

**Tehran Military Prosecutor Gholamabbas Torki Says Ten Officials Have Been Indicted in Iran Over the Military Shootdown of a Ukrainian Passenger Plane That Killed 176 People**

# IRAN NEWS

**Health Ministry Spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari Said on Tuesday That 174 More Iranians Lost Their Lives Due to COVID-19 Over the Past 24 Hours Bringing The Death Toll to 63,506**

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## Iran Testing Advanced IR-9 Centrifuges

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The spokesman for the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) says the organization is running the mechanical test of its new-generation IR-9 centrifuges. "One of the advances made in the field of [uranium] enrichment is the beginning of the mechanical test of the IR-9 centrifuge," Behrouz Kamalvandi told ISNA on Tuesday. The AEOI spokesman noted that the output of the IR-9 centrifuge can stand at 50 SWUs (separative work units) – the standard measure of work required to separate uranium isotopes. He noted that this machine is one of the most important completely native centrifuges in Iran, which manufactures and operates with new standard methods. The output of the IR-8 centrifuges, which the country currently has in service, reaches 24 SWUs. Kamalvandi also said the country will unveil 133 achievements in the nuclear industry on Friday (April 9), which marks the National Day of Nuclear Technology. He said 40 items out of the 133 achievements are related to the field of uranium enrichment, including centrifuges and enrichment equipment. Moreover, 12 projects in the fields of quantum, laser, nuclear medicine, and enrichment will be launched on the same day by President Hassan Rouhani, Kamalvandi added.

## Presidential Election The Main Political Event of Current Year

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Interior Minister called Iran's upcoming presidential election an important political event ever to transfer power to the president-elect. In a meeting of governors-general of the country held on Monday, Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli said that Interior Ministry was in charge of the presidential election to be held safe and secure. Rahmani Fazli emphasized the Interior Ministry's readiness to hold presidential, Parliament (6 constituencies), the Assembly of Experts, and 'City and Rural Council' elections. The presidential election is scheduled to be held on June 18, 2021. However, the election can be held earlier under exceptional circumstances, such as the deposition, resignation, or death of the President. It will be the thirteenth presidential election in Iran. **See Page 7**

## Tehran Urges IMF, World Bank to Act Fairly



IRANNEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Governor of Iran's Central Bank (CBI) Abdolnaser Hemmati called on the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) to act fairly with G24 countries. Addressing a G24 meeting on Monday, Hemmati said: "Demands are expected to be met without discrimination and not under the influence of political lobbies." He stressed the need for unbiased support of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and called for inclusive cooperation to transfer the technology of producing drugs for the COVID-19 and the distribution of the drug. "Presently, what is very vital and important is global cooperation and the transfer of technical knowledge in the production and possibility of equitable production and distribution of vaccines at reasonable prices," he said. Hemmati further said that there were morally no limitations to export COVID vaccines and the relevant medical equipment. "IMF and WB have a key role to play in supporting member countries to mitigate the health and economic effects of the pandemic and the various stages of recovery," he noted. Hemmati that the IMF was expected to fulfill the members' legal demands, away from any political lobbies and pressures. He underscored that the IMF must have sufficient resources to meet the large financial needs of its members in the event of a crisis. The G24 meeting was chaired by Hemmati in the presence of the heads of the IMF and the WB, and the heads of the member central banks. Examining the global economy, contributing to the economic recovery of developing countries after the Coronavirus Pandemic, and promoting cooperation between members were the main topics of the meeting. How to support international organizations such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and multilateral development banks from developing countries and increase low-interest loans to these countries and delay previous loans were also among the most important topics discussed at the meeting.

## Russia Sees No Change in U.S. policy of Blackmail, Sanctions Under Biden

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - A Russian official says the United States' practice of blackmailing other countries and imposing sanctions on them is continuing under the administration of President Joe Biden and will never end. "Never ending story. The U.S. blackmails and sanctions even its allies. At the time of previous U.S. administration, West European companies were intimidated to such an extent that they ran away from Iran," Mikhail Ulyanov, Russia's permanent representative to international organizations in Vienna, said in a tweet on Tuesday, referring to the failure of the European parties to the 2015 Iranian nuclear deal — France, Britain, and Germany — to fulfill their contractual commitments to Tehran after the then-U.S. President Donald Trump unilaterally abandoned the pact in May 2018. "No changes since then so far. This policy will continue with some exceptions," he added. The United States has imposed sanctions on Turkey — a fellow member of NATO — over its acquisition of advanced Russian missile systems. A notice of the sanctions, imposed last December, was due to be published on the US Federal Register, the daily journal of the U.S. government, on Tuesday. Turkey has condemned the sanctions as a "grave mistake" that would inevitably harm mutual relations between Ankara and Washington and has threatened retaliation. The sanctions target Turkey's top defense procurement and development body, the Presidency of Defense Industries (SSB), its chairman Ismail Demir and three other Turkish defense officials, namely Mustafa Alper Deniz, Serhat Gencoglu, and Faruk Yigit. Turkey and Russia finalized the agreement on the delivery of the S-400 missile systems in late 2017. The S-400 is considered Russia's most advanced long-range, anti-aircraft missile system. The U.S. alleges that the S-400 is not compatible with the military hardware owned by the other members of NATO. Washington also says that the defense system poses a threat to the American Lockheed Martin F-35 stealth fighter jets, which were to be jointly produced in Turkey. That production was canceled by the White House over Ankara's purchase of the Russian-made air defense systems. Ankara has gone ahead with the procurement nevertheless. Turkey has sought to boost its air defense particularly since Washington decided in 2015 to withdraw its Patriot surface-to-air missile system from the Turkish border with Syria, a move that weakened Turkey's air defense. Before turning to Russia, the Turkish military reportedly walked out of a 3.4-billion-dollar contract for a similar Chinese system. The withdrawal took place under purported pressure from Washington.

## ViewPoint China's Strategy Is Not "to War" with the U.S.

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

A short search in the internet and monitoring all actions of former U.S. President Donald Trump during his four years in office, from the standpoint of the U.S. Republicans and also actions during the past three months of the White House with its new resident President Joe Biden from the standpoint of Democrats which have been taken against People's Republic of China, indicates the reactions of the U.S. Administrations regarding these reports which have been prepared and handed over to the executive bodies by the U.S. Department of State, all intelligence offices, think-tanks and existing data banks in the country either secretly or openly for provoking politicians against China. A climate which has been painted in these four years and a quarter between the two states means that the U.S. as flag-bearer of the West in the conflict with China sees inevitable its rivalry and hostility with this country. On the other hand, they consider insignificant the impact of these two countries on the common trend in running their overseas economies from the strategic aspect and they do not assess these impacts because of their international stands and their roles in legislating the international rules. Of course what is obvious in the current climate of the world community is that Americans mostly fan the flames for creating tension and some sort of crisis. For example, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken during his recent remarks has assessed his country's relations with China "increasingly adversarial" and in one of his interviews has said that he wants to deal with Beijing in any interaction or confrontation from a position of strength. Indeed, these types of remarks of the U.S. Secretary of the State are considered as a hidden reflection of the national security strategic guidance of the country that some part of it has been published and it has presented the U.S. approach as an anti-Asian one. Although in this guidance it has been said that the U.S. in some fields like climate change, infectious disease, stability of world economy and also in the issues like North Korea and Iran can have close cooperation with China but verbally and in the remarks in the media, the U.S. is competing for a better position in the economic and political scenes with China and in operational field with India, and actually in Asia. On the sidelines of the effective reflection of competition and collaboration, there are also several disputable issues between Beijing and Washington which can lead to the increasing trend of adversary between the two states. **See Page 7**

## Iran, Pakistan Stage Naval Drill in Persian Gulf, Oman Sea

TEHRAN (MNA) - The Pakistan Navy fleet departs Bandar Abbas for a designated area to conduct a combined naval exercise in the Persian Gulf's water and the Sea of Oman. Captain Reza Sheibani, chief of staff of the Iran Navy's first naval region who also acts as the spokesman of the joint exercise, made the announcement on Tuesday, saying that the purpose of this naval exercise is to improve combat capability and exchange information and military knowledge between the two navies of Iran and Pakistan. This exercise is to demonstrate naval power and synergy and establish a constructive and dynamic interaction to create lasting peace and security in the region, and conduct joint naval operations, including air and sea transfers, and joint operations of Passex with the Iranian and Pakistani navies in the Persian Gulf's water and the Sea of Oman, he added. Navy units consisting of the 'Alborz' destroyer and a missile launcher along with a helicopter, as well as submarine combat and support units of the Pakistan Navy are participating in the naval exercise, Sheibani said. **See Page 7**

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## Iran Ready to Host D8 Youth Summit

TEHRAN (IP) - Minister of Sport and Youth in a virtual meeting about D8 youth announced Iran's readiness to hold a meeting of selected youth of the member countries of this group.

"You know that Iran has faced the most severe sanctions for years, but today it has made significant progress in industry, medicine, engineering, nuclear technology, nanotechnology,

new technologies, and knowledge-based industries," said Masoud Soltanifar in the meeting hosted by Bangladesh.

The minister added: "We in Iran are ready to host a meeting in which the selected youth of the D8 member countries will present their ideas, creativity, and initiatives to build a better world, and I suggest 2022 that Iran be a host for thoughtful, dynamic and creative youths of D8."

## U.S. Has No Option But To Stop Law Breaking

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

**TEHRAN – The government spokesman says the United States has been left with no choice but to end its law-breaking policies "in the very near future" given the failure of Washington's so-called maximum pressure campaign in the face of the Iranian nation's resistance.**

Ali Rabiee, the administration's spokesman, made the remarks at a media briefing in Tehran on Tuesday, as the parties to the 2015 nuclear deal are preparing to meet in Vienna later in the day to discuss the future of the multilateral agreement, officially named the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

"On Tuesday, we will be witnessing a new chapter in the process of defeating coercion and resurrecting the JCPOA," he said.

"As we predicted at the height of bullying and pressure by [former US president Donald] Trump's regime, the U.S. — now disappointed with the previous wrong path — will eventually confess that 'maximum pressure' has failed, and that there is no choice but to revive the JCPOA and get all parties return to their commitments."

He added, "Today, we say with confidence that in the very near future, the US administration has no option but to terminate its law-breaking behaviors. Unilateral sanctions as well as violations of international agreements and regulations will also end. The Vienna meeting, which will take place today, is an opportunity for all sides to exchange views on how and when to return to the JCPOA obligations."

The official said Iran would not have achieved such a diplomatic victory had it not been for the nation's resistance and the wisdom of Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei in dealing with the American campaign of pressure and sanctions.



In 2015, Iran and the P5+1 group of countries, the U.S., the UK, France, Russia, and China plus Germany, signed the JCPOA, which was ratified in the form of UN Security Council Resolution 2231.

Tehran says Washington, as the first party that reneged on its commitments, should take the first step towards the JCPOA's revival and unconditionally remove all the sanctions in a verifiable manner.

Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi was to lead the Iranian delegation to the Vienna talks later on Tuesday, which was to focus on a potential US return to the JCPOA.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Rabiee said, "Our principled position is very clear and it will be repeated by our negotiators. As it has been said many times, no negotiations will take place between the representatives of Iran and the US, but we are ready to send a message to the JCPOA members that if sanctions are lifted and Resolution 2231 is honored, the Islamic Republic is reciprocally ready to return to its commitments in the shortest possible time after verifying the implementation of the obligations by the other sides."

"At the moment, we are neither optimistic nor pessimistic about the outcome of the meeting, but we are confident that we are on the right track. If America's will, seriousness and honesty are proven, it could be a good sign for a better future for the agreement (the JCPOA) and finally its full implementation in the coming weeks," he said.

## Opposition Elements Attempt to Attack Iranian Negotiator in Vienna

TEHRAN (IFP) - A counterrevolutionary element has attempted to attack Iran's chief nuclear negotiator Seyyed Abbas Araqchi in Vienna, the capital of Austria, where Iran and other parties to the JCPOA are to meet later in the day.

Intense negotiations have been going on between different delegations in the Austrian capital, Vienna, where the joint commission of the 2015 nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), was to meet.

Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Abbas Araqchi met with the head of the Chinese negotiating team on Monday night and the head of the Russian delegation early Tuesday.

Araqchi also sat down with Enrique Mora, the European Union's coordinator and the chairman of the JCPOA Joint Commission, early Tuesday, where they reviewed the latest arrangements pertaining to the commission's meeting later in the day.

After the meeting with Mora when Araqchi was leaving, a counterrevolutionary element began raving and ranting and intended to assault him, but to no avail.

Members of the MKO group as well as other counterrevolutionary elements have gathered outside the venue of the talks in Vienna in protest at the negotiations.

The Iranian embassy in Vienna has given the necessary warnings to the Austrian police to ensure the security of Iranian negotiators.

## Iran, Oman Discuss Development of Joint Relations

MUSCAT (IP) - Minister of the Royal Office of Oman and Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Muscat discussed ways to develop relations and cooperation between the two countries.

Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office of Oman, hosted Ali Najafi Khoshroudi, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Muscat.

During the meeting, ways to develop relations and cooperation between the two countries were discussed.

The two sides also talked about areas of joint cooperation and how to develop them in a way that provides the common interests of the two friendly countries.

## Iran Defuses Over 2m Mines Left From Iran-Iraq War

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Ministry of Defense has succeeded in defusing more than 2 million mines and one million unexploded pieces of ordnance left behind from the eight years of the Iraqi imposed war.

Deputy Minister for Engineering and passive defense of the Ministry of Defense Ali Akbar Soleimani said on Monday on the occasion of the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action, noting that around 4.2 million hectares of five border provinces were subjected to different types of mines and ammunition following the Holy Defense period.

Nearly 1,200 kilometers of land near the Iran-Iraq border was mine-polluted, which were immediately demined following a ceasefire between the two countries in 1988, he said.

Army of the Islamic Republic of Iran and The Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC) carried out such an important task under the supervision of the Ministry of Interior from 1988 to 2003, the official added.

Soleimani went on to say that the Islamic Republic of Iran established an international center to train demining in a bid to upgrade the scientific level of activities in this respect and assist other nations to get rid of such phenomenon.

Iran is ready to train volunteers from other countries and take essential steps in strengthening peace and security throughout the globe, he underlined.

### Tehran, Bishkek Discuss How to Make Mutual Cooperation Immune to Sanctions



TEHRAN (IFP) - Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif held talks with his Kyrgyz counterpart Ruslan Kazakbaev in Bishkek on the second leg of his four-nation tour of Central Asia.

In the Tuesday meeting, the two top diplomats discussed bilateral issues, regional cooperation and international issues. The Iranian foreign minister expressed congratulations on the recent presidential election in Kyrgyzstan being held successfully and on Nowruz, touching upon age-old, historical and cultural relations between Iran and countries in the region.

He at the same time noted that the extent of trade-economic relations between Iran and Kyrgyzstan is not on a par with the existing potential, calling on both sides to utilize the great potentialities which exist in order to boost mutual cooperation, especially in technical-engineering, road-building, dam construction and transportation domains as well as building thermal, solar and hydro- power stations.

Zarif highlighted some of the impediments to the enhancement of mutual cooperation, including the coronavirus pandemic and Washington's unilateral, illegal and cruel sanctions. He expressed hope the pandemic could be tackled through vaccination. He also said he hopes the US would lift sanctions and make good on its commitments, paving the way for Iran and Kyrgyzstan to benefit from mutual cooperation in economic and trade areas.

Zarif also emphasized the necessity of making Tehran-Bishkek relations immune to sanctions, once again reiterating Iran's willingness to work closely with the Eurasian Economic Union.

Kazakbaev, in turn, expressed gratitude to Iran for sending humanitarian aid to Kyrgyz people in the fight against COVID-19, especially at a time when Iran is feeling the pinch of sanctions.

He also referred to mutual cultural ties as well as common values, and said his country was ready for all-out cooperation with Iran on different fronts, including in agriculture, production of medicines, construction of small- and medium-sized hydro-electric power stations and re-establishing flights between the two countries.

Among other topics discussed were regional issues, including the peace trend in Afghanistan and Iran-Kyrgyzstan cooperation in regional and international domains.

## Zarif, Uzbekistan President Discuss Mutual Ties, Regional Issues

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and Uzbekistan's President Shavkat Mirziyoyev have discussed ways to boost bilateral cooperation in different fields as well as leading issues in the region.

During a meeting in the Uzbek capital of Tashkent on Monday, Zarif briefed the Uzbek president on the latest developments in mutual relations in various political, economic and cultural sectors, saying that Tehran is keen to further expand cooperation in the light of extensive capacities of the two sides.

The Uzbek president, for his part, stressed the importance of strengthening cooperation with Iran and urged the two countries' officials to hold the 14th session of the two countries' joint economic commission at the earliest.

Zarif and Mirziyoyev also exchanged views about the peace process in Afghanistan and the expansion of bilateral cooperation with regards to international issues.

The chief Iranian diplomat arrived in Tashkent on Monday at the first leg of a four-nation Central Asian tour that will also take him to Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan.

## Comprehensive Cooperation Document Key to Regional, Global Peace

TEHRAN (IP) - Chang Hua, China's ambassador to Iran, says that the comprehensive cooperation document between the two countries is not only in the interest of the Chinese and Iranian nations, but will also contribute to regional and global peace.

The Chinese ambassador to Iran in an interview with Iranian media said: "China is always determined to maintain its legitimate cooperation with Iran in the fields of trade, energy, and other fields, and actively calls on the international community to protect Iran's legitimate economic interests."

According to Chang Hua, China-Iran friendly relations have a long history. The Chinese ambassador to Iran also said: "In recent years, popular and cultural exchanges between the two countries have been frequent."

Chang Hua noted that Iran and China have deepened cultural, scientific, artistic, and media interactions and strengthened cooperation between friendship



associations, the media, and universities.

On Sunday, 27 March in Tehran in the meeting between Iranian and Chinese Foreign Ministers, the 25-year comprehensive document on the Iran-China strategic partnership was finalized and inked on Saturday in the Iranian capital.

## Iranian, Yemeni Diplomats Discuss Peace Process

TEHRAN (IFP) - Ali-Asghar Khaji, a senior advisor to the Iranian foreign minister for special political affairs, has held phone talks with Mohammed Abdul-Salam, the senior negotiator for Yemen's National Salvation Government.

The phone call was part of Iran's ongoing consultations on the settlement of the Yemen crisis.

In the Monday telephone conversation, the two sides exchanged views on the latest developments pertaining to the peace process in Yemen.

The top Iranian official expressed content with the headway made with Yemen peace talks under the aegis of UN Special Envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths. Khaji expressed hope Yemeni people's resistance will result in the lifting of the cruel blockade and the establishment of a lasting peace.

The two officials also discussed Iran's latest diplomatic attempts to help solve the problem of the Safer oil tanker.

Abdul-Salam, for his part, appreciated Iran's political support while elaborating on some points regarding the latest developments in the ongoing Yemen peace talks as well as the latest situation of the Safer vessel.

## Iran Annual Power Generation Rises Over 5%

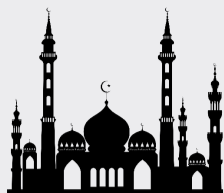
TEHRAN (MNA) - Iranian power plants managed to generate over 434 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity in the previous Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20) to register a 5.1-percent rise compared to the preceding year.

Based on the data released by Iran's Power Generation, Distribution, and Transmission Company (known as Tavanir), some 337 billion kilowatt-hours of the mentioned figure was generated by the power plants run by the government and the private sector, and the rest was generated by power plants owned by major industries.

power plants reached 58,076 megawatts (MW) in the previous year's peak consumption period, indicating an increase of 5.8-percent in the production capacity of the country's thermal power plants.

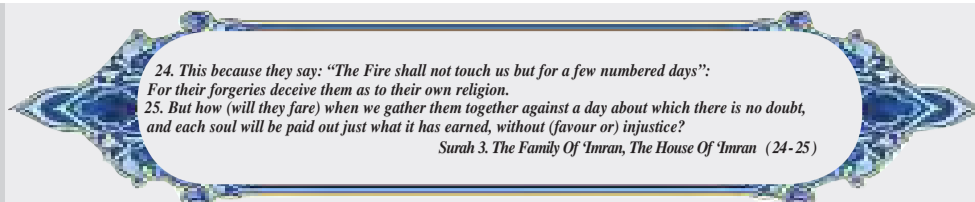
The production capacity of hydropower, nuclear and renewable power plants, however, decreased by 15.2 percent to stand at 9,098 MW.

Iranian Energy Ministry managed to supply electricity to 339 rural areas across the country, increasing the number of villages with access to the electricity network to 57,759.



PRAYER TIME

- Noon (Zohr) 13:06
- Evening (Maghreb) 19:49
- Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr) 05:13
- Tomorrow's Sunrise 06:40



# 1st Iran-Made Corona Vaccine Ready Within 40 Days

**TEHRAN (IRNA) - Deputy Health Minister Iraj Harirchi has announced that among nine COVID-19 vaccines, which are under development in Iran, the first home-made corona vaccine will be available within 40 days.**

In a meeting with Malaysian Deputy Foreign Minister Dato' Kamarudin Jaffar, Harirchi said on Tuesday that Iranian researchers have been successful in developing nine vaccines and four of them will be distributed within next months, adding that the Iranian people will be provided with the first domestically produced vaccine in next 40 days and that the second vaccine with the production capacity of eight to 10 million doses per month will be available within around 70 days.

The third and fourth vaccines will be distributed within 120 days, the Iranian official said, noting that Iran could cooperate with Malaysia in producing these corona vaccines.

Pointing to the impact of sanctions imposed on the Islamic Republic of Iran since the victory of the Islamic Revolution in 1979, he stipulated that 98.3 percent of medicine used in Iran are being produced inside the country.

The health official has expressed the Islamic Republic's readiness to expand relations and cooperation with the Muslim country of Malaysia in different political, cultural, economic, trade and health sectors.



He also underlined that officials from both sides have held phone calls to exchange experiences on the ways to confront the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic as well as discuss issues of mutual interests.

Malaysian and Iranian health officials have so far emphasized that they are prepared to cooperate in producing vaccines, exporting medicines and supporting startups active in health sectors of both countries.

Head of Pasteur Institute of Iran Alireza Biglari said the Malaysian side has received a report on the institute's experience on producing vaccines and expressed readiness to expand cooperation with Iranian research and health organizations.

A proposed memorandum of understanding between the two sides has been finalized in the Tuesday meeting, which will be signed in a future session between health ministers of both countries.

## Iran Air to Resume Bandar Abbas-Dubai Flights

**BANDAR ABBAS (IRNA) - Governor-general of Hormozgan Province, Iran said on Tuesday that Iran Air will resume Bandar Abbas-Dubai flights.**

Governor-general of Hormozgan Province Fereydoun Hemmati said on Monday night that the hurdles before Bandar Abbas-Dubai flight route have been cleared and infrastructure has been totally prepared.

Hemmati who was speaking in a meeting with Iran's Civil Aviation Organization CEO Touraj Dehaqni, highlighted long-lasting emotional, trading and economic ties between people of Hormozgan province and Persian Gulf states.

According to Hemmati, people can't travel to Dubai by airplane through direct flight. He added that the cancellation of flight due to the Coronavirus pandemic hurt the Province's tourism industry and the livelihood of those working in travel agencies.

As the halt to direct flights to Dubai is imposing additional costs, the official said that Bandar Abbas- Abu Musa and Jask-Tehran routes were going to increase flights.

## Friday Prayer Leader of Neishabour Hails Manager of KSC

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN - Friday Prayer Leader of town of Neishabour Hojjatoleslam Seyed Ghasem Yaghoobi hailed the performance of Khorasan Steel Complex Company (KSC) and its CEO for their observing social responsibilities.**



During his first meeting with the CEO of company Dr. Kasra Ghafoori in the New Year, Hojjatoleslam Yaghoobi praised the novel approach and social responsibility of the KSC management and called it praiseworthy.

He wished Dr. Ghafoori and his colleagues in the company success and said the responsible presence of Khorasan Steel Company in the social scene bespeaks the new approach of the management in the company and expressed his gratitude.

Yaghoobi also pointed to the naming of the year by Supreme Leader as the year of production, support and removing hurdles and expressed hope the Leader's concerns regarding the pick-up in the production and job creation would be resolved.

Then Ghafoori, for his part, thanked the support of officials of the town especially its Friday Prayer Leader and emphasized continuation of the company's strategy in the scene of social responsibility, adding that despite cruel sanctions, crusaders of the scenes of economy and industry of the country continued their resistance by laying the national and religious roles and responsibilities and did their best to improve the domestic production and it is hoped with the Supreme Leader's emphasis on support and removal of hurdles in way of production, the country would enjoy considerable growth and acceleration in production this year.

## First Joint Agricultural Meeting of Iran, Netherlands to Be Held



**TEHRAN (IP) - The head of the Agricultural Engineering and Natural Resources Organization of Khorasan Razavi, Iran, announced that the first joint meeting of senior managers and owners of Iran and the Netherlands' agricultural industry would be held in spring.**

Speaking to the reporters on Monday, Naser Sedaghat said: "The meeting is the first step in implementing the memorandum concluded between the Khorasan Razavi Agricultural Engineering Organization and the Dutch Chamber of Commerce, in order to increase knowledge and utilizing the experience of the Netherlands."

He announced the summit's time in June but said that the place had not been decided yet. The Permanent Secretariat of the Joint Summit of the Iranian and Dutch Agricultural Industry is based in Mashhad.

## Iran Halts Turkey Tours, Flights Still Ongoing

**TEHRAN (IRNA) - Association of Iranian Airlines Secretary Maqsood As'adi said on Tuesday that tours to Turkey were ceased in line with the National Coronavirus Headquarters, but flights were still operating.**

Iran's Ministry of Tourism ordered to halt tours to Turkey based on the decision made by National Coronavirus Headquarters, As'adi told IRNA.

However, normal flights are still in place for those compatriots who intent to travel to Turkey in case of necessary conditions, according to the official.

Health Ministry spokesman said on Tuesday that consultation with the National Coronavirus Headquarters came to the conclusion that the COVID-19 pandemic circumstances required a limitation on Turkey flights.

## Iran Imports 800,000 Doses of Covid Vaccine From South Korea

**TEHRAN (IP) - The head of the Iranian Parliament's Health Commission announced that 800,000 doses of vaccine will be imported from South Korea to Iran.**

Hossein Ali Shahriari, the head of Iran's Parliament Health Commission said: "In the next 24 hours, 800,000 doses of vaccine will enter Iran from South Korea."

The head of the Health Commission of the Iranian Parliament added: "Corona vaccine has become a

political issue for governments in the world and is not distributed fairly."

The head of the Health Commission of Iran's Parliament also said: "There are about 100 countries in the world that have not yet received a single vaccine jab and have not been able to import it."

Shahriari also stressed that the process of coronavirus vaccine production in Iran has been successful and continues. 219

## Much of High-Tech Petchem Equipment Built Domestically

**TEHRAN (Shana) - The CEO of the Persian Gulf Petrochemical Industries Company (PGPIC) said a large part of the high-tech equipment needed in the petrochemical industry is supplied domestically.**

Jafar Rabiee told reporters on Monday, April 5, that feedstock supply and capturing flared gas have been two of the main concerns of the petrochemical industry over the years.

He said PGPIC is currently engaged with a €1 million project for gathering flared gas, adding a major part of the project is being developed by local experts given the fact that the lion's share of the high-tech items needed in the industry are supplied domestically.

Once operational, the project will result in a major reduction in gas flaring in the southwestern oil-rich province of Khuzestan to be consumed by petrochemical plants as feedstock.

## Elimination of Tax Exemption on Value Added Is Not to the Benefit of Free Zones

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN - Deputy Head of Economic Commission of Majlis and representative of the city of Ardabil Hojjatoleslam Seyed Kazem Mousavi in meeting with Secretary of Iran's High Council of Free and Special Economic Zones Hamidreza Momeni stipulated that elimination of tax exemption on the value added will not be to the benefit of the free zones and today, value added can turn into a source of income for those provinces.**



Mousavi said that the approach of the free zones is not in contradiction with the spirit of the resistance economy which is emphasized by the Supreme Leader and it should continue activities in this direction. He went on to say that the nature of these zones is a very good asset for these border areas and today 8 more border provinces are on the verge of turning into free zones and its bill is under study at the Expediency Council.

He added Ardabil Province is one of these eight provinces which enjoys a good position due to its agro products and it has good economic and tourism capacities that it can solve most of the problems of the people in this province by becoming a free zone.

Mousavi noted that the issue of tax on the value added is under slight study in the economic commission of Majlis and it seems elimination of tax on value added will not to the benefit of the free zones as the value added can be a very good source of earning for the provinces.

He then pointed to some part of details of his meeting with Mr. Momeni, adding that today Mr. Momeni has put good ideas on the agenda and he can handle them very well and Majlis is beside him and will create a climate for him to move on course to develop the free zones.

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## Montenegro's PM Seeks Dismissal of Justice Minister

BELGRADE (Reuters) - Montenegro's Prime Minister Zdravko Krivokapic on Monday launched the procedure to dismiss the justice minister over his denial of the 1995 Srebrenica genocide and asked parliament to back the motion.

Vladimir Leposavic, the minister of justice, human and minority rights, last month questioned the legitimacy of international courts, which ruled that the Srebrenica massacre of around 8,000 Muslim men and boys by Bosnian Serb forces constituted genocide. Leposavic, a pro-Serb politician with no party affiliation, also said the Srebrenica genocide was not "unequivocally established" as fact.



## Only Immunized Pilgrims Allowed to Mecca During

RIYADH (Dispatches) - Saudi authorities said Monday only people immunized against Covid-19 will be allowed to perform the year-round umrah pilgrimage from the start of Ramadan, the holy fasting month for Muslims.

The hajj and umrah ministry said in a statement that three categories of people would be considered "immunized" -- those who have received two doses of the vaccine, those administered a single dose at least 14 days prior, and people who have recovered from the infection. Only those people will be eligible for permits to perform umrah, as well as to attend prayers in the Grand Mosque in the holy city of Mecca.



## Putin Signs Law Allowing Him To Serve Two More Terms



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russian President Vladimir Putin on Monday gave final approval to legislation allowing him to hold office for two additional six-year terms, giving himself the possibility to stay in power until 2036.

The 68-year-old Russian leader, who has already been in power for more than two decades, signed off on the bill Monday, according to a copy posted on the government's legal information portal.

Putin proposed the change last year as part of constitutional reforms that Russians overwhelmingly backed in a vote in July. Lawmakers approved the bill last month. The legislation will reset presidential term limits, allowing Putin to run in elections again after his current and second consecutive term expires in 2024. Putin was first elected president in 2000 and served two consecutive four-year terms. His ally Dmitry Medvedev took his place in 2008, which critics saw as a way around Russia's limit on two consecutive terms for presidents.

While in office, Medvedev signed off on legislation extending terms to six years starting with the next president.

Putin then returned to the Kremlin in 2012 and won re-election in 2018. The term reset was part of constitutional reforms that included populist economic measures and sweeteners for traditionalists such as an effective ban on gay marriage.

Russians voted yes or no to the entire bundle of amendments in a vote last summer that was held over the course of a week, in a move authorities said was aimed at limiting the spread of the coronavirus but critics said left the process open to manipulation.

Golos, an independent election monitor, criticized the format of the vote, saying Russians should have been able to vote for each separate change.

It also said it received hundreds of complaints of violations, including people voting multiple times.

Russians ultimately voted 78 percent in favor of the changes. Kremlin opponents have said the constitutional reforms were a pretext to allow Putin to become "president for life". Putin would be 85 when he leaves office if he is elected and serves two additional terms to their end in 2036. The final approval of the legislation comes as authorities ratchet up pressure on the opposition and clamp down on dissent.

## Western Sahara Demands UN Seat

ALGIERS (Dispatches) - Western Sahara's foreign minister Mohamed Salem Ould Salek on Monday demanded a UN seat for the disputed territory and accused France and Spain of impeding a referendum on self-determination.

The status of Western Sahara, which the United Nations classifies as a "non-self-governing territory", has for decades pitted Morocco against the pro-independence Polisario Front.

"The Sahrawi state claims its seat at the UN," said Ould Salek, on behalf the republic declared by the Polisario in 1976.

## Jordan's Prince Hamza Defies The Military in New Recording

AMMAN (Dispatches) - Jordan's estranged Prince Hamza said in a voice recording released on Monday that he would disobey orders by the army not to communicate with the outside world after he was put under house arrest and accused of trying to destabilise the country.

The half-brother of King Abdullah and former heir to the throne said in the recording released by the country's opposition that he would not comply after being barred from any activity and told to keep quiet.

While Prince Hamza is not seen as a direct threat to the king, his actions suggest he is keen to shore up his position with ordinary Jordanians after he was removed from the royal succession.

"For sure I won't obey when they tell you that you cannot go out or tweet or reach out to people but are only allowed to see the family. I expect this talk is not acceptable in any way," he said in the recording he circulated to friends and contacts.

On Saturday the military warned the prince over actions it said were undermining "security and stability" in

Jordan. Prince Hamza later said he was under house arrest. Several high-profile figures were also detained.

"The situation is difficult ... and the chief of staff came to me warning me and I taped his words and distributed it to friends abroad and my family in case something happens and now I am waiting to see what they will do," Hamza said in the recording, which appeared shortly after the visit by the head of the armed forces.

Officials announced on Sunday that Prince Hamza had liaised with people who had contacts with foreign parties in a plot to destabilise Jordan and he had been under investigation for some time.

The intrigue is likely to shake Jordan's image as a haven of stability in the unpredictable Middle East.

It is unclear why the kingdom decided to crack down on Prince Hamza now, but he put himself at growing risk by stepping up visits in recent weeks to tribal gatherings where the king and his government have been criticized more openly.



## Myanmar Protesters Clap to Denounce Junta

YANGOON (Dispatches) - Protesters in Myanmar clapped together in a show of dissent against the military junta on Monday as a regional bloc prepared for talks on the crisis that has killed nearly 600 people.

Clapping began in various parts of the main city Yangon at 5 p.m. (1030 GMT) in response to a call by protest organizers, residents said.

The gesture would honor "Ethnic Armed Organisations and Gen Z defence youths from Myanmar including Yangon who are fighting in the revolution... on behalf of us," Ei Thinzar Maung, a protest leader, wrote on Facebook.

Despite the killing of at least 564 people by the security forces since the Feb. 1 coup, protesters have come out across the country every day to voice opposition to the overthrow of the elected government led by Aung San Suu Kyi and the return of military rule.

The movement, which some protesters are calling a "spring revolution", has included street marches, a civil disobedience campaign of strikes, and quirky acts of rebellion organized via social media.

In addition to the crackdown on the streets, the junta has sought to suppress the campaign by shutting down wireless broadband and mobile data services.

On Monday, one person was killed in the central Sagaing region when security forces broke up a protest, the Myanmar Now news outlet reported. Earlier, demonstrators with placards of Suu Kyi and signs calling for international intervention marched through the second-biggest city Mandalay, images posted on social media showed.

Brunei, chair of the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), threw its support on Monday behind a leaders' meeting to discuss Myanmar.

After talks between Malaysian Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin and Brunei Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, Brunei said both countries would make preparations for a meeting to be held at the ASEAN Secretariat in the Indonesian capital Jakarta. No date was given.

## Bulgaria's Course Unclear After Fractured Election Result

SOFIA (Dispatches) - Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borisov's centre-right party came first in the weekend's parliamentary elections, partial results showed Monday, but with protest parties surging it has no clear partner to form a governing coalition.

Borisov's GERB party, undermined by scandals and protests after nearly a decade in power, won just 26 percent of Sunday's vote.

With the country facing an uncertain political period ahead as Borisov attempts to form a government, he pitched himself as a leader representing stability.

"You won't make it on your own... let's unite," the 61-year-old said in a live broadcast on Facebook Sunday night.

"Do you have someone more experienced than me?" He also suggested a cabinet of "experts... to carry the responsibility and to make the maximum efforts for Bulgaria until December in order to exit the pandemic," after an election held at the peak of the country's third coronavirus wave.

Analysts predicted an uphill battle for Borisov to cobble together a new coalition after an unexpectedly strong performance by new populist and anti-government protest parties.

"The results show the profound fragmentation of society," political analyst Antony Galabov said.

"No clear majority is in view and GERB owes its

win only on voters' concern for stability."

The new populist party There is Such a Nation of 54-year-old entertainer-turned-politician Slavi Trifonov came in a surprise second with 18.4 percent of the vote, according to Monday's official partial results.

The traditional main opposition Socialist party received a mere 14.9 percent, its lowest number in the Balkan country's post-communist history.

Socialist leader Kornelia Ninova said Monday the movement "will not support any government -- neither political, nor made up of experts -- put forward by GERB", predicting a "political crisis" ahead.

But political analyst Daniel Smilov said it was "too early to talk about a political crisis".

"Let's wait for the various coalition options, even if they unrealistic, to be examined," he said, while adding that "there are many unknowns".

Several other parties appear set to enter the 240-seat parliament, including two which led massive anti-government protests last summer, accusing Borisov of protecting oligarchs.

They are the right-wing Democratic Bulgaria coalition, which won around 10 percent of the vote, while new leftist coalition Stand up! Mafia out! -- which is close to President Rumen Radev, a sharp critic of Borisov -- took nearly five percent.



## Erdogan Accuses Retired Admirals of Hinting at "Coup"



ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said a statement by former admirals warning that his plans for a new canal in Istanbul put the Montreux Convention maritime accord in jeopardy was hinting at a "political coup", though he added he was committed to the pact.

Earlier on Monday, Turkish prosecutors detained 10 retired admirals and ordered four others to turn themselves in for signing the statement supporting the 85-year-old maritime accord governing the use of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits on grounds they were conspiring against the constitutional order.

Officials said their declaration, signed by more than 100 former high-ranking navy personnel, was a direct challenge to civilian government and evoked past army interventions.

The suspects were detained at their homes in Ankara, Istanbul and Kocaeli, and were to be questioned by the chief prosecutor's office in the capital.

"The duty of retired admirals -- 104 of whom came together -- is not to publish declarations that hint at a political coup," Erdogan said on Monday. "It is under no circumstances acceptable for 104 retired admirals to make such an attempt in the middle of the night in a country whose history is full of coups and memoranda. We cannot call this freedom of speech."

The military staged three coups between 1960-1980 and, with a statement by the National Security Council, pressured the first Islamist-led government out of power in 1997. Another coup was attempted in 2016.

Officials last month approved a project to develop a new 45km (28-mile) shipping lane -- linking the Black Sea to the Mediterranean -- comparable to the Panama or Suez canals but it has raised questions over Turkey's commitment to the Montreux Convention.

The 1936 pact is aimed at demilitarising the Black Sea by setting strict commercial and naval rules on passage through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits leading to the Mediterranean.

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## Turkish Builders to Play Key Role in Reconstructing Nagorno-Karabakh

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Liberated after a 30-year occupation, the Nagorno-Karabakh region is set to undergo a complete transformation, from infrastructure to roads and hospitals, with Turkish contractors set to play a key role in the process, according to an investment bank CEO. Azerbaijan wants to work with Turkish contractors, known for their experience in construction in the region,

said Cenk Eynehan, the CEO of Istanbul-based PASHA Bank, whose parent company is located in the Azerbaijani capital Baku.

Azerbaijani officials earlier expressed that Turkish companies would be prioritized in tenders in a bid to improve the quality of construction projects and that procedures for planned investments would be simplified.



## Kuwait Welcomes OPEC+ Deal

KUWAIT CITY (Dispatches) – Kuwait Minister of Oil Mohammad Al-Fares extolled the successful meeting of OPEC+, affirming the importance of continuing cooperation to restore market balance. The positive developments of the last period contributed to a noticeable improvement in oil market situation that reflected on expectations to improve demands in light of the spread of coronavirus and distribution of vaccines. Al-Fares, who also doubles as Minister of Higher Education, said in a statement carried by the Ministry of Oil on Thursday. Based on this development, OPEC+ ministers agreed on moving forward with a gradual increase of output with 350,000 barrels per day (bpd) in May and June each, and 440,000 bpd in July, he noted.

Kuwait's quota of this rise is 29,000 bpd in May and June each, and 38,000 bpd in July, he revealed. Saudi Arabia will gradually increase its output with 250,000 bpd in May, 350,000 in June and 400,000 in July, he said. The minister underlined the importance of abiding by the specific quotas stipulated in the deal. The next OPEC+ meeting will be held on April 28 to review the effect of the deal and market situation in the upcoming period, he pointed out.

The 15th meeting of OPEC and non-OPEC ministers took place via videoconference on Thursday, under the chairmanship of Prince Abdulaziz Bin Salman, Saudi Arabia's Minister of Energy, and Co-Chair Alexander Novak, Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian Federation, and decided to raise output as of May. The meeting emphasized the ongoing positive contributions of the Declaration of Cooperation (DoC) in supporting a rebalancing of the global oil market, said a statement by the OPEC secretariat. These outcomes are in line with the historic decisions taken at the 10th (Extraordinary) OPEC and non-OPEC ministerial meeting on 12 April, 2020 to adjust downwards overall crude oil production, and subsequent decisions, it added.

The ministers noted, with gratitude, the value of the prudent policy approach by Saudi Arabia of maintaining its additional voluntary adjustments of 1 mb/d in April 2021 for third month in a row. The meeting approved the adjustment of the production levels for May, June and July 2021, while continuing to adhere to the mechanism agreed upon in the 12th OPEC and non-OPEC ministerial meeting (December 2020) to hold monthly OPEC and non-OPEC ministerial meetings to assess market conditions and decide on production level adjustments for the following month, with every adjustment being no more than 0.5 mb/d, it noted.

The ministers reviewed the monthly report prepared by the Joint Technical Committee (JTC), including the crude oil production data for February. They recognized the improvements in the market supported by global vaccination programs and stimulus packages in key economies but noted that the volatility observed in recent weeks warrants a continued cautious and vigilant approach in monitoring market developments. The meeting observed that in February, oil stocks in OECD countries fell for the seventh consecutive month, but still remained above the 2015-2019 average, it stated.

The meeting welcomed the positive performance of participating countries. Overall conformity reached 115 per cent in February 2021, reinforcing the trend of aggregate high conformity by participating countries, it pointed out.

## Lebanon Agrees With Iraq to Swap Medical Expertise for Oil

BEIRUT (Dispatches) - Officials from Beirut and Baghdad signed a preliminary agreement that would see Lebanon trade its medical expertise for Iraqi fuel supplies, Lebanese state media reported.

Lebanon's state-run electricity company faces dire cash shortages as the country grapples with its worst economic crisis since the 1975-1990 civil war.

Oil-rich Iraq, which has seen Covid-19 cases soar in recent weeks, suffers from a chronic lack of drugs and medical care, and decades of war and poor investment have left its hospitals in bad shape.

Caretaker Health Minister Hamad Hassan and his Iraqi counterpart Hassan al-Tamimi signed "a framework agreement... that includes (the supply of) oil in exchange for medical and hospital services," Lebanon's National News Agency (NNA) said.

Under the accord, inked in Beirut, Lebanon would receive 500,000 tons of Iraqi oil annually, or a sixth of its needs, caretaker Lebanese Energy Minister Raymond Ghajar said.

Hassan said the agreement included cooperation in training and hospital administration, with Lebanese experts and specialized teams to be involved in managing new facilities in Iraq.

Lebanese officials made no secret of their desire to strengthen cooperation with Iraq in various fields. Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri described the most recent agreement as a lifeline for Lebanon. This comes as the Lebanese are losing hope in donor pledges due to the government formation crisis and the veto imposed by several countries on the disbursement of aid in light of the domination of Iran-backed Hezbollah.



During his meeting in Beirut with the Iraqi Minister of Health and Environment Hassan al-Tamimi, Berri stressed the need to enhance cooperation with Iraq, and considered that this would help Lebanon resolve its crises.

"In light of the dangers threatening Lebanon, this cooperation can significantly help in resolving the country's crises," he said.

He added that Lebanon risks collapse if the situation remains as it is without a swift formation of a new government.

Lebanon's President Michel Aoun conveyed to Tamimi his country's "appreciation for the efforts of the Iraqi government and the latest agreement to provide Lebanon with oil in exchange for medical services."

## Pakistan Business Council Urges Gov't to Renegotiate IMF Deal

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) – Pakistan's business community has urged the government to renegotiate the International Monetary Fund (IMF) program, taking into account the energy tariffs, rising unemployment, price hikes and other economic issues.

"The IMF program needs renegotiation. Front-loaded tax targets without the Federal Board of Revenue's (FBR) capability to broaden the tax base, knee-jerk withdrawal of investment incentives, higher utility costs to manage circular debt will sap growth of the fragile economy, threaten jobs," the Pakistan Business Council (PBC) said in a tweet on Saturday.

The PBC had tagged the official Twitter accounts of Prime Minister Imran Khan and Minister for Finance, Revenue, Industries & Production Hammad Azhar.

Earlier on April 1, Finance Minister Hammad Azhar on Wednesday hinted at reviewing the IMF programme and the controversial State Bank of Pakistan amendment bill 2021.

"We are taking the SBP law to parliament with an open mind and are ready to adopt recommendations for its improvement," he said at his maiden news conference as finance minister, a day after Pakistan launched a \$2.5 billion international bond and received the \$500 million tranche from the IMF.

When asked if the design of the program could also be changed given its harsh conditions, he said the government always had the powers to review the program.

## Switzerland Asks EU for Exception to Vaccine Export Rules

ZURICH (Dispatches) - As of this week, Switzerland can no longer import Covid vaccines from the European Union (EU) without a special license. Officials in Bern have asked to be granted an exception to the stricter conditions.

According to the SonntagsBlick newspaper, at the end of March the EU removed Switzerland – along with 16 other countries



– from a list of states not subject to the stricter export controls.

The newspaper says the decision in Brussels was largely down to tensions about vaccine supplies that have been heightened by the fact that AstraZeneca has been slow in

getting supplies to Europe, while it has been "generous" in delivering to the UK.

The export rules, while not foreseeing full-on bans, state that controls can be put in place for various reasons: for example, if the country in question imports vaccines but doesn't export or reciprocate; or if the country has a much higher vaccination rate than the EU.

This content was published on Apr 4, 2021 Apr 4, 2021 "The pandemic has shown us that we are very dependent, maybe too much so, on other markets," Swiss President Guy Parmelin has said.

For Switzerland, the SonntagsBlick writes, this could mean a difficult situation whereby the more quickly the country administers jabs, the more difficult it might be to obtain new supplies via Europe.

In response to the decision, Livia Leu, the Swiss diplomat overseeing relations with Brussels, discussed the issue with the EU's ambassador in Bern, Petros Mavromichalis.

In a discussion confirmed on Sunday by the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO), Switzerland requested that it once again be placed on the list of countries not subject to the export license rules. SECO based its request on the highly integrated and co-dependent nature of the Swiss and European medical supply and distribution chains, it said.

Although the outcome of the request is not yet clear, SECO did confirm to the Keystone-SDA news agency that "the measures [of the EU] did not specifically target Switzerland".

## Venezuela, Russia Ramp Up Economic Ties With a Ten-Year Plan

CARACAS (Dispatches) - Venezuela and Russia have signed agreements on energy, trade, financial, transport, military, agricultural, and pharmaceutical cooperation, among other areas.

The trade deals, which form part of a 10-year agenda, were the result of five technical meetings held in Caracas as part of the High-Level Intergovernmental Commission (CIAN) framework. Russian deputy prime minister Yuri Borisov, who led the Kremlin commission, met with president Nicolás Maduro, vice president Delcy Rodríguez, and oil minister Tarek El Aissami.

Borisov said the agreements centered around "joint investment projects in the development of Venezuela's hydrocarbon reserves," vowing that trade between the two nations will continue to grow.

The Russian envoy highlighted that bilateral relations "have shown capacity to counteract sanctions" imposed against the Latin American country by the US, the European Union (EU) and their allies in recent years.

"We rigorously condemn the practice of unilateral sanctions against Venezuela that greatly affect the country's social situation and limits the possibility of purchasing food and medicine," he told reporters.

Sanctions against Venezuela began in 2015 but were increased from 2017 when the US targeted state-owned PDVSA with financial sanctions, an oil embargo and a host of other measures. The US and allies have also frozen around \$7 billion in Venezuelan assets abroad. In early 2020, secondary sanctions forced Russian energy giant Rosneft to shut down its dealings with PDVSA, with its assets taken over by a Kremlin-owned company.

Venezuelan authorities denounced that the US blockade has hampered the acquisition of vaccines and medical supplies during the COVID-19 pandemic. Recently, top United Nations officials have urged countries to lift all coercive measures after attesting they violate human rights and international law. US representatives have likewise called on the Biden administration to revise its sanctions policy and consequences, with a 2019 report by the Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR) finding that the measures were responsible for the deaths of 40,000 Venezuelans.

## France Cuts Economic Growth Forecast to 5% Amid Lockdown



PARIS (Reuters) – The French economy will expand by 5% in 2021, Economy Minister Bruno Le Maire said in a newspaper interview, as a third lockdown to tackle the coronavirus pandemic has prompted a downward revision in the previous government forecast for 6% growth.

The new forecast was prudent, Le Maire said in comments published on Sunday in Le Journal Du Dimanche (JDD).

"Our fundamentals are sound; we will be able to bounce back," Le Maire said.

French schools and non-essential stores such as clothing chains will now be shut for four weeks, after COVID-19 cases surged in recent weeks, edging up the number of patients in intensive care units.

Bars and restaurants have already been closed for months, while tourist travel is at a standstill, although unlike when France entered its first national lockdown a year ago, construction work and manufacturing are among business areas still ticking over.

Like many countries in Europe, France has ploughed billions of euros into propping up struggling companies with state-backed loans, help with rents and partial unemployment schemes.

The latest restrictions will force some 150,000 businesses to temporarily close, and aid measures in April will cost 11 billion euros, the finance ministry has said.

Le Maire has repeatedly called for the European Union to accelerate the ratification and implementation of its 750 billion-euro economic stimulus plan.

He told the JDD that France was now unlikely to get the 5 billion euro disbursement from that scheme in July as planned, due to delays.

France has its own 100 billion-euro economic reboot program, and plans to spend roughly half of that budget by the end of the year, Le Maire said.

## Tajikistan Has Special Place In Iran Foreign Policy

TEHRAN (MNA) – The Republic of Tajikistan has always had a special place in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iranian Defense Minister said, referring to the common language, culture, history, between Iran and Tajikistan.  
Iranian Minister of Defense Brigadier General Hatami met and held talks with Tajikistan Minister of Defense Col. General Sher Ali Mirza.

Islamic Republic of Iran and Tajikistan share a common language, culture, history, religion, and civilization, said the Iranian defense minister in this meeting, adding, “We believe that the existence of partnerships between the two countries can create a lot of chances for the development of relations between the two countries.”



## World Economy Risks Dangerously Diverging Even as Growth Booms

LONDON (Dispatches) - The world economy is on course for its fastest growth in more than a half century this year, yet differences and deficiencies could hold it back from attaining its pre-pandemic heights any time soon.

The U.S. is leading the charge into this week’s semi-annual virtual meeting of the International Monetary Fund, pumping out trillions of dollars of budgetary stimulus and resuming its role as guardian of the global economy following President Joe Biden’s defeat of “America First” President Donald Trump. Friday brought news of the biggest month for hiring since August. China is doing its part too, building on its success in countering the coronavirus last year even as it starts to pull back on some of its economic aid.

Yet unlike in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, the recovery looks lopsided, in part because the rollout of vaccines and fiscal support differ across borders. Among the laggards are most emerging markets and the euro area, where France and Italy have extended restrictions on activity to contain the virus.

“While the outlook has improved overall, prospects are diverging dangerously,” IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said last week. “Vaccines are not yet available to everyone and everywhere. Too many people continue to face job losses and rising poverty. Too many countries are falling behind.”

The result: It could take years for swathes of the world to join the U.S. and China in fully recovering from the pandemic. By 2024 world output will still be 3% lower than was projected before the pandemic, with countries reliant on tourism and services suffering the most, according to the IMF.

The disparity is captured by Bloomberg Economics’ new set of nowcasts which shows global growth of around 1.3% quarter on quarter in the first three months of 2021. But while the U.S. is bouncing, France, Germany, Italy, the U.K. and Japan are contracting. In the emerging markets, Brazil, Russia and India are all being clearly outpaced by China.

For the year as whole, Bloomberg Economics forecasts growth of 6.9%, the quickest in records dating back to the 1960s. Behind the buoyant outlook: a shrinking virus threat, expanding U.S. stimulus, and trillions of dollars in pent-up savings.

Much will depend on how fast countries can inoculate their populations with the risk that the longer it takes the greater the chance the virus remains an international threat especially if new variants develop. Bloomberg’s Vaccine Tracker shows while the U.S. has administered doses equivalent to almost a quarter of its people, the European Union has yet to hit 10% and rates in Mexico, Russia and Brazil are less than 6%.

“The lesson here is there is no trade-off between growth and containment,” said Mansoor Mohi-uddin, chief economist at the Bank of Singapore Ltd.

Former Federal Reserve official Nathan Sheets said he expects the U.S. to use this week’s virtual meetings of the IMF and World Bank to argue that now is not the time for countries to pull back on assisting their economies.

It’s an argument that will be mostly directed at Europe, particularly Germany, with its long history of fiscal stringency. The EU’s 750 billion-euro (\$885 billion) joint recovery fund won’t start until the second half of the year.

The U.S. will have two things going for it in making its case, Sheets said: A strengthening domestic economy and an internationally respected leader of its delegation



in Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, no stranger to IMF meetings from her time as Fed Chair.

But the world’s largest economy could find itself on the defensive when it comes to vaccine distribution after accumulating massive supplies for itself. “We will hear a hue and cry emerge during these meetings for more equal access to vaccinations,” said Sheets, who is now the head of global economic research at PGIM Fixed Income.

And while America’s booming economy will undoubtedly act as a driver for the rest of the world by sucking in imports, there could also be some grumbling about the higher market borrowing costs that the rapid growth brings, especially from economies which aren’t as healthy.

“The Biden stimulus is a two edged sword,” said former IMF chief economist Maury Obstfeld, who is a now senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics in Washington. Rising U.S. long-term interest rates “tighten global financial conditions. That has implications for debt sustainability for countries that went deeper into debt to fight the pandemic.”

JPMorgan Chase & Co. chief economist Bruce Kasman said he hasn’t seen such a wide gap in 20 to 25 years in the expected out-performance of the U.S. and other developed countries when compared with the emerging markets. That’s in part due to differences in distribution of the vaccine. But it’s also down to the economic policy choices various countries are making.

Having mostly slashed interest rates and started asset-purchase programs last year, central banks are splitting with some in emerging markets beginning to hike interest rates either because of accelerating inflation or to prevent capital from flowing out. Turkey, Russia and Brazil all raised borrowing costs last month, while the Fed and European Central Bank say they won’t be doing so for a long time yet.

## China's Strategy...

FROM PAGE 1

If we want to determine the priority in competition, cooperation and adversary in the ties between the U.S. and China, it should be said that currently competition comes first which is marching towards increasing adversary and the cooperation between them is in the lowest level of the priority. Of course the type of China’s behavior has been less in media spotlight and the country has shown more restraint and this does not mean that China has done nothing in direction of protecting its interest.



What is seen through a simple assessment is that China has supported the Philippines more openly in the past one year, has resisted against the adoption of UNSC’s resolutions against the Myanmar government and at the same time it has boosted its strategic relations with Pakistan and also recently signed or actually made public its 25-year cooperation agreement with Iran.

In fact, the Beijing government has resorted to the similar action taken by the U.S. in recruiting allies from the regional states for encountering China’s policies and it has started to recruit more strategic allies in competition with the U.S. in Asia. In such a condition, this strategy is shown by the American as a propagation strategy that the competition for supremacy has caused the hostility between the two countries to grow upward. So it should be said despite a new administration taking power in the U.S., the tension in relations of the both states not only has not decreased but also has been set on collision course and on more confrontation comparing to the time Trump was in office.

Therefore, it should be expected the ties between Tehran and Beijing to move in direction of more tension in the future and issues for cooperation between them like climate or infectious diseases will not let the strategic competition between the U.S. and China remain covered. Although China is currently moving on course of competing with the U.S. with a precautionary approach but one point should be mentioned that China government comparing to last year has to some extent come out of its precautionary mood in recruiting ally and it is objectively seeking providence in recruiting allies in encountering the U.S. policies.

What should be assessed as a futuristic analysis is that China due to its enormous forex reserves in the U.S. will not spearhead the production of hostility or at least in Biden’s four years in office will try not risk and adventurism in creating tension and will be more cautious than the U.S. in regulating precautionary criteria. Perhaps this precautionary policy has forced the U.S. to take initiative in propaganda war.

One should see how much the soft trend and turtle move of China in the West Asia would restrict the Western policies and especially the U.S., and it will be faced with more diligent action of the White House.

## Presidential Election...

FROM PAGE 1

“People’s presence is vital, so it is the Interior Ministry’s duty to get everything ready across the country for people to cast their vote in a safe and secure situation. Since several months ago the presidential election’s roadmap has been prepared,” added the official.

He went on to say: “The coronavirus can painstakingly have an impact on upcoming Iran’s presidential election, so in tight cooperation with the Health Ministry, all of us can make nonstop efforts not let that happen.” Rahmani Fazli has urged the IRIB (Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting) and Guardian Council to assist the Interior Ministry in holding Iran’s presidential election in the best possible way.

In a further remark, Iran’s interior minister warned about the fourth wave of the coronavirus outbreak, stressing everybody to fully observe hygienic protocols.

Emphasizing the negative social, economic, and political impact of the COVID-19, Rahmani Fazli said it was not just Iran that was grappling with the fourth wave of the variant but the whole world.

## Iran, Pakistan...

FROM PAGE 1

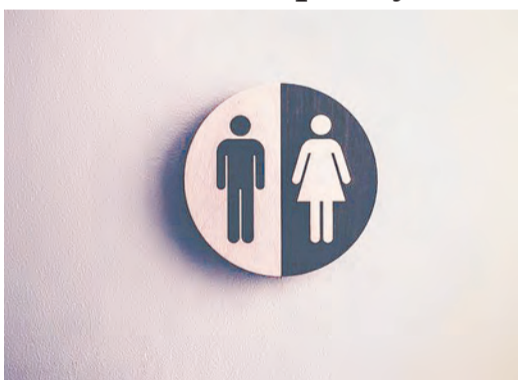
Referring to the importance of unity and convergence of naval powers in this strategic region, he added that creating security by the countries of the region will lead to the growth, development of security and ultimately the prosperity of world trade.

Pakistani fleet consisting of two naval vessels docked at Bandar Abbas on Saturday morning to further strengthen bilateral and friendly relations with Iran.

With the message of solidarity, peace and prosperity for the Iranian people and the region, the Pakistan navy flotilla will be present at Bandar Abbas from 3 to 6 April.

The Pakistani fleet enters Bandar Abbas every April, which did not happen last year due to the coronavirus pandemic, said Chief of Staff of the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy.

## Switzerland Among Top 10 Countries for Promoting Gender Equality



ZURICH (Dispatches) - Gender equality is improving in Switzerland, according to a World Economic Forum (WEF) global ranking that saw the Alpine state move back into the top ten of best performing countries.

Switzerland jumped eight places to number ten in the latest edition of WEF’s Global Gender Gap report. External link, which measures comparative opportunities offered to men and women in society.

The improvement was mainly driven by the increasing number of women elected into Switzerland’s parliament in 2019. But despite introducing new measures to improve equality in the workplace, Switzerland dropped marks for a lack of women in top management positions.

According to other recent studies on the Swiss workplace, women are being given more opportunities than in previous years. But progress is slow, particularly compared to Scandinavian countries.

Iceland topped the WEF Gender Gap ranking once again this year, followed by Finland, Norway, New Zealand and Sweden.

The report authors warn that the coronavirus pandemic has put back some of the progress that has been made in recent years. Total gender equality is now estimated to need 135.6 years at the current rate, compared to 95 years forecast before the pandemic began.

This is because jobs that are mainly held by women have been worst affected by lockdowns than male dominated work positions.

Switzerland faces a unique obstacle when it comes to preventing the pension system from collapsing with time.

## Italian Central Bank Chief Warns of Threat to Global Recovery

ROME (FT) - The uneven pace at which countries are vaccinating their populations against Covid-19 is the single greatest threat to a global economic recovery Italy’s central bank governor said, ahead of the country hosting a G20 summit this week.

Ignazio Visco, who will co-host the virtual G20 meeting of finance ministers and central bank governors with Daniele Franco, Italy’s economy minister, warned that a patchy international vaccine rollout could result in sharply different recoveries for developed and developing nations.

“The main instrument we have at the moment is neither monetary nor fiscal, it is vaccinations,” he said in an interview with the Financial Times.

“We need to maintain close international co-operation within the G20 to avoid that the different stages of the vaccination campaign in the various countries result in excessive divergences of the respective economies.”

Visco praised the co-operation between governments in the pandemic response thus far, but said ongoing multilateral measures would be critical to ensuring an evenly distributed global recovery.

“We must not waste what we have done last year: one of the main lessons from past crises is that we need to be very careful not to remove the support measures too soon,” he said. “The vaccination campaign allows us to see the light at the end of the tunnel, but we cannot make any mistakes.”

Visco also defended the scale of Europe’s economic response to the pandemic in comparison with the US. He pointed out that significant amounts of stimulus had been also provided by national governments alongside the EU’s €750bn post-pandemic recovery fund, known as “Next Generation EU”.

“The Next Generation EU plan has a completely different nature [to the US stimulus] because, while smaller in size, it will be mostly made of infrastructure investments,” he said.

“This choice is also due to the fact, usually neglected by many commentators, that very large relief packages have been implemented in Europe, and are still operating, at the level of national governments.”

All large European governments, Visco said, had sharply increased their budget deficits to provide direct assistance to households and companies outside the scope of the EU recovery fund.

The G20 meeting this week comes as the pace of the US’s vaccination push has increased significantly compared with the EU’s. Economists have also forecast the US economy to grow faster than those of European countries this year.

Visco said progress in the EU’s vaccination program meant that the bloc would not be left behind by the U.S. However, he added that reducing this risk for developing economies was a priority.

“This is not so much a problem for Europe with respect to the US — as the EU is aiming at immunizing a substantial fraction of the population by July — it is rather a question of advanced versus developing economies.”

Visco also said that the G20 meeting would focus on measures to assist developing economies in their recovery, including ongoing discussions of increasing the issuance of IMF special drawing rights (SDRs), a financial instrument that would boost those countries’ balance sheets.

## Climate Change, Biodiversity Loss the Top Concerns in UNESCO Survey

ENEVA (Dispatches) - As part of the survey, respondents were asked about their most pressing concerns. Apart from climate change and biodiversity decline, most identified violence and conflict, discrimination and equality and lack of food, water and housing as other top worries.

“At a time of massive disruption linked to the COVID-19 pandemic, our goal was to listen to the challenges being faced by people all over the world, and they have told us loud and clear,” UNESCO Director General Audrey Azoulay said in a statement.

“Greater efforts are needed to address people’s specific concerns, and multilateralism is the way to do this. Restoring confidence in multilateralism requires the implementation of concrete and impactful projects.”

Many respondents answered that improvements in education are likely a prime solution to fighting many of their most pressing concerns.

“This reflects a collective conviction in the importance of education not only as an end in and of itself but as a valid and wide-reaching solution to our many and varied global challenges,” the report states. “Education was also considered the area of society which will most need to be rethought in light of the COVID-19 crisis.”

Last Wednesday, the International Energy Agency also sounded an alarm over climate change -- saying that new commitments, substantial policy changes and far less reliance on fossil fuels are needed to achieve environmental goals around the world established to slow global warming.

## Season Over for Dortmund Teenager Moukoko

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Borussia Dortmund striker Youssoufa Moukoko, 16, is out for the rest of the season with a foot injury, the German club said Monday on the eve of their Champions League quarter-final, first leg, at Manchester City. Moukoko, who became the youngest player in Champions League history last December, tore ligaments in his foot while on Germany Under-21 duty late last month. He is sidelined for the European quarter-final, first leg in Manchester and the return on April 14, as well as the rest of Dortmund's Bundesliga campaign.

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## Spieth Ends Long Journey Back to Winner's Circle

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - After nearly four winless years, 27-year-old American Jordan Spieth is back in business. The one-time wunderkind picked up his first PGA Tour win a couple weeks shy of his 20th birthday in 2013 and went on to win the Masters - his first of three major titles - two years later, kicking off a remarkable early-career run. But he hadn't hoisted a trophy since the British Open in 2017.

## Everton Blow Late Lead Against Crystal Palace

LONDON (Dispatches) - Everton's hopes of a top-four finish in the Premier League were dented by Michy Batshuayi's 86th minute equalizer to salvage a 1-1 draw for Crystal Palace at Goodison Park on Monday.

The Toffees were made to rue a string of missed chances either side of James Rodriguez's opener as they only narrowly closed the gap on fourth-placed Chelsea to four points.

Rodriguez's return from injury for the first time since Everton ended a two-decade wait to beat Liverpool away in the Merseyside derby in February sparked a far more enterprising performance from Carlo Ancelotti's men.

Vicente Guaita was forced into fine saves from Dominic Calvert-Lewin and Richarlison in a dominant first-half display from the home side.

Rodriguez finally broke the deadlock 11 minutes into the second-half when he fired home Seamus Coleman's cut-back for his 100th goal in European football.

Another two fine saves from Guaita denied Richarlison and Calvert-Lewin from doubling Everton's advantage.

And that proved vital as Everton ultimately dropped points for the seventh time in eight home games.

Batshuayi had only been on the pitch two minutes when he latched onto Jeffrey Schlupp's through ball to fire low beyond Robin Olsen.

A draw leaves Everton in eighth, three points adrift of Tottenham, Liverpool and West Ham, who can move into fourth with victory at Wolves later on Monday.

Palace remain in 12th, but look safe for another season in the top flight as the Eagles edge 11 points clear of the relegation zone.

Meanwhile West Ham midfielder Declan Rice will reportedly be sidelined for a month due to a knee injury suffered on international duty with England.



Rice, who had previously played every minute in the Premier League this season, was absent for the Hammers trip to Wolves on Monday as David Moyes's men look to move fourth in the table.

"It's disappointing. We knew after the England game he wasn't going to be available," said Moyes.

"We've been over the disappointment of that feeling and it gives other people opportunities and that's what squads are for and, hopefully, we've got the squad to deal with it.

"We know we're missing a good player but the team's been playing really well."

Rice wrote on Twitter: "Rehab has started. Guttled to be missing the game tonight.

"Overwhelmed by all the support but I'll be back in no time."

Sky Sports and the BBC reported Rice will be sidelined for at least four weeks.

The 22-year-old has established himself as a regular starter for England under Gareth Southgate.

Rice has over two months to prove his fitness for Euro 2020 with England's first match against Croatia on June 13.

## Hurkacz Wins Miami Open

MIAMI (Dispatches) - Poland's Hubert Hurkacz defeated Italian teenager Jannik Sinner in straight sets to win the Miami Open and claim the first ATP Masters title of his career.

The 26th-seeded Hurkacz, who had eliminated four higher-ranked players en route to the final, held his nerve at Miami's Hard Rock Stadium to win 7-6 (7/4), 6-4 in 1hr 43min.

It was a deserved victory for the 24-year-old from Wroclaw, who claimed his second title of the season as Sinner's challenge unraveled with a series of unforced errors.

"It feels unreal, so happy that I was able to play a good match today," Hurkacz said.

"Jannik is an amazing competitor. I'm so proud of myself that I was able to beat him."

Hurkacz, whose win earned him a message of congratulations Polish President Andrzej Duda, said he hoped the tournament win would be a launchpad for more victories.



## Andreescu Climbs to Sixth

LONDON (Dispatches) - Bianca Andreescu climbed three places to sixth in the WTA rankings on Monday, following her run to the final where she lost to Ashleigh Barty, who remains the world number one.

Andreescu, a 20-year-old Canadian who was forced to retire in the second set in Miami after turning her ankle, is approaching her best ranking since winning the 2019 US Open when she reached fourth.

Barty, who retained her title in Florida, shrugged off criticism of her continued presence at number one on Saturday, saying "I thoroughly deserve my spot at the top of the rankings". The Australian has benefited from a tweak into the way rankings are calculated which takes into account the disruption caused by last year's pandemic shutdown. Barty skipped last year's rescheduled US and French Opens to remain at home.

In spite of Barty's victory, her nearest challenger Naomi Osaka closed the gap by 150 points although the Japanese player remains more than 1,000 points behind.

The best progression of the week came from the Greek Maria Sakkari who reached the semifinals in Florida after knocking out Osaka. The 25-year-old Athenian moves up six places to 19th, her highest ranking yet. Belarusian Aryna Sabalenka, who made it to the last eight in Miami, climbed one step to seventh place with Serena Williams dropping down to eighth and Karolina Pliskova going down three places to ninth.

## La Liga Investigating Valencia Racism Claims

MADRID (Dispatches) - La Liga are investigating allegations Valencia's Mouctar Diakhaby was racially abused by Juan Cala of Cadiz during their game on the weekend, the league's president Javier Tebas confirmed.

"We are already carrying out an internal investigation with the videos and images of the game we have to clarify what happened," Tebas told Movistar.

"The accounts are contradictory but looking at the behaviour of the Valencia player you can see that something happened."

## Martial Could Miss Rest of Season



LONDON (Dispatches) - Manchester United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer revealed France forward Anthony Martial could miss the rest of the season with a knee injury.

Martial was forced off with the problem during France's World Cup qualifier against Kazakhstan last weekend.

The 25-year-old was absent from United's squad for their Premier League clash with Brighton on Sunday and Solskjaer is concerned he could be sidelined for the rest of the campaign.

"Unfortunately he's sprained his knee with France," Solskjaer told MUTV.

"It's always when they go away on internationals, you've fingers crossed and you hope that they're going to come back fit.

"Paul (Pogba) played in all three games so that was a boost for us but losing Anthony for what might be the rest of the season is very disappointing, especially when the reports and signals from there are that it wasn't serious but it looks a bad one, yeah."

Speaking to BT Sport, Solskjaer offered a glimmer of hope that Martial might make it back before United's season is over, saying "He sprained his knee with France and it looks like he'll be out for a few weeks, definitely.

"We hope to get him back before the end of the season but we're not sure."

Solskjaer did not mention if Martial would be a doubt for the France squad at the delayed Euro 2020, which starts in June.

Martial has scored just seven goals for United this season, with none in his last nine appearances.

## Bulls Clip Nets To End Six-Game Skid

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - The Bulls halted a six-game losing streak, and breathed life into their playoff hopes by handling a Brooklyn lineup that was missing James Harden and Kevin Durant in Chicago.

The Nets, who had a four-game winning streak snapped, looked lethargic and out of sync playing without Harden and Durant, who continue to nurse hamstring injuries.

The Bulls got a game-high 25 points from Zach LaVine and a strong effort from Tomas Satoransky, who added 19 points and 11 assists. Nikola Vucevic contributed 22 points and 13 rebounds for Chicago, while Kyrie Irving led six Nets in double figures with 24 points and a season-high 15 assists.

The battle of Los Angeles turned into a lopsided affair as the Clippers clobbered the Lakers 104-86.

The Clippers never trailed, starting the game on a 13-2 run and leading by as many as 24 points. Swingman Marcus Morris Sr. led the charge, with 17 of his game-high 22 points in the first half. Kawhi Leonard totaled 19 points, 10 rebounds and eight assists. Paul George contributed 16 points and seven rebounds, while Luke Kennard chipped in 15 for the Clippers.

The Clippers snapped a two-game home losing streak. They also won the earlier matchup of the season between the two L.A. teams, a 116-109 decision in the season opener on Dec. 22.

Meanwhile Jayson Tatum scored 22 points with eight rebounds, and Boston Celtics rode dominant middle quarters to a rout of Charlotte 116-86 at TD Garden.

A 19-4 run to open the second quarter, kicked off when Romeo Langford knocked down one of Boston's 21 made 3-pointers on the night, turned a one-point deficit into a lead that never dipped below eight for the rest of the way.

The Celtics closed the period on a 9-2 run to finish the period with a 33-17 edge, then carried the momentum into a 40-27 third quarter. Tatum closed the third with a buzzer-beating 3-pointer.



## Man City Could Break Transfer Record

MANCHESTER (Reuters) - Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola said the club could break their transfer record and spend over 100 million pounds (\$139 million) on a player, amid speculation over the future of Borussia Dortmund striker Erling Haaland.

With Sergio Aguero leaving the Etihad Stadium at the end of the season, City have been linked with Haaland in British media reports and Guardiola will get a closer look at him on the pitch in Tuesday's Champions League quarter-final first leg.

Although City have been the biggest spenders in Europe over the last decade, they are yet to buy a player for a world record amount and their highest fee paid is 64 million pounds for Ruben Dias to Benfica in September.

Guardiola last week described the prospect of another record breaking transfer in the close season as "impossible", though on Monday he softened that stance by claiming a 100 million-pound signing was possible.

"So far the club has decided not to spend not close to 100 million pounds for a player, or more than that on a player," Guardiola told a news conference. "Maybe in the future it is going to happen if they decide it is necessary to improve the team for the next five, 10 years."

Media reports said Dortmund could demand a fee of about 180 million euros (\$177 million) for Haaland, who has scored 33 goals for the club in all competitions this season.

Guardiola refused to talk about the prospect of signing Norway international Haaland but hailed the 20-year-old's "exceptional" qualities.

"The numbers speak for themselves," Guardiola said.

"When that happens it's because he can score with the right, the left, the counter attacks, in the box."

