

German Airline Lufthansa Said That It Would Resume Flights From Frankfurt to Tehran From April 16, as The Conditions for Safe Flight Operations in Iranian Airspace Are Currently in Place

IRAN NEWS

Health Ministry Spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari Said on Saturday That Some 123 More Iranians Died From the Coronavirus Disease Over the Past 24 Hours Bringing The Total Deaths to 62,999

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Tehran Rules Out Step-by-Step Lifting of Sanctions

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh rules out any step-by-step lifting of sanctions imposed on the Islamic Republic under former U.S. president Donald Trump.

"As has been clearly stated many times, no step-by-step plan is being considered," Khatibzadeh said on Saturday.

"The definitive policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is the lifting of all US sanctions, whether those which Trump reimposed after withdrawing from the JCPOA or those which he initiated, as well as sanctions imposed under any other heading," he said.

"Obviously, this lifting of sanctions must be effective and must be verified by Iran," Khatibzadeh added.

His remarks came in response to claims made by US State Department deputy spokeswoman Jalina Porter about a planned meeting by representatives of Iran and other countries in Vienna Tuesday to discuss the troubled 2015 nuclear deal.

Restoring the nuclear agreement would be a major step, nearly three years after Trump scrapped it and imposed new sanctions or reimposed others lifted under the deal, forcing Iran to take a series of "remedial" measures in response to the decision.

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Fourth Wave Coming as COVID-19 Cases Spreading Across Iran

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN (IP) - The spokesman of the National Task Force for Fighting Coronavirus said that if health protocols were not strictly followed, we would experience a new wave of coronavirus across the country.

Describing the situation of coronavirus in the country, the Deputy Health Minister Alireza Raeisi said in a press conference on Saturday that the COVID-19 disease is on the rise in the country and that the British variant virus had spread to almost all provinces.

The spokesman said: "Nowruz holiday caused the situation of the coronavirus to worsen in the country and some provinces entered a new peak and wave of the disease."

Raeisi stated that Alborz and Ilam provinces entered the fourth wave of disease, adding that Mazandaran, Gilan, Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari, Markazi, and Lorestan provinces are also on the verge of entering a new wave.

"47 cities in are red and 126 are orange, and the number of yellow cities has reached 247 and only 14 are blue," the spokesman added.

He also urged those who traveled on holidays not to attend parties to prevent more spreading of the virus.

AEOI Chief Says JCPOA Deadlock Is Breaking



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) says recent talks has been promising as the deadlock is breaking.

"The emerged stand-still in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) is being resolved," Ali-Akbar Salehi said in an interview with a number of journalists at the social network Club House on Friday.

"Now the talks on the nuclear deal have entered the technical phase, having left behind the initial controversial debates, which means resolving of the former halt, which is promising," he added.

"It has been agreed that as of next week technical talks will begin in Vienna, after which the pivotal issue of the legal and political aspects of the JCPOA will be dealt with," Salehi said, adding that the ground was paved for entering the political and legal aspects of the job.

"Presently we have taken a number of steps forward, since the unjustifiable discussion that they had initially started, or we had started, is now left behind, and this is very promising," said the AEOI chief.

"When we will enter the technical talks phase, it means that the issue is being governed and so that 'after you; no you first' discussion is being left behind," he said.

Salehi said that some people inside the country (and even abroad) argue that why at all we need nuclear energy. "But if we study the history of the nuclear technology before the revolution, we will notice that at that time Iran was advised to have its first nuclear plant, such as the Bushehr facilities, in 20 to 30 years and that suggestion was not only for the economic concerns but also for the country's need to have a reliable energy basket.

"The nuclear discussions have unfortunately been strongly politicized and everyone views it as a political, rather than scientific issue. That is while currently, 400 nuclear reactors are active around the globe, producing 390 gigawatts of electricity," said the AEOI chief.

He added that 109 more nuclear plants are being designed and 329 other nuclear reactors are proposed to be designed; "Therefore, the world is moving towards that direction. China is currently constructing 47 nuclear power plants and dozens of other reactors and Canada has said that by the year 2050 they need to have increased their nuclear products.

The entire budget allocated to the nuclear industry during the past 30 years has been 7 billion dollars, that equals annually 230 million dollars, while 230 million dollars of it was spent for the Bushehr Nuclear Plant, which is worth five billion dollars now," said Salehi.

He said that the added value in Bushehr Nuclear Plant (BNP) equals 600 million dollars of electricity exports, which means the BNP can in ten years earn the money spent for it, while its life-span is 60 years.

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New Delhi Helps Tehran To Fight Locust Swarms

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India has delivered 20,000 litres of the pesticide Malathion to Iran via the strategic Chabahar port to help mount a coordinated regional response to the threat posed by swarms of desert locusts.

This was the second consignment of Malathion, a 95% ultra-low volume pesticide, supplied to Iran under a government-to-government locust control program, the external affairs ministry said. The consignment was handed over to Iran's Plant Protection Organization on March 18.

Last year, India had approached Iran and Pakistan for a coordinated regional response to the threat of desert locusts. "It was in this context that Iran had requested the supply of pesticides. There was no response from Pakistan," the external affairs ministry said.

India supplied the first consignment of 20,000 litres of Malathion to Iran in June 2020.

Iran is using the pesticide to control locust populations in Sistan-Balochistan and South Khorasan provinces, people familiar with developments said on condition of anonymity.

The British government this weekend hailed its jabs programme as "a huge success" after announcing half of the adult population -- nearly 27 million people -- had now received a first dose.

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Iran Planning to Start Power, Gas Exports to Oman

TEHRAN (MNA) - Head of Trade Promotion of Iran's (TPO) Arab and African office announced the country is pursuing plans to commence exports of gas and electricity to Oman.

Referring to the development of Iran's trade program with neighboring Arab countries, Farzad Piltan said, "We are pursuing the exports of gas and electricity as two Iranian export projects to Oman."

He also informed that Iran has plans to develop trade relations with Oman and Qatar. "As an example, next year we plan to hold a joint economic commission between Iran and Oman in the presence of officials from the Iranian industry in Muscat," he said.

"The follow-up committee of the 18th meeting of Iran-Oman Joint Commission was held virtually this year, and we hope to be able to hold this committee next year to follow up on the understandings reached between the two countries in various fields," Piltan added.

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U.S. Fines Italian Firm For Selling Gas Boiler Systems to Iran

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The U.S. government has fined Italian company Nordgas which manufactures components for gas boiler systems and application over trade with Iran, a report says.

The trade over a four-year period reportedly started in 2012, during which Nordgas re-exported 27 shipments of air pressure switches from US company UniControls to Iran.

According to the US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Asset Control (OFAC), Nordgas "obfuscated the re-exportation and Iranian customers from the US company."

OFAC says the Italian company misrepresented its intent, claiming that it was selling to a Nordgas affiliate, while in fact it sold to customers in Iran.

As a result, the U.S. government forced Nordgas to pay \$950,000 for apparent sanctions violations, the Treasury's official website said.

"In view of the individual facts of this case, as well as Nordgas's financial circumstances, its cooperation with OFAC, and its agreement to implement enhanced compliance commitments, \$650,000 of the settlement amount will be suspended pending satisfactory completion of Nordgas's compliance commitments," it said.

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China's Oil Imports From Iran Hit New High

SINGAPORE (Reuters) -- China will receive another large influx of cheap Iranian oil in March passed off as crude from other origins, curbing the top importer's appetite for crudes from other suppliers, according to traders and analysts.

Close to 1 million barrels per day of Iranian crude could arrive at China this month, nearly half the volume that the world's top exporter Saudi Arabia supplied to China in the first two months this year.

Refinitiv Oil Research estimates this month's arrivals at 3.75 million ton (27 million barrels), topping the previous record in January of 3.37 million ton.

"The trend seems to be continuing, though buying appetite is waning because of high inventories at ports and abundant supplies," said Emma Li, a senior Refinitiv analyst.

Separately, a trade source familiar with Iranian ship movements pegged China-bound cargoes at 30 million barrels for March, while Sara Vakhshouri, president of SVB Energy International, estimated Iran oil exports this month exceeded 1 million bpd.

Reuters reported last month that China quietly accepted record amounts of Iranian oil in early 2021, despite U.S. sanctions designed to penalize buyers. Analysts say the buying was a key factor behind the slide in global Brent oil prices from \$70 per barrel, limiting room for OPEC to increase production.

"The recent jump in Iranian crude exports, notably to China, and crude going out of inventories are contributing to the weakness of the oil market, undermining OPEC+ efforts to limit supply and setting prices for a third weekly drop," Rystad Energy analysts said ahead of the OPEC+ meeting on April 1.

China, Iran's top oil client, said last week it will work to safeguard the Iran nuclear deal and defend the legitimate interests of Sino-Iranian relations.

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FM to Visit Central Asia Next Week

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif will pay an official visit to four Central Asian countries next week for talks on enhancing bilateral and regional cooperation.

In a post on his Twitter account on Friday, Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said Zarif will travel to Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan on April 5-8.

Enhancing ties with Central Asia, a region of civilizational, historical & cultural commonalities, has always been among #Iran's top priorities.

Heading a 20-member delegation of businessmen and company representatives from Iranian public and private sectors, Zarif also made a three-day visit to Central Asia and the Caucasus which took him to Turkmenistan, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan.

U.S. Economic War Against Iran Unprecedented In the Past Century

TEHRAN (IP) - President Hassan Rouhani on Saturday in the meeting of the National Task Force Against Coronavirus said that the US imposed economic war in the past 3 years amid coronavirus pandemic in the past year was unprecedented in the past century.

Speaking at the meeting of the National Task Force Against Coronavirus, Hassan Rouhani described the coronavirus pandemic as one of the most important events of the century and said: "The virus has not been eradicated or weakened in the past 14 months since its outbreak."

"Today, developing a vaccine is one of the main priorities for fighting the disease, and gatherings should still be considered dangerous," He added.

"In the four remaining months of this government's term of office, fighting coronavirus, lifting sanctions, people's livelihoods, and finalizing projects are the government's 4 main goals," President Rouhani stressed.

The President added: "The government will do its best to achieve these four goals, and we will definitely have acceptable conditions in the next 4 months."

He also called Iran's national power as the source of significance and pride stressing that the Iranians stood together and resisted, they could successfully pass through the issues of nature, disease, and foreign affairs.



President Rouhani referring to the facts about COVID-19 saying: "In the studies, we saw that unfortunately, the fourth wave has started in two provinces, and in some other provinces, if we do not observe, we may enter this wave".

Rouhani highlighted: "We have had two unprecedented incidents in recent years, three years of economic warfare and COVID-19 pandemic all across the world. Three years of economic war have been unprecedented in the last 100 years. We have never had a three-year economic war, and it is less common in the world."

Emphasizing that the coronavirus put a lot of pressure on the people, he stated: "People faced the virus with perseverance, unity, pious help, assistance and the efforts of doctors and the sacrifice of the medical staff."

He called Iran's record of struggles against COVID-19 and economic pressure as acceptable saying: "Some people are losing their lives in the face of this dangerous disease, others are threatening their health and their lives are becoming more difficult in the face of the economic war."

Renovation Operations at Iran-Afghanistan Border to Go Ahead

TEHRAN (MNA) – The renovation operations of border crossing between Islamic Republic of Iran and Afghanistan will continue rapidly.

Deputy foreign ministries of Iran and Afghanistan agreed that road-construction and renovation operations of border crossing should continue rapidly without affecting border and legal issues.

Deputy Ministry of Foreign Affairs for Legal and International Affairs Mohsen Baharvand and Afghan Deputy Foreign Ministry for the Political Affairs Mirwais Nab met and held talks at Dogharoon-Islam Qala border crossing on April 1.

While visiting border crossing renovation and restoration operations between the two countries of Iran and Afghanistan, the two sides discussed border issues



and issues related to traffic and transit affairs.

The two countries' deputy foreign ministers agreed that the road construction and renovation of the border crossing should continue quickly without affecting border and legal issues and such issues should be reviewed and resolved only by the joint border

commission of the two countries of Iran and Afghanistan.

The two sides discussed issues related to the need for development and trade balance between the two countries, efforts to regulate the transit of citizens, the need to intensify fight against human and drug trafficking and international terrorism, facilitate assistance between the two sides in the event of natural disasters as well as other issues of mutual concerns.

Lifting Sanctions Needed for Halting Iran's Compensatory Acts

TEHRAN (MNA) –Foreign Ministry Spokesman said that the only condition for stopping Iran's compensatory measures is the complete lifting of sanctions and its verification.

In response to remarks of Deputy Spokesperson of the US Department of State Jalina Porter, Saeed Khatibzadeh said, "As has been made clear many times, there is no step-by-step plan, and the Islamic Republic of Iran's definitive policy is the lifting of all US sanctions, including both those imposed by Trump after his withdrawal from the JCPOA and the sanctions imposed under any other heading."

"Obviously, this lifting of sanctions must be effective and verified by Iran," he added.

"The suspension of Iran's compensatory measures and their resumption will take place only after all sanctions have been lifted and verified," he highlighted.

Previously, Jalina Porter has said that the U.S. intends to discuss the steps that Iran must take to return to its commitment to the JCPOA.

Iran Set to Close Borders With Turkey to Curb COVID-19

TEHRAN (MNA) - Health minister has issued an order, restricting travels to and from Turkey for a week in a bid to help contain the new coronavirus variant.

In a letter to the interior minister, Health Minister Saeed Namaki stressed the need for closing air and land borders with the neighboring country for a

week, IRNA reported on Saturday.

Considering the wide spread of the mutated coronavirus in Turkey, it is necessary to halt, by the next 48 hours, traveling via land and air borders to and from Turkey for a week, Namaki stressed.

"Iranian citizens who are in Turkey and intend to turn back to the country, as well as Turkish citizens who are in Iran, can leave the country observing the relevant protocols and doing PCR test to make sure no infection spreads," he highlighted in the letter.

For Iranians entering the country from land and air borders, quarantine is also required for suspicious or positive cases, he stated.

To prevent the new strain of COVID-19, the ministries of health and transport implemented a plan with the goal of rapidly identifying and testing incoming passengers and keeping them in quarantine facilities, if necessary.

Thirty border checkpoints have been selected, including 18 land borders, nine air borders, and three sea borders, all incoming passengers will be tested and referred to the quarantine facilities in case of necessity.

Some 5,000 members of the Iranian Red Crescent Society cooperate for carrying out the plan; while around 8,000 individuals enter the country via borders on a daily basis, Karim Hemmati, head of IRCS said on March 26.

Gen. Soleimani Terror Case Sent to Iran-Iraq Joint Committee



TEHRAN (MNA) – The head of the Iranian Judiciary's High Council for Human Rights says the case in connection with the assassination of anti-terror commander, Lt. General Ghassem Soleimani, has been sent to a joint committee with Iraq.

"The process of investigating the case of the assassination of Martyr Soleimani is to be followed as seriously and quickly as possible in the form of a joint committee between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Iraq," Ali Bagheri-Kani said.

Noting that the Tehran International Court of Justice is responsible for following up this case, the judiciary official said, "We have started another process in cooperation with the Iraqis... Since this crime took place in Iraq and the citizen of that country were targeted and martyred in the terrorist act, the Iraqi side has the authority to pursue this crime."

"There is another way of pursuing the case jointly, which was addressed and discussed during the Iranian Judiciary Chief's visit to Iraq," Bagheri-Kani noted.

He said, "In this regard, a joint committee has been formed, and the Deputy Attorney General of Iraq and the Deputy Prosecutor of Tehran are committed to pursue the case." U.S. terrorists assassinated General Soleimani, the commander of the Quds Force of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), along with Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, deputy head of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), and their companions by targeting their vehicle outside Baghdad International Airport on January 3.

The cowardly act of terror was carried out under the direction of US President Donald Trump, with the Pentagon taking responsibility for the strike.

Nanotech Products Exported to 49 Countries

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran has exported nanotechnology products to 49 countries in five continents, an official said.

In recent years, export plans have developed and Iran has set up an export base for nano products in Asian countries, Secretary of Iran Nanotechnology Innovation Council (INIC) Saeed Sarkaar said, according to the information center of Vice-Presidency for Science and Technology.

At present, 725 kinds of nanotechnology products are being manufactured in the country and sent to markets, Sarkaar noted.

The official went on to say that China, India, Indonesia, Syria, Turkey and Iraq have received Iranian nanotechnology products and equipment.

Also, Iraq, Afghanistan and Azerbaijan imported Iranian-developed nano-coated radiators in the past Persian year ended on March 19, 2021, Sarkaar underlined.

Trade forum between Iran and Indonesia and online health exhibition were also among the events that happened in the past Iranian calendar year, he added.

INIC secretary introduced the knowledge-based companies have noticeably helped the country as many of the companies' products have been used to fight against the pandemic since its outbreak in Dec 2019.

As the official said, over 12,000 essays of the Iranian researchers were published in reputable magazines affiliated to the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI) in 2020 which led the country to be ranked at fourth place in terms of nanotechnology.

Despite the pandemic, Iranian knowledge-based companies did make effort to meet national needs to technology; and Iran Nanotechnology Innovation Council took effective steps to support the companies' activities.

Iranian, Pakistani Armies Cooperate To Support Maritime Security

BANDAR ABBAS (IRNA) - Iranian and Pakistani Navy forces cooperate to support maritime security, an Iranian official has announced on Saturday.

Commander of Iranian Army's first zone Rear-Admiral Jaafar Tazakkor made the remarks on the sidelines of a ceremony a Pakistani flotilla docked at a harbor in Bandar Abbas, southern Iran.

Iran-Pakistan maritime cooperation has existed from the past and still continues, Admiral Tazakkor said.

He said that Pakistani flotilla is in Iran in line with cooperation of Navy forces of Iran and Pakistan, adding that the two Navies will stage a joint maneuver at the end of expedition.

Such travels will boost interactions and have positive impacts on security of the ships and sea trade, Rear-Admiral Tazakkor noted.

Pakistani flotilla will stay in Iran for four days, he said adding that it carries a message of peace, solidarity and friendship for the Islamic Republic of Iran and the region as well.

Iran, France Stress Parliamentary Cooperation

TEHRAN (IP) - Iranian and French officials stressed the importance of parliamentary cooperation as a dialogue between nations and an arm that helps governments to make decisions.

Iran's ambassador to France, Bahram Ghasemi, tweeted about his meeting with Jean Louis Borlange, head of the French National Assembly's foreign policy committee. In particular, the issues of the West Asian region and the unilateral actions of the United States, which worsened the abnormal situation in all parts of the world, were discussed.

Ghasemi added: "In this meeting, the importance of parliamentary cooperation as a dialogue between nations and an arm that helps governments to make decisions, as well as mutual recognition of nations without any mediation, was discussed and it was agreed that after providing health conditions and lifting of restrictions due to COVID-19, contacts between the parties should be resumed."

The Iranian ambassador to France continued the tweet: "In this meeting, the current situation of The Iran Nuclear Deal and the non-return of the US President Joe Biden to the nuclear agreement and the lifting of sanctions were discussed in detail, and Iran's key positions in this regard were discussed."

Iran to Establish Joint Transport Firms With Foreign Countries

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Road and Urban Development Minister Mohammad Eslami said that agreements have been signed with foreign countries to establish joint rail transport firms.

Iran had made agreements and memorandums of understanding with foreign countries to finance and develop railway transportation, but investments were hurt by U.S. sanctions, Eslami said as reported by Ministry of Road and Urban Development.

Stating that there have always been opportunities in this regard and Iran welcomes them, the minister said Iran had agreements with different countries and was going to establish joint transportation firms.

By establishing these firms, Iran is set to pave the way for its trains to be able to pass through other countries, Eslami explained, expressing hope that this would bring about a transition in Iran's railway industry.

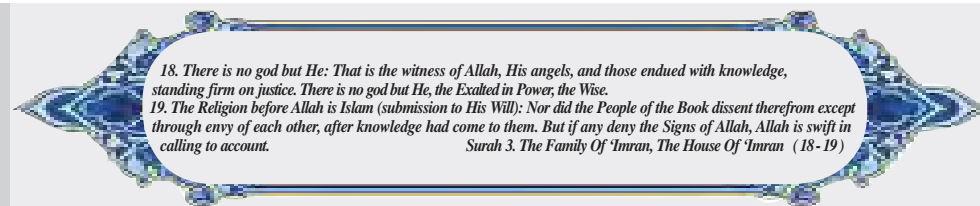
He underlined that Iran has paved the way to have a more advanced and more efficient railway system by joining International Union of Railways (UIC) and Commonwealth of Nations and signing agreements to adopt joint procedures and tariffs.

Iran has also constructed high-speed electric railways (300 km/h) and is going to afford high-speed trains later this year and connect to global lines, according to the minister.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:08
■ Evening (Maghreb)	19:46
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:23
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:48



Oil Demand Has not Reached 2019 Levels

TEHRAN (Shana) -- Oil demand is expected to grow by 5.6 million bpd as business activities would recover, however, it has yet to reach 2019 levels, said Iran's Minister of Petroleum, Bijan Zangeneh, on the sidelines of the 15th OPEC and non-OPEC Ministerial Meeting held via video conference.

The 15th OPEC and non-OPEC Ministerial Meeting was held today and we reviewed the situation, he said. "Generally, OPEC and non-OPEC members stayed committed to the pact although some members failed to comply fully which caused other members' complaint. So, it was decided to allow them to compensate for their non-compliance until September.

Global economy is expected to grow by 5 percent. Oil demand is also forecasted to increase by 5.6 million bpd as business activities would rebound, he said, adding "global oil demand decreased by 9.6 million bpd in 2020 compared to 2019 and it has yet to reach 2019 levels."



Given the successful vaccination as well as the allocation of 1900 billion dollars by the U.S. administration as economic stimulus, OPEC+ agreed to raise oil output by 350,000 in May and June, and by over 400,000 July in order to avoid market volatility and support prices. The group also decided to hold monthly meeting to examine the condition in order to cut oil production, if needed, to avoid instability in the market.

Venezuela, Libya and Iran are still exempt from any cuts as they produce less than their traditional capacity and their historic right due to the U.S. pressure, he said.

Pandemic Slowed Down Country's Economic Growth



TEHRAN (MNA) – The governor of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) Abdol-Nasser Hemmati has said that while Iran's economy was coming out of recession in early 2020, due to the pandemic the country's economic growth slowed down.

Speaking to state TV, Hemmati said that "coronavirus pandemic caused the country's economic growth, which was on the verge of becoming positive, to become negative again, but the resilience of the Iranian economy helped it to overcome the recession after a while and the country's economic growth became positive again."

The CBI chief added that in 2018 and 2019, Iran's economy recorded negative growth due to the return of economic sanctions after the US illegal move in violation of the nuclear deal, but the economy was recovering from the sanctions and becoming positive before the pandemic arrived.

Hemmati considered the decrease in the services sector as the most important factor behind the decline of the economy in the first months of last Iranian year and added, "Iran's economy gradually came out the recession in the second and third seasons of the previous year (summer and autumn)."

The governor of the Central Bank estimated that the impact of the decline in the services sector on the overall economy at more than 50 percent and said, "Most job opportunities were lost in this sector and about one million people, mostly part-time service job holders, lost their jobs due to pandemic."

He further added that the country is selling more oils as compared to last year now.

Iran Posts \$1.83b Trade Deficit With Turkey in Fiscal Year to March

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iran's customs office (IRICA) has updated figures related to trade with Turkey for the calendar year to March 20, 2021 as the balance of trade with the northwestern neighbor shows a deficit of \$1.83 billion.

IRICA spokesman Rouhollah Latifi said on Tuesday that the value of trade between Iran and Turkey had amounted to \$6.856 billion over the past calendar year, down by nearly 32 percent compared to the year to March 2020.

Latifi said Iran's exports to Turkey dropped significantly over the yearly period to stand at \$2.512 billion in value terms, a decline of nearly 51 percent year on year.

Imports, however, decreased by 13.5 percent compared to the year to March 2020 to reach \$4.344 billion, he said.

Balance of trade with Turkey had been slightly



positive at just \$3 million in Iran's favor in the year to March 2020, said the IRICA spokesman.

Iran reports lower exports to Turkey after a year of strict restrictions at borders because of the spread of the coronavirus pandemic.

The drop is also due to the fact that Turkish businesses are facing increased difficulties in trading with Iranian counterparts because of banking restrictions imposed by the United States.

Iran's energy exports to Turkey have specifically suffered because of U.S. bans although Ankara is still a main customer of Iranian natural gas.

Latifi said natural gas topped the list of Iran's export items to neighboring Turkey, followed by dried nuts, fruit and foods, metals, petrochemicals and construction materials, among other products.

Turkey's main exports items to Iran included legumes, barley, banana, seeds, animal feed and cooking oil, he said.

Gov't Cancels Privatization of Flag Carrier IranAir

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Transportation Minister Mohammad Eslami says a full divestment of government shares in the state-run airline IranAir has been cancelled over concerns that the carrier might face financial problems in future.

Eslami said that the government had decided to remove the IranAir from a list of state-run companies available for sale to private owners.

"IranAir is among our national assets ... after gaining the approval of the government, we took it out of the privatization list," he said.

IranAir, founded just after the Second World War and known locally as Homa, is the largest airline in Iran as it operates numerous domestic and international routes. The company has faced financial difficulties in recent years mainly because of foreign sanctions that ban purchases of brand-new planes and restrict the company's operations.

Eslami said the decision to cancel Homa's privatization came following discussions in government about the potential impacts of the divestment, including the risk of insolvency after a few years of operating under private ownership.

"This company was available for privatization for several years. However, the situation was not ripe for such divestment because what was taking pace in practice could have harmed the IranAir," said the minister.

He said the transportation ministry is planning to carry out an overhaul in IranAir's organizational structure to turn it into a major player in the global aviation industry. IranAir was poised to take delivery of dozens of modern jetliners under deals signed with two major global plane manufacturers Boeing and Airbus after a previous round of sanctions on Iran ended in 2016.

However, the supply of planes was halted in 2018 after the United States pulled out of an international agreement on Iran's nuclear program and reimposed sweeping sanctions on Tehran.



Iran Cuts Imports Bill by \$10b Amid Growth in Manufacturing

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran slashed its imports bill last calendar year by some \$10 billion, says the country's minister of trade as he insists the achievement was made possible by considerable growth in the manufacturing sector.

Alireza Razm Hosseini said that Iran had ended the year to late March with a record 7.5% growth in manufacturing activity.

Razm Hosseini said the growth had enabled the government to cut back on imports for thousands of products that were previously supplied from abroad.

The minister made the comments after the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei named the new calendar year as the year of "Production: Support and the Elimination of Obstacles."

In his speech to mark the beginning of the new year on March 20, The Leader described efforts by the government to boost manufacturing activity over the past calendar year as "acceptable" while insisting that there were more works to do to improve conditions for manufacturers including by banning imports of goods that are produced inside Iran.

Razm Hosseini said his ministry of MIMT, which is also responsible for manufacturing and mining activity, would do its utmost to "eliminate unnecessary laws and regulations that hamper production".

He said the MIMT would grant permissions for activating nearly 5,000 mining sites across Iran by late April.

Iran's growing efforts to boost domestic manufacturing is in line with the country's general policy of diversifying the economy away from crude and to minimize the impacts of unilateral foreign sanctions targeting crude exports.

The efforts seem to have paid off, as testified by major international organizations and experts who believe Iran's economy will expand in the years to come regardless of how much the country earns from oil exports.

Over 360,000 MT of Commodities Traded on IME Last Week

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) witnessed trade of 367,605 tons of commodities with a total trading value of more than \$200m last week.

According to a report by the IME's international affairs and PR, the exchange sold on its mineral and industrial trading floor, 195,158 tons of various types of commodities valued at nearly \$99m

Commodities traded on this floor were 194,528 tons of steel and 630 tons of aluminum.

Also within this week, the IME sold on both domestic and export pits of its oil and petrochemical trading floor, 172,049 tons of commodities with a trading value of \$103m.

Items sold on this floor included 36,100 tons of vacuum bottom, 41,971 tons of bitumen, 35,155 tons of polymeric products, 31,941 tons of chemicals, 25,000 tons of lube cut, 1,346 tons of base oil and 50 tons of sulfur.

Moreover, the IME's side market saw trade of 398 tons of commodities within the same week.



Price Index Rises in Final Month of Year to March

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Statistical Center of Iran (SCI) has released latest monthly data on consumer prices in the country, saying inflation rose to 36.4 percent in the final month of the last calendar year which ended on March 20.

The SCI figures, covered in a Sunday report by the IRNA news agency, showed that inflation rate had increased by 2.2 percent compared to the month to February 18. The report said that point-to-point inflation, a measure used by the SCI to compare prices in similar months in two years, had increased for the month to late March by 48.7 percent.

It said, however, that food prices had risen by 66.6 percent on the point-to-point scale, down slightly 0.2 percent against the previous month's comparison. Point-to-point inflation for all goods was higher for households living in rural regions at 53.3 percent, down 0.3 percent against the month to February 18, said the SCI.

Monthly inflation, which compares prices in two successive months regardless of the annual index, rose by 1.8 percent in the month to late March. Monthly growth in consumer prices had been higher at the end of the month to late February at 1.15 percent. High rates of inflation in Iran comes as the country has been grappling with one of the largest outbreaks of the coronavirus pandemic in the Middle East.

The government has introduced several rounds of closures for businesses and manufacturing units across the country to curb the spread of the disease. That comes as the country is still under a series of harsh American sanctions that have mainly targeted the country's energy and banking sectors.

Iran Installs New System to Sell Crude in Sea of Oman

TEHRAN 9PressTV) - Iran has launched a project to transfer its crude away from the Arabian Gulf in an effort to circumvent U.S. sanctions and warnings to countries that purchase Iranian oil.

With the installation of an offshore structure at a distance of approximately six kilometers from Makran coast, the early phase of the project will go operational, according to PressTV.

Jask terminal is under construction by Pars Oil and Gas Company on 60 hectares of land and with nearly €260 million of investment.

The Single Point Mooring (SPM) system and its accessories, including floating and submersible hoses, weigh nearly 800 tons. It will be installed and fixed to the seafloor at a depth of 48 meters.

The 1,000-kilometer pipeline from Bushehr will soon be linked to Jask terminal and then via the underwater pipes it will reach the SPM to load tankers with crude. Jask will soon become Iran's second-largest oil export terminal after the Kharg Island terminal.

The Kharg Island in the Arabian Gulf is Iran's main terminal to export crude oil. To reach Kharg, tankers must pass through the Strait of Hormuz.

With the new project, the country's oil exports will not be linked to the Strait of Hormuz and tankers can load in the Sea of Oman.

U.S. Lifts Sanctions On ICC Prosecutor

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The United States on Friday lifted sanctions on International Criminal Court prosecutor Fatou Bensouda that drew international criticism after they were imposed by the administration of former U.S. President Donald Trump.

The move, announced by U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken in a statement, lifts the sanctions imposed on Bensouda over her investigation into whether American forces committed war crimes in Afghanistan. It also removes Phakiso Mochochoko, head of the ICC's Jurisdiction, Complementarity and Cooperation Division, from the Specially Designated Nationals list.



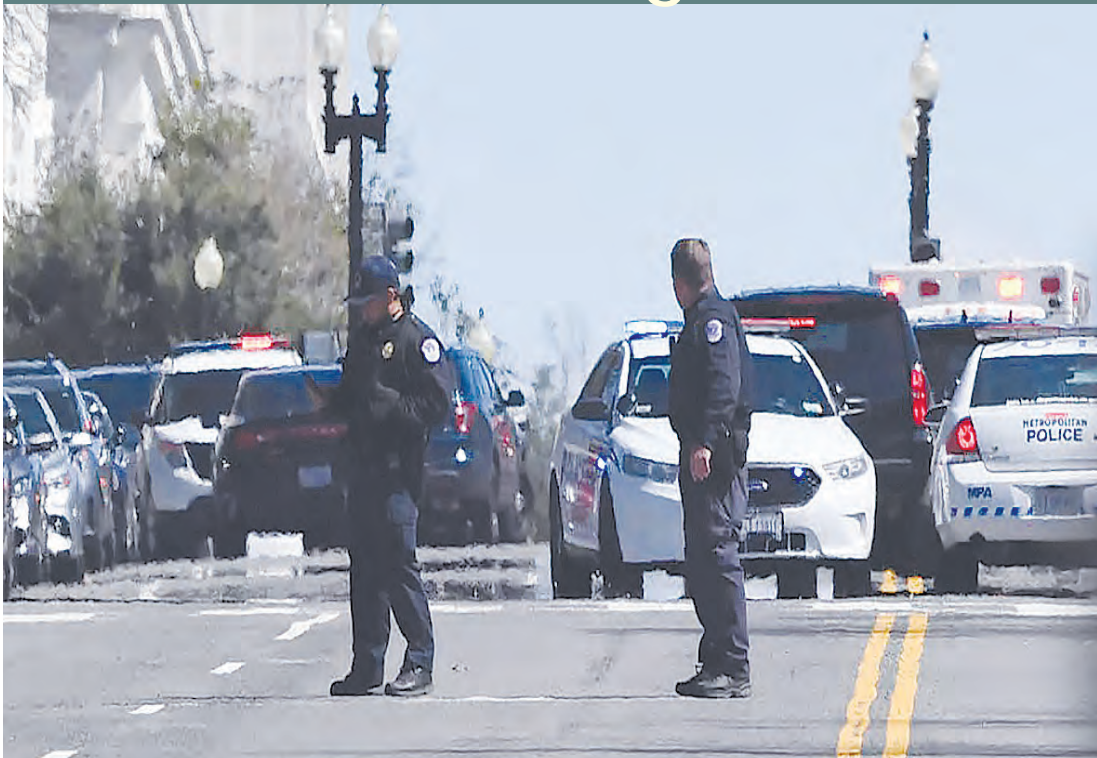
Allies of Jailed Navalny Pledge Prison Protest

MOSCOW (Reuters) - Allies of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny said on Friday they would stage a rolling protest outside his prison next week unless he is examined by a doctor of his choice and given what they regard as proper medicine.

Navalny, one of President Vladimir Putin's most prominent critics, has complained of acute back and leg pain and accused authorities of refusing him access to his chosen doctor and of declining to supply him with the right medicine for a condition he has joked darkly could deprive him of the use of both legs.



Officer Killed in U.S. Capitol Car-Ramming Attack



WASHINGTON (AFP) - One officer was killed and a second injured Friday after a vehicle rammed through security and crashed into a barrier at the U.S. Capitol, forcing it into lockdown less than three months after a mob assault on Congress.

Capitol Police shot dead the driver after he jumped out of the car and lunged at them with a knife, Acting Chief Yogananda Pittman told reporters.

No information was available on the identity of the attacker or his motivation, but Washington Metropolitan Police Chief Robert Contee indicated that a terror link was not suspected at this stage.

"It does not appear to be terrorism-related, but obviously we will continue to investigate," said Contee.

National Guard troops were mobilized and staff at the huge Capitol complex ordered to stay away from windows and seek cover after alerts went out over the incident.

Television footage showed a blue sedan crashed into a security barrier on one of the streets leading to Congress, as what appeared to be the injured officers were loaded onto gurneys and into ambulances.

A helicopter landed on the Capitol grounds and the police were loaded on board to be taken to a hospital.

The attack came amid tightened security in Washington after the January 6 insurrection by supporters of then-president Donald Trump.

In that attack, hundreds smashed into the Capitol building yelling threats against politicians and shutting down the legislature.

One Capitol Police officer died as a result of the attack, as well as four others individuals who took part or were nearby. Since then security officials have said there is an ongoing threat from extreme-right groups and Trump supporters.

More than 300 people have been charged in the January attack, including members of armed extremist groups like the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers, and 100 more are expected to be charged, according to Justice Department court filings.

In recent weeks some security has been loosened, with the number of armed National Guard troops at the Capitol reduced and a security fence that created a broad perimeter around the Capitol complex removed.

CBS News reported that security officials had already warned congressional staffers of a threat before the car ramming.

Text messages sent to staffers inside told them to avoid windows and said no one could enter or leave the building.

"If you are outside, seek cover," the messages said.

But the danger on Friday was limited as Congress was in recess for the Easter holiday and relatively few people were in the building.

Russia Warns NATO Against Deploying Troops to Ukraine

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia has warned NATO against deploying troops to Ukraine, saying such a move would escalate tensions nears its borders, amid renewed fears over the region's long-simmering conflict.

Moscow's comments came after NATO voiced concern on Thursday over what it said was a large Russian military build-up near eastern Ukraine, with leading member the United States pledging to stand by Ukraine in the event of any Russian "aggression".

Renewed front-line clashes have gripped the region in recent weeks.

Russia earlier said an escalation in the conflict in Ukraine's Donbass region could "destroy" Ukraine.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters on Friday that the situation at the contact line in eastern Ukraine between Ukrainian government forces and Russian-backed separatist forces was concerning, and that multiple "provocations" were taking place there. Peskov also said Russia would be forced to respond if NATO



troops were deployed to Ukraine as he insisted Russia was not threatening Ukraine.

"There is no doubt such a scenario would lead to a further increase in tensions close to Russia's borders. Of course, this would call for additional measures from the Russian side to ensure its security," he said, without specifying which measures would be adopted. "Russia is not threatening anyone, it has never threatened anyone."

Ukraine has been battling pro-Russian separatists in the eastern Donetsk and Lugansk regions since 2014, following Moscow's annexation of the Crimean peninsula after an uprising that toppled Ukraine's Kremlin-friendly President Viktor Yanukovich.

Moscow and Kyiv this week blamed each other for a rise in violence that has undermined a ceasefire brokered last year.

Peskov's comments came after the US warned Russia against "intimidating" Ukraine, with both Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin and Secretary of State Antony Blinken calling their Ukrainian counterparts to stress support.

Anti-India Protests Erupt in Kashmir After Troops Kill 3 Protesters

SRINAGAR (Dispatches) - Anti-India protests have erupted in a village in Indian-administered Kashmir following the killing of three suspected rebel fighters in a gun battle with Indian troops in Pulwama district, police and residents said.

The gunfight erupted shortly after scores of counterinsurgency police and soldiers launched an operation based on a tip-off about the presence of rebels in Kakpora village in southern Pulwama district, Inspector General Vijay Kumar said on Friday.

Kumar claimed two of the three slain men had been involved in fatally shooting a policeman guarding the home of a local politician from India's governing party in the region's main city of Srinagar.

He said troops recovered two rifles and a pistol from the site of Friday's clash, and that one of the recovered weapons had been taken by the rebels from the slain policeman.

Residents said troops used explosives to blast a civilian house during the fighting, a common tactic employed by Indian troops in Kashmir.

As the fighting raged, hundreds of people marched nearby in solidarity with the rebels while chanting slogans seeking the end of Indian rule over the region. Government forces fired shotgun pellets and tear gas at the stone-throwing protesters.

At least four civilians were injured in the clashes, including a woman with a bullet injury in her leg.

Kumar, however, said the woman was injured in the crossfire between Indian troops and suspected rebels.

The Himalayan region of Kashmir is divided between India and Pakistan and is claimed by both in its entirety. Many Muslim Kashmiris support the rebel goal of uniting the territory, either under Pakistani rule or as an independent country.

Indian officials describe the Kashmir rebellion as Pakistan-sponsored "terrorism". Pakistan denies the charge, and most Kashmiris consider it a legitimate freedom struggle.

Dutch PM Under Pressure Despite Surviving Vote

THE HAGUE (AFP) - Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte remained under pressure on Friday despite narrowly surviving a no-confidence vote over his handling of coalition talks in the toughest crisis of his decade in power.

Rutte, whose liberal VVD party won the most seats in elections in March, was formally condemned by parliament over claims that he covered up efforts to rein in an outspoken MP during coalition negotiations.

Dubbed "Teflon Mark" for his ability to dodge a series of scandals, Rutte could now face difficulty in building a new government as other parties say they have lost trust in him.

But Rutte, one of Europe's longest serving leaders, refused to resign and said he would continue "step by step" to forge his fourth coalition since taking office in 2010.

"I got 1.9 million votes, so it would be crazy to step aside two weeks after the election," Rutte was quoted as telling reporters by broadcaster RTL. Nieuws on Friday, hours after the overnight vote.

His most likely partners in a coalition, the

centre-left D66 party and the centre-right Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA), helped him defeat the no-confidence motion after a marathon debate.

But both of them both voted in favour of the so-called censure motion that criticised his behaviour, casting his ability to lead months-long coalition negotiation into serious doubt.

"I wouldn't have carried on, but I'm a different person," Kaag, whose party won the second most seats after Rutte in the election, said when asked if he should have resigned.

The youth wings of the D66, the CDA and the right-wing ChristenUnie party, which was also part of his old coalition, said on Friday that their parties should not start talks with the VVD until Rutte had quit.

"We no longer consider him a credible leader of the Netherlands," ChristenUnie youth leader Bina Chirino told Nederlands Dagblad newspaper.

The row erupted last week, when coalition talks were halted after one negotiator rushed out of parliament on learning she had tested positive for Covid-19, and a photographer snapped the notes she was carrying.



Train Crash Kills 48 in Taiwan's Deadliest Rail Tragedy for Decades

TAIPEI (Dispatches) - A Taiwan express train with almost 500 aboard derailed in a tunnel on Friday after hitting a truck that had slid down a bank onto the track, killing at least 50 passengers and injuring 146 in the island's worst rail disaster in seven decades.

Images from the scene showed some carriages ripped apart by the impact, with others crumpled, hindering rescuers in their efforts to reach passengers.

By mid-afternoon no one was still trapped, though the fire department said it had found body parts, meaning the number of those killed, who included the driver, was likely to rise.

"People just fell all over each other, on top of one another," a woman who survived the crash told domestic television. "It was terrifying. There were whole families there." Taiwan's government said there were 496 people on the train, including 120 without seats. Many were tourists and people heading home at the start of a traditional long weekend holiday to tend to family graves. One French citizen was amongst the dead, officials said.

The train was travelling from Taipei, the capital, to the southeastern city of Taitung.

It came off the rails north of the eastern city of Hualien after hitting a truck that had slid off a road from a nearby construction site, Feng Hui-sheng, the Taiwan Railways Administration's deputy director, told reporters.

Feng said the manager of the site, which was stabilising the mountainside to prevent landslides, visited around 9 a.m. (0100 GMT) and stopped his truck in front of the site office.

"At present it is suspected because the vehicle wasn't braked properly, it slid for around 20 metres along the site access road and entered the eastern trunk line," he added. The official Central News Agency said police had taken in the manager for questioning.

The fire department showed a picture of what appeared to be wreckage of the truck beside the derailed train, with an aerial image of one end of the train still on the track next to the construction site.

People walk next to a train which derailed in a tunnel north of Hualien, Taiwan April 2, 2021, in this handout image provided by Taiwan's National Fire Agency. Taiwan's National Fire Agency/Handout via REUTERS





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J, balcony
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Shanon (adviser)

Niavaran Villa (\$5000)
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S, J, balcony
green yard
Fully Furn

Parsian

Zaferanieh Apt
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S/p, S, J, balcony
(\$3000)

Farmanieh Apt
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BMW Expects at Least Half of Sales to Be Electric Cars by 2030

LONDON (Reuters) - BMW expects at least half of its sales to be zero emission vehicles by 2030, setting a more conservative target than some rivals in the race to embrace cleaner driving.

In the short term, the German carmaker forecast on Wednesday a big rise in pretax profit for this year, with a strong performance in all areas - from MINIS through its upmarket BMW brand to top-of-the-range Rolls-Royces. Its shares rose as much as 4.9% to a 2-1/2 year high of 84.42 euros, buoyed by its forecast for a strong recovery from a pandemic-hit 2020.

Bernstein analyst Arndt Ellinghorst said BMW had entered 2021 “very confidently.”



OPEC+ Agrees to Gradually Boost Oil Output in Coming Months

LONDON (Dispatches) -OPEC+ agreed to increase oil production gradually from May to July, responding to both internal and external pressure to supply more crude to the recovering global economy.

Saudi Arabia proposed the supply boost, which would include phasing out the kingdom’s voluntary extra 1 million barrel-a-day supply cut, delegates said, asking not to be named because the information wasn’t public.

The group’s video conference was still continuing on Thursday as ministers hammered out the final details of the accord, they said. The current plan is to boost output by 350,000 barrels a day in May, add the same volume again in June and increase by 440,000 barrels a day in July, delegates said. At the start of this week, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies had been widely expected to roll over their existing curbs into May. Yet Brent crude was little changed at \$62.63 a barrel as of 4:29 p.m. in London.

“Increasing production by about 1 million barrels a day over three months when product demand is expected to rise by about 3 million barrels a day over the same period is not bearish, Roger Diwan, a vice president at IHS Markit Ltd. and veteran OPEC-watcher, said on Twitter. “It is conservative anticipation, but anticipation nonetheless.

With crude above \$60 and gasoline retail costs fast rising, consumers including the U.S. and India have started to call on the OPEC+ alliance to keep prices under control, fearful that more expensive oil could add to inflationary pressures worldwide.

Although European oil consumption is weak as France, Germany and Italy extend or impose new lockdowns due to rising Covid-19 cases, fuel use is growing fast in America, where the vaccination campaign is progressing better than expected.

U.S. Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm called her Saudi counterpart Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman on the eve of the OPEC+ meeting to highlight the importance of affordable energy.

“We need to keep our finger on the market pulse and not allow an overheating or a significant deficit, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak, whose country has been steadily increasing production this year, said at the opening session of the meeting. “Since we last talked, the situation has improved and the trend is positive.

Meanwhile OPEC+ has lowered its 2021 oil demand growth forecast by 300,000 barrels per day reflecting concerns about the market’s recovery as new coronavirus lockdowns take hold, a report from its experts panel meeting seen by Reuters showed.

The Joint Technical Committee, which advises the group of oil-producing nations that includes Saudi Arabia and Russia, met on Tuesday ahead of a ministerial meeting on Thursday to decide output policy.

“Despite the ongoing destocking of commercial OECD stocks, they remain above the 2015-2019 average, while recognizing that prevailing volatility in the market structure is a signal of fragile market conditions,” the panel said in the report.

Under its base case scenario, it expects oil demand to grow by 5.6 million barrels per day this year, down by 300,000 bpd from its previous forecast.

Aramco to Scale Back Spending After 2020 Profit Slump

RIYADH (Dispatches) - Saudi Arabian state oil giant Aramco is betting on an Asian-led rebound in energy demand this year after it reported a steep slide in net profit for 2020 on Sunday and scaled back its spending plans.

The COVID-19 pandemic took a heavy toll on the company and its global peers in 2020, but oil prices have rallied this year as economies recover from last year’s downturn and after oil producers extended output cuts.

“We are pleased that there are signs of a recovery,” Aramco CEO Amin Nasser told an earnings call. “China is also very close to pre-pandemic levels. So in Asia, East Asia in particular, there is strong pickup in demand.”

He said demand in Europe and United States would improve with more deployment of vaccines. Global oil demand is expected to reach 99 million barrels per day by the end of this year, he said.

Aramco lowered its guidance for capital expenditure in 2021 to around \$35 billion from a range of \$40 billion to \$45 billion previously, according to a disclosure to the kingdom’s Tadawul bourse. Capital spending in 2020 was \$27 billion.

The world’s largest oil exporter said net profit fell 44.4% to 183.76 billion riyals (\$49 billion) for the year ended Dec. 31, from 330.69 billion riyals a year earlier.

Analysts had expected a 2020 net profit of 186.1 billion riyals, according to the mean estimate of analysts in Refinitiv’s Eikon.

Aramco declared a dividend of \$75 billion for 2020, but Nasser said there was no intention to increase the dividend this year from what’s been pledged. “The dividend is in line with expectations, which is what holders of Aramco will care about most, but lower capex implies the company does not expect high oil prices to last for the long-term,” said Hasnain Malik,

head of equity research at Tellimer. Aramco’s shares were marginally down 0.6% after its results.

Through most of last year, Aramco’s shares held up well against global oil companies in emerging and developed markets, but underperformed against the company’s peers when oil prices recovered.

“Looking ahead, our long-term strategy to optimize our oil and gas portfolio is on track,” Nasser said.

Aramco’s 44.4% drop in 2020 profit compares with a 30.7% decline in oil revenues last year for the Saudi government, with the steady dividends paid to the state despite lower oil prices contributing to Aramco bearing the brunt of the crisis more than the treasury, said Monica Malik, chief economist at Abu Dhabi Commercial Bank.



IMF Sees Global Economy Improving Despite Uncertainties

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Economic growth led by the United States and China is accelerating, amplifying the risks of an uneven global recovery, the head of the IMF said.

“In January we projected global growth at 5.5 percent in 2021,” said IMF Chief Kristalina Georgieva in an address ahead of the body’s annual spring meeting cohosted with the World Bank.

“We now expect a further acceleration,” she said ahead of the international organization’s official update of its forecast in a week.

Key factors in the improved outlook includes the US passage of President Joe Biden’s \$1.9 trillion economic relief package and an expected bounce from coronavirus vaccines increasingly available in larger economies, Georgieva said. She also praised the “extraordinary effort” of workers throughout the health care universe, including doctors, nurses and vaccine scientists.

Governments played a key role in averting a worldwide depression, Georgieva said, with some \$16 trillion in fiscal support and a “massive liquidity injection by central banks” averting complete disaster. Without these steps, the worldwide economic contraction of 3.5 percent in 2020 “would have been at least three times worse,” she said. But the IMF is seeing increasing signs of a “multi-speed recovery” powered by the United States and China, which are on track to enjoy growth by the end of 2021 that outpaces their pre-crisis performance.

In general, the global outlook remains clouded by “extremely high uncertainty,” with economic activity still tied closely to the pandemic. “So much depends on the path of the pandemic – which is now shaped by uneven progress in vaccination and the new virus strains that are holding back growth prospects, especially in Europe and Latin America,” she said.

Especially vulnerable are emerging markets with more “fragile” government. “Many are highly exposed to hard-hit sectors, such as tourism,” she said. “Now they face less access to vaccines and even less room in their budgets.”

A keen worry in a global economy fractured by different-paced recoveries would be a sudden rise in US growth that leads to a jump in interest rates and capital flight from emerging regions.

“We expect inflation to remain contained, but faster US recovery could cause a rapid rise in interest rates, which could lead to a sharp tightening of financial conditions -- and significant capital outflows from emerging and developing economies,” she said.

Georgieva urges generous investment in the production and distribution of vaccines to facilitate the transition to the post-Covid economy. She also backs increased investment for the most vulnerable countries, as well as spending on infrastructure, health and education so that “everyone can benefit from the historic transformation to greener and smarter economies.”

This group of nations requires \$200 billion over five years to overcome the pandemic and another \$250 billion to return to a trajectory of meeting richer countries, said Georgieva, citing a recent IMF study.

The IMF has already provided \$107 billion in financing and debt service relief for the 29 nation poorest nations. This includes support for sub-Saharan Africa at about 13 times the level previously.

Support within the international organization is also building for lending some \$650 billion in special drawing rights to aid the most vulnerable nations, she said.

Kazakhstan Hosts Informal Summit of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States



NUR-SULTAN (Press Release) - Informal Summit of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States (Turkic Council) was hosted by the Republic of Kazakhstan via videoconference on 31 March 2021 on the theme of “Turkistan – A Spiritual Capital of the Turkic World”.

The Summit was presided over by H.E. Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, and attended by H.E. Nursultan Nazarbayev, First President of the Republic of Kazakhstan – Elbasy and the Honorary Chairman of the Turkic Council, H.E. Ilham Aliyev, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan,

H.E. Sadyr Zhaparov, President of the Kyrgyz Republic, H.E. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, President of the Republic of Turkey, H.E. Shavkat Mirziyoyev, President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, H.E. Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, President of Turkmenistan, and H.E. Viktor Orbán, Prime Minister of Hungary.

The main decision of the Summit was the proclamation of the Kazakh city of Turkistan as a Spiritual Capital of the Turkic World.

1 Million Barrels of Iranian Crude Oil Near Suez Canal

TEHRAN (MNA) – According to TankerTrackers, a million barrels of Iranian crude oil is approaching the Suez Canal from the Red Sea.

A million barrels of Iranian crude oil is approaching the Suez Canal from the Red Sea, TankerTrackers reported in its tweeter account.

“It is part of a larger flotilla of tankers bound for Baniyas, Syria.

We have visually identified all of them. The first one shall arrive in about 3 days time, all depending on congestion”, it added.

Last week, the Suez Canal was closed for about a week due to the sinking of a giant ship in the Suez Canal, which caused heavy traffic at the entrance to the canal, but now it is said that the condition of the canal has returned to normal.



Oil Supercycle Unlikely But Gasoline Demand May Have Peaked

LONDON (Reuters) - An extended surge in oil prices is unlikely as the world rebounds from the pandemic given ample supply but changes are seen in demand and gasoline may have peaked, the International Energy Agency (IEA) said on Wednesday.

“Oil’s sharp rally to near \$70 a barrel has spurred talk of a new supercycle and a looming supply shortfall. Our data and analysis suggest otherwise,” the IEA said in its monthly report.

“For a start, oil inventories still look ample compared with historical levels despite a steady decline ... On top of the stock cushion, a hefty amount of spare production capacity has built up as a result of OPEC+ supply curbs,” it said.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies, a group dubbed OPEC+, largely kept limits on production this month, galvanising the market and causing some investors to predict a supercycle - a large, multi-year price rise.

“The prospect of stronger demand and continued OPEC+ production restraint point to a sharp decline in inventories during the second half of the year,” the Paris-based energy watchdog said.

“For now, however, there is more than enough oil in tanks and under the ground to keep global oil markets adequately supplied.”

Changes to work and travel patterns wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic as well as governments’ low-carbon targets have permanently altered the trajectory for demand, the IEA added, with gasoline possibly never to recover to pre-crisis levels.

Increased gasoline use in developing countries will be offset by rising fuel efficiency and a switch to electric vehicles in wealthy nations, the IEA said in its Oil 2021 five-year outlook, also published on Wednesday.

Together with reduced consumption due to increased remote working likely to continue into the near future, gasoline demand may have peaked in 2019, it said.

“Consumption should continue to rise strongly in 2022 ... narrowing the gap with pre-pandemic levels. However, beyond that, gasoline demand is likely to stagnate for



several years,” the report said.

The Paris-based watchdog lowered its outlook for oil demand for 2025 by 2.5 million bpd from its forecast last year but maintains that oil demand has yet to peak and is set to return to 2019 levels by 2023.

“Rapid changes in behavior from the pandemic and a stronger drive by governments towards a low-carbon future have caused a dramatic downward shift in expectations for oil demand over the next six years,” the IEA said.

WHO Chief Calls for Deeper Probe Into Lab-Leak Theory on Covid-19 Origins



GENEVA (Dispatches) - World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus urged a deeper investigation into whether the coronavirus outbreak originated with a leak from a lab, as world leaders pushed for a treaty to prepare for future pandemics.

A report by WHO and Chinese experts, published Tuesday, judged the lab-leak hypothesis highly unlikely, saying the virus behind Covid-19 had probably jumped from bats to humans via an intermediary animal.

But a potential leak “requires further investigation, potentially with additional missions involving specialist experts”, Tedros said.

He added that the international team had difficulty accessing raw data during the mission to China, demanding “more timely and comprehensive data-sharing” in the future.

The United States, in a statement with 13 allies, including Australia, Britain, Canada, Japan and South Korea, voiced concern over the report and said that the mission to China “was significantly delayed and lacked access to complete, original data and samples.”

“It is critical for independent experts to have full access to all pertinent human, animal and environmental data, research, and personnel involved in the early stages of the outbreak relevant to determining how this pandemic emerged,” said the statement, without explicitly criticizing China.

“We share these concerns not only for the benefit of learning all we can about the origins of this pandemic, but also to lay a pathway to a timely, transparent, evidence-based process for the next phase of this study as well as for the next health crises,” it said.

The other nations signing the joint statement were the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Israel, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway and Slovenia.

Members of the international team that wrote the report said Tuesday that it was only a “first start” and more needed to be done.

They appealed for patience as reams of information continues to pour in. The team emphasised that hypotheses, including a possible laboratory leak theory, could not be fully ruled out.

Team leader Peter Ben Embarek of the WHO said international team members faced political pressure from “all sides”, but insisted, “We were never pressured to remove critical elements in our report.” He also pointed to “privacy” issues in China that prevented sharing of some data, saying such restrictions would exist in many countries.

The report was released more than a year into the pandemic that has killed nearly 2.8 million people worldwide, with several countries battling new waves of infections.

Before its release, world leaders called for a new international treaty to better fight future pandemics and for countries to be ready if – or when – another hits.

Fourteen U.S. States Sue Biden Administration Over Oil, Gas Leasing Pause

NEW YORK (Reuters) - Fourteen U.S. states including Louisiana and Wyoming filed lawsuits against President Joe Biden’s administration, challenging his pause on new oil and gas leasing on federal lands and waters.

The legal actions, which seek to restore regular federal drilling auctions, came a day before the administration is set to launch a review of the oil and gas leasing program.

Biden, a Democrat, in January signed an executive order putting on hold new leasing pending that review. During his election campaign, he pledged to end new federal leasing as part of a sweeping plan to address climate change.

The pause has triggered heavy criticism from the oil industry and producing states that receive half of the revenues generated from federal lands drilling within their borders.

“We believe that the president’s actions are illegal and unlawful, and we’re going to hold him accountable for them to try to make sure that the gains that we’ve made over the years to help protect domestic oil and gas and energy continue,” Louisiana Attorney General Jeff Landry said in an interview. A coalition of 13 states filed one lawsuit in federal court in Louisiana, while Wyoming filed its own lawsuit in federal court in that state.

New Delhi...

FROM PAGE 1

The proposal for a coordinated response was made by India against the backdrop of swarms of the destructive pests making their way to Indian states such as Rajasthan after breeding and maturing in Iranian provinces and Pakistan’s Balochistan province.

Iran witnessed its worst locust invasion of the past 25 years in 2020.

Afghanistan, Iran and India signed a tripartite agreement on developing Chabahar port and setting up a trilateral transport and transit corridor in 2016. India then set up India Ports Global Limited to operate Shahid Behesti terminal at Chabahar. Since the Indian firm began operations in December 2018, the port has handled 123 vessels, 13,752 containers and 1.8 million tons of cargo. There has also been an increase in the average monthly calls by merchant vessels, and 110,000 tons of wheat and 2,000 tons of pulses have been shipped to Afghanistan through the port.

Iran Planning to...

FROM PAGE 1

He further explained that, “The mutual agreements include facilitation of maritime transport, banking relations between the two countries, facilitation of trade between the two countries, the establishment of business centers and marketing offices for companies, as well as the exchange of trade delegations.”

The official noted that the most important projects on the agenda of Iran and Oman are gas exports, while electricity export from Iran to Oman is also on agenda. He added that Iran is seeking the signing of a trade roadmap to achieve a specific goal in the next three years in economic and trade relations with Oman.

The Iran-Oman gas pipeline project is expected to connect Iranian gas infrastructure to Omani consumers and LNG plants so that the sultanate can re-export the gas. According to projections, an estimated 28.3 million cubic meters of gas per day is to be exported to Oman through a direct pipeline bypassing the United Arab Emirates.

In recent years, talks have been underway with Oman for exporting gas to the Arab nation.

China’s Oil...

FROM PAGE 1

Without commenting directly on the March oil transactions, China’s Foreign Ministry said late on Tuesday that Beijing has “consistently opposed” the U.S. unilateral sanctions and “long-arm jurisdictions” and urged Washington to lift these “illicit sanctions” as soon as possible.

China’s commerce and energy ministries had not responded to faxes and messages at time of publication.

U.S. President Joe Biden has sought to revive talks with Iran on a nuclear deal abandoned by former President Donald Trump in 2018, although harsh economic measures remain in place that Tehran insists be lifted before negotiations resume. “Iran is exporting more oil to China and that poses a challenge to the U.S. sanctions regime,” Eurasia Group analyst Henry Rome said.

“However, the structure of the sanctions is not on the verge of collapse by any means especially because Iran is not able to repatriate much of that revenue.”

According to Refinitiv’s Li, about 650,000 bpd of Iranian oil were discharged in the first 19 days of March, mainly via the eastern province of Shandong, the hub for China’s independent refiners.

This compared with 490,000 bpd discharged in February and a record 797,000 bpd in January, she added.

Chinese buyers are attracted to low prices for the crude which is being offered at discounts of \$4-\$6 a barrel to ICE Brent on a delivered basis, traders said, adding that sellers were sometimes packaging the sale with import quotas.

“The ultimate rule for private Chinese buyers is cost and margin...and they find the Iranian barrels offered at steep discounts hard to resist,” said a Beijing-based trader.

Reuters was unable to identify the buyers of the cargoes.

Officially, China skipped imports from Iran in March for the second month in a row as no cargo has been marked for its Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR), according to Refinitiv.

Tankers carrying Iranian oil typically switch off their transponders when loading to avoid detection, but then become traceable via satellites near ports in Oman, the UAE and Iraq. Some transfer part of their cargoes to other ships near Singapore or Malaysia before sailing to China. China maintained small monthly purchases of Iranian oil that averaged 2.4 million barrels over the whole of 2020, according to Chinese customs.

AEOI Chief Says...

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“Our challenge with the West, too, was not initially of nuclear nature, but it has started since the Revolution. Mr. Antony Blinken has said that China is the main US enemy and his analysis was that China is creating a disturbance in the world order that the Americans had established after World War II,” said the chief.

The Americans must have achieved a new level of intelligence, as they have realized that the greater the pressure they will impose against Iran, our country will get stronger, said Salehi, adding: Friends and enemies are confessing that if the great pressure imposed against Iran during the past decades at the international scene was levied against any other country it could not have resisted.

“God knows that Iran has got stronger at the international scene for sure. Iran is the golden key for the region, and if they want to open any lock in the region the key to it is in Iran,” he added.

The AEOI chief said that the nuclear talks are not being pursued with the American side, as they are in the framework of the G5+1, while the AEOI, that is in charge of observing the NPT, is not present in the negotiations, and the Iranian diplomats are representing it, as well.

He meanwhile criticized those who weakened the JCPOA inside the country till it became useless, asking “Why? What did they shoot at our own feet, and propagated harmoniously with Israel?” He said.

Nuclear energy is important for Iran both from the economic point of the view, and from the strength aspect... The Americans were arguing that Iran is blotting about the production of the 20% enriched fuel, but we noticed that Iran produced it, and the Americans were surprised.

Salehi said that despite Iran’s debts to Russia, they are still cooperating with the Iranian nuclear program and are committed to their agreements.

Elsewhere, he said that the production of 20% enriched uranium has reached 50 kg.

Tehran Rules...

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Porter said Friday that the discussion would focus on “the nuclear steps that Iran would need to take in order to return to compliance with the terms of the JCPOA”, using initials for what is formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

In the talks, American officials would be down the hall while British, German, French, Chinese and Russian officials meet with Iran.

And that would be joined with discussion of “the sanctions relief steps that the United States would need to take in order to return to compliance, as well,” Porter said, an acknowledgment that the United States is currently in violation of the accord.

Khatibzadeh stressed that “the suspension of Iran’s remedial measures and their reversal will take place only after the lifting of all sanctions and its verification” by the Islamic Republic.

In a tweet on Friday, Iran’s Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said the aim of the Vienna session would be to “rapidly finalise sanction-lifting & nuclear measures for choreographed removal of all sanctions, followed by Iran ceasing remedial measures”.

“No Iran-U.S. meeting. Unnecessary,” he added Friday.

American officials have said they were willing to meet directly with the Iranians, but the Iranian government has insisted on working through the Europeans, a stance which Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi reiterated Friday.

“We only negotiate with the members of the JCPOA. The parties that are now known as the P4+1 will be our negotiating partners. They can talk to the other sides as they wish. We have no direct or indirect dialogue with the Americans,” he said.

U.S. Fines...

FROM PAGE 1

Nordgas, the Treasury said, agreed to implement a sanctions compliance program and enhanced compliance commitments, including submission of an annual report to OFAC each year for the next five years.

UniControls reportedly settled with OFAC earlier this month when it agreed to pay \$216,464 for violations of the Iran sanctions program.

OFAC continues to pile up sanctions enforcement actions. As the Biden Administration slowly takes over the reins of the Department of Treasury, US reports say OFAC enforcement profile is likely to increase.

They say companies should expect more and complex sanctions, including anticipated strict sanctions against Russia and China.

Buffon Given One-Match Blasphemy Ban

TURIN (Dispatches) - Juventus goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon was on Tuesday handed a one-match ban for blasphemy which would rule him out of the weekend's Turin derby. The 43-year-old Italian World Cup winner had been fined 5,000 euros (\$6,000) last month by the Italian Football Federation, but escaped a ban. However, the FIGC's Court of Appeal upheld the Federal Prosecutor's appeal and imposed a ban, meaning Buffon will be ruled out of Saturday's game at Torino.

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Davies Made UN Refugee Ambassador

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Bayern Munich star Alphonso Davies became the first footballer to be appointed a UN special ambassador to help refugees. The 20-year-old, who was born in a refugee camp in Ghana before emigrating to Canada, has been appointed as a goodwill ambassador for the United Nations Refugee Agency. "My own experiences make me want to speak up for refugees, to share their stories and to help make a difference," Davies said in a statement on Bayern's website.

Trae Young, Hawks Outlast Spurs in OT

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Trae Young was nearly unstoppable at the end of the game, scoring 15 of his 28 points in the two overtime periods, and Danilo Gallinari canned a clutch late 3-pointer as the Atlanta Hawks outlasted the host San Antonio Spurs 134-129 in a double-overtime thriller.

Young also had seven points in the fourth quarter and racked up 12 assists overall. Clint Capela and Bogdan Bogdanovic added 28 points each for the Hawks, who snapped a two-game losing streak. Capela also pulled down 17 rebounds, and Gallinari finished with 16 points and 12 boards.

Atlanta led 107-105 before two free throws by Young with 39.5 seconds to play. Dejounte Murray countered with a three-point play with 15 seconds remaining to allow the Spurs to move within one point. After Young hit another free throw, DeMar DeRozan sent the game into overtime with a pullup jumper in the lane.

DeRozan led the Spurs with 36 points, two off his season high, and Derrick White added 29 to set a regular-season career high.

Shake Milton scored 27 points off the bench to help Philadelphia 76ers conclude a six-game road trip with a 114-94 rout of Cleveland.

Milton made 10 of 14 shots from the floor and joined Seth Curry by draining five 3-pointers. Curry had 19 points and Dwight Howard collected 18 points and 15 rebounds for the 76ers, who snapped a two-game skid to finish the trek with a 4-2 mark.

Collin Sexton had 24 points and Dean Wade chipped in with 16 points and eight rebounds for the Cavaliers, who have dropped four in a row. Kevin Love scored all 13 of his points in the first quarter in his return from an eight-game absence caused by a severe calf strain.

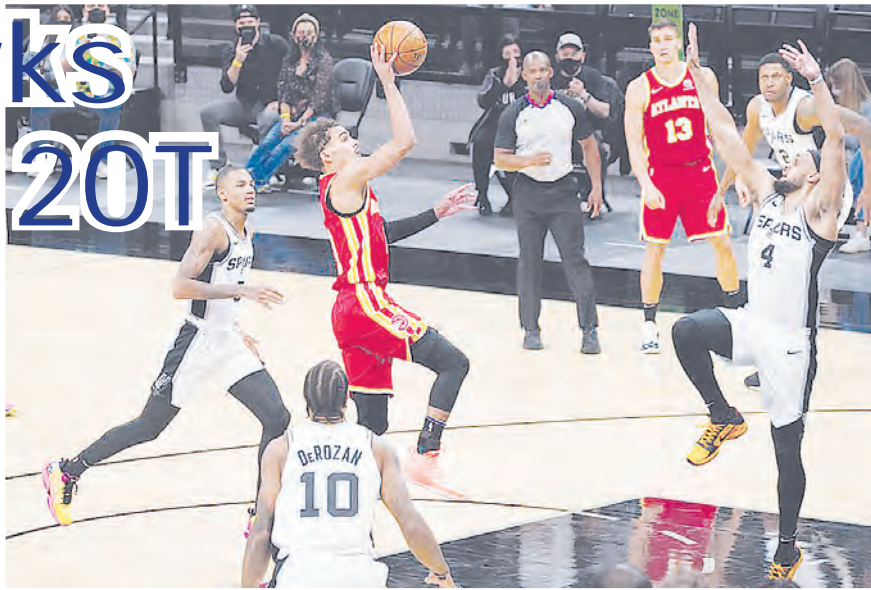
Meanwhile Jimmy Butler scored 22 points and helped host Miami Heat pull away to beat Golden State Warriors 116-109.

Butler, who scored 12 of his points in the third quarter, finished with eight assists and six rebounds. His efforts sparked the Heat to their third consecutive win.

The Warriors lost for the fifth time in their past six games despite getting 36 points and 11 rebounds from Stephen Curry. The star guard scored the Warriors' final nine points and cut Golden State's fourth-quarter deficit from 13 to seven with back-to-back 3-pointers in the final two minutes.

Jeff Green scored 21 points and Brooklyn Nets didn't miss a beat despite playing without James Harden, ripping visiting Charlotte Hornets 111-89 in New York.

Harden, who averages 26.1 points



per game, sustained a hamstring injury a night earlier and sat out the fourth quarter in the team's comeback victory against the Houston Rockets. His condition isn't expected to keep him out of the lineup for long.

Landry Shamet and Tyler Johnson came off the bench for Brooklyn to score 17 and 15 points, respectively. Forward LaMarcus Aldridge made his Brooklyn debut, starting at center and posting 11 points, nine rebounds and six assists. Devonte' Graham and Gordon Hayward scored 13 points apiece for the Hornets.

Josh Jackson led seven Detroit Pistons scorers in double figures with 31 points in a 120-91 rout of visiting Washington.

A 9-2 run in the first quarter powered Detroit to a 10-point advantage through the opening period, and the Pistons only grew their lead the rest of the way. Detroit's balanced scoring, coupled with a stout defensive effort, helped push the gap to as many as 31 points.

Mason Plumlee finished with 13 points, 11 rebounds and seven assists for the Pistons, and Frank Jackson also scored 13 points off the bench. Russell Westbrook recorded his fourth straight triple-double and 18th of the season for the Wizards, matching a team high of 16 points and adding 11 rebounds and 12 assists.

Terrence Ross scored 19 points and made a tiebreaking jumper late in overtime as visiting Orlando Magic held off short-handed New Orleans Pelicans 115-110.

.Wendell Carter Jr. added 21 points and 12 rebounds and Chasson Randle scored 15 points for the Magic, who won their second straight after losing 13 of 15.

Nickeil Alexander-Walker scored 31 points to lead New Orleans. James Johnson, who started in his Pelicans debut after being acquired in a trade with Dallas last week, scored 17 points, and Josh Hart had 14 points and matched a career-high with 17 rebounds. New Orleans lost for just the second time in six games.

Barty to Face Andreescu In Miami Final

MIAAMI (Dispatches) - Hubert Hurkacz of Poland reached the Miami Open semi-finals with an upset of Greek second seed Stefanos Tsitsipas

World number one Ashleigh Barty bucked the upset trend at the Miami Open, rolling into the women's final as men's second seed Stefanos Tsitsipas was toppled by Hurbert Hurkacz.

Australia's Barty fired 27 winners in a 6-3, 6-3 victory over fifth-seeded Ukrainian Elina Svitolina to return to the title match of a tournament she won when it was last held in 2019.

But Greece's Tsitsipas was left trying to explain a "self-explosion" after he squandered a commanding lead in a 2-6, 6-3, 6-4 quarter-final loss to 26th seed Hurkacz of Poland -- the latest in a string of upsets that saw men's top seed Daniil Medvedev and No. 3 Alexander Zverev bow out along with women's No. 2 Naomi Osaka.

Tsitsipas admitted it was a crushing outcome in a tournament where the absences of superstars Novak Djokovic, Rafael Nadal and Roger Federer and his own recent solid form seemed to offer him a chance to shine.

"I felt like it was my opportunity," Tsitsipas said. "I feel like there was more space for me to show something greater. It's a very disappointing loss. "It was there, everything was under control. And suddenly, I don't know, self-explosion."

Tsitsipas exited the tournament after a tense encounter that saw the 22-year-old Greek given a time violation after the second set for taking too long to change his shirt and headband.

The world number five was also reportedly involved in a tense exchange with officials before the match after refusing to share a golf cart with Hurkacz used to ferry players to the court.

There was no sign that incident had unsettled Tsitsipas early on, however, as he dominated a one-sided first set to win 6-2.

Tsitsipas then quickly broke Hurkacz at the start of the second on the way to a 2-0 lead.

But just when it appeared the match was heading for a brisk conclusion, Hurkacz finally found his range.



Aguero joined City from Atletico Madrid in 2011 and has 257 goals in 384 games since, making him their record goal-scorer.

He scored the dramatic winning goal as they edged local rivals Manchester United to the 2012 Premier League.

"When a cycle comes to an end, many sensations arise," he posted on social media.

"A huge sense of satisfaction and pride remains in me for having played with Manchester City for a whole ten seasons - unusual for a professional player this day and age.

Solskjaer and Tuchel Play Down Haaland Talk

LONDON (Dispatches) - Manchester United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer and Chelsea boss Thomas Tuchel have played down reports their clubs will go head to head in the race to sign Borussia Dortmund striker Erling Braut Haaland.

Haaland has emerged as one of the world's top forwards after scoring 21 goals in 21 appearances in the Bundesliga this season.

The 20-year-old Norwegian snubbed United to join Dortmund from RB Salzburg in 2019, but there is growing speculation Solskjaer will make another attempt to sign him in the close season.

Solskjaer coached Haaland at Molde and talk of a summer move from Dortmund has intensified after the player's agent Mino Raiola and father Alf-Inge Haaland were pictured in Spain.

He has also been linked with Manchester City, Real Madrid and Barcelona. Asked if he can afford to miss out on Haaland again, Solskjaer said: "Well, I'm focusing on the next two months and whatever happens in the world of football. There's only so many places anyone can go to.

"I just focus on the ones who are here and even though I've worked with Erling it's not right for me as a Man United manager (to be) talking about Erling.

"I can talk about him as an ex coach of his but he will make his own mind up."



Aguero to Leave Man City

"I will continue to give it my utmost for the rest of the season to win more titles and bring more joy to the fans," he added.

In a club statement, City chairman Khaldoon Al Mubarak said he would reserve any farewell speeches until Aguero leaves, but revealed he had commissioned a statue of the striker.

"Sergio's contribution to Manchester City over the last 10 years cannot be overstated," Al Mubarak said.

"This is not yet the moment for farewell words and speeches. There is still much to achieve," he said with City in the running for their first ever Champions League and hot favourites to win the Premier League.

"In the meantime, it gives me great pleasure to announce that we will be commissioning an artist to create a statue of Sergio to live at the Etihad Stadium," he added.

Klopp Urges Liverpool to Make Late Top Four Bid

LONDON (Dispatches) - Jurgen Klopp has challenged Liverpool to salvage their troubled Premier League season with a late bid to finish in the top four.

Klopp's side are languishing in seventh place and sit five points adrift of fourth-placed Chelsea in the race to qualify for next season's Champions League.

The Reds' win over Wolves before the international break was only their fourth Premier League victory since Christmas during a spell in which they lost eight times.

With just nine games remaining -- starting with Saturday's trip to Arsenal -- Liverpool boss Klopp knows his team have no margin for error.

"We don't have a lot of points to waste any more but we have a tough programme on top of that, not only in the Premier League but the Champions League as well," Klopp said on Friday.

"We will not hesitate, we will just go for it and hopefully we can do that on Saturday.

"It is always a challenge for teams after the international break, with players coming back from their countries having played different systems and different match plans.

"We have one session to bring it all together again and that's a challenge but we are used to it.

"We know whatever we want for the rest of the season we can only get it if we win football games, and the first one is at Arsenal."

