraZeneca Vaccine

COPENHAGEN (Dispatches) - Denmark will not use AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine for two weeks after reports that some recipients had developed serious blood clots, and in one case may have died as a result, the country's authorities said on Thursday.

They did not say how many reports of blood clots there had been, but Austria has stopped using a batch of AstraZeneca shots while investigating a death from coagulation disorders and an illness from a pulmonary embolism. Following Denmark's move, Norway announced later on Thursday that it was also halting the use of the AstraZeneca vaccine.



## Turkey, Russia, Qatar to Push For Political Resolution in Syria



DUBAI (Reuters) - Turkey, Russia and Qatar are making a joint attempt to promote a political solution to Syria's 10-year conflict, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said on Thursday.

"Today we launched a new trilateral consultation process," Cavusoglu said after talks in Doha with Russian and Qatari foreign ministers. "Our goal is to discuss how we can contribute to efforts towards a lasting political solution in Syria."

All three ministers emphasised in their meeting that the only solution to the conflict, in which hundreds of thousands of people have been killed and millions displaced, was a political settlement in line with United Nations resolutions, he said. Turkey and Qatar have backed fighters who sought to topple Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, while Moscow provided military support which helped Assad seize back most of the country.

Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said the three countries were not seeking to replace efforts which Turkey, Russia and Iran had jointly been making since 2017 to reduce fighting in Syria and discuss a political solution.

"I can only welcome Qatar's desire to make its contribution to creating the conditions for overcoming the current tragic situation in Syria," he said.

Qatari minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani said they had also discussed mechanisms for delivering humanitarian aid across the whole of Syria, adding "there is a crucial need to lessen the suffering of the Syrians."

He said the reasons for Syria's suspension from the Arab League in 2011 remain, while Cavusoglu said recent international engagement with Assad's government hindered efforts for a political solution by giving it more legitimacy.

In a joint statement after their talks, the ministers urged U.N. agencies and the World Health Organization to prioritise COVID-19 vaccinations inside Syria and to "enhance" efforts for delivering humanitarian aid. They also stressed their commitment to preserving Syria's independence and territorial integrity.

Cavusoglu said Turkey would host the next round of the talks.

### Lebanon's Politicians Show No Sign of Saving Their Country

PARIS (Dispatches) - France's foreign minister said on Thursday time was running out to prevent Lebanon collapsing and that he could see no sign that the country's politicians were doing what they could to save it.

France has spearheaded international efforts to rescue the former French protectorate from its deepest crisis since the 1975-1990 civil war by trying to use Paris' historical influence to persuade squabbling politicians to adopt a reform roadmap and form a new government to unlock international aid.

"I would be tempted to qualify Lebanese politicians as guilty of not helping a country in danger," Jean-Yves Le Drian told a news conference in Paris.

## Chile Caught in Battle Between Protesters and Police



SANTIAGO (Reuters) - General Manuel Baquedano Gonzalez, a 19th century hero of Chile's War of the Pacific, is caught in a new battle: his statue drenched in blood-red paint and set on fire as protests reignite in the Andean country's capital.

Positioned in Santiago's iconic Plaza Italia, the center of protests that began in October 2019, it has become a lightning rod for anger at the establishment.

It has been drenched in paint, repainted custard yellow by the authorities, daubed in graffiti, bashed with sledgehammers and set alight during protests that started in October 2019 over the high cost of living in Chile and inequality.

On Wednesday night, with fears mounting that protesters could topple it entirely, Chile's National Monuments Council announced it would remove the statue for repairs.

On Thursday though, with protesters gathered in large numbers to mark the third and final year of unpopular President

Sebastian Pinera in office, the bronze militaryman remained conspicuously on his plinth, guarded by armed police.

Critics of the statue say Baquedano represents a Chilean elite that repressed indigenous people. Last week, the army issued a furious statement after it was doused with fuel and set alight, accusing the perpetrators of being "ignorant", "anti-Chilean" and "cowards."

Daniel Jadue, the Communist Party's candidate in this year's presidential election, responded by calling for the army chief's resignation and recalled the military's role in Chile's 1973-1990 dictatorship, saying:

"This reinforces the nefarious idea of an enemy in our midst that led that institution to commit the worst crimes in our history."

The episode underscores how deeply polarised Chile remains despite more than a year of battling a pandemic from which it is slowly emerging thanks to one of the world's most rapid vaccination campaigns.

The vaccine drive has bolstered the beleaguered government's approval ratings significantly but Pinera's only minimally.

## EU Urges Britain Over Post-Brexit Relations

LONDON (Reuters) - Britain and the European Union should stop trying to score points in their post-Brexit relationship, the bloc's ambassador to London said on Thursday, appealing for a more constructive approach to their increasingly thorny ties.

After completing its journey out of the EU at the end of last year, Britain's relations with the bloc have soured over COVID vaccines and accusations from both sides that the other is acting in bad faith towards their Brexit and trade agreements.

On Wednesday, Britain summoned an EU diplomat to "correct" a comment by European Council President Charles Michel that Britain had "outright" banned exports of vaccines produced on its territory. Britain denies the charge.

Joao Vale de Almeida, who took up his role as ambassador in January last year when Britain left the bloc, tried to smooth the strained relations by underlining how much Britain and the EU had in common and how a reset could help future ties.

"I think we need to make an effort to change the mindset and give up on trying to score points on disputes of the past and focus ourselves on doing what we can do in making the most out of the agreements that we made," told reporters.

"We need to have high levels of trust, mutual trust."

But with the EU poised to launch legal action against Britain over its moves to smooth trade with Northern Ireland and London smarting over the bloc's accusations on vaccines, many diplomats see a struggle ahead to restore that trust.



## Seven Dead in Myanmar as Amnesty Accuses Amy of Killing Spree

YANGON (Dispatches) - At least seven people have been killed in Myanmar after security forces opened fire on anti-coup protesters, according to witnesses and local media, as Myanmar's military government accused deposed leader Aung San Suu Kyi of accepting illegal payments.

The violence comes after the United Nations Security Council called on the military to "exercise utmost restraint" in its response to peaceful demonstrators and rights group Amnesty International accused the military of adopting battlefield tactics against peaceful demonstrators.

Six people were killed in the central town of Myaing on Thursday when security forces fired on a protest, one man who took part in the demonstration and helped carry bodies to hospital, told Reuters by telephone. A health worker there confirmed all six deaths.

"We protested peacefully," the 31-year-old man said. "I couldn't believe they did it."

One person was killed in the North Dagon district of Yangon, Myanmar's biggest city, domestic media said. Photographs posted on Facebook showed a man lying prone on the street, bleeding from a head wound.

Myanmar has been in chaos since its military toppled the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi on February 1. The power grab, just a decade after the

end of 49 years of strict military rule, triggered huge protests nationwide. The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners advocacy group said security forces have killed more than 60 protesters and arrested 2,000 others in the ensuing crackdown.

The army has justified the coup by saying that the election, won by Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy, was marred by fraud – an assertion rejected by the electoral commission.

The military spokesman, Brigadier General Zaw Min Tun, told a news conference in the capital, Naypyitaw, on Thursday that Aung San Suu Kyi had accepted illegal payments worth \$600,000 as well as gold while in government.

The information had been verified and many people were being questioned, he added.

He said President Win Myint and several cabinet ministers had also engaged in corruption and that he had pressured the country's election commission not to act on the military's reports of irregularities.

Al Jazeera's Tony Cheng, reporting from Bangkok in neighbouring Thailand, said that Zaw Min Tun had failed to provide evidence of the new allegations.

"But we assume that these will be part of new charges which will be used to extend [Aung San Suu Kyi's] detention," he said.



## Shock and Uncertainty After Death of Ivory Coast PM Bakayoko

ABIDJAN (Dispatches) - Ivory Coast faced shock and uncertainty on Thursday following the death of Prime Minister Hamed Bakayoko, the West African nation's second premier to die in office in less than eight months.

A close ally of President Alassane Ouattara, Bakayoko, who died of cancer a few days after his 56th birthday, was appointed prime minister in July 2020 after the death of his predecessor Amadou Gon Coulibaly, Ouattara's handpicked successor. Although Ouattara named his chief of staff Patrick Achi as interim prime minister on Monday while Bakayoko was in hospital, Bakayoko's passing leaves a vacuum for Ouattara to fill as he continues his search for a potential successor. read more

"It will be difficult to replace him because of his standing, his way of doing things," Abidjan resident Maturin Bamouni said. "Even when they are not from his political side, he still managed to sort things out."

A central figure in Ivorian politics over the past two decades as the country was plunged into a prolonged conflict and a partition, Bakayoko, a jovial character with roots in media and showbiz, emerged as a conciliatory figure, able to talk to all sides of the conflict.

"Bakayoko meant everything for Ivorians, a minister who listened to the whole population, even the opposition," Abidjan resident Kevin Bigore told Reuters.

His capacity to gain the trust of all sides including former rebel soldiers who staged a series of mutinies in 2017, threatening a fragile peace in the world's top cocoa producing nation, saw him appointed as defence minister in 2017, and kept the portfolio when he became prime minister.

He ended the mutinies and carried out reforms that helped keep soldiers away from the political scene during the October 2020 presidential election, said Abidjan-based historian and military analyst Arthur Banga.

"He succeeded in building trust between the soldiers, the chain of command and the regime, which contributed a lot to the stability observed from 2017 until now," Banga said.

Guillaume Soro, a former rebel leader who later led a government with Bakayoko as a minister before falling out with the current government, said he had lost a friend and a brother.







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## China's Smartphone Shipments Build on Post-Pandemic Rebound

SHANGHAI (Reuters) - China's smartphone shipments increased more than threefold in February 2021 from a year ago, government data published on Thursday showed, signaling an encouraging rebound from last year's nadir as the pandemic peaked in China.

Shipments of smartphones within China jumped 236.6% annually to 21.3 million handsets in January, according to the China Academy of Information and Communications (CAICT), a state-backed think tank.

That was up from 6.3 million in February 2020 and higher than the 14.9 million in February 2019, suggesting China's smartphone sector has returned to its pre-pandemic levels.



## OECD Increases 2021 Global Economic Growth Forecast to 5.6%

LONDON (Dispatches) - The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development has raised its 2021 global growth forecast to 5.6%, which is 1.4 percentage points higher than estimated in December.

Activity has picked up in many sectors of the economy and the rollout of vaccines, while still uneven, is gaining momentum, the organization concluded in its latest interim economic outlook.

The huge fiscal stimulus in the U.S., meanwhile, is likely to provide a major boost to the economy. The OECD estimates that the U.S. stimulus package is going to add one percentage point to global growth. But vaccines have to be deployed faster to achieve a global economic recovery, as the performance across countries is still uneven and the pandemic is increasing social inequalities.

Lockdown measures are particularly affecting vulnerable groups and risk long-term damage to job prospects and living standards for many people.

The interim economic outlook therefore calls for ramping up vaccinations; for swifter, more targeted fiscal stimulus to foster output and confidence; and for maintaining income support for people and businesses hard hit by the pandemic, while preparing the ground for a sustainable recovery.

"Speed is of the essence," said OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría. "There is no room for complacency. Vaccines must be deployed faster and globally. This will require better international co-operation and co-ordination than we have seen up to now. It is only by doing so that we can focus our attention on building forward better and laying the foundations for a prosperous and lasting recovery for all."

The OECD estimates that world output is expected to reach pre-pandemic levels by mid-2021 but the pace and duration of the recovery will depend on the race between vaccines and emerging variants of the virus. The OECD's upside and downside economic scenarios are mainly influenced by the pace of the COVID vaccine rollout around the world.

This news comes after the head of Swiss-German logistics group Kuehne+Nagel warned in the Financial Times that half of all adults in wealthy countries will still be waiting for their first jab 15 months from now. People in the developing world would have to wait a year longer.

Detlef Trefzger, CEO of the world's largest haulage group, which has been contracted to deploy the vaccines, said manufacturing capacity, not distribution, was the main limiting factor.

"I would not expect it to be realistic that more than 30-50 per cent of people [would be] vaccinated in the western world before summer next year," Trefzger said. OECD chief economist Laurence Boone said on Tuesday that vaccination programmes and stimulus measures should work hand-in-hand.

"Widespread vaccination of the adult population is the best economic policy available today to get our economies and employment growing again," she said. "If we are at war with the virus then we need to put vaccine production on a war footing, provide the necessary resources and speed up deployment across the world."

She said, "If we don't get enough people vaccinated quickly enough to allow restrictions to be lifted, the recovery will be slower and we will undermine the benefits of fiscal stimulus." In the OECD's central scenario, US growth is projected to be 6.5% in 2021, an upward revision of more than three percentage points since December, partly reflecting the large-scale fiscal stimulus now planned with a sustained pace of vaccination.

## Italy Set to Launch 40-Billion Euro Fund for Virus-Hit Companies

ROME (Reuters) - Italy plans to launch a fund worth up to 40 billion euros (\$47.8 billion) this month to help its companies hit by the coronavirus crisis raise capital and strengthen their balance sheets, two sources familiar with the matter said.

The so-called "Patrimonio Rilancio" is a special purpose vehicle (SPV) to be financed by the Treasury via specifically issued sovereign bonds and managed by state lender and equity investor Cassa Depositi e Prestiti (CDP).

The 170-year-old CDP, which the Treasury controls with an 83% holding, is playing an increasingly active role in Italy Inc to keep strategic assets in national hands and mitigate the economic damage caused by the pandemic.

Taking advantage of the European Union's more flexible approach to state aid in the face of the COVID-induced recession, the fund will invest in non-financial Italian companies with revenue above 50 million euros, over the next 12 years.

To give the CDP financial backing, Rome will issue up to 40 billion euros of sovereign bonds in several tranches, increasing a public debt pile which already equalled 155.6% of national output at the end of last year, a post-war Italian record.

The timing of the bond issuance will track the fund's capital injection deals, the two sources said. The size of the initial tranche will be set out in a decree now being drafted by the Treasury, they added.



## German Exports Post Surprise Rise as China Trade Sizzles

BERLIN (Reuters) - German exports unexpectedly rose in January, buoyed by robust trade with China in a positive start to the year for manufacturers in Europe's largest economy.

Seasonally adjusted exports increased 1.4% on the month after an upwardly revised increase of 0.4% in December, the Federal Statistics Office said on Tuesday. Imports fell 4.7% after showing no change in the prior month, an upward revision.

A Reuters poll had pointed to a 1.2% drop in exports and a 0.5% fall in imports. January's 1.4% increase in exports far surpassed even the most optimistic forecast.

The trade surplus grew to 22.2 billion euros. On the year, exports to China rose by 3.1%. Exports to other European Union countries fell 6.0% on the year, those to the United Kingdom dropped 29% and those to the United States decreased by 6.2%.

Thomas Gitzel, chief economist at VP Bank, described the overall rise in exports as "an extremely positive surprise" and expected further growth.

"Net exports will thus be able to partially offset losses in private consumption in the economy as a whole - but not completely. On balance, the German economy will shrink in the first quarter," he said.

Most economists expect the economy to shrink in the first three months of the year, before rebounding in the second.

On Monday, official data showed industrial output fell in January as winter weather slowed construction and semiconductor shortages held back production in the car industry.

## UAE Attracts Corporate Billions to Climb Tax-Haven Ranking

FRANKFURT (Reuters) - The United Arab Emirates, a magnet for the globe's ultra-rich, has also emerged as one of the fastest-growing corporate tax havens, according to a study released that highlighted \$200 billion-plus flowing into the country.

The index by the Tax Justice Network, which documents countries that attract companies to shrink their tax bills, added the United Arab Emirates to its top-10 ranking, which includes Switzerland and Bermuda.

Britain's offshore territories the British Virgin Islands (BVI), the Cayman Islands and Bermuda were named as the most significant jurisdictions used by companies to minimise

their tax, followed by the Netherlands.

The United Arab Emirates joined the top ranking at number 10 after multi-nationals rerouted over \$218 billion of foreign direct investment via the Netherlands to the UAE to save taxes, the study said, bolstering financial activity by almost 180%.

A Dutch finance ministry spokeswoman said it had introduced a withholding tax to target flows of money to low-tax countries, including the United Arab Emirates and Bermuda, and to prevent the Netherlands being used as a conduit. It estimates, however, that the money flows are lower. The UAE did not respond to a request for comment.

The Tax Justice Network, a group funded by donations and campaigning for transparency, said its study measured multinational activity, as well as tax rates and loopholes. While companies are not forbidden from using loopholes, the practice is viewed critically.

"You don't need to be a tax expert to see why a global tax system programmed by a club of rich tax havens is haemorrhaging over \$245 billion in lost corporate tax a year," said Alex Cobham, Tax Justice Network's chief executive.

Dubai, a party capital in the United Arab Emirates and a magnet for social media influencers, was hit hard by the pandemic as lockdowns hurt tourism and shopping while lower oil prices weighed on the Persian Gulf state's revenues.

To counter the decline in local population and revive a struggling property market, after job cuts prompted many expatriates, who make up the majority of the population, to leave, it redoubled efforts to boost the economy.

The government loosened rules to encourage international companies to establish a local foothold and bolstered schemes offering visas to rich foreigners.

The country has been criticized by the Financial Action Task Force, the global dirty-money watchdog. UAE recently approved the creation of a new government office to tackle money laundering and terrorist financing.

## U.S. Consumer Prices Rise; Underlying Inflation Muted for Now

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - U.S. consumer prices increased solidly in February, with households paying more for gasoline, but underlying inflation remained tepid amid weak demand for services like airline travel and hotel accommodation.

The mixed report from the Labor Department on Wednesday did not change expectations that inflation will push higher and exceed the Federal Reserve's 2% target, a flexible average, by April as declining COVID-19 infections and a faster pace of vaccinations allows the economy to reopen.

Inflation is also seen accelerating as price decreases early in the coronavirus pandemic wash out of the calculations. Many economists, including Fed Chair Jerome Powell expect the strength in inflation will not stick beyond the so-called base effects and the reopening of services businesses.

"Base effects and one-time price increases stemming from the reopening of the economy and some pass-through of higher prices from supply chain bottlenecks should lift core inflation to 2.5% in the spring," said Kathy Bostjancic, chief U.S. financial economist at Oxford Economics in New York. "However, the acceleration in inflation will be transitory and will not represent the start of an upward spiral."

The consumer price index increased 0.4% last month after rising 0.3% in January. A 6.4% advance in gasoline prices accounted for more than half of the gain in the CPI.

In the 12 months through February, the CPI shot up 1.7%, the largest rise since February 2020, after climbing 1.4% in the 12 months through January. Last month's CPI readings were in line with economists' expectations. Gasoline prices surged 7.4% gain in January. Food prices climbed 0.2% last month, with the cost of food consumed at home gaining 0.3%. The cost of food consumed away from home rose 0.1%.

Excluding the volatile food and energy components, the CPI nudged up 0.1% after being unchanged for two straight months. The so-called core CPI was lifted by a surprise pick-up in rents as well as rising costs for recreation, medical care and motor vehicle insurance, which offset declines in prices for airline fares, hotel and motel rooms, used cars and trucks and apparel.

The core CPI rose 1.3% on a year-on-year basis, retreating from January's 1.4% gain. The Fed tracks the core personal consumption expenditures (PCE) price index for its inflation target. The U.S. central bank has signaled it would tolerate higher prices after inflation persistently undershot its target. The core PCE price index is at 1.5%.

Stocks on Wall Street were trading higher. The dollar was steady against a basket of currencies. Prices of U.S. Treasuries rose.

## IMF Sees Upside in Delaying Argentina Deal After October



WASHINGTON (Bloomberg) -- Officials at the International Monetary Fund see some benefit in delaying a \$45 billion agreement with Argentina after the nation's midterm election in October, with talks yielding little progress six months after they began, according to people familiar with the situation.

While IMF negotiators prefer to hash out a deal with Argentina as soon as possible, some see a silver lining in the government's procrastination. Argentina could take more ownership and make bigger policy commitments once the pressure of a key legislative vote is off, three people familiar with the talks said, declining to be named because discussions are private.

The IMF's top priority is for Argentina to design a deal that it can honor and that returns it to growth, and the Fund knows it can't force the nation's hand, the people said.

A spokesperson for the Washington organization said its staff continues to engage constructively with the Argentine authorities on a possible program. The country's Economy Ministry declined to comment.

Argentina began in September talks with IMF officials for a revamped program to reschedule payments on \$45 billion that the nation owes the lender from a previous record deal. Government leaders have initially aimed to close it by May, a timeline that an IMF official recently called ambitious. IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva hinted at the tension last month, saying that the IMF is engaged, but "it takes two to tango."

Officials in Buenos Aires have been taming expectations on an agreement, with President Alberto Fernandez recently saying he doesn't want to rush talks. He has yet to send a detailed economic plan to the IMF or even top leaders within his coalition -- a key step to move the negotiation forward -- according to two other people familiar with the situation, who also asked not to be named.



# Moscow-Tehran Treaty to Be Extended

MOSCOW (IRNA) - Iran's Ambassador to Moscow Kazem Jalali says Moscow-Tehran cooperation treaty will be extended for more five years automatically and will be updated based on new capacities. Jalali said that the treaty on the basis for mutual relations and the principles of cooperation between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Russian Federation was signed 20 years ago, and

that the two sides agreed upon the automatic five-year extension of the treaty until they have no problem with the extension. During an official visit by the then Iranian president to Moscow, the treaty was signed on March 22, 2001. The Iranian ambassador expressed hope that the bilateral ties between the two friendly states will expand more than ever.



# World Failing to Take Green Covid Recovery Path

PARIS (Dispatches) -The world is missing a once-in-a-generation chance to rebuild a sustainable post-pandemic future, the United Nations said Wednesday in an assessment showing less than 20 percent of recovery finance can be considered "green".

Although the unprecedented economic slowdown caused by Covid-19 saw greenhouse gas emissions fall dramatically in 2020, institutions from the UN to the International Energy Agency have warned against a fossil-fuel powered rebound.

The UN says emissions must fall nearly seven percent -- roughly equivalent to 2020's fall -- this decade in order to keep the Paris climate deal's temperature goals in play.

With renewable energy more affordable and scalable than ever, there were hopes that governments would use the opportunity presented by the pandemic to green their economies and to prioritise nature in their recoveries.

But the UN's Environment Programme said Wednesday that just 18 percent of announced pandemic recovery spending could be considered green, such as renewable or low-carbon energy projects and nature-based solutions.

"We are not yet building back better when it comes to recovery spending," said UNEP Executive Director Inger Andersen.

"So far global green spending does not match the severity of the three planetary crises of climate change, nature loss, and pollution."

The UNEP analysis, co-authored by researchers at the University of Oxford, showed that out of the \$1.9 trillion announced for Covid-19 recovery among 50 major economies, just \$341 billion was earmarked for green projects.

When pandemic rescue packages were factored in, the green gap becomes even starker. Just \$368 billion of \$14.6 trillion (2.5 percent) Covid-induced rescue and recovery spending in 2020 was green, the report found.

The analysis singled out Spain and Germany for praise with their large subsidies to renewable energy projects, as well as France and Britain for their commitment to increase energy efficiency through building retrofits.

"There are clearly some leading countries that are taking green recovery seriously," Brian O'Callaghan, lead researcher at the Oxford University Economic Recovery Project and report author, told AFP.

"Unfortunately, the vast majority of countries are not and there is a long way to go." He voiced hope however that as countries transition from rescue packages -- that



is, "keeping businesses and people alive" -- to recovery, more governments may seek to prioritise renewables and nature preservation.

Several nations were named for prioritising "dirty energy", including China and India for announcing expanded domestic coal plans, and the US, Canada, Mexico and Australia for planning additional oil and gas exploration.

"Alongside the negative (emissions) consequences of these policy decisions, the negative health consequences for proximate communities and workers can be significant," the report said. Several planned stimulus packages were not included in the analysis, including the huge US green spending plan, "which paves the way for a significant acceleration in US green spending in 2021," the report said.

Globally, the report found that green spending had been "incommensurate with the scale of ongoing environmental crises".

## Biden a Bigger Liar...

FROM PAGE 1

The same behavioral pattern has been pursued and implemented by the Democrats in Palestine and the West Asia regarding China and the issue of Afghanistan which shows that the Democrats are bigger liars than the Republicans.



The U.S. Democrat Party has always employed a professional rhetoric and literature in expressing its policies and diplomacies but what it has been pursued in the scene and in implementing its foreign policies, both in terms of approach and tools, has been deceptive and shrewd, and totally different with what it has been stated publicly. The current U.S. President Biden is today facing with a large number of crisis and tensions either inside or outside of the country, and even for preparing the national security document in several issues, domestic elites and institutes have not reached a consensus yet. The U.S. economic condition is deteriorating day by day because Reuters predicted that the U.S. budget deficit was projected to be 2.3 trillion dollars in the fiscal 2021.

As per Reuters report, the U.S. Congressional Budget Office predicted two weeks ago that the federal budget deficit was projected to be \$2.3 trillion in fiscal 2021 while the U.S. debt would hit \$35.3 trillion or 107% of GDP by 2031. The Office in its latest budget and economic outlook predicted for the next ten years between 2021 and 2031 that the U.S. budget shortfall in 2021 will be \$900b lower than the registered shortfall in 2020 but 25 percent more than forecasts in last September.

Undoubtedly, with such a condition the Democrats will not go after genuine human rights. The most key and important thing that they will do is to blackmail other countries through false, self-made and void threats and to sell them arms in order that they could likely balance their budget deficit.

## Asian Refiners Hopeful...

FROM PAGE 1

The sources and the companies declined to be identified due to the extremely sensitive nature of the matter that involves Iranian products.

"We have been keeping an eye on this, as Iranian crudes' rich naphthenes and aromatics content is good for boosting refining margins in integrated complexes," a Beijing-based trader with a state-owned oil giant told Platts.

"It's still a big 'if' at this stage ... but we are actively reviewing the recent past Platts assessments to stand ready to submit term and spot cargo bids to the NIOC in the 'big if' event the international sanctions on Tehran are called off and Iranian oil exports resume," a source at the South Korean company said.

The source added that the company's plant engineers have been directed to start drafting a preliminary plan to tweak the refinery configuration to process Iranian grades.

Iran's flagship ultra-light crude South Pars condensate was assessed at a discount of \$2.90/b to Dubai on March 3, Platts data showed.

NIOC raised the March Iranian Light OSP differential by 5 cents/b from February to a premium of 85 cents/b to the average of Oman/Dubai assessments in March, while it increased the price of Forozan Blend from parity in February to a premium of 15 cents/b in March.

South Korean refiners and petrochemical companies are especially keen to resume Iranian oil imports as South Pars condensate would make one of the most economical and ideal base feedstocks for petrochemical products that would support the country's medical equipment and hygiene product manufacturing.

Due to increasing concerns over health and infection following the outbreak of the coronavirus, demand for certain petrochemical products like polypropylene and polyethylene, recorded a sharp uptick as these products are essential for making mask filters and protective medical suits and gears

As a result, South Korean refiners and petrochemical makers have been making rigorous efforts to secure a steady supply of base feedstock condensate and naphtha over the past trading cycles and increasingly, these companies see the need for the resumption of Iranian condensate trades.

The South Korean refining and downstream petrochemical industry is hopeful that tensions between the U.S. and Iran would ease to the extent that Iranian oil and condensate could at least partially resume, enabling many Asian end-users to secure more condensate supply during the pandemic, according to a market research manager at Korea Petroleum Association based in Seoul.

South Korea had imported more than 100 million barrels/year of crude and condensate from Iran in 2016 and 2017. However, the shipments tumbled to 58.2 million barrels in 2018, 33.23 million barrels in 2019 and the country received zero cargoes from the Persian Gulf producer in 2020, according to data from state-run Korea National Oil Corp.

## 16 States Forming...

FROM PAGE 1

Multilateralism is currently under an unprecedented attack, which, in turn, threatens global peace and security," said the concept note for the group.

"The world is seeing a growing resort to unilateralism, marked by isolationist and arbitrary actions, including the imposition of unilateral coercive measures or the withdrawal from landmark agreements and multilateral institutions, as well as by attempts to undermine critical efforts to tackle common and global challenges," it added.

The founding members of the group have been under harsh and illegal sanctions by the former US administration in Washington, with Iran over its peaceful nuclear program, China over alleged technology theft and Russia over the 2014 integration of Crimea.

The United States under Trump was taken to task for "weaponizing" its influence over international trade through the imposition of hefty tariffs on China, and the hostile measure still continues to harm Beijing in the new US administration.

China strongly opposes US tariff hikes, saying they are harmful not only to China and the US, but to the whole world. Washington, for its part, says a primary goal of the aggressive tariff strategy is to decrease the trade imbalance with China, which totaled \$379 billion in 2018.

Moreover, the European Union seems to follow in Washington's footsteps and levy restrictive measures against Russia and China or threaten to do so.

In the latest move, EU foreign ministers agreed to back a French-German proposal to impose sanctions on several Russian military intelligence officials over the case of Russia's opposition figure Alexei Navalny.

The Kremlin spokesman says the United States under outgoing President Donald Trump created exceptional havoc in world politics and violated all possible rules.

Former U.S. President Donald Trump was internationally criticized for his unilateral and isolationist approaches after his administration announced plans to quit the World Health Organization, pulled out of the UN Human Rights Council, the UN cultural agency UNESCO, the Paris climate accord and the 2015 Iran nuclear deal.

Trump's successor, Joe Biden, has pledged to reverse Washington's previous course but has yet to fully deliver.

## Leader...

FROM PAGE 1

He added: "Of course, today, cyberspace is an opportunity to do so. You, dear youth, utilize cyberspace in such a way to create hope and advice about the right and insight creation, and advise about not being lazy. This is about the first task of the enemy, which is to break the chain of recommendation."

"Their second task is to lie about the truth, and they act so boldly and decisively that anyone who listens to them thinks they are telling the truth," he said.

Pointing to Yemen, the Leader noted: "Suppose, for example, that the Arab ally of the United States has been bombing the oppressed people of Yemen at home, in hospitals, and at school for six years now, blocking them economically and preventing them from receiving food and medicine. This has been happening for six years, and of course, it happened with the green light of the US government, which was the Democratic government at the time, and this hard-hearted Arab government treats the Yemeni people this way."

He stressed: "The Yemeni people, of course, are talented and have been able to build or provide themselves with defense equipment and respond to the six-year bombing. As soon as this is done, their propaganda cry is raised that there is an assassination, etc. Everyone says that; the United Nations also says that. The ugliness of the United Nations is greater than that of the United States," Ayatollah Khamenei highlighted.

"This is an example of their lying or that the US has the largest arsenal in the world, and they have used it. The only government that has used the atomic bomb is the United States. Then they shout that we are against the development of nuclear weapons. They claim that we are against weapons of mass destruction. The worst and most dangerous weapon of mass destruction is in their hands, and they have used it as well."

Ayatollah Khamenei added: "ISIS was created by the United States itself; they themselves admitted to it. They create themselves, then under the pretext of the existence of ISIS, create a military base, claiming that we want to confront ISIS. They provide ISIS with modern media facilities and money and allow them to destroy and sell Syrian oil, then they claim they are fighting against ISIS."

He underscored that the presence of Iranian military forces in the region was of advisory nature in a place where there are no military forces at all, and this presence is merely political. "This is referred to by the U.S. as a destabilizing factor. Iran has shown its presence in a place where it has been requested to be present to defend the rule of law. But the U.S. itself attacks a country without permission and establishes a military base. Of course, the Americans must evacuate Iraq, which is based on their will and their law. Syria must also be evacuated as soon as possible."

He noted: "The year is over and the efforts of the country's medical staff against the COVID-19 disaster lasted a year and more than a year, and it is necessary for both me and the people to express our heartfelt gratitude to this staff."

The Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution stated that political Islam had been realized in the Islamic system of Iran.

He pointed out that on such a day, the Holy Heart of the Prophet of Islam (PBUH) had become the repository of the most precious divine trust, i.e. divine revelation, and the heaviest responsibility of the universe had been placed on His mighty shoulders, which was the responsibility of guiding humankind till the end of the world. This revelation was also a great gift to all of humanity.

He added that all the prophets had had divine purposes in their mission, and naturally, the purpose of the prophet himself would be to follow the purpose of God; at the top of all these goals was monotheism.

He went on to explain how these difficult goals were achieved:

First, it requires extensive planning for social relations; that is to say, if the truth Prophet in each era wants to achieve these goals, they must inevitably determine social relations in proportion to these goals.

The second issue is political power; i.e. these relationships cannot be created by an isolated human being who advises people, but power is needed. So, a political system emerges, and this is the goal.

Now which prophet succeeded and which did not is another matter, but the goal was how to create such a system. In this political system, the rite of governance is taken from the Book of God (Quran).

What is the source of governance and from which governance plans are taken is the divine book; this is the principle and basis, and all human programs must be within these principles.

## Tehran Rejects...

FROM PAGE 1

The envoy also complained that the interactive debate has been used over the past decade as a platform to launch a rhetorical anti-Iran campaign under the guise of human rights.

"This is not interactive; it is counteractive to the promotion and protection of human rights. Nor is it truly a debate; it is a one-sided and accusatory disputation in which the sponsors set the terms of reference to arrive, uncontested, at the conclusions they preordained," he said. "The way 'human rights' discourses are framed and weaponized by a certain group of States to score points in their political conflicts against their adversaries should be a matter of serious concern to any responsible stakeholder," the official added.

Baghaei Hamaneh also noted that the establishment of special rapporteurs on Iran's rights situation is not fair and justified and lacks any legitimate ground.

"The mandate comes from a non-consensual resolution forced upon the Council by a few

political actors who are long fixated in their habitual confrontational thinking pattern with Iran ... A mandate which is flawed by default can hardly yield a credible outcome other than profiling a country on the basis of generalization of individual cases, disinformation and false narratives," he added. The Iranian envoy also said that Iran's "courageous and efficient" performance against the COVID-19 pandemic "is egregiously distorted only to whitewash the deadly impacts of US inhuman unilateral coercive measures on Iran's health sector."

"My country is still under the most unprecedented unilateral sanctions ever imposed on a country. The U.S. continues to carry on with the unlawful and inhuman legacy of the former administration in complete defiance of international law and basic principles of humanity," he said. "The U.S. must be held to account for the massive systematic and gross violations of human rights perpetrated as the result of these unlawful and brutal sanctions," he added.



## Vidal to Undergo Knee Surgery

MILAN (Dispatches) - Inter Milan's Chilean international midfielder Arturo Vidal is set to undergo surgery for a left knee problem, the Serie A leaders announced on Thursday. "Arturo Vidal will undergo surgery tomorrow (Friday) for meniscal pain in his left knee," Inter Milan said in a brief statement.

The 33-year-old former Barcelona, Juventus, Bayern Munich and Bayer Leverkusen player could be sidelined for up to a month, according to Italian media reports.

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## Nadal Declines Dubai Wild Card

MADRID (Dispatches) - Rafael Nadal has declined a wild card invitation to play next week's Dubai Championships, telling tournament organisers on Thursday he needs more time to recover from a back injury.

The 20-time Grand Slam champion was hampered by the problem at the Australian Open, where he was knocked out in the quarter-finals by Stefanos Tsitsipas. Nadal pulled out of the Rotterdam tournament last week and had already announced his absence from Acapulco, which like Dubai starts on Monday.

# PSG, Liverpool Cruise Into Champions League Quarters

PARIS (Dispatches) - Lionel Messi scored one stunning goal but then had a penalty saved as Barcelona failed in their attempt to produce a second Champions League comeback for the ages against Paris Saint-Germain on Wednesday, a 1-1 draw taking the French side through to the quarter-finals 5-2 on aggregate.

Kylian Mbappe netted a hat-trick as PSG stunned Barca 4-1 in the first leg last month, and he extended their advantage in this last-16 tie by netting a first-half penalty in the second leg to put last season's runners-up ahead on the night.

But Messi made it 1-1 with a ferocious strike from 30 metres and the Argentine had the chance to put the visitors ahead after Antoine Griezmann was fouled in the area, only for the outstanding Keylor Navas to tip his spot-kick onto the bar.

Barcelona certainly went for it, but there was to be no repeat of their infamous recovery against the same opponents four years ago, when they lost the first leg 4-0 but triumphed 6-1 in the return.

It is the first time they have gone out before the quarter-finals since 2007 and, after Juventus were knocked out on Tuesday, neither Messi nor Cristiano Ronaldo will feature in the last eight for the first time since 2005.

Barcelona coach Ronald Koeman can nevertheless be encouraged by the way his team played on a cold, wet and windy night at an empty Parc des Princes.

"We are out, and that is what counts in our sport, but we can feel good about it because we had chances to make life difficult for our opponents," Koeman told Movistar Plus.

"We deserved more, and things could have been different had it been 2-1 at half-time."

Barcelona have been a club in crisis for some time but they have a new president in Joan Laporta, who will hope to restore calm at boardroom level, and they can still hope to finish the season strongly domestically.

## Koeman Hopes Young Talent Will Convince Messi to Stay

MADRID (Dispatches) - Barcelona boss Ronald Koeman is hopeful the club's young talent will convince Lionel Messi to stay this summer.

The Catalan giants were much improved in the second leg of their Champions League last 16 tie against Paris Saint-Germain on Wednesday evening as they played out a 1-1 draw.

And while the result was not enough to keep them in the competition, Koeman believes the signs of progression is something Messi has identified.

Speaking in his press conference after the match, he said: "Leo's seen for a while that the team is improving with the changes we've made. "[There are] many youngsters with quality and a big future coming in, so it's not a question of having doubts about this team."

Some of the youngsters Barcelona are excited about include the likes of Riqui Puig, Ansu Fati, Oscar Mingueza, and Ilaix Moriba.

Messi scored with an incredible long-range strike against PSG, but then saw his penalty saved by Keylor Navas.

The Argentine's contract expires at the Nou Camp this summer as speculation continues about whether he may move to

## Woods Could Soon Return Home From Hospital

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Rory McIlroy has been in touch with Tiger Woods and said that the 15-times major champion is doing better and could soon return home from hospital to begin recovery after sustaining serious leg injuries in a car crash last month.

World number 11 McIlroy delivered the update on Woods while speaking in a video call with "Tonight Show" host Jimmy Fallon that aired late on Tuesday.

"I've spoken to him a little bit," McIlroy said from Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, where he is the defending champion at this week's Players Championship. "He's doing better. I think all the guys have reached out to him."

"Hopefully if things go well over the next week or so he might be able to get home and start recovery at home which would be great for him. See his kids, see his family."



Meanwhile Liverpool eased past RB Leipzig into the Champions League quarter-finals with a 2-0 win in Budapest Wednesday that coach Jurgen Klopp said helps his side put their Premier League woes to one side.

Repeating their rapid-fire double act from the first leg, Mohamed Salah and Sadio Mane again struck within four second-half minutes to give the Reds a 4-0 aggregate win and keep alive Liverpool's hopes of rescuing their miserable domestic season with European glory.

After six successive defeats at Anfield and dropping to eighth place in the Premier League, Klopp's men looked relieved to be away from home, with the second leg also played in the Hungarian capital due to Covid-19 travel restrictions.

"They were outstanding. We had to switch off the Premier League stuff to get here and to try. To give it a proper try," Klopp told BT Sport.

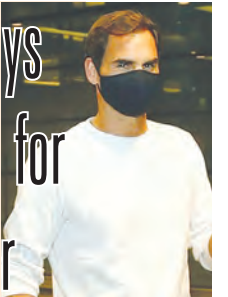
"The boys really enjoyed themselves tonight which is important," said Klopp.

"It is a big result for us," said Salah.

"We lost a few games in the Premier League, the team is not in the best shape but we want to fight in the Champions League," he said.

"It's been tough in the Premier League, everybody can see that. The last couple of years we were winning, we were flying. This year we had a couple of injuries so we were unlucky, we are trying to fix that but it is hard," he added.

## Federer Pays First Match for Over a Year



DOHA (Dispatches) - Roger Federer played his first match for over a year as the Swiss 20-time Grand Slam champion returned from injury to take on British number one Dan Evans at the Qatar Open in Doha.

Federer, who underwent two knee surgeries in 2020, won the toss and elected to serve first after joking with the umpire about the rules of the game.

He received a rapturous welcome from the 20 percent-capacity crowd at Doha's Khalifa Tennis Complex, beaming back at the crowd.

The 39-year-old initially pulled ahead winning his service game which was tempered by Evans also winning his opening service game.

Federer hasn't played a match since a semi-final defeat by Novak Djokovic at the Australian Open in January 2020 and acknowledged it was unusual for a player of his age to return after injury.

"I know it's on the rare side for a 40-year-old to come back after a year out," he said at a media briefing in the Qatari capital Doha Sunday.

"I feel there is still something -- retirement was never really on the cards."



# China Olympic Committee Offers Vaccines for Tokyo Games

BEIJING (Dispatches) - The Chinese Olympic Committee has offered vaccine doses to be used for participants at this year's Tokyo Olympics and the Beijing 2022 Winter Games, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) said on Thursday.

The Tokyo Olympics, postponed because of the novel coronavirus pandemic, were the first Games outside wartime to be cancelled but have been rescheduled for July 23 to Aug. 8.

Due to the delay the Beijing Games will now start just over six months after Tokyo.

"The IOC has received a kind offer from the Chinese Olympic Committee, hosts of the 2022 Beijing winter Olympics, to make additional vaccine doses available to participants in both editions of the Olympic Games, Tokyo 2020 and Beijing 2022," IOC President Thomas Bach told the Olympic body's virtual session.

He did not provide any details on the number of doses. The Olympics involve more than 10,000 athletes while usually tens of thousands more people are involved in the Games as coaching staff, media, volunteers and officials.

Bach was addressing an on-line presentation by new Tokyo Olympics chief Seiko Hashimoto, her first presentation to the IOC since taking over three weeks ago.

## Navas Dedicates Messi Penalty Save To PSG Teammate

PARIS (Dispatches) - Paris Saint-Germain keeper Keylor Navas dedicated his penalty save against Barcelona on Wednesday evening to teammate Sergio Rico.

The 34-year-old thwarted Lionel Messi from 12 yards in the first half just as the Spaniards looked to be conjuring up the beginnings of an unlikely comeback.

Messi thumped his spot kick low and hard but Navas deflected the ball onto the bar with his legs and celebrated by pointing to the touchline, an action he later explained was for Rico.

"It is always difficult, especially up against Messi who takes them very well," said the Costa Rican keeper after the game.

"It gives a lot of joy to everyone. This penalty (stop) is for Sergio Rico who is going through some difficult moments with his family, this is for him."

"It was a very great match from Barcelona, they pushed to the maximum. We were very motivated to continue in this competition, with this spirit."

"We have to be united for this competition, the squad has very clear aims in their head. This is what will help us to go far in this competition."

Meanwhile, PSG manager Mauricio Pochettino was thrilled with Navas' performance.



## Bale Reveals Son Heung-min Is Fourth Member of Tottenham's Welsh Mafia

LONDON (Dispatches) - Gareth Bale has revealed Son Heung-min is an honorary member of Tottenham's 'Welsh Mafia'.

The Wales trio of Bale, Ben Davies and Joe Rodon have jokingly dubbed themselves a 'mafia' group and reaffirmed that with a 'WM' celebration that the ex-Real Madrid man has shown off numerous times in recent weeks.

And while South Korean attacker Son may not be a compatriot of Bale's, he has confirmed he is still a part of the Welsh clique.

Speaking on Spurs' official Twitch channel, Tottenham's No 9 said: "He's (Son) basically Welsh to us. We're a bit disappointed because all the pictures have us three and Lucas -- but really Sonny should be the fourth man."

"We knew the other Mafia was Moussa, Serge and Tanguy -- La Mafia. So we decided to create a Welsh Mafia, but the original Welsh Mafia had four of us because Sonny is in it."

Bale has found his form at Tottenham in recent weeks as he, Son and Harry Kane begin to become a formidable attacking trio. The four-time Champions League winner has now scored ten goals in 22 appearances this season.

He has also netted a brace in each of his last two Premier League home games against Burnley and Crystal Palace.

