

Health Ministry Spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari Said on Monday That Some 172 More Iranians Lost Their Lives Because of COVID-19 Over the Past 24 Hours Bringing The Total Deaths to 63,332

IRAN NEWS

The Secretary of the Headquarters for Culturalization And Knowledge-Based Economy Said a Special Export Corridor for Creative and Cultural Industries In the Country Was Launched

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Lifting of Sanctions Only Step to Revive JCPOA

TEHRAN (MNA) – Foreign Ministry Spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said that the only step to revive JCPOA is the lifting of all sanctions imposed during Trump's era under different titles.

Speaking in his weekly press conference on Monday, Saeed Khatibzadeh answered questions on a wide range of topics.

"What is signed between Iran and China does not contain any contract, number or figure, granting exclusive rights and obligations to both parties," said Khatibzadeh

"There were some concerns and rumors that some foreign troops would be stationed in Iran, which was completely rejected," he added.

"There is also cooperation between Iran and countries such as India and Russia, and this year we have the tenth year of a joint agreement between Iran and Russia," he noted.

"What can help the revival of JCPOA is to lift all the sanctions imposed during Trump's tenure under different titles after Iran's verification. Iran's position on this issue was fully explained in the Joint Commission on Friday," Khatibzadeh noted.

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First COVAX Shipment of 700,000 Jabs Sent to Tehran

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Health Ministry says the first shipment of the World Health Organization's COVAX global vaccine plan, containing more than 700,000 doses of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, has been sent to Tehran from Amsterdam.

"The first shipment of vaccines prepared by the COVAX scheme, containing more than 700,000 doses of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine manufactured by SK-Bio Institute of South Korea was loaded and sent to Tehran from the Amsterdam route minutes ago," Kianoush Jahanpour, the spokesman for Iran Food and Drug Administration (IFDA), wrote in a tweet.

According to Jahanpour, Iran has bought 16.8 million doses of vaccine via the COVAX global initiative.

Iran began its COVID-19 vaccination campaign with Russia's Sputnik V vaccine on February 9, starting with front-line medical workers who have already fought off three tough coronavirus waves in the country.

According to the spokesman of the National Headquarters for Managing and Fighting the Coronavirus, Iran has so far received 790,000 vaccine doses from other countries.

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Judiciary Determined to Fight Corruption, Support Production



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - In a virtual meeting with judicial officials from around the country, Judiciary Chief Hojjatoleslam Seyed Ebrahim Raisi said that the duty of the judiciary is to support production and more than 2,000 production units have been activated by Judiciary efforts.

He referred to the motto of the year "Production, Support and Elimination of Obstacles" by the Leader of the Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei, and said: "When the Leader announces a slogan all institutions must work to achieve this, the judiciary must be involved in any area where it is possible to remove barriers to production and support production."

"Our colleagues activated more than two thousand production units, which deserves appreciation and thanks," he said.

Raisi said that the duty of the judiciary is to support production and remove its obstacles.

"Last year, my colleagues tried to save more than a thousand production units from closure," said the chief of the judiciary.

He noted: "We are confident that with the efforts of our colleagues, the support of production and the fight against corruption to support production will come to an end."

Raisi stated: "One of the important areas of production in the judiciary is fighting corruption; because economic corruption hinders production prosperity, and if there are bribery and special privileges somewhere, the prosperity of production will not take place."

Emphasizing that economic security must be created for production prosperity, Raisi added: "Economic security depends on the fight against economic corruption. One of the important obstacles to production is the smuggling of the goods, and it is our duty to fight it."

Touching upon the talks on the JCPOA, he that Iran will not reverse its remedial measures on the nuclear deal until the US removal of all sanctions and verification of its measures by Tehran.

"Today, the clear policy and strategy of the Islamic Republic towards the U.S. is that it should lift all sanctions and we should verify them and then return to the nuclear deal undertakings," Raisi said.

"Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution (Ayatollah Khamenei) did not declare this strategy in a closed-door room but in the presence of all people of Iran, and no other strategy is acceptable," he added.

Raisi referred to certain analyses which say that the new U.S. administration is different from the Trump government, and said the Americans have always been after implementing arrogant plots against the Iranian nation and if they claim that they have changed this policy, they should prove it in practice.

Talks in Vienna to Focus Merely on JCPOA Legal Discussions

TEHRAN (IFP) - An informed source close to the Iranian negotiating team in Vienna says the agenda of the talks on April 6, 2021 will only include legal discussions on how parties to the 2015 nuclear deal should fulfill their obligations and how this should be verified.

The meeting of the joint commission of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) is slated to be held in Vienna on Tuesday, April 6, bringing together delegates from Iran and the P4+1 group.

This comes as the event has been controversial due to some false claims by Western media, which have alleged that the Vienna talks also include Iran's missile and regional programs.

Iran has said time and again that it will return to its obligations under the JCPOA only after the United States lifts sanctions against Iran all at once and after Tehran verifies the removal of sanctions.

Iran has rejected a step-by-step lifting of sanctions.

Tehran has made it clear that it will make good on its commitments if the 4+1 group can talk Washington into complying with this framework, or else Iran will keep moving on its current path.

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Iran Hands Over 185 Illegal Migrants To Pakistan

CHAGAI (Dispatches) - Iranian authorities on Sunday handed over 185 more Pakistanis to Levies Force through Raahdari Gate at Taftan border in Chagai district.

According to official sources, the Levies Force authorities later handed over them to the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) for further investigation and prosecution accordingly.

Initial investigation revealed that these people had crossed the border illegally in an attempt to reach Turkey and Europe for a better livelihood, while some others were working in Iran on daily wages, a Levies Force officer told Dawn. He said that 121 detained people were from Punjab, 35 from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 17 from Sindh and 12 from Azad Jammu and Kashmir. Some of these people were arrested in different parts of Iran for not having valid travel documents.

As many as 30 people, who did not have national identity cards, were handed back to Iran and they would be received once they proved that they are Pakistani nationals, the sources said.

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New Deal Offers Business Opportunities To Turkey, Iran

ANKARA (Dispatches) - A business representative from Tehran province in Iran said a Turkey-Iran Social Security Agreement inked on March 24 would contribute to strengthening the commercial and economic relations between the two countries.

Fatih Cayabatmaz from the Independent Industrialists and Businessmen Association (MUSIAD) told Anadolu Agency that the agreement offers important opportunities for the business world.

"Implementation of the Turkey-Iran Social Security Agreement will increase the Iranian businessmen's interest in Turkey.

Noting that Iranians were at the top of the list of foreigners establishing a company in Turkey, Cayabatmaz said, "In February, Iranians came first on the list with 75 companies." In addition to reinforcing relations, it will warm "the two nations towards each other," he said.

Cayabatmaz said with the new agreement, an Iranian businessman who founded a company in Turkey has to submit documents indicating that he paid insurance in his home country for the Iranian staff he employs, while not having to pay insurance in Turkey.

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India in Talks With Iran to Use Reserves for Sugar Exports

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India's Foreign Ministry has been involved in negotiations with Iran to persuade the country to use its hard currency reserves in Indian banks for purchases of sugar and other agricultural commodities from Indian exporters.

India's Food Secretary Sudhanshu Pandey told PTI news agency that talks with Iran began after exports of sugar to the country declined significantly in recent months because of Iran's rupee serves shortage in India.

Pandey said Indian authorities were now in talks with Tehran to get the authorization for using Iran's reserves in other currencies in Indian banks to pay for exports.

"Our negotiations with Iran are on. The Ministry of External Affairs is negotiating. We hope to see a breakthrough soon. We are trying to resolve this by April," said the Indian minister.

It was not yet clear if Iran would agree to the new mechanism or it would opt for other ways for meeting its sugar import needs.

Iran has been a top customer of Indian sugar over the last years as imports amounted to 1.1 million metric tons last year.

Pandey said it would be favorable for Tehran to continue imports of sugar and other agricultural commodities from India both because of lower price and also because of better transportation arrangements.

He said Iran has other currency reserves in India which could be used for bilateral trade although he would not elaborate.

Iranian government authorities have indicated that the country holds tens of billions of U.S. dollars in banks in other countries for crude sales that took place before the United States imposed its sanctions on Tehran in 2018.

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Tajik Defense Minister Due in Tehran

TEHRAN (MNA) – Tajikistan Defence Minister Colonel General Sherali Mirzo left Dushanbe for Tehran, announced Tajikistan's Ministry of Defense on Monday.

According to the report, the Tajik Defense Minister is expected to meet with senior Iranian political and military officials during the visit.

During the talks, a wide range of issues related to military-technical cooperation will be discussed. During this visit, coordination and exchange of information in the field of joint fight against terrorism will be examined as well.

Iran Can Provide Uzbekistan With Transit Route to Int'l Markets

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif says Iran can provide Uzbekistan with a transit route to international markets and waters.

Zarif made the remarks after meeting his Uzbek counterpart Abdulaziz Kamilov in Uzbekistan's capital Tashkent on Monday on the first leg of his visit to four Central Asian nations.

Today, we discussed economic, political and cultural relations, and the strengthening and expanding of these ties between Iran and Uzbekistan, as well as regional cooperation, especially with regard to peace in Afghanistan," Zarif told reporters on his meeting with Kamilov.

"Our very long common history further expands the basis for friendship between the two nations," he added.

Zarif also voiced hope that the two sides would be able to expand bilateral ties during his meeting with Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, which will be held later in the day.

The two countries of Iran and Uzbekistan enjoy high potentials in different areas, he said, adding, "The age-old historical ties between the two countries can



further expand the preliminaries for friendship between the two countries of Iran and Uzbekistan."

Zarif met and held talks with his Uzbek counterpart Abdulaziz Kamilov in Tashkent on Monday.

During his visit to Uzbekistan, Zarif discussed the current bilateral cooperation in political, economic, investment, transportation, logistics areas as well as other issues of mutual interests.

The chief Iranian diplomat is also scheduled to visit Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan to meet with officials of those countries.

Zarif's Central Asia tour, from April 5 to 8, will focus on bilateral and regional cooperation with the four countries, Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh announced on Friday.

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

Hormuz Strait's Security Can Be Ensured By Regional States



TEHRAN (MNA) – Commander of Iran Army Navy's First Zone said that security of Strait of Hormuz can only be ensured by the cooperation of regional countries.

Holding joint meetings in order to exchange maritime information and technical knowhow conveys this message that security and peace in the strategic Strait of Hormuz and North Indian Ocean can only be achieved with the cooperation and interaction of regional countries.

Second Rear Admiral Jafar Tazakor made the remarks on Monday in his meeting with Khan Mahmood Asif, commander of a Pakistani naval fleet, and stated that strengthening military relations and achieving a method accepted by both sides for the implementation of combined naval exercises is the main aim of interactions between the two navies of Iran and Pakistan.

This maritime synergy and interaction at different levels between the two countries of Iran and Pakistan will lead to the realization of common maritime goals, he said, adding, "As a result, maritime cooperation between the two countries will show determination and will of the navies of the two countries in establishing security of transportation and maritime trade in the regions under their control."

The Pakistani commander, for his part, emphasized that sailing trips to the Islamic Republic of Iran will deepen friendly relations between the two countries and added that such trips, in addition to transferring specialized experiences, will increase capabilities and transfer of experiences between the two countries.

Strengthening relations between the two countries' navies and holding joint naval exercises are the two main goals of the fleet in Bandar Abbas, he added.

Establishing security in the Persian Gulf, which is the most important international waterway in the world, is important for Iran and Pakistan, the commander continued.

Tehran Battles Fourth Wave of COVID

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – Tehran is battling a fourth wave of Covid-19 and cases are surging, the country's health ministry said on Monday, as officials sounded the alarm to tighten restrictions during Ramadan later this month.

The announcement comes just two days after the end of Iran's two-week Nowruz holidays and before this year's Ramadan, which is expected to begin around April 12.

The daily 7-day average cases in Iran has crossed 10,000 again with 11,680 new cases on April 4 and 161 deaths. Despite calls from health officials, many Iranians celebrated the New Year holidays and continued to see family members and travel around the country.

Tehran is "witnessing a 37 per cent surge in the number of hospitalized patients compared to last week," Nader Tavakkoli, a member of the city's Covid-19 task force, told semi-official news agency ISNA.

Mr Tavakkoli also raised concerns over employees returning to work and the possibility of a further rise in cases as he says that it may take nearly two weeks before the full impact of the New Year celebrations are seen.

"To fully realize the effect of the travels on the spread of the disease, we need to wait 10 more days. What is evident to us, for now, is that the fourth wave of the pandemic has hit Tehran," he said.

New restrictions will be going into effect in the 10 cities that make up the Tehran province.

As of now, those cities have been declared high-risk "red" and "orange" zones.

The new rules will focus on targeting the spread of the virus in workplaces and freeing up beds in Tehran's hard-hit hospitals. In red zones like the capital city of Tehran, officials said that one-third of employees will be required to stay at home in hopes of mitigating further spread.

Tehran hospitals will now be rejecting all elective surgeries and will be converting them into hospitals for Covid-19 patients.

Iran's Health Minister Saeed Namaki took to social media last week to plead with Iranians to listen to health experts.

He wrote that officials have begged, pleaded and called on people not to travel and to use the two weeks of Nowruz to help control the virus and that Iranians should expect tough days ahead.

Boosting Economy, Foiling Sanctions Majlis Top Priorities

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – Majlis Speaker Mommad Baqer Qalibaf described plans to strengthen the country's economy and nullify the foreign sanctions as the legislature's main priority in the new Iranian year that began two weeks ago.

Speaking at a meeting on Monday, Qalibaf said research programs, scientific studies, and a review of the function of the Parliament's commissions have led the lawmakers to the conclusion that the two main priorities in the New Year would be working on economic issues and nullifying the sanctions.

"This topic would be our main criterion, and we will transparently give a report of our activities to people," the speaker added.

Qalibaf also noted that an initiative has been put forward to change the policies on granting permission for activities in the business and production sectors at a

special commission focusing on a rise in domestic production, which will be finalized soon.

He went on to say that mismanagement and conflict of interest were among the causes of economic problems, noting that the COVID-19 and sanctions had added to the country's these problems in recent years.

He pointed out that a bill to change the issuing business and production permissions were being drafted by the Special Commission on Production Surge and announced that the commission would finalize it soon.

Based on the research work, scientific studies, and commissions' works in the parliament, two important priorities were identified: focusing on economic issues and neutralizing sanctions, Qalibaf noted.

He added that these two matters would be the main criterion of the parliament's action, and the performance report would be presented to the people in a transparent manner.

Iran Major Victim of Mine in War With Iraq

TEHRAN (MNA) – In a message on the occasion of the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action, Iranian defense min. named his country as a major victim of mine due to the imposed war with Iraq.

In his message Brigadier General Amir Hatami wrote: "During the eight years of the imposed war with Iraq, an area of about 42,000 square kilometers of Iranian territory were contaminated by 20 million types of mines and explosives made by countries who claim to be supporters of human rights."

He noted that the enemies, in the post-war years, refused to help our country to solve this problem and withheld their technological support from the Iranian nation.

"This made Iran the biggest victim of mine," he added.

"World Mine Awareness Day is a valuable step towards paying redoubled attention to life, health, society, and a safe environment for the carefree life of human society," he said.

The minister hailed the international occasion, announcing that Iran calls on all countries to work harder and pay more attention to this important issue.

He also hoped for a day when violence, threats, and war will be replaced by love and empathy in the world.

Tehran, Doha Discuss Bilateral Ties

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iran's Ambassador to Oman Ali Najafi and the country's Minister of the Royal Office Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani discussed bilateral ties on Sunday.

In a meeting held in the capital city of Muscat, the Iranian ambassador and the Omani minister explored avenues to boost bilateral ties binding the Sultanate of Oman and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

According to Omani media, cordial conversations were exchanged on several fields of joint cooperation and means of promoting them to serve the mutual interests of the two friendly countries. A range of matters of common concern were also discussed during the meeting.

Iran-China Long-Term Cooperation To Make U.S. Sanctions Ineffective

QAZVIN (IRNA) - Iranian lawmaker believes that Iranian comprehensive cooperation with China for 25 years will make the U.S. sanctions ineffective and bring economic stability.

Lotfollah Siahkhalil told IRNA that the West had a dream of making Iran bow down to their illegitimate demands through putting pressures and breaking negotiations.

He went on to say that Iran is a country whose activities are done based on independence and it is not after being dependent on others. U.S. made a big mistake when it left the Iran Deal, the lawmaker noted while referring to U.S. unilateral withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in May 2018.

About Iran-China document on cooperation, the member of the Majlis (Parliament) said it is too soon to term the document as an agreement. Supreme Leader's advisor Ali Larijani and China's Minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Yi exchanged the 25-year document on comprehensive cooperation in Tehran on March 27.

Antique Relics Delivered To Iran From Austria

TEHRAN (MNA) – Brigadier General Hadi Shirzad, Head of International Affairs of Police and Director General of Interpol in Iran, announced on Monday that Iran has received 28 pieces of its antique relics from Austria.

According to Shirzad, 28 antiquities belonging to the Achaemenid, Parthian, and Sassanid eras were handed over to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Austria in July 2020, with the pursuit of the International Police of NAJA and the cooperation of Interpol in Vienna.

These antiquities and historical objects, which were illegally taken out of the country, were transported as diplomatic cargo from Austria to the Islamic Republic of Iran, he added. The Achaemenid [Persian] Empire was the largest and most durable empire of its time. The empire stretched from Ethiopia, through Egypt, to Greece, to Anatolia (modern Turkey), Central Asia, and to India.

The Parthian Empire, also known as the Arsacid Empire, was a major Iranian political and cultural power in ancient Iran. The Parthians largely adopted the art, architecture, religious beliefs, and royal insignia of their culturally heterogeneous empire, which encompassed Persian, Hellenistic, and regional cultures. The Sassanid era (224 CE–651) is of very high importance in Iranian history, under which Persian art and architecture experienced a general renaissance.

15,000 People Visit Virtual Tour of Iranian Museums in Nowruz Holidays

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Some 15,000 people have used a virtual tour program to visit museums during a 10-day live tour in Nowruz holidays, an Iranian official said on Monday.

Director of the Communications Museum Hassan Amidi said that the most visited museum was the National Museum of Iran along with the virtual tour of Niavaran Cultural Center. Enthusiasts could visit virtually and free of charge the Communications Museum as well as nine other museums during the holidays, he said, adding that the National Committee of Museums of Iran (ICOM) developed the program by using official page of the Aparat website of the National Post Company.

The motto of the virtual tour has been "Museum is not closed," which has been welcomed by visitors, the director of the Communications Museum noted. The total number of 15,000 people visited the virtual project in 10 days, he said.

The Communications Museum has been successful in developing a virtual museum tour by using Aparat and Instagram platforms for the first time in Iran concurrent with the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic in the country in March 2020. The museum provided museum-goers with the opportunity to visit several museums across the country through virtual technology during the Nowruz holiday, which is the traditional Iranian festival of spring to mark the new year and fertility of nature.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:06
■ Evening (Maghreb)	19:48
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:19
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:42

22. They are those whose works will bear no fruit in this world and in the Hereafter nor will they have anyone to help.
23. Hast thou not turned Thy vision to those who have been given a portion of the Book? They are invited to the Book of Allah, to settle their dispute, but a party of them Turn back and decline (The arbitration).
Surah 3. The Family Of 'Imran, The House Of 'Imran (22-23)

Local Firms Awarded €165m Deals to Capture Flared Gas

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Persian Gulf Bidboland Gas Refinery has signed three contracts valued at a total of €165 million with local firms for the manufacture of a plant to capture flared gas and convert it into usable fuel.

The Persian Gulf Bidboland Gas Refining Company has signed the deals for the construction of 24 centrifugal compressors and a gas processing plant at Ragsefid Operational District.

A signing ceremony was held at the Iranian Oil Ministry on Monday to sign the contracts in the presence of Oil Minister Bijan Zanganeh as well as Mahmoud Aminnejad, the CEO of Bidboland Persian Gulf Gas Refining Company, along with the CEOs of the three Iranian firms.

The concluded deals entail construction, installation and commissioning of 24 centrifugal compressors with a value of 75 million Euros with Oil Turbo Compressor Company (OTC), MAPNA Turbine Engineering and Manufacturing Company (TUGA), and a contract for the collection of associated petroleum gas in the Ragsefid operational district worth 90 million Euros with Energy Industries the Engineering and Design (EIED) Company.

OTC is responsible for the construction of 16 centrifugal compressors for Aghajari 5 and Bibi Hakimeh 1 operation units and Pazanan gas pre-compression station. On the other hand, TUGA will build eight centrifugal compressors at a gas collection plant for Bibi Hakimeh 2.

The gas collection plant is aimed at preventing gas flaring, observing environmental



considerations, creating value added from collecting the flared gases in the east of Karun River and providing sustainable feedstock to petrochemical companies. To this end, two contracts for "improvement and construction of gas collection facilities" were signed in September 2018 between the National Iranian South Oil Company (NISOC) and the Persian Gulf Bidboland Gas Refining Company and Maroon Petrochemical Company with a total investment of 1.3 billion dollars.

The \$1.109 billion contract with Bidboland Persian Gulf Gas Refining Company includes 27 projects for construction of flared gas collection plants, improvement of existing plants and transfer of collected gas to Bidboland Refinery.

With the implementation of these projects, about 600 million cubic feet per day of associated gases will be collected and transferred to the refinery and about 1.5 million tons of C2+ will be added to the refinery's feed annually, which is a big step in solving the feedstock shortage of this refinery and the nearby petrochemical plants.

Also, with the implementation of this project and processing of associated gases, about 400 million cubic feet of light gas will be provided to the National Iranian Oil Company on a daily basis, which will be used for injection into oil fields or to supply fuel to the country.

Direct Flight Launched From Gorgan to Aktau

TEHRAN (Press Release) - For the first time ever in the history of Kazakh-Iranian relations a direct flight from Gorgan - the capital city of Golestan Province to Aktau - the capital city of Mangystau Province of Kazakhstan has been launched with the support of the Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan in Tehran and the Consulate General of the Republic of Kazakhstan in Gorgan.

Operated by Iranian airline Kish Air, the direct flight successfully conducted its first trip on 1 April 2021. The direct flight will facilitate development and extension of trade-economic and cultural-humanitarian relations between Kazakhstan and Iran and the two provinces as well as will boost business and human-to-human links, exchange of leisure, religious and medical tourism.

Most importantly the direct flight will strengthen ties of over a 6-thousand Kazakh diaspora historically residing in the Golestan province with their historic mother land.

Currently operated once in a month the direct flight is expected to increase its frequency in the future.

Envoy Urges Increasing Trade Exchanges With China's Xinjiang

TEHRAN (MNA) – Stating that Xinjiang, as large as Iran and neighborhood of eight countries, has been a linking bridge between China and West since the Silk Road, Iranian Ambassador to China called on increasing trade with this province.

Mohammad Keshavarzadeh, who traveled to Xinjiang province in China, tweeted pictures of the region and wrote that Xinjiang, as vast as Iran and a neighborhood of eight countries, has been China's connecting point with the West since the Silk Road. Its development is based on agriculture, transportation and tourism.

He added that huge combat-desertification and water supply projects and modern technologies have turned this province into the hub of agriculture in China.

The ambassador reiterated that the Islamic Republic of Iran should increase trade exchanges with this province optimally.

Labor Ministry Working to Prevent Mass Unemployment

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Minister of Labor Cooperation and Social Welfare of Iran Mohammad Shariatmadari announced that the ministry in 2020 prevented workers from being left unemployed.

"Last year, the Employment Department of the Ministry of Labor Cooperation and Social Welfare prevented the annual loss of 30,000 workers by establishing a business emergency and an employment policy monitoring centers," Shariatmadari said in a statement on Twitter. He went on to say that the Employment Department of the Ministry is constantly monitoring the barriers of businesses through those centers.

Shariatmadari noted that such initiatives make employment policy more efficient.

IME Breaks 8 All-Time Records

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Within the last Iranian year ended on March 20, 2021, the Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) posted its biggest yearly gain, with a total trading value of \$17.5b, more than doubling up the figure as compared to the previous year.

According to a report by the IME's International Affairs and PR, both value and volume of trades for IME's physical market, for its industrial products, its petrochemical products and for its oil products registered new records.

The exchange witnessed trade of more than 33 million tons of commodities, valued at more than \$15.5b on its physical market over the year, showing 27 and 127 percent of growth in volume and value of trades respectively.

It's worth noting that the IME traded 13 million derivatives contracts with a total trading value of more than \$975m.

Moreover, the IME's financial market value surpassed \$935m, with unprecedented rises of 90 and 187 percent in volume and value respectively.

Foreign Investment In Iran Bourse Nearly Doubled Last Year



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has seen an increasing presence of foreign investors in its stock market as investment by foreign individuals and entities nearly doubled in the Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE) and its subsidiary markets in the year to late March.

A senior official at Iran's Securities & Exchange Organization said that foreign investment in the Iranian bourse had reached 46 trillion rials (\$184 million) in March, up 84 percent compared to late March 2020.

Bahador Bijani said that the number of foreign-national investors registered in the TSE and other markets had also increased by 100 percent to reach a total of 3,600 in late March.

Bijani said the considerable presence of foreigners in the Iranian stock market should be viewed as a major success for the country at a time it has been facing a raft of financial and banking restrictions because of U.S. sanctions.

"This two-fold increase is a sign of growing inclination of foreign investors to enter the Iran's capital market," he said.

The official said that foreign investment in the Iranian bourse kept rising even over autumn when trade began to drop off in the TSE and other markets.

Share trading experienced a historic boom in Iran last calendar year as the TSE's main index TEDPIX reached an enviable record of over two million points in mid-summer.

The boom was mainly due to several rounds of listings held for major state-run companies which caused many households and retail investors to increase their purchases of shares.

However, the TSE and its subsidiary market Fara Bourse, where the amount of investment is capped, have seen lower volumes of trade over the past six months.

TEDPIX closed at over 1.307 million points and a market value 52,000 trillion rials (nearly \$209 billion) on its final working day on March 17 before the New Year holidays started in Iran.

Over \$714m Allocated for Mechanizing Agriculture

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Head of Iran's Agricultural Mechanization Development Center said some 30 trillion rials (over \$714.2 million) has been allocated for mechanization of the country's agricultural sectors in the current Iranian calendar year 1400 (started on March 21).

According to Kambiz Abbasi, the mentioned funding will be used to supply about 30,000 tractors, 800 combine harvesters, and about 50,000 different agricultural machines and equipment used in various sectors like horticulture, livestock, poultry, and aquaculture.

As per IRNA report, the mentioned funds will be injected into the ninth credit line that has been opened so far for the development of the country's agricultural mechanization.

The official further noted that the Agricultural Mechanization Development Center plans to increase the country's agricultural mechanization coefficient to 2.3 horsepower per hectare in the current year.

Iran's agricultural mechanization coefficient has currently reached 1.65 horsepower per hectare.

"Our ultimate goal is to inject enough machines into the sector to improve the status and degree of mechanization in



the process of agricultural production," Abbasi said.

According to the official, the Agriculture Ministry has been allocating a separate credit line for the mechanization of the agriculture sector every year, so that since the Iranian calendar year of 1392 so far, nine credit lines have been opened for this sector.

Statistics show that there is an annual demand for 25 trillion rials (about \$595 million) of facilities for the development and modernization of agricultural machinery.

Since over 95 percent of the technology and knowledge in this area is domestic, despite the U.S. sanctions most of the goals in the mechanization of various agriculture sectors will be achieved without any problems, according to Abbasi.

In the past forty years, since the Islamic Revolution, Iran has witnessed a remarkable improvement in various sectors and the agriculture industry has been one of the areas in which the country has undergone huge development.

Implementing billions of dollars worth of development, research, and educational projects across the country is an indication of the significant improvements in this sector.

General Points of Iran-China Strategic Partnership Document Verified

TEHRAN (IP) - The chairman of the Iranian Parliament's Economic Commission says the general points of Iran-China's 25-year strategic partnership document are verified since China had economic cooperation with Iran during the U.S. and Europe's sanctions.

Mohammad-Raza Pourebrahimi said with regard to the long-standing regional and international cooperation, the implementation of the strategic partnership document was put on the agenda.

Pourebrahimi said China tried to choose a path in strategic cooperation with Iran that was beneficial to both sides, and that the 25-year agreement between Iran and China was important.

The strategic view outlined Iran's path in a long-term approach in cooperation with China so that the two countries could cooperate in various fields, including the oil industry, petrochemicals, tourism, transit, and rail, he explained.

The chairman of the Iranian Parliament's Economic Commission said due to the need to connect Asia to Europe, the Silk Road passes through Iran, and China had to see the route in strategic communication and cooperation with Iran.

Nobakht Vows for Opening Zahedan-Khash Railway in Next Months

ZAHEDAN (IRNA) - Vice President and Head of the Budget and Planning Organization Mohammad Baqer Nobakht said that Zahedan-Khash railway will open in the next few months.

Speaking to reporters, Nobakht said about 46 projects are under construction with spending 570 billion tomans.

He added that Zahedan-Khash railway will bring about significant developments with regard to trade relations and will improve southeastern provinces' conditions.

The railway will use 90% for transferring cargo and 10% for passengers, he noted.

It is to create eastern corridor, to connect Chabahar

Port to Iran's railways network, Central Asian states, help develop Makran and pave the way for promoting Sistan and Baluchestan economy.

The Iranian government earlier announced that it will finish construction of a railway that connects the oceanic port of Chabahar to Central Asia.

The 750-kilometer railroad starts from Shahid Beheshti harbor at Chabahar Port and will connect it to Zahedan, the provincial capital of Sistan and Baluchestan. The government has so far provided more than 950 million dollars for the mega railway project.

This railway will be later connected to Sarakhs on the Turkmen border, linking the Iranian railroads to that of the Central Asian nations.

Portugal Extends Restrictions On Spanish Border Until April 15

LISBON (Reuters) - Portugal on Sunday extended restrictions on travel via land and sea to Spain that had been due to end this weekend until April 15 as it works to contain the spread of COVID-19.

The two countries imposed the restrictions on Jan. 28.

The interior ministry said the restrictions would remain in place for a further 11 days, adding that the measures did not prevent citizens or residents of Portugal from entering the country.



Taiwan Transport Minister to Step Down Over Train Crash

TAIPEI (Dispatches) - Taiwan's transport minister said on Sunday he would step down after he and the manager of a construction site whose truck slid onto rail tracks causing a catastrophic train crash accepted responsibility for the disaster.

In the island's worst rail accident in seven decades, 50 people have been confirmed dead after a packed express train carrying almost 500 passengers and crew slammed into the truck near the eastern city of Hualien on Friday, causing it to derail and the front part to crumple.



Turkey Condemns Admirals' Warning Over Bosphorus Treaty



ISTANBUL (Dispatches) - Top Turkish officials on Sunday lashed out at an open letter signed by more than 100 retired admirals warning about a possible threat to a treaty governing the use of Turkey's key waterways.

Turkey's approval last month of plans to develop a shipping canal in Istanbul comparable to the Panama or Suez canals has opened up debate about the 1936 Montreux Convention.

Canal Istanbul is the most ambitious of what President Recep Tayyip Erdogan terms his "crazy projects", which have seen him transform Turkey's infrastructure with new airports, bridges, roads and tunnels during his 18 years in power.

Turkish officials argue that the new canal is vital to take the pressure off Istanbul's Bosphorus Strait, a key route for world trade which saw more than 38,000 vessels pass through last year.

The waterway between Europe and Asia is clogged with maritime traffic and has seen several shipping accidents in recent years. But opponents say apart from its environmental impact, the new canal venture could undermine the Montreux accord. The convention guarantees the free passage through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits of civilian vessels in times of both peace and war.

It also regulates the use of the straits by military vessels from non-Black Sea states.

The new canal would allow ships to transit between the Mediterranean and the Black Sea without passing through part of the straits that are covered by the treaty.

Ozgur Unluhisarcikli, an analyst with the German Marshall Fund, said whether the new canal would affect the Montreux rules remained "ambiguous".

"Montreux is a convention that guarantees Turkey's security. Even if the new canal is not bound by the treaty, Turkey must respect its terms unilaterally," he told AFP.

The proposed 75-billion-lira (\$9.8-billion) alternative would run to the west of the Bosphorus along a 45-kilometre (28-mile) route.

Unluhisarcikli said if the new canal is covered by Montreux treaty, Turkey could not demand fees from commercial vessels.

In their letter, 104 retired admirals said it was "worrying" to open the Montreux treaty up to debate, calling it an agreement that "best protects Turkish interests".

"We are of the opinion to refrain from any kind of rhetoric or action that could make the Montreux Convention... a matter of controversy," they said.

The letter drew a strong riposte from top government officials, while prosecutors in Ankara have also launched an investigation.

"Not only those who signed but also those who encourage them will give an account before justice," Erdogan's top media aide Fahrettin Altun said on Twitter, referring to the probe.

Erdogan is expected to address the issue at a meeting at 1200 GMT on Monday, the presidency said.

Presidential spokesman Ibrahim Kalin said the declaration was "reminiscent of coup times".

Pope Slams Weapons Spending In Time of Pandemic

VATICAN CITY (Reuters) - Pope Francis urged countries in his Easter message on Sunday to quicken distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, particularly to the world's poor, and called armed conflict and military spending during a pandemic "scandalous".

Coronavirus has meant this has been the second year in a row that Easter papal services have been attended by small gatherings at a secondary altar of St. Peter's Basilica, instead of by crowds in the church or in the square outside.

After saying Mass, Francis read his "Urbi et Orbi" (to the city and the world) message, in which he traditionally reviews world problems and appeals for peace.

"The pandemic is still spreading, while the social and economic crisis remains severe, especially for the poor. Nonetheless - and this is scandalous - armed conflicts have not ended and military arsenals are being strengthened," he said.

Francis, who would normally have given the address to up to 100,000 people in St. Peter's Square, spoke to fewer than 200 in the church while the message was broadcast to tens of millions around the world.

The square was empty except for a few police officers enforcing a strict three-day national lockdown.

The pope asked God to comfort the sick, those who have lost a loved one, and the unemployed, urging authorities to give families in greatest need a "decent sustenance".

He praised medical workers, sympathised with young people unable to attend school, and said everyone was called to combat the pandemic. "I urge the entire international community, in a spirit of global responsibility, to commit to overcoming delays in the distribution of vaccines and to facilitate their distribution, especially in the poorest countries," he said.

Francis, who has often called for disarmament and a total ban on the possession of nuclear weapons, said: "There are still too many wars and too much violence in the world! May the Lord, who is our peace, help us to overcome the mindset of war."

Noting that it was International Awareness Day against anti-personnel landmines, he called such weapons "insidious and horrible devices ... how much better our world would be without these instruments of death!"



Bulgaria's Ruling Party Wins National Vote

SOFIA (Reuters) -Bulgaria's long-serving Prime Minister Boyko Borissov won a national election on Sunday, exit polls showed, and he is now likely to face complex coalition talks to secure another four-year mandate in the European Union's poorest member state.

Exit polls showed Borissov's centre-right GERB will be the largest party in parliament, winning around 25% of the vote, compared with the 33.5% it won four years ago.

After a decade of dominating Bulgarian politics, Borissov has few natural coalition partners in a fragmented legislature, with most groupings rejecting direct cooperation with GERB.

Weeks of talks, or even another election, cannot be ruled out, meaning Bulgaria may have difficulty tapping the EU's 750 billion euro (\$884 billion) Recovery Fund aimed at helping rebuild economies across the bloc after the coronavirus pandemic.

A former fireman and bodyguard, Borissov, 61, sought to showcase his successes in modernising Bulgaria's creaking infrastructure in a low-key campaign after massive anti-graft rallies last summer eroded his popularity.

Complicating his coalition-building options is the emergence of the anti-establishment There is Such a People party of popular TV host and singer Slavi Trifonov, which came in second according to a Gallup International poll on 17.1%.

A poll by Alpha Research put Trifonov third on 15.2% and the opposition Socialists second with 17.6%. Gallup found GERB had won 25%, while Alpha research put it slightly higher at 25.7%.

Trifonov, 54, whose concerts peppered with patriotic songs have attracted thousands, has ruled out governing with either GERB or the Socialists.

Afghan President Proposes Peace Road Map

KABUL (Dispatches) - Afghan President Ashraf Ghani will put forward a three-phase peace roadmap for Afghanistan during a proposed meeting in Turkey, seeking an agreement with the Taliban and a ceasefire before elections, a document seen by Reuters shows.

Washington is pushing for a conference to be hosted by Turkey, with U.N. involvement, this month to finalize a peace deal between the government and the Taliban as a May 1 deadline looms for the withdrawal of all foreign troops.

Ghani's plan will be presented as a counter to proposals put forward by Washington, rejected by the Afghan government, that envisage immediately drawing up a new legal system for an interim administration to include Taliban representatives.

The document shows Ghani's "Reaching an Endstate" proposal will include, in the first phase, a consensus on a political settlement and an internationally monitored ceasefire.

The second phase will be holding a presidential election and the establishment of a "government of peace" and implementation arrangements for moving towards the new political system.

The third phase will involve building a "constitutional framework, reintegration of refugees and

development" for Afghanistan moving forward.

A senior government official said Ghani has already shared his road map with foreign capitals.

A date for the Turkey meeting is yet to be decided, but multiple sources told Reuters it could take place in two weeks' time.

The Afghan government and a number of politicians said they would have to agree on an agenda with the Taliban before the meeting.

In a statement last month, the Taliban threatened to resume hostilities against foreign troops in Afghanistan if they did not meet the May 1 deadline envisaged in an agreement between the insurgents and the Trump administration last year.

U.S. President Joe Biden said this month it would be "hard" to withdraw the last U.S. troops from Afghanistan by May 1 "just in terms of tactical reasons", but he said he did not think they still would be there next year.

A senior government official said the Taliban was willing to extend the May 1 dateline and would not resume attacks against foreign forces in exchange for the release of thousands of their prisoners held by the Kabul authorities.



Former Jordan Crown Prince Behind Malicious Plot

AMMAN (Dispatches) - Jordan's deputy prime minister on Sunday said the king's half-brother, Prince Hamza, had liaised with foreign elements over a plot to destabilise the country and had been under investigation for some time.

Ayman Safadi, who is also Jordan's foreign minister, told reporters that the plot had been foiled at the "zero hour".

"Then it was clear they moved from design and planning into action," Safadi said, adding that some 14 to 16 people are under arrest.

Safadi spoke a day after Prince Hamza, a half-brother of King Abdullah II, was placed under house arrest, in a rare public clash between top members of the long-ruling family.

The unprecedented incident has raised concerns about stability in a country seen as a key Western ally in a volatile region and drawn an outpouring of support for Abdullah. In a videotaped statement from house arrest, Hamza accused the country's leadership of corruption and incompetence.

Safadi said intelligence agents had been observing the plotters for some time and raised their concerns with the king.

He said Hamza was asked to "stop all these activities and movements that threaten Jordan and its stability", but he refused.

Safadi did not identify the foreign countries allegedly involved in the plot. But he said a longtime senior official who has business ties in several Gulf Arab states, Bassem Awadallah, was involved and had been planning on leaving the country. He also said Awadallah had been trying to secure a place for Hamza's wife to flee.

Labib Kamhawi, a Jordanian analyst, said Hamza had crossed a red line by indicating he might be an alternative to the long-ruling king.

"This is something the king does not accept or tolerate," he told AP. "This is why we are now witnessing what has happened. This file is now more or less closed."

Early on Sunday, Hamza's mother, Queen Noor, expressed sympathy for "innocent victims".

"Praying that truth and justice will prevail for all the innocent victims of this wicked slander. God bless and keep them safe," she tweeted.



Shanon
(adviser)

Velenjak Apt (\$2000)
250sq.m, 4bdrs
S/p, Sauna
J, balcony
marble fl
Fully Furn

Darrous Villa (\$5000)
1000sq.m
5bdrs, S/p
S, J, balcony
marble floor
Fully Furn

Parsian

Farmanieh (\$2300) 240sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, S, J, balcony, F.F
Zaferanieh (\$3000) 400sq.m, 4bdrs, S/p, S, J, balcony, F.F
Gheitarieh (\$1600) 130sq.m, 2bdrs, S/p, S, J, balcony, F.F
Fereshteh (\$2200) 200sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, S, J, balcony, F.F

Niavaran Apt (\$1800)
170sq.m, 3bdrs, F.F

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Malaysian Economy to Grow 6-7.5% in 2021

KUALA LUMPUR (Dispatches) - Malaysia's economic growth will likely be in a range of 6 per cent to 7.5 per cent this year, rebounding from contraction last year, boosted by improving external demand and a pick-up in investment and production, the central bank said.

Gross domestic product will hit pre-Covid-19 levels by mid-year, though downside risk remains from the ongoing

pandemic, Bank Negara Malaysia said in its annual report. "The path of recovery will be gradual and uneven across economic sectors, and it may encounter speed bumps along the way," Governor Nor Shamsiah Mohd Yunus said in the report.

The central bank had earlier projected a growth range of 6.5 per cent to 7.5 per cent.



World Bank Sees MENA Debt Rising At Fastest Pace in 21st Century

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Public debt levels in the Middle East and North Africa are expected to rise to 54% of economic output by the end of this year from 46% in 2019, the fastest accumulation this century, the World Bank said on Friday.

Countries in the region were hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic last year and like the rest of the world, lockdown measures introduced to combat the spread of the virus left many of its economies in distress, the World Bank said in its first economic update of 2021. Despite global efforts to roll out vaccines, the economic situation remains volatile, it said.

The region is expected to see an uptick in its gross domestic product levels this year, after record economic contractions in several countries in 2020, the report said.

"But that recovery is unlikely to be strong enough to get the MENA region's output back to pre-pandemic levels," Ferid Belhaj, vice president for the Middle East and North Africa, wrote in the report, "the substantial borrowing that MENA governments had to incur to finance essential health and social protection measures boosted government debt dramatically."

The double crisis of the virus, along with plummeting oil prices, created an even bigger problem for the region's oil exporters. Saudi Arabia's budget deficit widened the most in more than three decades. It was a similar case for neighboring countries which have had to slash spending and pump money through stimulus programs.

The pandemic affected sectors other than energy in the region too and the World Bank expects overall exports will have dropped sharply last year and will only partially recover in 2021.

The World Bank estimates the region's economic growth will be 2.2% in 2021, only partially recovering from last year's 3.8% contraction. It said the region must prioritize fiscal spending to mitigate the effects of the virus.

More from the World Bank:

*Total pandemic cost, in terms of GDP loss, is set to exceed \$227 billion by the end of 2021.

*Debt among the region's oil importers is seen averaging about 93% of economic output this year.

*Inflation-adjusted government revenues dropped by 24% last year.

*Exports dropped 44% on an annual basis during the second quarter of 2020 at the height of the pandemic and continued year-on-year drops for the two consecutive quarters.

Indonesia Offers to Become Vaccine Hub for Southeast Asia

JAKARTA (ANTARA) - During a meeting with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in WuYi, Fujian province, China, Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi submitted a proposal for turning Indonesia into a vaccine hub for Southeast Asia, as part of long-term vaccine cooperation.

"This idea is still in its early stage, but what we are proposing includes cooperation to strengthen vaccine development research, develop raw material industries, and increase national vaccine production capacity," she said during a press conference held from China on Friday. The idea was discussed with Wang Yi during talks on strengthening vaccine partnership, both in the long and short term, she informed.

The two countries will hold further discussions on long-term vaccine cooperation, but in principle, China has expressed its support for the Indonesian initiative, she said.

During the meeting, Indonesia also expressed the hope that, in the short term, the Chinese government would continue to provide support so that the delivery of vaccines, which has become a binding commitment, can be carried out according to the agreed schedule, she added.

"We also discussed the issue of strengthening vaccine cooperation directly with vaccine producers in China," said Marsudi. The discussion comes at a time when vaccine producing countries have imposed export restrictions and bans on the grounds of meeting domestic needs, as several countries are facing a spike in cases.

The restrictions are affecting the supply chain rate of vaccine supply to the world, Marsudi noted and expressed her concern over the impact of the vaccine supply slowdown amid the fight against the pandemic and economic recovery efforts. "Therefore, as one of the co-chairs of the COVAX AMC Engagement Group, I have a moral responsibility to continue to call for cooperation so that equal access to vaccines for all countries can be realized," she remarked.

Marsudi paid a visit to Fujian province, China with Minister of State-owned Enterprises, Erick Thohir, and Minister of Trade, Muhammad Lutfi.

On Friday, the three ministers held about 14 meetings on various issues, including vaccine cooperation, increased trade and investment activities, as well as consular cooperation, particularly for efforts to strengthen protection for Indonesian sea vessel crew members.



Japan, U.S. Aim for Chip Supply Chain Deal

TOKYO (Reuters) - Japan and the United States will cooperate on the supply of critical parts for chips, aiming for an agreement when the leaders of both countries meet later this month, the Nikkei newspaper said on Friday.

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga is due to become the first foreign leader to visit the United States since President Joe Biden took office. The meeting, originally scheduled for April 9, has been pushed back until April 16, Japan's chief cabinet secretary said. At a regular news briefing, White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki confirmed the timing of the visit. Psaki said the visit reflected "the importance we place on the bilateral relationship with Japan, and our friendship and partnership with the Japanese people."

The White House had no immediate comment on the Nikkei report. The Japanese embassy said no decisions had been made about the expected results of Suga's meeting with Biden.

The visit comes as the global shortage of semiconductors has squeezed U.S. automakers and other manufacturers, forcing them to cut production. The issue has become important for policymakers, who worry about economic and security risks from the shortage. Officials from the United States, South Korea and Japan are expected to discuss concerns about the shortage at a meeting on Friday, a senior U.S. administration official said.

"It would be fair to say our three countries hold many of the keys to the future of semiconductors manufacturing technology and we will seek to affirm the importance of keeping these sensitive supply chains secure," the official told reporters.

White House aides will meet with chipmaker and automakers on April 12 to discuss the resiliency of the U.S. supply chain, amid a broader policy review on the issue, according to a source familiar with the matter.

French Lockdown Will Hit Economic Growth

PARIS (Dispatches) - A fresh lockdown in France will dent economic growth this year but it is too early to say by how much, the finance minister, Bruno Le Maire, has warned.

Amid concerns that increasing infection rates across much of continental Europe will slow the recovery from the pandemic, Le Maire indicated on Friday that a forecast of 6% GDP growth this year may need to be revised downwards.

President Emmanuel Macron on Wednesday ordered France into its third national lockdown and said schools would close for three weeks as he sought to tackle a rising wave of infections and prevent hospitals from being overwhelmed.

France reported more than 50,000 new Covid-19 infections on Thursday and 308 deaths, while the number of people in intensive care units rose to 5,109.

Belgium was one of several European countries to join France in imposing tighter restrictions. From this weekend the government in Brussels said schools would be closed, borders kept closed, there would be limited access to non-essential shops and it lowered the number of people able to meet outdoors to four.

Le Maire said: "These measures will impact economic growth in 2021. We are in the process of assessing it. There will be a new evaluation in the coming days."

He added the new lockdown measures, which will also restrict travel and gatherings to six people, would force the temporary closure of 150,000 businesses at a cost of €11bn (£9.3bn) a month.

The Bank of France governor, François Villeroy de Galhau, said he did not expect the new restrictions to have an impact on the bank's forecast of 5.5% growth in 2021, provided the restrictions did not last beyond early May.

Eurozone manufacturers recovered strongly in March, according to business surveys that said a similar recovery was under way in the US and Britain.

However, the ratings agency S&P Global said Europe faced an uneven and slower recovery than previously expected "following delays to the vaccine rollout across the continent, vaccine hesitancy, the emergence of a third wave, and the threat of dangerous new variants".

Global Factory Recovery Picks Up, But Cost Pressures Grow

LONDON (Reuters) - Factories across Europe and Asia ramped up production in March as a solid recovery in demand helped manufacturers move past the setbacks of the pandemic, although escalating costs and supply-chain disruptions were creating challenges and driving prices.

A series of upbeat factory surveys released on Thursday reinforced market optimism that vaccine rollouts, as well as strong growth in global powerhouses like the United States and China, would help economies emerge from their sharp downturns of 2020.

Euro zone monthly factory activity growth galloped at its fastest pace in the near 24-year history of a leading business survey last month, but supply chain disruptions and renewed lockdowns in the region may rein it in soon.

IHS Markit's final Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) jumped to 62.5 in March from February's 57.9, above the initial 62.4 "flash" estimate and the highest reading since the survey began in June 1997.

"The euro zone manufacturing sector proved once again to remain resilient through the re-imposed wave of lockdowns," said Maddalena Martini at Oxford Economics.

In Germany, Europe's largest economy, activity grew at the fastest pace on record. In France, the bloc's second-biggest economy, it hit levels not seen since the internet boom at the turn of the century.

But much of Europe is suffering a third wave of coronavirus infections, and with a slow vaccine rollout in the region, governments have re-imposed tough controls on citizens, likely hitting the bloc's dominant services industry hard.

Meanwhile, supply-chain issues, exacerbated when the recent blockage of the Suez Canal caused disruption in global shipping and ports that could take months to resolve, has driven a surge in input prices and the biggest increase in suppliers' delivery times since the survey began.

"Margins are coming under pressure because of all the supply-chain issues. The Suez issue didn't help and we now have inventories at very low levels," said David Owen at Jefferies.

In Britain, outside the currency union, factories rode a wave of orders and prepared for a gradual re-opening of the economy from its COVID-19 shutdowns by hiring staff at the fastest rate since 2014.

Japan and South Korea saw factory activity expand in March thanks to solid demand at home and abroad, PMIs showed, offering relief to policymakers facing pressure to speed up a patchy recovery.

"South Korean manufacturers continued to signal strong optimism as the rollout of COVID-19 vaccinations began and demand for new products accelerated," said Usamah Bhatti, economist at IHS Markit.

Turkey Committed to Economic Reforms



ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkey is committed to implementing economic reforms, Treasury and Finance Minister Lutfi Elvan told ambassadors of European Union countries in a videoconference.

"We are going to tell all of our counterparts about how committed we are to the reforms," he said.

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan last month outlined a series of measures that he said would boost the country's economy, as he pledged to bring inflation back down to single digits.

Under the package, Erdoğan said he would focus efforts to reform Turkey's economy on bringing down inflation and tightening state finances as well as increasing the country's potential growth through productivity driven by investment, employment and exports.

He also announced plans to set up coordination committees on prices, financial stability and the economy to navigate the changes.

Erdoğan has said the priority would be fighting against the rise in consumer prices, with the aim of reaching single-digit inflation.

"An agenda point of priority is the battle with inflation. The goal is single-digit inflation," he said, adding that an "early warning system" was being developed for food prices.

The president also announced the formation of a price stability committee, which he said will increase the effectiveness of the fight against inflation, while public sector price hikes will be based on targeted inflation.

Matys said the committee could result in some structural changes in a number of areas such as food prices.

Food prices are one of the main causes of inflationary pressures, he stressed.

Energy Ministry Grants 100% Discount To Low Consuming Subscribers

TEHRAN (MNA) - As announced by the managing director of Iran's Power Generation and Distribution Company (TAVANIR), seven million subscribers have received 100-percent discount on their electricity bills in the framework of the "Power of Hope" program.

Mohammad-Hassan Motevalizadeh said, "Since the start of this program in last August, the subscribers have had some good

cooperation with us, and we hope that the hot season coming this cooperation will increase."

Implementation of a program by the Iranian Energy Ministry for rewarding efficient electricity subscribers with a 100 percent discount on their bills, has reduced the number of high-consuming subscribers across the country by 6.1 percent.



India to Launch Supercharged Push for Global Electric Vehicle Players

NEW DELHI (Reuters) - India plans to offer fresh incentives to companies making electric vehicles (EVs) as part of a broad auto sector scheme it expects to attract \$14 billion of investment over five years, according to industry sources and a document seen by Reuters.

The country's efforts to promote EVs to reduce its oil dependence and cut pollution have been stymied so far by a lack of investment and weak demand, as well as the patchwork nature of existing incentives that vary from state to state.

The new automotive sector scheme, however, has been under discussion since mid-2020 to provide a more focused approach, industry sources close to the matter told Reuters. The plans envisage \$8 billion of incentives for carmakers and suppliers over a five-year period to drive large investment in the sector.

Final details of the scheme are expected within a month, but companies will be able to apply for incentives from April 1, the sources said.

Companies will receive 4-7% government cashbacks on the eligible sale and export value of vehicles and components, but for EVs and their components there is an additional 2% as a "growth incentive" to promote electric mobility, according to the draft policy document seen by Reuters.

Elon Musk's Tesla Inc is already gearing up to enter India while rivals including Ford, Volkswagen and India's Tata Motors and Mahindra & Mahindra also have plans to invest billions of dollars in EVs to meet stricter global emissions regulations.

Automotive component manufacturers in India must be ready to pivot their product offerings to cater for the shift towards EVs, the document said.

The automotive incentive scheme is part of India's broader \$27 billion program to attract manufacturers from the likes of China and Vietnam to capture a bigger share of the global supply chain and exports.

But for new companies entering India, as well as existing automakers, challenges abound.

Steep interest rates and power tariffs, as well as poor infrastructure and high logistics costs, make it costlier for companies to operate in India compared with rivals such as Thailand or Vietnam.

"The (new) scheme proposes financial incentives to help overcome these disabilities and make India more competitive," the draft policy document said, referring to



inefficiencies that it said can lead to 5-8% higher costs for manufacturers in India.

The government expects the scheme to bring additional investment of \$14 billion, create 5.8 million new jobs and rake in more than \$4 billion in total tax revenue over five years.

To benefit from the scheme automakers must meet conditions including minimum global revenue of \$1.4 billion. For auto parts makers it is \$69 million. The companies must grow by at least 8% each year to qualify for the incentives, which are also linked to the distance between the factory and point of sale.

The document added that existing programmes focus on a large number of companies that lack scale and "are constrained in their ability to invest and undertake the risk required for rapid growth".

"A change in strategy is needed to focus on promoting firms that have the scale, competitive ability and management capabilities to be automotive champions," it said.

COVID-19 Strains May Lead to Economic Loss of 7 Trillion Yen



TOKYO (Dispatches) - A state of emergency declared over the spread of novel coronavirus variants in Japan could cause an economic loss of about 7 trillion yen (\$63 billion), according to two University of Tokyo economists.

That figure is much higher than the estimated economic loss of between 700 billion yen and 800 billion yen arising from the original virus.

The study was conducted by Taisuke Nakata, an associate professor of economics at the University of Tokyo, and Daisuke Fujii, a specially appointed lecturer at the same university's Economics Faculty. They have previously made gloomy forecasts about the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Japanese economy.

In the latest simulation, the two economists set the variant strain as being 1.5-fold more infectious than the novel coronavirus. They also used two different rates of the spread of infection.

One was the British variant that caused a much faster infection spread, while the other was the American strain that circulated at a slower pace.

The economists found that if the spread of the variant in Britain occurred at a similar level in Tokyo, it would take about four months for the British strain to completely replace the previous novel coronavirus in the Japanese capital. It would take about a year for the American case to unfold in Tokyo, they said.

The economists estimated the number of daily new infections in Tokyo based on those assumptions.

Even under the more optimistic American version, daily new COVID-19 cases would exceed 1,000 by July in the capital, leading to the need for another declaration of a state of emergency.

If the British scenario unfolded, 1,000 daily new infections would be reached in June.

Moreover, under the British case, another state of emergency would have to be declared in early 2022 because of a new wave of infections following the lifting of the previous state of emergency.

The economic loss under the American scenario would be between 3 trillion yen and 4 trillion yen, while the British case would lead to a loss of between 6 trillion yen and 7 trillion yen, they said.

The more virulent strains are expected to cause more economic damage because tougher measures would be needed to halt their spread, leading to major declines in economic activity.

The study also compared the situations in the Kanto and Kansai regions.

Poorest Countries Will Follow a Tricky Path Back to Debt Markets

LONDON (Reuters) - Ghana and Pakistan's return to international debt markets this week, a year after COVID slammed them shut, has been an encouraging sign for the world's poorest countries, but investors still need convincing.

As the pandemic enters its second year, funding needs are huge. Lower growth and higher deficits mean public debt in developing nations swelled to more than 60% of gross domestic product last year, rising by double-digit percentage points from 2019 in Latin America, the Caribbean and South Asia, Eurodad estimates.

They have a route to cope with the debt load. Last year, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank launched the Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI) and its accompanying Common Framework to help the poorest nations survive the pandemic. They create obvious benefits. But they also carry additional hazards.

The Common Framework effectively requires a country to try to restructure its private debt. That would trigger a default in the eyes of credit-ratings agencies, a situation investors wouldn't want to be dragged into.

The scheme has been something of a hot potato even after Ethiopia said in January it would be the first country with an international government bond, and not already in default, to use it. It was promptly downgraded by Fitch and S&P.

Neither Ghana, Pakistan nor the Maldives, which also sold an Islamic finance bond this week, had signalled plans to follow suit. This week's debt sales showed how sensitive the issue has become.

"The G20 Common Framework requires the debtor country to seek comparability of treatment with private creditors, and investors are concerned how that may be implemented," said Jim Ho, a sovereign debt restructuring lawyer at Cleary Gottlieb.

Investors who bought into Ghana's \$3 billion bond sale on Wednesday said officials had assured the would-be buyers that the government, which has debt approaching 80% of GDP and spends roughly half of its revenue on interest payments, was not planning to pursue debt relief.

"They were saying they are not going for DSSI," said Richard Briggs, at fund manager GAM, who bought a slice of the issue. "They were worried about the perception of what DSSI might mean."

In what was seen as an alternative, one of the bonds Ghana sold was a four-year, zero-coupon issue. Zero coupons are not common among emerging-market issuers, but the lack of regular coupon payments effectively allows the government to defer some payments.

That cost Ghana, classified as at high risk of debt distress by the IMF. Its yield-to-maturity equivalent was 7.3%, around 150 basis points above its existing comparable bonds.

Maldives and Pakistan took a different approach. They have applied for DSSI, as has Ivory Coast which become the first of the DSSI cohort to return to borrowing markets in November.

Analysts said that partly explained why Maldives' \$200 million five-year sukuk was less than it planned to borrow and priced at 10.5%, reckoned by Tellimer to be one of the highest yields at issue since Mongolia in 2016.

"The operation may signal that investors remain sceptical about the Maldives' post-Covid recovery," Tellimer's Stuart Culverhouse wrote in a note.

Laos in south east Asia, meanwhile, has been forced to scrap a bond sale for the third time this month.

Despite the doubts, many saw this week's sales as the latest sign of a gradual recovery of poorer nations. For around a year, they have had to rely on debt relief and funding from international financial institutions like the IMF.

"These have opened the issuance door to those EM countries burdened by almost a year of noise surrounding PSI (private sector involvement) and the G20 common framework," said Simon Quijano-Evans, chief economist Gemcorp Capital.

Hastening the push is a desire to secure funding before U.S. bond yields possibly climb higher later in the year.

"There's certainly more uncertainty looking forward, but it's difficult for most borrowers to imagine that by waiting they're going to gain economic advantage, i.e. lower financing costs," said Stefan Weiler, JPMorgan's head of Central and Eastern Europe, Middle East and Africa debt capital markets.

The first quarter saw around \$225 billion of EM debt issuance, according to Refinitiv data, up from \$181 billion in the same period of last year, the final weeks of which were blighted by the pandemic.

"We do anticipate a meaningful pickup in sovereign supply from Africa this year," Weiler said. "There's general expectation that several countries will look to come to the bond market this year."

Low-income countries would need \$200 billion over five years to fight the pandemic and \$250 billion to return to the path of catching up to higher income levels, IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said on Tuesday.

Some help may come from a possible \$650 billion handout of the IMF's Special Drawing Rights - its quasi-currency - which might be finalised at the spring meetings next week. []

On the issue of countries not openly talking about whether they would opt for DSSI or the Common Framework at bond road shows, "you wouldn't expect them to, said Jeff Grills, head of emerging markets debt at Aegon Asset Management. "We will probably learn more at the IMF meetings"

Lifting of Sanctions...

FROM PAGE 1

Stating that Iran welcomes if the United States corrects the wrong path of the past, he said, "Tomorrow, there will be talks between Iran and the remaining parties in the JCPOA, and we will not have any direct or indirect negotiations with the United States."

"Tomorrow is the periodic commission between Iran and the P4 + 1. It was supposed to be held in March, but the date had not been finalized. The agenda of this meeting is to lift the oppressive US sanctions against Iran and how to fulfill the obligations of the other side," the spokesman added.

"Tomorrow it will be clear whether the P4 + 1 can serve our interests or not," he highlighted.

Referring to the Wall Street Journal claims about two agreements in Vienna, FM spokesperson said, "Where and how the P4 + 1 negotiates with the United States is up to the P4 + 1 itself. Tomorrow we will discuss the way to lift the sanctions according to the agenda of the commission. The P4 + 1 asked us to explain the way we are going to stop the compensatory measures."

"The path is clear; U.S. sanctions must be completely lifted and verified. There is only one step. It is a step that includes the lifting of all U.S. sanctions, and in return, Iran is ready to suspend its retaliatory measures," Khatibzadeh noted.

First COVAX...

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"Some vaccines are on the way and will arrive in Iran this week. Of course, there is a special situation regarding vaccines in the world and the disputes that have arisen among some countries due to vaccine [distribution and supply]," Alireza Raeisi said.

Raeisi also pointed to the purchase of vaccines via the COVAX initiative, saying while Iran expected to receive 4.2 million doses before the Iranian New Year on March 21, the plan has been postponed repeatedly, and instead, 780,000 doses will arrive in the country by Wednesday.

He added that so far 250,000 people in Iran have been vaccinated, of whom 56,000 have received their second jabs.

Last week, Ali Rabiei, the spokesman for the Iranian administration, said Iran has authorized the purchase of more than 21 million doses of vaccines via the COVAX mechanism.

Talks in Vienna...

FROM PAGE 1

"We will hold talks only with the 4+1 group about the return of all signatories to their obligations under the JCPOA, and we will hold no direct or indirect talks with the United States," said Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Abbas Araçchi in a meeting on Sunday, April 4.

He added Iran will lay out its demands at Tuesday's meeting in accordance with the policies announced by Iran's Islamic Revolution Leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei.

Iran Hands...

FROM PAGE 1

Three people died after a pick-up loaded with petrol collided with a trailer coming from the opposite direction on RCD Highway in the Gazan area of Chagai district on Sunday.

Dalbandin Tehsildar Akbar Ali Mazarzai told Dawn that the accident occurred after the pick-up went out of control as its tyre burst. Soon after the incident both vehicles caught fire. Traffic remained suspended on the Quetta-Taftan RCD highway for several hours, he added.

He said the driver of the trailer was rescued by a passerby and taken to a hospital in Dalbandin.

The fire brigade extinguished the fire after struggling for almost an hour, Mr Mazarzai said.

New Deal...

FROM PAGE 1

"The time the Iranian workers spend working in Turkey will be valid in Iran. This will reduce costs and increase the possibility of Iranian businessmen investment in Turkey. The same applies for Turkish businessmen operating in Iran and their personnel," he said.

He noted that health insurance for an employer would be valid in the other country, allowing workers to access health services free of charge.

A previous Social Security Agreement between Turkey and Iran, inked on April 16, 2016, was approved and took effect once again by the Turkish parliament on March 24. With the addition of Iran, the number of countries with effective social security agreements with Turkey rose to 34.

Chepngetich Smashes Half Marathon World Record

PARIS (Dispatches) - Kenya's Ruth Chepngetich smashed the women's half marathon world record on Sunday in a time of one hour four minutes and two seconds in Istanbul. The marathon world champion sliced almost half a minute off the previous best mark of 1hr 4:31 set by Ethiopia's Ababel Yeshaneh in February 2020 in the United Arab Emirates. Chepngetich, 26, was followed across the line in Turkey by Ethiopian Yalemzerf Yehualaw (1hr 4:40) with Kenya's Hellen Obiri third in 1hr 4:51.

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Tapie Attacked in Violent Burglary Near Paris

PARIS (Dispatches) - Former French minister and scandal-ridden tycoon Bernard Tapie, the former owner of Adidas, was attacked along with his wife during a night-time burglary of their home near Paris, police said Sunday. The couple were asleep when four men broke into their house in Combs-la-Ville near Paris around 00:30 AM (2230 GMT Saturday) on Sunday, beat them and tied them up with electrical cords before making off with their loot.

Bucks Fend off Kings' Late Rally

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Jrue Holiday turned a short jumper into a three-point play with 1:32 to go, then added a driving hoop 33 seconds later Saturday night, allowing the visiting Milwaukee Bucks to stall a Sacramento Kings rally and pull out a 129-128 victory without Most Valuable Player candidate Giannis Antetokounmpo. Holiday's personal five-point flurry capped a season-best, 33-point night. The Bucks led 118-105 after a tip-in by Brook Lopez with 6:48 remaining. But despite playing on the second night of a back-to-back, the Kings made an energetic late push, scoring 14 of the next 15 points to tie the game at 119 on a Terence Davis 3-pointer with 2:06 to play. Davis, who shared Kings scoring honors with De'Aaron Fox with 27 points, had a pair of 3-pointers in Sacramento's frantic late run. Fox added a three-point play, while Buddy Hield did the rest of the scoring on a dunk and a 3-pointer. Lopez added 26 points, Bobby Portis 18 and Khris Middleton 16 for the Bucks. Donte complemented a game-high 14 rebounds with 12 points. Buddy Hield finished with 19 points, and Tyrese Haliburton had 12 points and 11 assists for the Kings.

76ers 122, Timberwolves 113

Tobias Harris scored 32 points and Joel Embiid added 24 in his return from a 10-game absence to lift host Philadelphia to a victory over Minnesota. Embiid added eight rebounds and three blocks in his first game since sustaining a bone bruise in his left knee during Philadelphia's 127-101 win over the Washington Wizards on March 12. Shake Milton and Ben Simmons each had 14 points and Seth Curry chipped in 13 for the 76ers, who have won 12 of their last 15 games. Philadelphia shot 50.6 percent from the floor and 42.9 percent from 3-point range to win its eighth straight meeting with Minnesota.

Mavericks 109, Wizards 87

Luka Doncic finished with 26 points, Jalen Brunson came off the bench to score 19 and visiting Dallas wrapped up a five-game road swing with a win at Washington. All five Mavericks starters scored in double-figures, including Tim Hardaway Jr. with 16 points. He made consecutive 3-pointers in the fourth quarter that extended the Dallas lead to 19 points and effectively quashed Washington's comeback efforts. Robin Lopez came off the bench to score 18 points on 8 of 9 shooting and Raul Neto added 16 points for the Wizards. NBA-leading scorer Bradley Beal missed his fourth straight game due to a hip contusion.

South Africa Beat Pakistan by 17 Runs

JOHANNESBURG (AFP) - South Africa levelled the series with a 17-run win in the second one-day international against Pakistan at the Wanderers Stadium in Johannesburg on Sunday despite a spectacular innings by Pakistan opening batsman Fakhar Zaman. Fakhar hit 193 off 155 balls with 10 sixes and 18 fours but he lacked support as Pakistan made 324 for nine in reply to South Africa's 341 for six. Quinton de Kock, captain Temba Bavuma, Rassie van der Dussen and David Miller hit half-centuries for South Africa, who were sent in. Pakistan's chances seemed to be minimal when fast bowler Anrich Nortje dismissed captain Babar Azam for 31 in his first over and followed up with two more quick wickets to reduce the tourists to 85 for four. However, Fakhar launched an astonishing assault to keep their hopes alive until he was run out in the last over.

Oyarzabal Salutes Fans After Real Sociedad Win Copa del Rey

MADRID (Dispatches) - Mikel Oyarzabal scored the penalty that won Real Sociedad the delayed 2020 Copa del Rey on Saturday before dedicating their victory to the fans unable to attend an historic final against Basque rivals Athletic Bilbao. Oyarzabal, La Real's captain who joined their youth academy aged 14, proved the difference in a 1-0 win in Seville, where the biggest ever game between these two famous clubs was played in an empty stadium. "It's an incredible day," said a tearful Oyarzabal afterwards. "You remember everybody, all the people who would have loved to be here, people who have left us. This is for everyone, my family, my friends. It means everything." Oyarzabal's strike secures Real Sociedad their first Copa del Rey triumph in 34 years while at the same denying a 24th success for Athletic Bilbao, who must now try to recover in time for a second attempt in two weeks' time.



Pacers 139, Spurs 133 (OT)

T.J. McConnell canned a jumper with the shot clock running out with 17.8 seconds to play in overtime as part of his 18-point performance as Indiana outlasted host San Antonio in overtime. The overtime was tied at 130 with 3:46 remaining until Indiana pulled away down the stretch, with Turner converting three free throws and McConnell hitting a pair of shots. Caris LeVert led the Pacers with 26 points, with Myles Turner and Aaron Holiday adding 18 each. DeMar DeRozan had 25 points for San Antonio, which has lost two straight and seven of its past nine games. Keldon Johnson and Dejounte Murray scored 20 each for the Spurs.

Jazz 137, Magic 91

Donovan Mitchell scored 22 points and led Utah's 3-point barrage with six in a rout of short-handed Orlando in Salt Lake City. Joe Ingles and Bojan Bogdanovic each scored 17 points, while Jordan Clarkson threw in 15 off the bench as the Jazz won their ninth straight overall and 22nd in a row at home. Utah set an NBA record with 18 3-pointers in the first half, passing the 2018 Golden State Warriors (17). Wendell Carter Jr. led the Magic with 19 points and 12 rebounds, while Chuma Okeke added 16 points. The Magic were without Michael Carter-Williams (non-Covid illness), Otto Porter Jr. (left foot pain), Khem Birch (non-Covid illness) and Karim Mane (right hamstring).



Barty Wins Miami Open

MIAMI (Dispatches) - Ashleigh Barty insisted she is a worthy world number one after defeating Bianca Andreescu to retain her Miami Open crown. The 24-year-old Australian star served notice of her determination to be a force this season with a 6-3, 4-0 victory as Andreescu retired with a foot injury in the second set. Barty -- who had already been assured of holding on to her No.1 ranking before Saturday's final -- has faced sniping from some players over her continued presence at top spot. The Queenslander has benefited from a tweak into the way rankings are calculated which takes into account the disruption caused by last year's pandemic shutdown. However, Barty shrugged off the criticism on Saturday following her Miami win, rejecting a suggestion that her latest title "proved" she deserved her No.1 status. "I never have to prove anything to anyone," Barty said. "I know all the work that I do with my team behind the scenes. "I know there has been a lot of talk about the ranking, but I didn't play at all last year and I didn't improve any of my points whatsoever. "Yes, I didn't drop, but I didn't improve any. I didn't play any at all. There were girls who had the chance to improve theirs, so I felt like I thoroughly deserve my spot at the top of the rankings."



Gasperini Wins Serie A Coach of the Year Award

ROME (Dispatches) - Atalanta boss Gian Piero Gasperini was voted Serie A coach of the year for the second consecutive season. Gasperini won the Panchina d'Oro (the Golden Bench) following a vote of his coaching colleagues in the Italian Coaches' Association. The 63-year-old led Atalanta to a third-place finish in Serie A last season and into the Champions League quarter-finals on their debut in the European competition. Gasperini has transformed the Bergamo club since taking over in 2016, and they are in

the running to qualify for the Champions League for a third consecutive season. "I dedicate this award to all of Bergamo," said Gasperini, "to the staff and to the players: to everyone, because it is truly a team victory." The northern Italian city was at the epicentre of the country's coronavirus pandemic a year ago. And Gasperini praised the team spirit. "Even in difficulties we managed to be an even more united team. "We played thinking a lot about the pain that hit Bergamo and the people who cheered Atalanta and who had left us, it was a strong motivation for the team, to always give our best."

Spurs Frustrated By Newcastle

LONDON (Dispatches) - Tottenham's bid for a top-four finish in the Premier League suffered a setback as Joe Willock's late strike rescued a 2-2 draw for lowly Newcastle, while Southampton took a huge step towards survival with a 3-2 victory over fellow strugglers Burnley on Sunday. Jose Mourinho's side were just five minutes away from moving into fourth place when Willock equalised at St James' Park. Joelinton had put Newcastle ahead, but Harry Kane struck twice in four minutes before the break. Even Kane's latest heroics weren't enough for Tottenham though and they now sit in fifth place, two points behind fourth-placed Chelsea with eight games left. West Ham would climb above both of their London rivals into fourth if they win at Wolves on Monday. "I'm frustrated. We needed to win the match. We created some instability with so many individual defensive mistakes that we made," Mourinho said. "Of course, we had the biggest chance of the game to make it 3-1 and kill it, then we concede a goal the next minute." Asked why Tottenham have struggled to hold onto leads when his teams have been so solid defensively in the past, Mourinho replied: "Same coach, different players. "The Premier League is hard and is high-level football, and when in some actions you don't show that you belong to that high level of football, it's difficult." Willock's goal could prove invaluable for fourth-bottom Newcastle as they battle to avoid relegation. Steve Bruce's side are without a win in seven games and sit three points above third-bottom Fulham, who would go above them if they win at Aston Villa later on Sunday.



De Bruyne Salutes Man City's Title Focus

LONDON (Dispatches) - Kevin De Bruyne says Manchester City's focused approach has been key to the leaders' surge towards the Premier League title. Pep Guardiola's side beat Leicester 2-0 on Saturday and need just three wins from their final seven games to secure a third title in four seasons. Goals from Benjamin Mendy and Gabriel Jesus sent City 17 points clear of second-placed Manchester United, who face Brighton on Sunday. City's 15th successive away win in all competitions was especially impressive as it came against in-form Leicester and with many of Guardiola's players just back from a draining international period. De Bruyne, in action for Belgium during the World Cup qualifiers, was delighted with the way his quadruple-chasing team quickly got their focus back on the title. "They played defensive and we had to be patient. That's what we did and I was happy for Mendy to break the deadlock," De Bruyne told City's website. "I thought we were really good today. Especially the first half we totally dominated. They had the chance with (Jamie) Vardy but in the first half there was basically one team playing. "If you look at 90 minutes it was 2-0. I think we deserved more goals. After an international break, that's really well done by the team. "I came back on Tuesday after the game and trained on Thursday and half the team trained yesterday. "All we can do is rest up, be ready for the games and the manager chooses the players who have been here the longest."

