

Health Ministry Spokeswoman
Sima Sadat Lari Said on Tuesday
That 291 More Iranians Died From
The Coronavirus Disease Over
The Past 24 Hours Bringing the
Total Deaths to 65,055

IRAN NEWS

Iranian Nuclear Negotiation Team,
Headed by Deputy Foreign Minister
Abbas Araqchi, Arrived in Vienna
On Tuesday to Continue the
Nuclear Talks Between Iran and 4+1

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Iran Suspends All Talks With EU

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The spokesman for Iran's Foreign Ministry says the Islamic Republic is considering counter-sanctions in response to new bans imposed on several Iranian individuals and entities by the European Union while suspending all talks with the bloc in various fields.

Saeed Khatibzadeh made the remarks on Monday after the European Union announced it has imposed sanctions ranging from travel bans to asset freezes on eight Iranian individuals, including the chief commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Major General Hossein Salami, and three prisons on baseless human rights-related grounds.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran is considering reciprocal sanctions in reaction to the EU's measure, whose details will be announced later," the spokesman said, adding, "Iran strongly condemns this measure and considers it as lacking any credibility."

"Without a doubt, such measures have no value as they have been taken by false preachers of human rights, who have remained silent on the basis of political motives and only expressed regret in the face of the violation of Iranian people's rights under inhumane and illegal US sanctions, and even agreed to them," Khatibzadeh said.

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Enrichment at Natanz Nuclear Facility Not Halted

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's permanent representative to Vienna-based international organizations has stressed that despite an act of sabotage, enrichment at the safeguarded nuclear facility in Natanz has not stopped.

In a televised interview on Monday, Kazem Gharibabadi, who is also Iran's ambassador to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), said that the damaged IR-1 centrifuges were replaced in no time with others capable of 50 percent more enrichment capacity.

He added that the latest generation of Iranian-manufactured centrifuges would also be set up in the nuclear facility in the near future.

His remarks came just a day after a reckless act of sabotage targeted the electricity distribution network of Shahid Mostafa Ahmadi Roshan nuclear facility in Natanz, which is a uranium enrichment center located in the city of the same name in Iran's central province of Isfahan.

The attack caused a blackout and the disruption of the operations of this sensitive nuclear facility which has been under the IAEA's safeguards and extensive monitoring.

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Lavrov in Tehran To Bolster Ties



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has condemned the European Union for imposing sanctions on Iran at a time when Tehran and the signatories to the 2015 nuclear deal are engaged in a diplomatic process in Vienna to save the troubled agreement.

Speaking after talks in Tehran with his Iranian counterpart, Mohammad Javaz Zarif, on Tuesday, Lavrov said the European sanctions could undermine the negotiations in the Austrian capital to revitalize the nuclear deal in the Austrian capital.

"We expect that it will be possible to preserve the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)," said the top Russian diplomat, adding, "As far as we understand, our partners in Tehran have expressed their readiness to immediately move in that direction" if Washington returns to compliance with the deal it abandoned.

However, he added, the latest EU sanctions gave rise to "a huge amount of questions."

"If there is any kind of coordination lacking in the EU and the right hand is not aware of what the left hand is doing, that's simply unfortunate," Lavrov said. "But if this decision has been deliberately taken amid the talks continuing in Vienna to rescue the JCPOA then it is not just unfortunate — this is a mistake that is worse than a crime."

"I hope our European colleagues understand that such actions are unacceptable and will take measures not to allow the talks to be derailed," the top diplomat added.

Zarif, for his part, lashed out at the Europeans imposing sanctions on Iran instead of condemning America's economic terrorism against 82 million Iranians and Sunday's incident at Natanz nuclear facility.

The sanctions, he added, only make the world realize that the EU "has no status [of its own] in the world, and that it is not only a follower of American policies, but also a follower of the most extremist groups in the United States and the Zionist regime."

"This is a reason for Europe to be ashamed. It is definitely a destructive action and we will definitely respond to this action," the top Iranian diplomat said.

Zarif advised the Europeans to "think about their dignity. Europe should know that it is not in a superior moral position. Europe cannot preach to the world. A Europe, where xenophobia and anti-Islamism have created terrible conditions for Muslims, has neither the reputation nor the position to sanction the Iranian authorities."

Elsewhere in his remarks, Zarif said that what happened at Natanz nuclear facility was "a terrorist stupidity" aimed at undermining Iran's leverage in the talks on the JCPOA's revival.

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Halkbank Urges End of Alleging Iran Sanctions Violations

NEW YORK (Reuters) - A lawyer for Halkbank told a U.S. appeals court on Monday that the state-owned Turkish lender was immune from U.S. prosecution and that an indictment accusing it of helping Iran evade American sanctions should be thrown out.

In arguments before the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Manhattan, Halkbank's lawyer Simon Latcovich said the U.S. government had no basis to assert criminal jurisdiction over the bank, and that the bank was "synonymous" with Turkey for purposes of immunity.

Halkbank has pleaded not guilty to bank fraud, money laundering and conspiracy charges over its alleged use of money servicers and front companies in Iran, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates to evade sanctions.

Prosecutors accused the bank of converting oil revenue into gold and then cash to benefit Iranian interests, and documenting fake food shipments to justify transfers of oil proceeds.

They also said Halkbank helped Iran secretly transfer \$20 billion of restricted funds, with at least \$1 billion laundered through the U.S. financial system.

The case has complicated U.S.-Turkish relations, with Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan urging Halkbank's innocence in a 2018 memo to former U.S. President Donald Trump.

Laticovich argued on Monday that the bank was immune from prosecution under the federal Foreign Sovereign Immunities Act. But U.S. prosecutor Sidhardha Kamaraju said that act applies only to civil cases, and urged the appeals court to reject what he called a "dramatic extension" of sovereign immunity.

Halkbank is appealing an Oct. 1 ruling by U.S. District Judge Richard Berman allowing the prosecution.

Berman has overseen several related cases, including the conviction of former Halkbank executive Mehmet Hakan Atilla and a guilty plea by Turkish-Iranian gold trader Reza Zarrah.

The appeals court did not say when it will rule.

ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian



World to Contain COVID-19

During the past one year and four months which has passed since the news on the outbreak of this devastating deadly coronavirus, more than 40 countries in the world have taken steps to know the virus and to find ways for containing it and all inabilities of the mankind in this regard can be attributed to the level of cultural maturation and beliefs of the people.

In the process of fighting with this virus, the governments have taken action to produce vaccine and most of these vaccines have been effective to 80 to 90 percent. This motivation in the world has enjoyed constructive economic impact and it has brought along the ground for passing through the economic anomalies in most places in the world.

Regarding this, one can look at the statistics and forecasts, for example, looking at the International Monetary Fund (IMF)'s forecasts and approach. The IMF on last Tuesday and in its report on global economic growth forecast said that the world in the current year will witness the most economic growth in recent three decades following its efforts for vaccination against the COVID-19 and implementing economic stimulus plans in different countries.

This body in its upgraded report claimed the global economy will expand 6% in 2021, up from the 5.5% pace estimated in January. That would be the most since 1980 and registration of statistics by the IMF. In the report of the Washington-based IMF, the fund has also seen global growth for 2022 at 4.4%, higher than the 4.2% projected in January.

The IMF in its forecast has also said that the pace of economic growth in poorer countries which are not able to carry out the economic stimulus plan will be slower comparing to other countries. This financial body has also predicted that those countries whose economies are too much dependent on tourism will face problem in coming out of economic recession and retaining its pre-COVID-19 era economic growth. That the world with production of vaccine has relatively become more hopeful to contain the COVID-19 can be completely seen in the approach, news and reports coming from the West.

But the condition in Iran is slightly different. The government should have begun the new Iranian calendar year with more restrictions on travels and lockdowns but it did not do it and it not only ruined the past relative successful management, but also has no comprehensive and clear standpoint on the economy affected by the outbreak of the coronavirus. **See Page 7**

Saudi Peace Initiatives Aimed at Covering Up Crimes Against Yemenis

SANAA (Dispatches) - Chairman of Yemen's Supreme Political Council has roundly dismissed Saudi Arabia's so-called peace initiative on the conflict in his country, emphasizing that such bids are meant to conceal the heinous crimes that the Riyadh regime and its allies are perpetrating against the Yemeni nation.

"The continuation of the crippling U.S.-Saudi blockade and aggression against our people for seven years proves to the entire world that the aggressor states as well as Washington have no respect whatsoever for human values and principles," Mehdi Mohammad Hussein al-Mashat said in a message on the occasion of the arrival of the holy Muslim fasting month of Ramadan.

He added, "Their talk of peace at the same time as pressing ahead with their aggression and siege is simply nothing but a desperate attempt to cover up their horrific crimes against Yemeni people."

On March 22, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud presented a so-called peace initiative to end the war in Yemen, which would include reopening Sana'a airport and allow fuel and food imports through Hudaydah port — both of which are under the control of the Ansarullah movement.

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info@irannewsdaily.com

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IMF Data on Iran Forex Bank Reserves Wrong

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Central Bank of Iran (CBI) Governor Abdol-Nasser Hemmati said here on Tuesday that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) data on Iran's foreign exchange bank reserves is wrong.

The recent report published by the IMF on the foreign exchange bank reserves of the Central Bank of Iran is a big mistake arising from their incomplete information, Hemmati wrote on social media.

Publishing a false estimate by the IMF, without obtaining approval from the Central Bank of Iran, like its discriminatory treatment, is unacceptable, he further noted.

Iran Frontrunner in Quantum Technology in West Asia

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) has inaugurated a center for developing quantum technology, hailing the country's position as a pioneer in the field in the West Asia region.

Speaking to reporters at the ceremony to inaugurate the National Center for Quantum Technologies, Ali Akbar Salehi hailed Iranian experts for taking big strides toward the promotion of quantum technology, and said great efforts have been made to launch the laboratories at the center.

Although other countries such as the U.S., India and China have made fast progress in the area of quantum technology, Iran has been a "frontrunner" in the highly-important field in the West Africa region, Salehi said.

The technology, he added, is used for communication, computing, producing sensitive sensors and simulation of chemical processes.

"In 2016, the AEOI started studies in the field of quantum technology, and in 2019, it carried out very important experiments such as producing pairs of intertwined photons," Salehi said. "We are moving fast in this area and also cooperating with a number of universities."



On Saturday, the 15th anniversary of the National Nuclear Technology Day, Iran unveiled 133 new nuclear achievements made by the country's experts in different areas of the nuclear industry, including quantum, enrichment, heavy water and deuterium compounds, radiopharmaceuticals, lasers, and etc.

Quantum technology is an emerging field of physics and engineering that relies on the principles of quantum physics. Major world countries have made huge investments in producing quantum computers, which not only will help the future users do things much faster or more efficiently, but will also pave the way for performing tasks that even the best supercomputers are not capable of.

Experts say the technology, which is in the very early stages of development, could bring about a revolution in the world by changing how medicine is produced, breaking encryption and transforming communications and artificial intelligence, or even managing climate change, among other things.

Natanz Sabotage Aimed To Derail Diplomacy

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Government spokesman Ali Rabiei said on Tuesday that the sabotage act in Natanz nuclear facility was aimed at preventing constructive diplomacy, adding that Iran was committed to reciprocate proportionally in appropriate time.

Rabiei made the remarks in online press briefing. He said that the Natanz sabotage has caused some damages, but it was an indication that enemies of Iran's industrial and political progress and opponents of the ongoing talks to lift sanctions against the country have failed.

He further said that Iran condemns 'the desperate act' and emphasizes the necessity of addressing 'this nuclear terrorism' by the international community and especially by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

"Iran reserves the right to act against those who planned, ordered, and carried out this attack. Iran's government also will decisively continue to develop its nuclear technology and the efforts to get rid of cruel sanctions," Rabiei warned.

Iran's Atomic Energy Organization (IAEO) has vowed to quickly recover damaged capacity and replace the old technology by new ones, Rabiei said.

He urged members of the JCPOA, the nuclear deal, and the United States favoring diplomacy to condemn the terrorist attack carried out by Israeli occupying regime.

Rabiei also offered some details on the incident in Natanz nuclear site, saying that the sabotage act damaged the electricity network supplying power for centrifuges.

He further elaborated that the sabotage was not caused by external factors, as its origin has been identified.

Rabiei denied reports claiming that the damage had impacted Iran's enrichment capacity, underlining that it would be quickly repaired and the old machinery would be replaced with modern technology.

Deputy South Korean FM Meets Araqchi

TEHRAN (IRNA) - South Korean Deputy Foreign Minister Choi Jong-kun who is in Tehran as part of a delegation accompanying his country's prime minister met and conferred with the Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araqchi on Monday.

Araqchi in the meeting referred to the Korean prime minister's visit of Tehran, which is unprecedented in the post-revolution history of bilateral ties, and said that by exchanging delegations at such a high level the two nations expect major developments in bilateral ties, and therefore, South Korea is expected to make immediate acts aimed at problem resolving in bilateral ties.

The illegal act of the Korean banks in blocking the Iranian monetary assets led to loss of trust among the Iranian nation, rebuilding which will not be an easy job, added the Iranian diplomat.

Deputy Foreign Minister Choi, too, expressed delight that during the course of the past three months he had visited Iran twice as deputy foreign minister, emphasizing that resolving the emerged problems and strengthening the relations are among the main priorities in bilateral ties, which need to be further expanded.

Zarif Writes Letter to UN Secretary General on Nuclear Terrorism

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif in a series of tweets addressed to the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres informed him about the terrorist attacks and cased destruction in Iran's Natanz Nuclear Enrichment Complex.

Zarif said in his tweets that "premeditated targeting of a nuclear facility, under the nuclear-NPT, has the high risk of high level radioactive leakage that spreads aimlessly, and is therefore considered nuclear terrorism and a war crime."

"Israel's efforts aimed at preventing the revival of the international nuclear deal, JCPOA, after the US presidential elections was initially reflected in threats, which are now materialized," he added.

Zarif also said that if the United States wishes to prevent the aftermaths of this silly gamble, it should end continuing the economic terrorism which was initiated by Trump, and is now used as a lever in ongoing nuclear talks, and terminate the entire imposed sanctions under changed titled ever since the implementation of the JCPOA.

"After justification of the US moves in that respect, Iran, too, will halt its remunerative moves as response," he wrote.

The Iranian top diplomat also said that the remunerative moves have now due to the recent terrorist attacks been also further accelerated.

Iran to Initiate Mass Production of COVID Vaccines Next Week

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Chairman of Executive Office of Imam Khomeini's Order said on Tuesday that Barekat Foundation will start mass production of COVID-19 vaccines next week from April 21.

Mohammad Mokhber expressed satisfaction over the process of mass production of COVIran Barekat vaccines.

First phase of preparing the vaccine with capacity of producing three million doses has ended, Mokhber said.

Some 12 million doses have been planned for the second phase, he added, noting that main part of

country's needs will be met by the products.

Asked whether Iran will export its indigenous vaccine or not, Mokhber said that Iran's priority is the domestic needs.

He expressed hope that public vaccination with home-made vaccine will begin as of Khoradad, the third Iranian month which will start on May 22.

On December 29, 2020, Barekat Foundation conducted human trial of COVID-19 vaccine by injecting it to the first volunteer at the first phase.

Syria's Constitution Must Be Respected

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Senior Advisor to Iran's Foreign Minister on Political Affairs Ali Asghar Khaji and Russian President's Special Envoy for ME and Africa on Tuesday discussed Middle East affairs, including Syria and Yemen.

Highlighting the talks with Syrian officials and UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen on the importance of the Syrian Constitutional Committee, both sides confirmed it should continue.

Khaji and Russia's Mikhail Bogdanov stated that holding Syria's presidential election is a constitutional task based on the current constitution of the country and this constitution must be respected.

They exchanged views also on the latest developments in Yemen, the necessity of forming national talks with the help of the United Nations and the support of other international players.

Iran Emphasizes Full Support for Lasting Peace in Afghanistan

TEHRAN (MNA) - Special Representative of Iranian Foreign Ministry for Afghanistan Affairs Mohammad Ebrahim Taherianfard stressed full support of Islamic Republic of Iran for its efforts to achieve lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Mohammad Ebrahim Taherianfard held a telephone conversation with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan Mohammad Hanif Atmar on Monday to discuss bilateral ties and latest developments in the region.

During the phone talk, the two sides discussed latest

situation of peace talks in Afghanistan especially process of inter-Afghan peace talks and Istanbul Summit.

Special Representative of Iranian Foreign Ministry for Afghanistan Affairs Mohammad Ebrahim Taherianfard emphasized Tehran's full support for efforts to achieve lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Earlier, Taherianfard also discussed the latest developments in Afghanistan and current negotiation process with Head of Afghanistan's High Council for National Reconciliation Abdullah Abdullah.

MP Reveals More Details About Sabotage at Natanz

TEHRAN (IFP) - The head of the Parliament's Energy Committee said on Monday that the sabotage act at the Natanz nuclear facility's electricity and cable distribution system was related to emergency power batteries.

Regarding the Sunday electricity malfunction due to sabotage at the Natanz nuclear site, Fereydoun Abbasi said, "We have an electricity substation at the Natanz site, from where electricity goes to the basement, which is about 40, 50 meters underground. That place was built in a sturdy fashion and was located underground and so that air and missile attacks could not destroy this place." He went on to explain different types of sabotage by the enemy, from cyber-attacks to sabotage being done by the enemy agents, or by sending in defective equipment in five to ten years. He then explained that when there is sturdy, underground construction, that could not be destroyed by air or missile attacks, the enemy resorts to evil methods like the sort occurred at the Natanz nuclear site.

The act of sabotage at the Natanz nuclear plant occurred on Sunday, prompting a wave of international and domestic reactions. Qatar's foreign minister strongly has condemned the incident, calling it "a dangerous and destructive action" that could intensify tension in the region and leave negative impacts on the region's stability.

South Korean PM Says Iran Money Should Be Quickly Released

SEOUL (Dispatches) - South Korea's Prime Minister Chung Sye-kyun has affirmed that the country should "quickly" return billions of dollars of frozen money to Iran as tensions between the two countries ease.

"I have said before that this money is Iran's money and should be returned to its owner," Chung said in Tehran on Monday.

"It's best to find a way and return it quickly," he told reporters traveling with him.

Chung stressed that the release of 7 billion dollars of Iran's frozen funds was in South Korea's best interests and that efforts needed to be made to overcome the "various constraints" that are preventing it from happening, according to Yonhap news agency.

The South Korean prime minister arrived in Tehran on Sunday for talks with senior Iranian officials on bilateral issues, particularly the release of the frozen funds.

Iran has been seeking to access the funds frozen by South Korean banks amid the coronavirus pandemic over the past year.

Several billions of dollars of Iran's money, mostly from oil and gas exports, are held abroad and are difficult to access because of U.S. sanctions.

About 2.7 billion dollars deposited by the Seoul branch of Iran's Bank Mellat is held by the Bank of Korea, while more than 7 billion dollars worth of Iranian oil money is stuck at the Industrial Bank of Korea and Woori Bank, according to Yonhap news agency. South Korea's refusal to free them has caused a diplomatic spat.

Foreign Forces Must Leave Region

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said that foreign forces must leave the region.

He made the remarks in his meeting with Iraq's National Security Advisor Qasim Muhammad Jalal Al-Araji in Tehran on Monday and reiterated that foreign forces must leave the region.

Security of the region is provided by countries of the region and foreign forces must leave the region, Zarif added.

During the meeting, Zarif emphasized Iran's priority for expanding relations with its neighbors, recalling Iraq as a country with numerous and growing ties with Iran.

Islamic Republic of Iran has always respected Iraq's independence, security, territorial integrity, and integrated sovereignty and welcomes its constructive role in regional relations.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Foreign Minister Zarif stressed that security in the region is provided by countries of the region and that foreign forces must leave the region.

Turning to the importance of following up the terror case of Iran's former IRGC Quds Force Commander Martyr Qassem Soleimani and Second-in-Command of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Unit (PMU, known as Hashd al-Sha'abi) Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, Zarif stated that significance of pursuit of assassination case of martyrs of resistance is obvious to the Islamic Republic of Iran, so, Iran emphasizes on expanding bilateral cooperation for following up the case seriously.

Visiting Iraq's National Security Advisor Qasim Muhammad Jalal Al-Araji, for his turn, stressed Iraq's determination to expand al-out relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran and thanked Iran for its support for Iraq in various fields.

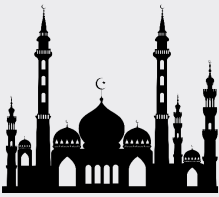
Earlier on Monday, Al-Araji met and held talks with the Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Ali Shamkhani.

Armenia, Iran Exchange Viewpoints On Defense Cooperation

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's Ambassador to Yerevan, Abbas Barakhshan-Zohuri, in a meeting with the Head of the Joint Chief of Staff of Armenia Artak Davutian exchanged viewpoints with him on defense cooperation.

According to the Armenian media, General Davutian who hosted the Iranian plenipotentiary ambassador to Yerevan accompanied by the Iranian embassy's military attaché at his office, said that the two republics fortunately enjoy quite friendly ties.

Besides cooperation in defense field, preservation and further expansion of comprehensive bilateral ties were discussed between the two countries' top political and military officials.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)

■ Evening (Maghreb)

■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)

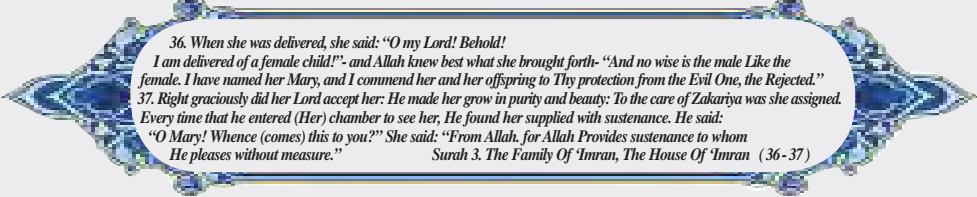
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise

13:04

19:55

05:02

06:31



36. When she was delivered, she said: "O my Lord! Behold! I am delivered of a female child!" - and Allah knew best what she brought forth- "And no wise is the male Like the female. I have named her Mary, and I commend her and her offspring to Thy protection from the Evil One, the Rejected."
37. Right graciously did her Lord accept her: He made her grow in purity and beauty: To the care of Zakariya was she assigned. Every time that he entered (Her) chamber to see her, He found her supplied with sustenance. He said: "O Mary! Whence (comes) this to you?" She said: "From Allah, for Allah Provides sustenance to whom He pleases without measure."
Surah 3. The Family Of 'Imran, The House Of 'Imran (36-37)

Impact of Politics On Economy Should Be Minimized

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Chairman of the Iran-China Chamber of Commerce says the impact of domestic and political policies on the economy should be minimized and if the country’s first priority is its economy, all of behaviors should be in the direction of improving livelihood of the people and economy.

Speaking to ILNA and touching upon the impacts of probable removal of sanctions on the national economy, Majid-Reza Hariri said that Iran’s economy is under the impacts of pressures of sanctions and according to the statistics released by the international communities, Iran’s forex reserves have highly declined and the available forex for the Central Bank is very limited. He added that requirement of trade is forex and when the forex is not accessed by the Central Bank or importers, then there will be problems.

He added sanctions strongly restrict the country in the field of oil exports and even in the field of non-oil exports. He noted that the most impact of sanctions is on the foreign trade and when the foreign trade faces problem, the country will face problems inside and in the production sector, adding that as we all have seen problems in people’s livelihood in most fields during the past year.

Mr. Hariri reiterated that major part of economic problem is because of the sanctions pressure and other part is because of the policy-makers in the country who always keep the country in the standby mode of whether sanctions are removed or not.


He said this uncertainty in trade and economy exists and causes us to have always a halt mode. Hariri said that four years ago all eyes were directed to Vienna to see what would happen there, and again it is happening and all attentions are on Vienna for the result of the talks.

Hariri said that this impact should be minimized in the national economy and the country should have plans for both modes of sanctions and non-sanctions period.

He said if sanctions are removed and a good management is taken, the condition can highly change today. He noted but the national economy should be built in a way whose impacts of sanctions to be minimized.

Harir said currently national economy is ill and it is in the emergency condition and no infrastructural action can be done and all should work together for immediate saving of this economy but first the impact of politics on economy should be minimized otherwise any time sanctions may return and the country will face the same problem.

Cargo Transit Through Iran Stable y/y At Over 7m Tons



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran’s customs office (IRICA) says cargo transit through the country’s territory had been stable year on year in late March despite restrictions imposed at borders to curb the spread of the coronavirus.

IRICA spokesman Rouhollah Latifi said on Monday that the volume of cargoes that passed through the Iranian territory in the calendar year to March 20 had reached a total of 7.000532 million metric tons, down only 67 tons or 0.89% against the previous year.

Latifi said the customs facilities at Shahid Rajaei port, Iran’s largest container port on the Persian Gulf, had processed a bulk of the transit cargoes last year with over 3.3 million tons of shipments registered at the facility for passing through Iran to other countries.

The Bazargan border crossing, located on the northwestern frontier with Turkey, came second at 0.7 million tons, followed by Bashmaq crossing at the border with the Iraqi Kurdistan at 0.68 million tons, he said.

The official said transit through the Iranian territory could have witnessed a major increase last calendar year if it was not for restrictions imposed at borders because of the pandemic.

Iran ordered months of closures at its borders beginning March 2020 when the government imposed a lockdown across the country to curb one of the largest coronavirus outbreaks in the Middle East region.

Located on a key geographic crossroad, Iran seeks to increase its share of revenues levied on cargoes passing between Asia and Europe through its territory.

The volume of cargo transit through Iran had reached 12 million tons in 2013, a six-fold increase compared to early 1990s.

Latifi said a target has been set to increase cargo transit through Iran to 50 million tons per year. However, he said sanctions imposed by the U.S. in recent years have hampered government efforts to expand transit infrastructure across the country.

Water, Electricity Projects Worth \$122.5m Inaugurated

TEHRAN (MNA) - Six major water and electricity projects worth 5.145 trillion rials (about \$122.5 million) were put into operation through a video conference in three provinces to mark the second week of the third phase of the Energy Ministry’s A-B-Iran program.

The mentioned projects including electricity supply projects, a water treatment plant, some water supply projects in rural areas, and a rubber dam were inaugurated in Khuzestan, Mazandaran and Sistan-Baluchestan provinces, IRNA reported.

Out of the mentioned six projects, three projects were put into operation in Khuzestan Province, two projects were in Sistan-Baluchestan Province and one project was inaugurated in Mazandaran Province.

The first phase of the A-B-Iran program (the acronyms A and B stand for water and electricity in Persian) was initiated in the Iranian calendar year 1398 (ended on March 19, 2020), during which 220 major projects with a total investment of 335.6 trillion rials (about \$7.99 billion) were put into operation across the country.

In the second phase of the program that was carried out in the previous Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20) 250 water and energy projects worth 500 trillion rials (about \$11.9 billion) were inaugurated in several provinces.

The third phase of the program was officially started on April 6 and like the previous phases, this year, too, the Energy Ministry is planning to inaugurate numerous water and electricity projects in various provinces every week.

In the first week of the third phase, Iranian Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian inaugurated five major electricity projects worth 29 trillion rials (about \$690.4 million) across the country to mark the beginning of the third phase of the ministry’s A-B-Iran program.

Tehran, Baghdad to Expand Ties on Religious Tourism

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Deputy Minister of Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare and the Head of Iran Technical and Vocational Training Organization, Ali Awsat Hashemi said on Tuesday that according to Iran-Iraq five-year economic cooperation agreement, the two countries will expand ties on religious tourism.

Hashemi said that the holy city of Najaf in Iraq, needs to improve the quality of skilled labor and expertise which is a major part of employment in this city of service jobs and increasing the quality of labors for religious tourism.

He added that Iran and Iraq will expand cooperation for training of skilled experts in tourism sector.

Hashemi called for specialized training courses for hotels and restaurants with quality and facilities if demand in the required cities.

During his visit to Baghdad, Iranian Minister of Cooperative, Labor, and Welfare Mohammad Shariatmadari made arrangements to sign a five-year economic cooperation agreement with the Iraqi officials.

Speaking to IRNA before leaving Baghdad for Karbala on Sunday, Shariatmadari said he has reached an agreement to sign the 5-year economic cooperation document with Iraq’s minister of finance and labor, expressing hope that Iran and Iraq would also conclude a mutual agreement on customs investments, boarder markets, and other issues.

The Iranian minister also noted that the economic cooperation document will be finalized during the Iraqi finance minister’s visit to Iran.

“The preparations for signing the five-year cooperation document are being made and it is now ready for surveys, so that it will be signed and finalized before the end of the 12th (Iranian) administration’s tenure.”

Russian Firm Inks Investment Deal for Medical Projects in Iran

TEHRAN (PressTV) - A Russian company has undertaken to invest at least 500 million euros in Iran to produce antiviral medicine for COVID-19 and other diseases, IRNA news agency reports.

The “investment agreement for foundation of new perspective investment projects in the fields of medicine, biotechnology and bioengineering” was signed between Iran’s INGP Holding and Russian investment company Region TransNefit, the report says. “Based on the agreement, the Russian company Region TransNefit is willing to invest 500 million euros and more ... in advanced technology projects in Iran,” it said.

It will help produce the latest Russian antiviral vaccines for all strains of COVID-19 and retroviruses. The agreement also calls for production of active biological agents with high demand in international markets and medical equipment for sale in Iran and other countries.

According to the report, the two companies will cooperate on vaccinating Iranians against COVID-19 and establishing a network of clinics and medical laboratories for research in Iran.

TransNefit is a state-controlled pipeline transport company headquartered in Moscow. It is the largest oil pipeline company in the world. Iran’s Inter Naft Gas Prom Pars (INGP) Holding is based in Tehran, with branches on Kish Island and Moscow. Their partnership is based on promoting economic and social development in Iran and Russia, according to INGP’s website. Iran is currently grappling with a new wave of coronavirus infections which, officials say, surged following a two-week public holiday for Nowruz, the Persian New Year.

Millions traveled to the Caspian coast and other popular vacation spots, packed markets to shop for new clothes and toys and congregated in homes for parties in defiance of government health guidelines.

The country began a 10-day lockdown on Saturday, ordering most shops closed and offices restricted to one-third capacity in cities declared as red zones, including Tehran and 250 cities and towns.

Foreign Investment in industrial, Trade Sectors Rises Nearly 190%

TEHRAN (MNA) - The Ministry of Industry, Mining and Trade has approved 158 foreign investment projects valued at about \$2.469 billion in the past Iranian calendar year 1399 (ended on March 20), up 189 percent compared to its preceding year.

According to the latest data released by the ministry, the number of approved projects has also increased 92 percent in the previous year.

The Industry Ministry had approved 82 foreign investment projects with a total investment of \$854 million in calendar year 1398.

Of the total number of investment projects in the past year, 90.5 percent (143 projects) was the share of industry sector, 4.4 percent (seven projects) was the share of mining sector, while trade-related projects accounted for 5.1 percent (eight projects) of the total figure.

The highest volume of foreign investment approved in the industry, mining, and trade sectors in the period under review were in the categories of chemical materials and products, base metals, paper and paper products, as well as transportation logistic activities, respectively.

China, Germany, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Canada, and Austria were the top five countries with the highest volume of investment, while, Khuzestan, Sistan-Baluchestan, Fars, Hormozgan, and East Azarbaijan provinces were the top five provinces in terms of the volume of approved foreign investment.

Afghanistan, Turkey, China, Germany, and the United Arab Emirates were also the top five investors in terms of the number of approved projects.

As previously reported by the Industry Ministry, Iran expects a 10-fold increase of foreign investment in the industry and mining sectors by the end of the Sixth Five-Year National Development Plan (March 2022).

KSC Leading Organization in Sustainable Production, Social Responsibilities

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Commander of Hazrat Vali-e Asr (A) Headquarters of IRGC in Khouzeestan Province says Khouzeestan Steel Company (KSC) is the leading organization in the country in sustainable production and observing social responsibilities.

According to reports, the CEO of Khouzeestan Steel Company Mr. Amin Ebrahimi, head of board of directors of the company Mr. Reza Taheri, members of the board of directors of the company Mr. Esmaeel Goodarzi and Mr. Mohammad Mehdi Momenzadeh and some other officials of the company met the commander of the Hazrat Vali-e Asr (A) Headquarters Brigadier General Hassan Shahvarpoor.

In the meeting Brigadier General Shahvarpoor felicitated on the occasion of holy month of Ramadan and said one of the serious weaknesses of the country that enemies of the revolution are trying to harm it is economy.

He added that economy is comprised of industry, agriculture and services which deal directly with earnings and livelihood of the people, and enemies focus on exerting economic pressure.

Shahvarpoor added that state and private sectors should strive to find ways for steering the country out of cruel economic pressure and make up for enemies’ pressures with their developmental measures.

He then said that capabilities for development in Khouzeestan Province are ready and all efforts in the field of economy should be in a way that they should not cause tensions like poverty and unemployment as well and dwelling insuburbs and it should not risk security of production.

He noted that some of the social plans should be carried out in the under-privileged areas and Khouzeestan Steel Company has always played its share in eliminating deprivation.

Then the CEO of the company Mr. Ebrahimi, for his part, pointed to naming the current year as year of production, supports and removing hurdles and said that the Supreme Leader has always emphasized production and job. He noted these two issues both have direct impact on the livelihood of the society and help development and move on course of achieving sustainable economy.

He further said KSC by employing committed and efficient native youth have succeeded in moving in direction of development and job creation.

Massive Fire Engulfs Historic Saint Petersburg Factory

SAINT PETERSBURG (Dispatches) - A spectacular fire gutted a historic factory in Russia's second city Saint Petersburg on Monday, sending clouds of black smoke over the former imperial capital.

The emergencies ministry said 40 people had been evacuated, but that one firefighter had died and two more were hospitalised trying to put out the massive blaze visible across the city.

The ministry said that the fire had broken out over several floors of the red-brick Nevskaya Manufaktura building on the Oktyabrskaya Embankment of the Neva River. The enormous factory was engulfed in flames which spread to nearby trees, AFP journalists at the scene said, adding that the building was surrounded by fire trucks and several ambulances.



Taiwan Reports Largest Incursion Yet by Chinese Air Force

TAIPEI (Dispatches) – Taiwan says 25 Chinese air force aircraft entered Taiwan's air defense identification zone and flew in an area close to the Pratas Islands on Monday.

Twenty-five Chinese air force aircraft including fighter jets and nuclear-capable bombers entered Taiwan's air defence identification zone (ADIZ) on Monday, the island's government said, the largest reported incursion to date.

The report comes after the United States State Department on Friday issued new guidelines that will enable U.S. officials to meet more freely with Taiwanese officials, further deepening ties with Taipei.



Merkel Party Chief Swings Ahead In Race to Be Next Chancellor



BERLIN (Dispatches) - The head of German Chancellor Angela Merkel's CDU secured the backing of the party's top brass on Monday, party sources told AFP, in a key boost for his campaign to succeed the veteran leader at elections in September.

As head of the CDU, Armin Laschet would normally be a shoo-in to head the party and the CSU, its smaller Bavarian sister party, to the polls on September 26 -- when Merkel will retire after 16 years as chancellor.

But with public support for the conservatives tumbling over their recent handling of the coronavirus pandemic, some have called for Laschet to step aside in favour of Markus Soeder, the more popular CSU leader.

However, after a key huddle of the party's top brass on Monday, a party source told AFP that "the CDU leadership is in favor of Armin Laschet running as the (conservative) candidate in the 2021 election campaign".

While the backing of the party heavyweights does not mean Laschet is home and dry in the race, it is seen as a key indicator of who the alliance will end up picking. Long-time Merkel ally Laschet, 60, took over as CDU leader in January but has since suffered a series of setback including a damaging spat with Merkel over virus containment measures.

As head of the country's most populous state of North Rhine-Westphalia, Laschet defended his region's broad interpretation of national virus measures, calling for "more freedom and flexibility".

He was also ridiculed on social media for saying he needed time to "think about" how to deal with Germany's spiralling third wave over Easter, and accused of flip-flopping when he then appeared to change his mind with calls for a "bridge lockdown".

Soeder, meanwhile, has been praised for taking a hard line on virus measures in Bavaria and has sought to align himself with Merkel, arguing that the chancellor should help decide who would be her successor.

"A CDU-CSU candidate without the support of Angela Merkel will not be successful," he told Bild last weekend.

The Star Trek fan and fancy-dress loving Bavarian also insisted in an interview with Spiegel magazine that the candidate needed to be "accepted by the whole population, not just the party".

Soeder has consistently beaten Laschet in recent popularity polls, with one survey by public broadcaster ARD showing that 54 percent of Germans thought he would be a good chancellor candidate, compared to just 19 percent for Laschet.

The Bavarian premier had remained tight-lipped about his ambitions to be chancellor candidate, but openly declared his willingness to run for the first time on Sunday -- on the condition that he had the backing of the more powerful CDU. A final decision expected some time in the next two weeks, according to German media reports.

Taliban Not Ready to Meet Afghan Gov't in Turkey

ISLAMABAD (AP) — A Taliban spokesman said Monday the religious militia won't attend a peace conference tentatively planned for later this week in Turkey, putting U.S. efforts to get a peace plan anytime soon in jeopardy.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken previously said he wanted to see a peace agreement between Afghanistan's warring sides finalized at a conference hosted by Turkey and attended by top officials from both the Taliban and the Afghan government.

Afghan government, U.S. and Turkish officials had said they intended to begin the conference Friday. It was to last 10 days. No new date for the Turkey conference was set but time is running out on a May 1 deadline for the withdrawal of U.S. and NATO troops from Afghanistan in keeping with a deal the Trump administration made with the Taliban more than a year ago.

President Joe Biden has said he is committed to ending America's longest war but the U.S. is reportedly looking for a three- to six-month extension.

Until now the Taliban have refused, warning of "consequences" if Washington reneges on the deal and the withdrawal timeline.

Last month, Blinken gave both the Taliban and the Afghan government an eight-page proposed peace plan, which they were to discuss, revise and review and come to Turkey ready to cobble together an agreement.

In an audio message to The Associated Press, Taliban spokesman Mohammad Naem said the Islamic Emirate — the name the Taliban gave their government — was not ready to attend this week's planned meeting in Turkey. He said the insurgent group was still discussing the U.S.-proffered peace agreement. He later shared his audio recording on a What's App group.

Naem said attendance at the conference and the Blinken peace proposal were being discussed "and whenever the discussion is completed we will share our final decision."



One Dead, One Injured in Paris Hospital Shooting

PARIS (Dispatches) - An unidentified gunman shot dead a man and badly injured a woman outside a Paris hospital on Monday before fleeing the scene on a motorbike, police said.

Officials ruled out a terrorist attack, with witness statements appearing to point to a targeted killing. The attacker fired several shots at the Henry Dunant private geriatric hospital run by the Red Cross in the upmarket 16th district, investigators said.

"One person died and one is seriously injured," a fire service source said.

The two victims were taken into the hospital for treatment after the shooting which occurred in the early afternoon. The man died from his wounds.

"I heard six loud shots while I was having lunch around 1.30 pm (1130 GMT)," the caretaker of a nearby building told AFP.

"I went out immediately, and I saw a young black man on the ground, face down, outside the hospital. He was maybe 20 or 30 years old and he was already dead," said the caretaker, who declined to give her name.

The injured woman works as a security guard at the hospital, which runs a Covid-19 vaccination center. Paris prosecutors said they were treating the shooting as a murder and an attempted murder. District mayor Francis Szpiner told reporters that the attacker had fired several rounds at the man.

"It would seem that the security guard was hit by a stray bullet," he said.

Szpiner said the shooting was "neither a terrorist attack nor an attack on the vaccination center".

The owner of a restaurant across the street from the hospital told the BFMTV television channel that he also heard shots ringing out.

"I turned around and I saw a guy with a hoodie firing. Then I saw him approach a guy lying on the ground and put two bullets in his head to finish him off," he said. "The shooter walked off with amazing calmness, as if nothing had happened," he said.

Police cordoned off the area around the hospital, and forensic experts were examining the scene for clues, AFP journalists said.

Turkey, Libya Committed to Eastern Mediterranean Maritime Accord

ANKARA (Reuters) - Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said on Monday that Turkey and Libya were committed to a 2019 maritime demarcation accord in the eastern Mediterranean, after meeting Libya's Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibeh in Ankara.

"The maritime accord signed between Turkey and Libya secures national interests and future of both countries...We confirmed our determination on this issue today," Erdogan said in a news conference.

Libya's new unity government was sworn in on March 15 from two warring administrations that had ruled eastern and western regions, completing a smooth transition of power after a decade of violent chaos.

Turkey had backed the Tripoli-based Government of National Accord (GNA) against the eastern-based Libyan National Army (LNA), which was supported by Russia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and France.

Greece, which opposes the maritime agreement between Tripoli and Ankara, called for the accord to be cancelled, as it reopened its embassy in Libya after seven years.

Libyan Prime Minister Dbeibeh said agreements between the two countries, including the maritime demarcation agreement, are based on a valid framework.

Separately, Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias met Libya's alternative Prime Minister Hussein Atiyya Abdul Hafeez Al-Qatani in Benghazi and noted that Libya's parliament had not ratified the accord, which Greece considers has no legal force.

The set of meetings with the Libyan delegation also included discussions over concrete steps to improve investments, bilateral trade and economic relations. Erdogan also said adding that Ankara will send 150,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccines to Libya as part of a support against the outbreak.



Protests After Minneapolis Police Shoot 20-Year-Old Wright

NEW YORK (Dispatches) -

Protests have broken out in the U.S. city of Minneapolis after police shot a young Black man, who died shortly after, near where George Floyd was killed last year.

Hundreds of people, some visibly upset and one carrying a sign demanding "Justice for George Floyd", confronted police in riot gear on Sunday night, hours after the officer shot 20-year-old Daunte Wright in his car in the Minneapolis suburb of Brooklyn Center.

Brooklyn Center police set off flash bangs and fired tear gas into the crowd of protesters who had gathered outside the police station. National Guard troops were deployed just before midnight, the Star Tribune newspaper reported.

The latest shooting happened in a city already on edge and midway through the trial of the first of four police officers in Floyd's death. The unarmed Black man's death sparked months of protests in the US against racism and police brutality and attracted international outrage.

Duante's mother, Katie Wright, told a crowd earlier in the day that Wright called her to say he had been pulled over by police. She said she heard officers tell her son to put his phone down, and then one of the officers ended the call.

"All he did was have air fresheners in the car and they told him to get out of the car," Wright said.

"He got out of the car and his girlfriend said they shot him," she said. "He got back in the car and he drove away and crashed and now he's dead on the ground... Nobody will tell us anything. Nobody will talk to us... I said please take my son off the ground."

The Brooklyn Center police, in a statement, said officers pulled over a driver for a traffic violation on Sunday afternoon. When they discovered he had an outstanding warrant, they tried to take him into custody. He got back into his car and one of the officers fired their weapon, striking the driver.

The vehicle travelled several blocks before striking another vehicle, police said, adding both officers' body cameras were activated during the incident.

The driver died at the scene, the statement said.

A female passenger in the car suffered "non-life threatening injuries" from the crash and was transported to a local hospital.



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L.balcony
marble fl
Fully Furn

Jordan Villa
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800sq.m
5bdrs, S/p
green yard
parquet fl
Fully Furn

Shanon
(adviser)

Parsian

Zaferanieh Apt
280sq.m, 3bdrs
yard, parquet floor
recently renovated
terrace, pkg, fireplace
(\$2600)

Niavaran (\$1800) 3bdrs
Darrous (\$1600) 3bdrs
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Turkish Construction Industry Costs Decline

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Costs for Turkey's construction industry fell for the first month in 15 during February, according to data published by the Turkish Statistical Institute.

The construction costs index, which include materials and labour, dropped by 0.03 percent from January, the institute said on Monday.

The construction led economic growth in Turkey over the past decade but has suffered financially over the past two years after a building boom came to an abrupt halt and the lira slid against the dollar, leaving many companies with unsold housing stock. Some firms in the sector have been major beneficiaries of a government-led building boom focused on infrastructure and housing.



Kazakh, Uzbek PMs Launch Construction of Central Asia Int'l Center for Trade and Economic Cooperation

NUR-SULTAN (Dispatches) - Kazakh Prime Minister Askar Mamin and Uzbek Prime Minister Abdulla Aripov launched the construction of the Central Asia International Center for Trade and Economic Cooperation located at the Kazakh-Uzbek border, according to the Kazakh Prime Minister's press service.

Mamin and Aripov during the meeting. Photo credit: primeminister.kz. Click to see the map in full size.

The center with a total area of 400 hectares will be located near the Zhibek Zholy and Gisht Kuprik border checkpoint. The capacity is estimated at 35,000 people and 5,000 trucks per day in both directions.

The two countries seek to turn the centre into a major industrial, trade and logistics platform to implement joint investment projects between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, primarily in the manufacturing, agro-industrial and light industry sectors.

"The governments of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are working to bring the level of mutual trade up to \$10 billion. The project launched today will serve to achieve this goal and further strengthen the all-round strategic cooperation between the two countries," said Mamin.

The Kazakh side, he noted, is interested in creating a single commodity distribution system between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan by opening three wholesale distribution centers in Uzbekistan's Surkhandarya and Ferghana regions with a total investment of \$22.5 million and a capacity of 67,000 tons per year.

The memorandum to establish the center was signed as part of President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's visit to Tashkent in April 2019.

The officials believe the center will give significant impetus to regional tourist flow and cross-border trade and contribute to developing the North-South and Central Asian transport and transit corridor.

"New trade, industrial and logistics sites at the border of the two major agglomerations will provide great synergies for each of the economies. The Turkestan Region has an important role for Uzbek exports to Russia, the EU and China. The Tashkent region is a transit point for Kazakhstan to Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan. More than 50 percent of Uzbekistan's trade turnover transits through the territory of Kazakhstan," wrote Kazakh Minister of Trade and Integration Bakhyt Sultanov on his Facebook page.

Sultanov briefs the prime ministers on the center. Photo credit: Bakhyt Sultanov's Facebook page

He brought up the Asian Development Bank forecast that projects the trade between the regions to grow 35 percent by 2025 and 65 percent by 2030.

Transit trade can also grow up to \$37.9 billion in 2030 from \$23 billion in 2019, he said.

"The potential volume of markets (to Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, China, Eurasian Economic Union and Central Asian countries) in the creation of cluster cooperation projects for the production of food products is estimated at more than \$21 billion," he added.

Venezuela Will Produce Cuban Vaccine

CARACAS (Dispatches) - Venezuela hopes to produce 2 million doses per month of a Cuban coronavirus vaccine, President Nicolas Maduro said on Sunday.

The South American country will also take part in Phase 3 trials for the Abdala vaccine produced by its socialist ally. "We've signed an agreement to produce in our laboratories... two million vaccines a month of the Abdala vaccine... for August, September, approximately," said Maduro in a television address.

Earlier in the week, the government said that it would have already purchased the 30 million vaccines it needs but for economic sanctions, led by the United States.

Cuba has developed four vaccines that are in various stages of clinical trials.

The island nation has already started vaccinating its healthcare workers with its two vaccines still in the third phase of clinical trials.

One of those is Abdala, which is being given to 124,000 healthcare workers, while 48,000 volunteers are taking part in a parallel Phase-3 clinical study.

Should it be approved, Abdala would be the first COVID-19 vaccine entirely developed and produced in Latin America. Venezuela's vaccine rollout has been slow, with the country receiving just 250,000 Russian Sputnik V vaccine doses and half a million from China's Sinopharm to date.

The government said it had paid just over half of the amount it needs to acquire 11.3 million doses through the World Health Organization's COVAX mechanism.

Schnabel Warns of Economic Disaster If EU Aid Delayed

BERLIN (Bloomberg) -- The legal challenge to the European recovery fund at Germany's top court could be catastrophic for the region's economy, European Central Bank Executive Board member Isabel Schnabel warned.

"It would be an economic disaster for Europe if the disbursement of the funds were to be delayed indefinitely," she said in an interview published in German magazine Der Spiegel on Friday. "If that were the case, Europe would have to think about alternative solutions, but that could take some time."

The region's 750 billion-euro (\$892 billion)

stimulus plan is a key plank of the European Union's economic response to the pandemic crisis, consisting of grants and loans that will be primarily given to the worst-hit nations. The fund-raising must be ratified by all 27 member states, a step which Germany has been temporarily prevented from taking.

A political group filed an emergency case at the end of March claiming that the EU shouldn't be allowed to issue the joint debt. In response, the Federal Constitutional Court said it needed to assess whether a preliminary order would be needed -- while that step isn't uncommon and can usually be done quickly, it has raised concerns that the EU's cumbersome setup will undermine the recovery.

The bloc has already faced criticism that both its fiscal efforts and its progress on vaccinations are falling behind. The International Monetary Fund warned this week about widening inequality and a divergence between countries' recovery speeds, with other advanced economies set to return to their pre-crisis levels far more rapidly than the euro area.

Schnabel, who is responsible for market operations at the ECB, warned that with equity and real-estate prices relatively high, "the risks of a correction are increasing, especially if the economic recovery falls short of expectation."

She also addressed the collapse of the U.S. hedge fund Archegos Capital Management and the exposure of European banks. Credit Suisse Group AG lost \$4.7 billion and Deutsche Bank AG only narrowly escaped a similar hit.

"That is indeed a remarkable incident," she said. "There is a need to scrutinize the reasons why the banks enabled the fund to leverage up to such an extent. That could have resulted in further contagion effects."

Lagarde Sees Strong Rebound For EU Economy in H2

PARIS (Dispatches) - Despite a difficult struggle against the Covid-19 pandemic, the European Union will hit its economic stride later this year, European Central Bank President Christine Lagarde told CNBC.

Multiple parts of the euro zone have been hit by a renewed wave of coronavirus cases, leading officials to institute another round of shutdowns just as other developed economies are looking to rev up.

While acknowledging that the lockdowns are putting a dent in growth, Lagarde said she's optimistic that things will pick up.

"Light is at the end of the tunnel," Lagarde told CNBC's Sara Eisen on "Closing Bell." "We can see it. It's not yet within touching distance. We still have a few innings to go." She added that in the second half of the year "that will be [a] recovery that will be moving fast, actually."

The latest International Monetary Fund projections see EU growth running at 4.4% in 2021, about right on pace with the average of advanced economies but well behind the 6.4% estimate for the U.S. That comes off a year when GDP in the EU contracted at a 6.6% pace compared with -3.5% in the U.S.

The U.S. has been much more successful with its vaccine rollout, and Congress has been considerably more aggressive with fiscal support in the form of more than \$5 trillion in stimulus, with a massive infrastructure program still to come.

Both the ECB and the U.S. Federal Reserve have provided heavy monetary support in the form of rock-bottom interest rates and trillions in asset purchases. In fact, there have been some worries that the policy moves in the U.S. could push inflation to unwelcome levels, and Lagarde said she expects the Fed to reach its own inflation goals ahead of the ECB.

"We are in a completely different situation," Lagarde said. "You know, the U.S. is probably going to hit its inflation targets rather soon. We are very far away from that."

She added that the ECB's own approach to monetary policy is characterized by "complete flexibility. Flexibility across time, across asset classes, across countries, and we decided when it was needed to expand it, and to expand it we did it twice."

"If it is necessary to do it again, we will do it again," she added. "If it is necessary to spend more than what has been identified, we will do so. If we can spend less because the situation improves fast, we will do so as well. So we will use the flexibility in all respects."

While the region has lagged in vaccinations, Lagarde said she is hopeful that will change. Just 14% of those living in the EU have received at least one dose, compared with 33.5% in the U.S., according to Our World in Data.

Lagarde said there is a "very strong" determination to bring that number up to 70% by the summer.

France to Ban Short Domestic Flights In a Bid to Reduce Climate Emissions



PARIS (Dispatches) - A new French law will abolish domestic flights on trips that can be done by train in less than two-and-a-half hours, in a bid to help France reach its climate goals.

French MPs voted in favour of the law proposal, which will lead to trains replacing some short domestic flights. Flights will be banned only if there are several daily direct trains available for the same journey, and the train ride can be done in less than two-and-a-half hours, according to the bill.

Transport Minister Jean-Baptiste Djebbari so far has only mentioned three lines that will be cut, all of which include the Orly airport south of the capital:

The full details will appear in a coming government decree, but longer flights such as Paris-Nice (six hours by train), Paris-Toulouse and Paris-Marseille (both four hours by train) will continue as usual.

However, according to the draft law, the government will be able to scrap further routes by decree.

The law featured in a large bill proposed by the French Climate Convention – La Convention citoyenne pour le climat – set up to help the French government reach its goal of reducing carbon emissions by 40 percent by 2030, compared to 1990 levels.

The full bill is called Projet de loi sur la lutte contre le dérèglement climatique (Bill on the fight against climate change) and aims to decrease climate gas emissions by targeting several aspects of daily life, from travel to work to housing and agriculture.

It is a watered-down version of the initial Citizen Council's proposal, which wanted to abolish flights that could be replaced by a train trip of less than four hours.

Djebbari defended the decision to lower the threshold from four hours to the adopted two-and-a-half by saying "the four-hour limit would have isolated landlocked territories" and "violated the equity" between different parts of the country.

India's March Inflation Accelerates on Higher Food

NEW DELHI (Reuters) - India's retail inflation accelerated to a four-month high in March on higher food and transport costs amid rising coronavirus cases and fears of a surge in some commodity prices due to lockdowns in some states.

Annual retail inflation rose to 5.52% in March, up from 5.03% in February, and above the 5.40% forecast in a Reuters poll of economists, data released by the Ministry of Statistics showed on Monday.

"Consumer Price Index (CPI) for March has surprised us and markets on the upside, with strong price pressures seen in fuel and non-vegetables food prices of meat and fish, oils and fats and fruits, amidst an unfavorable base. Further, core inflation too accelerated to more than a 2-year high, at close to 6.0% which does not offer comfort.

"Looking ahead, we expect CPI to remain somewhat sticky and average at 5.0% in FY22. Continued comfort on food and goods inflation as production continues to normalize should prove supportive. "Upside from crude oil prices, if any, could be offset by a likely hold or reduction in duties on petroleum products, softening of demand due to a resurgence in COVID-19 infections, and likelihood of a normal monsoon outturn (as per private weather forecasting firm AccuWeather) in 2021."



"Industrial production has contracted at a much faster-than-expected pace of 3.6%, led by a steep contraction in mining and manufacturing sectors. It is clear that restrictions and restraints in response to the second wave of COVID-19 have started impacting overall demand and growth.

"Despite weak demand trends, CPI inflation is firming up on higher food and fuel inflation and elevated transportation costs. Core inflation too has risen to 5.76%."

"March CPI rose expectedly to 5.5% (5.6% our estimate) due to weak base from last year and higher fuel prices. We believe March CPI to be the peak and see headline inflation easing towards 4.5% due to stabilization in international commodity prices and weak pass-through to final prices given that growth momentum will soften on COVID 2.0.

UN Population Fund Envoy Submits Copy of Credentials to Zarif

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The new representative of the United Nations Population Fund submitted a copy of his credentials to Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif on Tuesday.

Sathya Doraiswamy presented his credentials at the beginning of his mission in Iran.

Doraiswamy has over 20 years of experience in academia, government, NGOs, and in the United Nations (UNHCR and UNFPA). He holds a Doctor of Health from the University of Bath, UK, and has worked and taught in Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, Europe, and the Middle East in various capacities.



Gig-Economy Film ‘Nomadland’ Wins Four BAFTA Awards

LONDON (Dispatches) - Gig-economy Western “Nomadland” won four prizes including best picture on Sunday at the British Academy Film Awards, which were handed out during a pandemic-curbed ceremony that recognized a diverse array of screen talent.

“Nomadland” filmmaker Chloe Zhao became only the second woman to win the BAFTA for best director, and star Frances McDormand was named best actress. “Nomadland” also took the cinematography prize.

Emerald Fennell’s revenge comedy “Promising Young Woman” was named best British film, while the best actor trophy went to 83-year-old Anthony Hopkins for playing a man grappling with dementia in “The Father.”

An event that was criticized in the recent past with the label #BAFTAsSoWhite rewarded a diverse group of talents, including Black British star Daniel Kaluuya, newcomer Bukky Bakray — who shone as a London teenager in “Rocks” — and veteran Korean actress Yuh-Jung Yoon.

The fact that Britain remains under coronavirus lockdown measures, with its movie theaters still closed, gave the evening a poignant tone, as did the death on Friday of Prince Philip, husband of Queen Elizabeth II, a long-time patron of the British film academy.

Prince William, who had been due to attend and make a speech in his role as president of Britain’s film academy, was absent following the death of his grandfather. The ceremony opened with a tribute to Philip, who was the academy’s first president in 1959.

Presenters including Hugh Grant, Tom Hiddleston, Gugu Mbatha-Raw and Priyanka Chopra Jonas announced the winners from the stage of London’s Royal Albert Hall, but recipients accepted their honors remotely, and there was no black-tie audience to cheer them on.

Director Remi Weekes, who won the British debut prize for his first feature, “His House,” noted the surreal sensation of accepting the award while sitting in his living room in a tuxedo.

“Nomadland” stars McDormand as a middle-aged woman who travels the American West while living out of her van and picking up short-term work.

Zhao, who lived among real American travelers for the film, thanked “the nomadic community who so generously welcomed us into their lives.”

“How we treat our elders says a lot about who we are as a society, and we have to do a lot better,” she said.

The British film academy expanded its voting membership and shook up its rules last year in an attempt to address a glaring lack of diversity in the nominations. In 2020, no women were nominated as best director for a seventh consecutive year, and all 20 nominees in the lead and supporting performer categories were white.

Under new rules that, among other things, made watching all longlisted films compulsory for academy voters, this year’s slate of acting nominees was strikingly more diverse, and four of the six filmmakers nominated for best director were women: Zhao, Sarah Gavron (“Rocks”), Shannon Murphy (“Babyteeth”) and Jasmila Zbanic (“Quo Vadis, Aida?”).

Asked what her directing prize meant for Asian women in film, Zhao said: “If this means more people like me get to live their dreams, then I feel very grateful.”

BAFTA chief executive Amanda Berry said the academy was “determined to make change.”



“We are not there yet, this is definitely still a work in progress, but I am really pleased with how far we have come,” she said.

Kaluuya was named best supporting actor for playing Black Panther leader Fred Hampton in “Judas and the Black Messiah.”

Yoon appeared astonished to win the best-actress prize for Korean-American family drama “Minari.” The Korean performer said she had always thought of the British as “very snobbish people.” But, she later clarified, “not in a bad way.”

Bakray, 19, won the Rising Star award, whose previous winners include Kaluuya, Kristin Stewart, Tom Hardy and John Boyega.

“I don’t know how to feel,” she said. “When we filmed ‘Rocks,’ I thought 100 people would watch this film, max.”

Danish director Thomas Vinterberg’s “Another Round” was named best film not in the English language. Vinterberg paid tribute to his daughter Ida, who had been due to appear in the film and died in a car crash at the start of the shoot.

“We made this movie for her, so the honor granted by you, BAFTA voters, means more to us than you could ever imagine,” he said.

The British awards are usually held a week or two before the Academy Awards and have become an important awards-season staging post. This year, both the BAFTAs and the Oscars were postponed from their usual February berths because of the coronavirus pandemic.

BAFTAs in craft and backstage categories were handed out in a separate ceremony on Saturday, when “Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom” won two prizes, for costume design and hair and makeup.

Other double winners included “The Father” (best actor and adapted screenplay), “Sound of Metal” (editing and sound), “Promising Young Woman” (British film and original screenplay) and “Soul” (animated film and musical score).

Director Ang Lee was awarded the academy’s top honor, the BAFTA Fellowship.

Actor, writer and director Noel Clarke received the outstanding British contribution to cinema award, dedicating it to “my young Black boys and girls out there that never believed it could happen to them.”

Ecuador Votes for Economic Reform, Spurns Correa

QUITO (Dispatches) - Ecuador is poised to deepen economic reforms with the victory of former banker Guillermo Lasso in a presidential run-off Sunday.

Lasso overcame his leftist rival Andres Arauz by a substantive margin of around 5pc, with more than 95pc of the votes tallied. According to official results issued by the national electoral council (CNE), Lasso secured 52.5pc compared with 47.5pc for Arauz.

The outcome turns back a leftist tide that has swept other Latin American countries, including Mexico, Bolivia and Argentina, in recent years, expanding a left-leaning alliance with Venezuela.

Arauz is a youthful protege of Ecuador’s exiled former president Rafael Correa, who ran the former Opec country from 2007-17 in a tenure marked by widespread corruption and a crackdown on political opponents.

Arauz’s loss is a repudiation of the Correa era, and also reflects divisions among indigenous groups that had supported Yaku Perez, the indigenous leader who came in a close third in the 7 February general elections.

Lasso has promised to work closely with the IMF to recuperate Ecuador’s oil-based economy, draw in foreign investment and bring Quito into the pro-trade Pacific Alliance of countries that include Chile. He will inherit a flagging national oil industry, and heavy oil-backed debt to China.

Lasso is promising widespread vaccinations against Covid-19, which hit the country early and hard last year. “Democracy has triumphed,” he said in a victory speech today, asserting that Ecuadoreans had chosen a “new path”.

Saudi Peace...

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The top Saudi diplomat told a news conference at the time that political negotiations between representatives of the Saudi-backed government of Yemen’s former president Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi and Ansarullah movement would resume as part of the initiative.

Al Saud said the initiative would be enforced once the Yemeni sides accepted it.

Reacting to the proposal, Mohammed Abdul-Salam, the spokesman for Ansarullah, said afterwards that it offered “nothing new,” and did not meet the movement’s demand for a complete lifting of the blockade on Sana’a airport and Hudaydah port.

Lavrov...

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“I assure you that in the near future, Natanz will definitely move forward with more advanced and powerful centrifuges. If the Israelis thought that they could stop Iran from following up on the removal of sanctions imposed on the Iranian people, then they made a very bad gamble,” he noted.

The Iranian foreign minister also warned that Israel will receive a response if Iran’s investigations hold the regime responsible for the Natanz incident. He further urged the U.S. to understand that sanctions cannot serve as a means of getting concessions. Earlier Foreign ministers of Iran and Russia signed Tuesday an agreement on cultural cooperation and setting up cultural center.

The two foreign ministers also set framework for activities of the cultural centers.

Meanwhile later, President Hassan Rouhani in the meeting with Lavrov that letting the Zionist regime as a destabilizing tension-creating element into the Persian Gulf region is a dangerous move.

Stressing the necessity to counter US unilateralism through expansion of regional cooperation, President Rouhani welcomed the cooperation with the goal of helping the establishment of peace and stability in the region as a strategic move against US unilateralism and interference in regional countries affairs.

Saying that the security, peace, and stability of the region should be provided by the regional countries, the Iranian president stressed Iran-Russia defense and military cooperation, with regard to the termination of Iran’s arms embargo in October 2020. Referring to good relation between Tehran and Moscow in political and regional fields, Rouhani stressed strengthening economic relations and acceleration and implementation of joint projects in oil, energy, and transportation, as well as cooperation for building two nuclear power plants in Bushehr.

He also referred to Russia’s success in making the COVID-19 vaccine and called for faster shipment of the vaccine to Iran and the launching of a production line in Iran. Russian foreign minister said in the meeting that there is no limitation for the expansion of relations between Tehran and Moscow, including defense and technology.

Lavrov said that Iran and Russia have common and close goals about international and regional cooperation.

Iran Suspends...

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He added that new EU bans will only bring more disgrace to those who abuse such lofty concepts as human rights.

“In reaction to this EU measure, the Foreign Ministry of the Islamic Republic of Iran stops all comprehensive talks with the European Union, including human rights discussions, as well as all forms of cooperation emanating from those talks, especially in the fields of terrorism, illicit drugs and refugees,” Khatibzadeh said.

This came after four days of talks between representatives of Iran and the remaining parties to a landmark nuclear deal between by Iran and world powers, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), ended in the Austrian capital, Vienna, on Friday. Last December, Iranian lawmakers strongly condemned the European Parliament’s resolution that censured Iran under the guise of protecting human rights, and threatened to take reciprocal action.

Enrichment at Natanz Nuclear...

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“The full responsibility for this act of sabotage lies with the Zionist regime of Israel and its supporters,” Gharibabadi further said, adding that the attack was aimed at weakening the morale and efforts of Iran’s nuclear scientists.

“Experience has shown that Iran has emerged stronger than before after such desperate acts of sabotage,” he stressed.

He said apart from replacing the damaged centrifuges with more powerful ones and a plan to add new machines to the facility, a number of other technical measures are also planned to be taken, in response to the Sunday attack, that would be reported to the IAEA this week. Elsewhere in his remarks, Gharibabadi said that Iran had sent a letter to Rafael Grossi, the IAEA’s chief, asking him to condemn the act of sabotage against the Natanz Fuel Enrichment Plant.

Separately on Monday, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, in a letter to the United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, strongly condemned the deliberate targeting of the Islamic Republic’s safeguarded nuclear facilities as a “war crime.”

World to...

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Some of the Iranian economic experts like Dr. Vahid Shafaqi Shahri believe that wrong, wish-like and dangerous optimism on the revival of the economy with the revival of the JCPOA is the weakness of the standpoint and planning of the government, and they believe this warning should be sent to the economic community in the Islamic Republic of Iran that pinning hopes on the JCPOA and unblocking the frozen assets in short term would be a dangerous and false hopefulness.

The economist Shafaqi Shahri by pointing to recent remarks of the governor of Iran’s Central Bank on this year budget’s slow-pacing says, “This year’s budget bill is a set of views and opinions of Majlis, and lawmakers have had some slight changes in the submitted bill by the government and added only some notes and articles during the Majlis session on reviewing the bill. But that it can prepare the ground for economic growth is hardly believable. Regarding the future hopes, of course it should be mentioned that although the agreement between Iran and China is not yet in the legal sense a contract and it mostly sets the cooperation framework, it has had its own psychological impact and acceleration effect on the economic beliefs in Iran.”

Experts on the international trade know that usually sets of two or multi-lateral agreements are signed by the governments which are in line with easing trade relations like easing the private sector investment (for protecting interests of the private companies against the governments). Some of these agreements are so-called state agreements wherein some principles should be observed.

These types of agreements are usually long-term ones in order that in their frameworks and with enjoying their support, the international trade contracts among the individuals of both sided are signed. The main goal of these agreements is a general obligation of the governments for observing the rights of individuals in the contracts which are signed later. For example, the government with its sovereignty power does not take action in unilateral and unfair rescinding of its private sector nationals and companies’ contracts with their foreign counterparts or it does not confiscate the investment of the other party or does not give concessions or subsidies to the domestic companies in a way that the capital of the counterpart investing company is ruined. And if due to some reasons it happened, it would make up for the damage fairly.

These agreements are mainly categorized under the simple and executive agreements. The simple and executive agreements unlike legal and official ones (because it is ethical promise and not legal commitment) do not usually need the approvals of parliaments and they are generally easing the condition for bilateral cooperation. So one of the main reasons for signing the agreement between Iran and China is the behavior of Iran’s government with the Chinese companies especially after the JCPOA which led to unilateral rescinding of agreements and Iran’s refrain from continuing trade cooperation with the Chinese companies especially in the field of energy due to the arrival of the Western companies and overjoy of the government which made the Chinese companies and government be surprised and harmed.

Of course with departure of the Western companies, we once again turned towards China but this disappointment was a hurdle for regaining reciprocal trust which was fortunately settled reasonably through mediation of the leader of the establishment.

We should notice this point that the government by assuming the JCPOA agreement accepted all the limited restrictions but it was probable that those restrictions would be permanent, and it held national celebration. But regarding its trade partner of tough times, namely, China, we see huge onslaught by the pro-government media for reducing the significance of the impact of the agreement between Iran and China and calling for monopoly agreement with the West.

So China’s stepping in for signing a 25-year contract with Iran has been so a comprehensive agreement that has pushed the Westerners to think of restoring the JCPOA even if partially. Experts today believe that Iran with the Rouhani government can contain COVID-19 but economy will not improve but they forecast better outlook for the country for the second half of the year and return to the native Iranian economy with electing a president which tears in the protocols of liberal democracy.

South Africa Level Series Against Pakistan

JOHANNESBURG (AFP) - South Africa levelled their four-match Twenty20 international series against Pakistan with a comfortable six-wicket win in the second match at the Wanderers in Johannesburg on Monday.

Left-arm spinner George Linde and fast bowler Lizaad Williams took three wickets each as Pakistan were restricted to 140 for nine in their 20 overs. Captain Babar Azam made 50 for Pakistan.

Aiden Markram led an aggressive South African reply, hitting 54 off 30 balls, and the hosts romped to victory with six overs to spare.

LICENCE HOLDER: SOKHAN GOSTAR INSTITUTE

Switchboard:

(+98) (21) 44253448

Public Relations Tel:

(+98)(21) 44253450

Editorial Board: 44253449

Public Relations Fax:

(+98)(21) 44253395

Advertising Department:

Tel/Fax:(+98) (21) 44253335-9/44253234

Website:

http://www.irannewsdaily.com

E-Mail Address:

info@irannewsdaily.com

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Leipzig Sign Henrichs On Permanent Deal

BERLIN (AFP) - Bundesliga high-fliers RB Leipzig confirmed Monday they have signed Monaco loanee Benjamin Henrichs on a permanent deal.

Henrichs, 24, has spent 2020/21 on loan in Leipzig, but the German club has given him a contract until 2025 after he made his 15th appearance this season and set up a goal in Saturday's 4-1 thrashing of Werder Bremen.

The transfer fee is reportedly around 15 million euros (\$18 million).

Tatum Shines as Celtics Rally to Cool off Nuggets

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Jayson Tatum tallied 28 points and 10 rebounds as the Boston Celtics snapped the Denver Nuggets' eight-game NBA winning streak with a 105-87 come-from-behind victory.

The visiting Celtics were fuelled by a 31-3 run that spanned parts of the third and fourth quarters after Denver led by 14 points late in the third.

"I think we just picked up the intensity," Tatum said. "I think we communicated a lot better. We started switching a little bit more. I think that helped us out, too."

"That was big," he added. "Because we could have let it get away from us."

Tatum's 28 points came just two days after he scored a career-best 53 against the Minnesota Timberwolves. Both Tatum (illness) and Jaylen Brown (knee) were questionable leading up to the start of Sunday's contest.

Brown had 20 points and eight rebounds, Marcus Smart and Kemba Walker scored 14 each and Robert Williams scored 10 points in the win.

Nikola Jokic had a triple-double of 17 points, 11 assists and 10 rebounds; Michael Porter had 22 points and 11 rebounds; Facundo Campazzo scored 14 and Will Barton had 13 for the Nuggets.

Romeo Langford hit two free throws to give the Celtics an 80-79 lead early in the fourth, their first lead of the contest.

"We just needed something to get us going," Boston coach Brad Stevens said.

The Nuggets had five turnovers following a Campazzo three-pointer that put them up by 14, and Denver scored just eight points over the final 14 minutes of the game, missing 22 of their last 25 shots.

Elsewhere, DeMar DeRozan nailed the game-winner with less than a second to go to lift the San Antonio Spurs to a 119-117 victory over the Dallas Mavericks, ending a five game losing skid.



DeRozan finished with 33 points, Dejounte Murray chipped in 25 points and Lonnie Walker scored 13 for the Spurs, who now travel to Florida to play Orlando on Monday.

Kristaps Porzingis scored 31 points and grabbed 15 rebounds, Luka Doncic added 29 points, Josh Richardson scored 16 and Jalen Brunson hit for 11 points for the Mavericks, who have lost two of their past three. Porzingis fouled out with just over 74 seconds left.

Dallas tied the game 117-117 with 19 seconds left on a running jump shot by Doncic.

But DeRozan's precision shooting was on display all game long and especially in the fourth.

With just seconds to go, the Spurs called a play for DeRozan. He dribbled the ball on the outside before shifting to the right and shooting over Mavs Dorian Finney-Smith to hit the game-winner.

In Cleveland, Zion Williamson scored 38 points, and the New Orleans Pelicans held on to beat the Cleveland Cavaliers 116-109.

Williamson made 16 of 22 from the floor and drained six free throws, Brandon Ingram added 27 points and rookie Naji Marshall scored a season-high 15 as the Pelicans beat the Cavs for the sixth straight time. Also, Bogdan Bogdanovic scored 32 points, including eight threes, as the Atlanta Hawks edged the Charlotte Hornets 105-101.

Clint Capela had 20 points and 15 rebounds for the Hawks, who moved ahead of Charlotte and into fourth place in the standings. Lou Williams scored on a tiebreaking drive to put the under-manned Hawks ahead with 58 seconds to go in the fourth.

Medvedev Does Not Like Clay



LONDON (Reuters) - Daniil Medvedev has risen to No. 2 in the world on the back of his incredible consistency during the hardcourt swing but the Russian says he will be outside his comfort zone when he takes to the clay for this week's Monte Carlo Masters.

Medvedev replaced Rafa Nadal as No. 2 last month, becoming the first player outside the Spaniard, Roger Federer, Novak Djokovic and Andy Murray to be ranked in the top two since Lleyton Hewitt in July 2005.

But all 10 of his career titles have come on hard courts and the 25-year-old has never managed to get past the first round of the French Open on the red clay at Roland Garros in four attempts.

"Honestly, there's nothing I like on clay," Medvedev told reporters with a wry smile on Sunday.

"There's always bad bounces, you're dirty after playing. I really don't enjoy playing on clay."

Medvedev reached his second Grand Slam final at the Australian Open in February on the back of a 20-match winning run that saw him pick up trophies at the Paris Masters, ATP Finals and team-based ATP Cup.

His run included 12 straight wins over top-10 opponents and ended with defeat to top-ranked Novak Djokovic in the final at Melbourne Park.

Japan Hails Matsuyama's Masters Win

TOKYO (Reuters) - Japan sucked in its breath as Hideki Matsuyama almost blew his chance to win the Masters but the golfer's one-shot victory at Augusta National sparked a joyous reaction back home as the country celebrated another sporting triumph in testing times.

Matsuyama, 29, became the first man from Japan to win one of golf's major titles, a feat that drew praise from government and Olympics officials with the Tokyo Games just three months away.

Katsunobu Kato, Japan's top government spokesman, expressed "congratulations and respect from the heart" for Matsuyama's "historic" win, which came as another ray of hope during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"It is another bright piece of news of a Japanese athlete's outstanding performance on the global stage under tough circumstances like training," Kato told a regular news conference.

Kato pointed to tennis player Naomi Osaka's win at the Australian Open and Shohei Ohtani's outstanding performance both as a hitter and a batter this week in Major League Baseball as further evidence of Japan's sporting success.

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga called Matsuyama's win "wonderful" and a source of pride and courage for the Japanese people during the difficulties posed by the pandemic.

Matsuyama has started Sunday's final round with a four-shot lead and looking a strong bet to join Hinako Shibuno and Chako Higuchi as Japanese major champions. Shibuno won the Women's British Open in 2019 and Higuchi won the Women's PGA Championship, formerly known as the LPGA Championship, in 1977.

Maiden Title for Kudermetova With Charleston Win

MIAMI (Dispatches) - Russia's Veronika Kudermetova secured her maiden WTA title, defeating Danka Kovinic of Montenegro in straight sets to claim the Charleston clay court title in South Carolina.

The 15th-seeded Kudermetova dominated from the outset to claim a 6-4, 6-2 victory over Kovinic, ranked 91 in the world.

Innsbruck, Turin Join Madrid as Davis Cup Finals Hosts



PARIS (AFP) - The 2021 Davis Cup Finals will be held in three cities, with Innsbruck and Turin joining Madrid as hosts, the International Tennis Federation (ITF) announced on Monday.

The competition was reformed in 2019, with Rafael Nadal's Spain winning the 18-team competition in Madrid, but scheduling issues resulted in a number of late finishes and poor attendances at some matches.

The ITF said Madrid, Austrian city Innsbruck and Turin in Italy would host two of the six groups each, with the latter two both staging one quarter-final.

The Spanish capital will host two last-eight ties, the semi-finals and the final.

70% of Japanese Want Tokyo Games Cancelled or Delayed

TOKYO (Reuters) - More than 70% of people in Japan want the Tokyo Olympics to be cancelled or delayed as the coronavirus pandemic rolls on, a Kyodo News poll showed on Monday, just over 100 days ahead of the planned start of the Games.

The survey showed 39.2% want the Games scrapped, while 32.8% favour another delay. Only 24.5% of respondents want the world's largest sporting event to go ahead as scheduled.

Tokyo on Monday began a month-long period of quasi-emergency measures to blunt a fourth wave of COVID-19 infections driven by virulent mutant strains.

More than 92.6% of respondents felt anxiety about the resurgence of infections, the Kyodo survey conducted from April 10 to 12 showed.

While vaccination shots for people aged 65 and above began at some 120 sites across the country on Monday, the imported doses are still in short supply and the pace of inoculations is unlikely to stop the latest wave of infections.

The survey found that about 60% of people were dissatisfied with Japan's progress on vaccinations.

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga's cabinet approval rate rose 1.9 percentage points from a month earlier to 44%, while his disapproval rating was at 36.1%, the survey showed.



Spurs to Take Action After Korean Star Racially Abused

LONDON (Dispatches) - Tottenham Hotspur are to take action after Korean star Son Heung-min was subjected to "abhorrent racist abuse" on social media following Sunday's 3-1 defeat by Manchester United.

Son is the second Spurs player in as many matches to suffer such abuse following Davinson Sanchez after the 2-2 draw with Newcastle United on April 4. Son scored Spurs's goal but was involved in a controversial incident when he went down clutching his face after contact with Scott McTominay.

That resulted in an Edinson Cavani goal being ruled out and post match criticism of the Korean by United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer. "Another matchday and more abhorrent racial abuse suffered by one of our players," said a Spurs statement.

"This has again been reported to the platforms and we shall now undertake a full review alongside the Premier League to determine the most effective action moving forward."

Tottenham said last week they wanted "social media platforms to take action" after the abuse of Colombian international defender Sanchez.

Several clubs have already taken a stand.

Scottish champions Rangers, and English Championship outfits Swansea and Birmingham announced on Friday they would boycott social media platforms for a week.

Spurs and Wales star Gareth Bale has said he would be in favor of boycotting social media if it was a mass movement.

